

THE GRACE OF THE GOSPEL

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Edited by
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REFORMATION HERITAGE BOOKS

Grand Rapids, Michigan

The Grace of the Gospel

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Published by

Reformation Heritage Books

3070 29th St. SE

Grand Rapids, MI 49512

616-977-0889

e-mail: orders@heritagebooks.org

website: www.heritagebooks.org

Printed in the United States of America

22 23 24 25 26/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN: 978-1-60178-979-2 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-60178-980-8 (e-pub)

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With heartfelt appreciation for

Dr. Manuel Canuto

*a Puritan-loving and steadfast
Brazilian friend for decades.*

Contents

Editorial Preface vii

The Purpose of the Gospel

1. The Gospel Need – *Stephen G. Myers* 3
2. The Gospel Planned – *Jon Payne* 21

The Proclamation of the Gospel

3. The Essence of the Gospel – *Joel R. Beeke* 37
4. The Grace of God in the Gospel – *Greg Salazar* 59
5. Apostolic Preaching and the Gospel – *David W. Hall* 79

The Precedents of the Gospel

6. Ceremonial Shadows and the Gospel – *Robert McCurley* 105
7. Gospel Inspired Gratitude – *Josh Buice* 121

The Power of the Gospel

8. Gospel Empowerment – *Josh Buice* 135
9. The Gospel Results – *Robert McCurley* 147
10. The Gospel Hope – *Mark Kelderman* 161
Contributors 179

Editorial Preface

The title of this book, *The Grace of the Gospel*, is rich with meaning. In fact, it is so rich that the content of this book is only a foretaste of a subject matter that is so remarkably beautiful that a believer will spend his or her lifetime and all eternity experiencing, learning, and being transformed by it. For millennia Christians have meditated on, prayed for, sang about, and sought to put this grace on display in their own lives and all for the glory of God.

Before we look to answer the questions of *what* grace is or *how* it works, we ought to ask the simple question of *why* we need grace at all. In the opening chapter, Dr. Steven Myers addresses these questions by considering the state of mankind before, during, and after the fall of Adam. He examines the immediate and lasting consequences of Adam's rebellious act against the law of God; and finally, he unfurls God's gracious remedy in Jesus Christ, the only assurance, comfort, and joy a believer has in this life and in the life to come.

When we fully comprehend our desperate need of a savior, we are driven to ask the question, "How can I be a recipient of such grace?" In chapter 2, Dr. Jon Payne plumbs the depths of this question by taking us back to the eternal counsel of our triune God. He explores the covenant of redemption, both from historical and theological perspectives. He shows how this intra-trinitarian covenant is not only true but is in fact the genesis of gospel grace. This covenant of redemption, says Dr. Payne, "provides profound comfort to the Christian's soul, for *in Christ* we were

chosen, *through Christ* we were reconciled to God, and *with Christ* we are already seated in the heavenly places.”¹

While chapters 1 and 2 lay the foundation by answering the questions of *why* we need the grace of the gospel and *how* we have been made recipients of that remarkable grace, the remaining eight chapters will unfold for us the rich tapestry of *what* the grace of the gospel is and what it is not.

In answering the question of what exactly the gospel is, I explain in chapter 3 the gospel’s content, reliability, universality, pattern, and purpose which are found in 1 Timothy 1:15–17. He reminds us that the gospel is good news to everyone who believes because the grace of the gospel is Jesus Christ and He alone.

In chapter 4, Dr. Greg Salazar explores the many facets of God’s grace in the active and passive obedience of Christ. He examines God’s perfect plan of salvation for sinners and highlights the need to embrace this gracious work on our behalf personally.

When examining what the gospel is, we need to ask, “What was the gospel message that the apostles preached?” To answer that question, Dr. David Hall explores in chapter 5 the earliest sermons we have in the Book of Acts, six homiletic themes that get repeated throughout the Book of Acts, and how the free offer of the gospel is central to each of these themes. Dr. Hall concludes that the gospel of grace was preached “plentifully, powerfully, promiscuously, and purposefully.”²

If the grace of the gospel is central to the Bible and its overarching message of redemption, what about its relationship to the law? The answer to that question is given to us in chapter 6. Rev. Rob McCurley examines the law’s ceremonial shadows of temple, sacrifice, and priesthood, and then points us to the substance of these shadows, the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Joel R. Beeke, ed., *The Grace of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2022), p.31.

2. Beeke, *The Grace of the Gospel*, p.101.

Dr. Josh Buice addresses gospel inspired gratitude in chapter 7. He points out that because of the grace of the gospel in our lives, we are to be thankful for our gospel inheritance, our deliverance, our redemption, and the forgiveness of our sins.

The last three chapters of the book focus on the power of the grace of the gospel. In chapter 8, Josh Buice examines the empowerment provided to the believer for total surrender of one's life in worship to Christ and in sanctification of that life to the glory of God. In chapter 9, Rev. McCurley looks at the source, the nature, and the consequences of gospel reconciliation. He concludes that doxology is the culmination of the grace of the gospel. Even though evangelism and evangelistic preaching will cease, worship of our triune God will be for eternity. In chapter 10, Dr. Mark Kelderman draws this study to a close by focusing on our gospel hope—a hope that enables the believer to persevere in this life and to look to Christ for the life to come.

