

“Distinguished by Grace”

1 Samuel 16:4-12 & Titus 2:11-15

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September 14, 2014

Dearly Beloved,

Last week Pastor James preached on ‘putting on the Amour of Love’ and in his opening he asked a question about summing up God’s relationship with us in one word – Love. He said, and I quote, “I would choose love; grace would be a close second. Grace is undeserved, unearned, forgiving Love.”

Grace. Grace has been given several definitions. Someone once described it as unmerited favor, and some others hold the opinion that it is a gift given unexpectedly. I am yet to come to terms with a phrase or a sentence that aptly or completely describes God’s grace.

It’s a kindness from God that we don’t deserve. There is nothing we have done nor can ever do to earn this favor, and it is truly a gift.

To be distinguished means to be honored, to be respected, or to be held in high esteem. **1st Samuel 16 vs. 4 -12 Samuel did what the LORD said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, “Do you come in peace?” Samuel replied, “Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me.” Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed stands here before the LORD.” But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, “The LORD has not chosen this one either.” Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, “Nor has the LORD chosen this one.” Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, “The LORD has not chosen these.” So he asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?” “There is still the youngest,” Jesse answered. “He is tending the sheep.” Samuel said, “Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.” So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the LORD said, “Rise and anoint him; this is the one.” So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah.**

Jesse had several accomplished sons, most of whom fought in Israel’s army and had wonderful physical capabilities. Eliab, Abinadab and Shammah were great men; yet, God himself had chosen to distinguish David, the little one whose only usefulness at that time was tending his father’s flock in the desert and taking provisions to his brothers at the war front. David as we all know became one of the greatest kings who ever lived: in military conquests, in material splendor, in honor, in respect, and above all in a deep understanding of the mystery of God. David was distinguished by grace.

You may be the least qualified or you may come from very humble beginnings like the man Jabez in 1 Chronicles 4:9, a man who was given emphasis in the middle of a chronology, whose background was shrouded in sorrow and negativity yet grace found him and he became more established than his brothers. The famed British explorer, David Livingstone, had a drunken interpreter named Brainerd; yet through the same man, the good news of salvation was spread through most of Africa. God Almighty says, “I will have mercy upon whom I will and compassion upon whom I will for it is not unto him who wills nor runs but to God himself who shows mercy. We are all beneficiaries of God’s grace.”

In the summer of 2010, at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the Uniting General Council was held. It was a merger into one body of the two global reformed church organizations, The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC), forming the WCRC World Communion of Reformed Churches. It was history being made, and I happened to be a part of it. I had been nominated a month earlier by the Ecumenical Water Network, an arm of the World Council of Churches, to

represent it and present papers at the council. In attendance were over fifteen hundred global church leaders from all over the world including my country, Nigeria. I was leading a group of presenters from India, the Caribbean, and Europe. As I stood before the audience, power point ready, impeccably dressed, emboldened by the Holy Spirit and fully prepared to deliver my presentation titled, “Water a Gift from God and a Fundamental Human Right,” my mind quickly flashed back to where I was coming from. I remembered that I was nothing. I was academically the least qualified of my co-presenters and even the majority of the audience; and spiritually, I was the Christian that struggled and fought to keep my faith. I didn’t any connections to anyone in authority or high position nor did I have money. In fact, every expense associated with my trip was being borne by the organization that sent me; yet, grace put me on that podium.

The greatest example, however, of the workings of God’s grace lies solely on our salvation, in the book *The Man God Uses* Oswald J Smith talks about the utter bankruptcy of the human race and how mankind already was doomed before Christ’s work on the cross. The moment Jesus died on the cross the veil in the temple in Jerusalem was torn from top to bottom depicting unrestricted access to God’s grace. Never again will mankind have to pay a steep price for redemption. God the Almighty had worked out the perfect, permanent solution to the fall of man. Apostle Paul summed it up beautifully in his letter to the Church in Ephesus **“You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else. But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus. God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God.**

How beautiful!! This good news, how beautiful this gift; yet, it’s not something we should take for granted. Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? Of course not! Since we have died to sin how can we continue to live in it? Wayne Johnson from the Christian Courier wrote, “In the New Testament ‘Grace’ takes on a special redemptive sense in which God makes available his favor on behalf of sinners who actually do not deserve it, there is tremendous emphasis upon the fact that human salvation is a result of heaven’s grace.” This beautiful truth should never be minimized. At the same time it must not be perverted, unfortunately much too often those with only a superficial concept of grace have hijacked the term and foisted upon it a sense alien to scriptural teaching. Let us consider scripture .. **Titus 2 vs 11 -15 for the grace of God have been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. ¹² And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God, ¹³ while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed. ¹⁴ He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds.**

In summary, God’s grace is such a beautiful gift that we should be eternally grateful for. It has distinguished us, changed our destinies, and purchased for us eternal life in place of utter damnation. No wonder the early church reformers found it so crucial as to coin the term, Sola Fide (faith alone), Sola Gratia (grace alone), Sola scriptura, (scripture alone). May Grace make you to be held in high esteem, may grace cause you to be honored and continually distinguish you. Amen.