

THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE

(LESSON THIRTY-EIGHT)

LET US HEAR THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER?

In this Lesson, we will conclude our study of the **Doctrines of Grace**. It is our sincere prayer that as we have endeavored to expound on these profound and life-transforming doctrines, we have been used by the Holy Spirit to present a view of Almighty God that has highlighted His transcendent majesty, glory and sovereignty in a way that is faithful to Holy Scripture. It is our hope that we have presented the vision of a God who reigns supreme over everything; a God whose purposes are always accomplished as He intends; a God who is in control of the course of human affairs; a God who single-handedly directs the drama of saving a people for the honour of His great name; a God who does all of these things with perfect holiness and matchless grace. We hope that we have exalted the Lord Jesus Christ *“far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come”* (Ephesians 1:21).

As we noted in our **Introductory Lesson**, when the Doctrines of Grace are correctly understood, they become the foundation for a church that is strong, vibrant, resilient, full of joy and one that responds to true Christian fellowship. It is our absolute persuasion that when God’s people are exposed to teaching that emphasizes the undeserved, unmerited, life-changing power of the grace of God, they will not merely be stirred emotionally, but they will be transformed internally. When they realize it was the plan of God from eternity past to provide for their salvation and ensure it; when they understand that God chose them in Christ from before the foundation of the world; when they come to acknowledge that it is to holiness and Christ-likeness that they have been called and not merely to the observing of rules and keeping of standards; when it dawns upon them that disobedience is not so much about the breaking of rules as it is about the breaking of God’s heart; when they are assured that God will not give up on them and that His purposes relating to them will not fail – the result will be a joy, a longing for faithfulness, a strong desire to please God that flows out of a deep appreciation of the unfathomable, overwhelming love of God for them. The Doctrines of Grace are the root of strength of character. The Doctrines of Grace are the basis of faithfulness in conduct; they are the cause of courage of conviction, humility of spirit and hope for the future. In the absence of a full appreciation of these doctrines, the church is severely hindered.

In our study of the Doctrines of Grace, we have examined in some detail the subjects listed hereunder:

1. **The Grace of God**
2. **The Sovereignty of God**
3. **The Free Will of Man**
4. **The Radical Corruption of Man**
5. **The Election of God**
6. **The Atonement**
7. **Does God Have Two Wills?**
8. **The Security of the Christian**

Resulting from our examination of these subjects, our basic understanding is that God, in eternity past, elected some persons to salvation, and that this election had nothing to do with any qualities, actions, behaviour, virtues, vices or choices of these persons. In other words, God's election was not determined by the characteristics or the behaviour of these persons. This, therefore, means that His calling of them to salvation must necessarily be ultimately successful, for it was effected by virtue of the fact that He bestowed His grace upon them and brought them, and them only, whom in eternity past He had unconditionally elected, to salvation.

We have argued that the doctrine of election does not support the idea that God, in eternity, chose those persons whom He knew would make a decision to choose Him in the future. If this were the case, it is obvious that the logical priority would be given to human choice and God's choice would merely be an echo of human choice! Rather, we have argued that God's choice of the persons whom He would bring to salvation was entirely apart from any external considerations. In this scenario the logical priority is given to God's choice and the choice of human beings is merely a reflection of what God had previously and unconditionally determined.

The cause of our Election lies in the good pleasure of God. Election was a necessity because man is so radically corrupt and spiritually dead that the Lord's sacrifice on the Cross of Calvary would never have become effectual but for the Sovereign Grace of God. Had His sacrifice merely been offered to man, it would never have been accepted. And God's prior knowledge of what human beings would or would not do in the future had nothing to do with Election because there is nothing good in man to be the basis of that knowledge except in a negative sense. God knew that human beings would never be able to turn to Him for salvation unless He Himself first turned them. As the Psalmist said in **Psalm 80:17-19**, *"Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself. So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved."*

The **New Living Translation** renders the passage as follows: *"Strengthen the man you love, the son of your choice. Then we will never abandon you again. Revive us so we can call on your name once more. Turn us again to yourself, O LORD God of Heaven's Armies. Make your face shine down upon us. Only then will we be saved."*

Brothers and sisters, we are persuaded that if human beings are to be saved at all, God must not only provide the means but He must undertake the entire initiative in making those means effectual. If anything is left to human beings, there is no hope. Human beings are totally dependent because they are radically corrupt, and unless God predestines some and elects them to be saved, they are entirely without hope. Salvation is all of grace and that grace is sovereign. That is the burden of our message.

We who claim to be Christians know how often we fail and how prone we are to wander away from God. If we are honest, we must admit, at least to ourselves that if we are not saved by the grace of God, we will not be saved at all.

Charles Hodge (December 27, 1797 – June 19, 1878) was a Presbyterian theologian and principal of Princeton Theological Seminary between 1851 and 1878. In his **"Systematic Theology"**, he wrote: *"The whole course of history is represented [in Scripture] as the development of the plan and purposes of God; and yet human history is little else than the history of sin."*

How unfortunate but true it is that human history, and the personal history for each one of us, has been little else than the history of sin.

It is ironic that while we say that we believe God is in control of every situation, we behave as though the success or failure of our lives in fulfilling the will of God is dependent upon ourselves. While we willingly acknowledge the sovereignty of God in our successes, when things go badly with us and especially when it is clearly our own fault, we seem not to believe that God is still in control. But unless we appreciate that God is always in control, no matter what is happening to us, we will not be able to honestly say with Paul, *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose”* (**Romans 8:28**).

It is true that this statement is conditional, for the passage says it is only true *“to them that love God.”* Brothers and sisters, again, if we are all honest, we must admit that our love for God is not necessarily reflected in our obedience even though it ought to be. Obedience may be a demonstration to others of something, just as disobedience is. Our love for God is not really dependent on either obedience or disobedience. It is dependent upon the Holy Spirit. In **Romans 5:5**, Paul tells us that *“the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”* It is the Holy Spirit who creates a love for God within us. Our obedience arises as a result of the love created in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Our obedience is not the cause of that love, but the consequence of it. The Lord did not say, *“If ye keep my commandments, ye love Me.”* He said, *“If ye love me, keep my commandments.”* (**John 14:15**).

Now this is what we all desire. We want our lives to reflect the state of our hearts. But our actions often contradict our love for the Lord; yet they are a contradiction not a denial of that love, for that love remains because it originates in God, not in ourselves. And as we live for Him, God is at work in our hearts, through the Holy Spirit perfecting that love in us. It is ourselves that we hate when we are disobedient, not God. We love God as a response to his love, not because we are obedient but because He first loved us (**1 John 4:19**). The truth is that we often disobey those whom we love. **Romans 8:28** is really an assurance that all things do indeed work together for good to them who have been called into this relationship of reciprocal love. This assurance is not based upon the extent to which our behaviour truly reflects that love. For whose behaviour ever does? Things work together for good not because we are good but because God is good and sovereign and He loves us.

Christians do disobey God. We disobey Him more frequently than we care to admit. Our personal lives, like human history, are records of sinful behaviour. The history of the nation of Israel was one of consistent failure and yet, in the Old Testament, we consistently see operating the providence of God who constantly brought good out of evil in the life of this elect nation, just as He constantly brings good out of evil in the lives of his elect children today.

Brothers and sisters, we must be very careful that we do not merely find a profound intellectual satisfaction in the grand truths contained in the Doctrines of Grace with their emphasis upon the sovereignty of God, and yet fail to find real comfort when we are in trouble. We must apply what we know to what we daily experience in the changing circumstances of life. The answers must not only be in our heads. They must be in our hearts also.

We must be comforted by our knowledge of the absolute sovereignty of the grace of God. We must be assured that God is still on the throne even in our most dismal defeats and that even in our failures He is *“for us.”* Our lives are so full of stupidities, unwise choices, fumbling, stumbling and plain selfishness and confusion of motive that it is difficult for us to be fully persuaded that the same grace which overwhelmed us when we were sinful wretches and which called us into God’s family, is still operating when we are sinful saints! If only we could grasp the fact that even when we walk in the shadows of our own disobedience, God is the One who controls the shadows!

In **Psalm 119:67** the psalmist said, *“Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.”*

In verse **71** he says, *“It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.”*

One day, as we look back over our record of failures, we will see it was not merely that God was in our victories but that He was also in our failures just as actively and sovereignly, performing his *“strange work”* as Isaiah was inspired to term it in **Isaiah 28:21**: *“For the LORD shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act.”*

One day, we will understand that God was just as sovereign in our times of failure as He was in our times of victory. This is a really important lesson to learn. We are so accustomed to reading success stories, both in the Bible and in everyday life, that we imagine that God’s purposes are fulfilled only, or at least best, during those times when our lives are *“successful.”* But for most of us, such *“successes”* are relatively few and far between. As soon as the Lord allows us to suffer the consequences of our actions, we are tempted to view these consequences as punishment. We seldom view the consequences as means by which God perfects in us that which He has begun. I must admit that it is very difficult for me not to make this false estimate of what is happening. Yet in the back of my mind I am aware that the dangers to my spiritual welfare from success are far greater than the dangers from failure.

Brothers and sisters, since God is far more concerned with the perfecting of the saints rather than the production of executives, then obviously, He must allow for us to experience failure. It may very well be that what persons, even Christians consider to be a highly successful life may very well be a failure from God’s point of view.

The secret of appreciating this is to realize why He has chosen us, and the extent to which He is sovereign over all the circumstances of our lives, both the happy and the unhappy ones. We have not yet learned the real meaning of the Lord’s words in **Isaiah 55:8-9**: *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

Perhaps this is why Paul wrote the following in **1 Corinthians 1:26-29**: *“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.*

But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

The Passion Translation renders the passage in the following way: *“Brothers and sisters, consider who you were when God called you to salvation. Not many of you were wise scholars by human standards, nor were many of you in positions of power. Not many of you were considered the elite when you answered God’s call. But God chose those whom the world considers foolish to shame those who think they are wise, and God chose the puny and powerless to shame the high and mighty. He chose the lowly, the laughable in the world’s eyes — nobodies — so that he would shame the somebodies. For he chose what is regarded as insignificant in order to supersede what is regarded as prominent, so that there would be no place for prideful boasting in God’s presence. For it is not from man that we draw our life but from God as we are being joined to Jesus, the Anointed One. And now he is our God-given wisdom, our virtue, our holiness, and our redemption. And this fulfills what is written: If anyone boasts, let him only boast in all that the Lord has done!”*

We have been studying the Doctrines of grace for more than one year. Surely, we have exhausted the topic! Exhausted the topic? No! No! No! A thousand times no! It is not possible to conduct an exhaustive study of the Doctrines of grace! We have merely been scratching at the surface! We have only just begun! There is more, there is much, much more!

It is our intention to delve deeper and deeper into the Doctrines of Grace as we believe that there is far more that we do not know than we know concerning the grace of God. In our messages on Sundays and in our Bible studies, we will continue to explore this subject+ which can never be exhausted since it originates in the heart of an infinite God.

*Into the heart of Jesus
Deeper and deeper I go,
Seeking to know the reason
Why He should love me so,
Why He should stoop to lift me
Up from the miry clay,
Saving my soul, making me whole,
Though I had wandered away.*

*Into the will of Jesus,
Deeper and deeper I go,
Praying for grace to follow,
Seeking His way to know;
Bowing in full surrender
Low at His blessèd feet,
Bidding Him take, break me and make,
Till I am molded, complete.*

*Into the cross of Jesus
Deeper and deeper I go,
Following through the garden,
Facing the dreaded foe;
Drinking the cup of sorrow,
Sobbing with broken heart,
O Savior, help! Dear Savior, help!
Grace for my weakness impart.*

*Into the joy of Jesus
Deeper and deeper I go,
Rising, with soul enraptured,
Far from the world below.
Joy in the place of sorrow,
Peace in the midst of pain,
Jesus will give, Jesus will give;
He will uphold and sustain.*

*Into the love of Jesus
Deeper and deeper I go,
Praising the One who brought me
Out of my sin and woe;
And through eternal ages
Gratefully I shall sing,
O how He loved! O how He loved!
Jesus, my Lord and my king!*