It is the desire of everyone involved in the production of this work that after reading these addresses, which were delivered at the 2021 Puritan Reformed Conference in Grand Rapids, your heart might swell with gratitude and your lips resound with the words of John Newton's hymn, *Amazing Grace*:

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch; like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

The Lord hath promised good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we'd first begun.³

3. <https://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/313>

The Purpose of the Gospel

The Gospel Need

Stephen G. Myers

The purpose of this volume is to meditate upon the grace of the gospel. And the gospel is *full* of grace. It tells us of the grace that is in Jesus Christ; the Spirit uses the gospel to work reconciliation between the Holy God and His people. The gospel is a gospel of *grace*. But to begin to see even the outer periphery of the grace of the gospel, we first have to see our *need* of the gospel.

Man's Initial Blessedness

To see our need, it perhaps is best to begin at the beginning, seeing the depth to which we have fallen from the heights from which we fell. As we all know, on the sixth day of creation, as the very crown of all that He had made, God made mankind. We read of that creation in Genesis 1:26: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”

Genesis 1 is God's sweeping account of His creation of all things other than Himself, including mankind. In Genesis 2, it is as if the Scriptures zoom in and give us a more detailed account of the creation of man that had been briefly described in Genesis 1. This is the creation of man in fine, granular detail. And there, in Genesis 2:7, we read this: “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” And then, in Genesis 2:21: “And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the

flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man.”

One of the striking aspects of God’s creation that emerges from Genesis 1 is God’s unbridled power and overriding authority in the creation. He speaks and the worlds spring into existence. He speaks and light breaks forth. He speaks and the seas gather; and the birds fill the skies; and the animals roam the earth. Romans 4:17 tells us that God calls things that are not as though they were and we see Him *doing* that in Genesis 1. God speaks things into existence. But not mankind. With mankind, God molds him from the dust of the ground; He fashions him into this bodily form. But it is just a form. This body that God forms out of the earth has eyes, but they do not see. It has ears, but they do not hear. There is no *life* in this molded dust. And then the Lord—the One whose glory fills the heavens and the earth that He just days before had made; it is as if He stoops down and He breathes *life* into this man. God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” Adam’s first inhalation was the exhaled breath of life from Almighty God.

Later that same day, the Lord took a rib from Adam’s side and He fashioned it into a woman. And when Adam woke from his sleep and he saw the woman whom God had made, what did he do? He sang! He burst forth in poetry! Adam just has been woken from his sleep and we read this in Genesis 2:23: “And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” It perhaps loses a bit of its melody in English translation, but this is poetic. Adam is singing. From Adam’s first sight of this woman, she has his heart. He is singing his love. Later, in Genesis 2:25, we read this: “And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.” Now, that might make some of us a little uncomfortable, but God is making a point about the nearness of Adam and Eve. There were no barriers. No boundaries of openness. They were completely, wholly open to each other and *with* each other. They were perfectly, wholly vulnerable—with no shame. There was no corner of their personalities where they hid things from each other, no thing that

they kept from each other, no thoughts that they kept concealed. They were open; they were together; they were one.¹ And there was no shame.

And they bore the image of God. When God created mankind, He was intentionally, purposefully crafting a created thing that bore His image. A creature who bore the impress of the Creator. A creature who was *like* Him, in some infinitesimal, analogous way. And with those image bearers, God had frequent communion and fellowship. He speaks immediately to Adam; from the language of Genesis 3:8, it appears that God regularly communed with Adam and Eve in the garden that He had made specifically for them.

Think of it. You cannot exhaust the glory of Adam and Eve's estate. You cannot find the bottom of their blessedness. They bear the image of the blessed God; they have breathed the breath of life from Him. They have perfect, entire communion with each other. And they have it all in a garden that has been specifically made to meet their every need and every desire to overflowing.

The Fall

And then it all collapsed. Or, more accurately, they pulled it all down. As we all know, God willingly had entered into what is called the covenant of works with Adam.² Like all covenants, the covenant of works was a relationship—in this case, a relationship between God and Adam—but it was a relationship that had parameters; a relationship that carried with it certain obligations for Adam. And one of those obligations was the command, recorded in Genesis 2:17, that Adam was not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. If Adam *did* eat of the forbidden tree, he would die. And Adam did. We do not have time to explore the obscenity of our first parents' fall, but Adam and Eve ate of the fruit. And with that sin, everything fell into ruin.

The ground under Adam's feet turned against him. God tells Adam in Genesis 3:17–19 that, because of his sin, the ground is cursed. It will

1. See John D. Currid, *Genesis*, 2 vols. (Darlington, U.K.: Evangelical Press, 2003), 1:114.

2. For more on the covenant of works, see Stephen G. Myers, *God to Us: Covenant Theology in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2021), 51–76.

render up to Adam thorns and thistles. Working that land will be *hard*. In verse 19, God says that it is only by the “sweat” of his “face” that Adam will be able to wrench food out of that ground. In verse 17, God says that “in sorrow” Adam will eat of the produce of the ground all of the days of his life. Adam *will* eat; God will continue to provide for him through the land; but it will be a life of toil. The very things which God had made to bless Adam and to provide for him now would bring him only sweat and labor and weeping.³ Because of his sin, the world in which Adam had reigned as the image bearer of the Creator now was turned against him.

And he was turned against Eve. In Genesis 3, when God confronted Adam about his sin and his rebellion, what was Adam’s first response? “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, *she* gave me of the tree and I did eat” (v. 12).

The woman. Now, at that point, Eve was not yet named Eve, so Adam is not demeaning her by calling her “the woman,” but he *is* blaming her. He is putting the responsibility on her. He is trying to distance himself from her so that the just anger of God can fall on *her* and be mitigated in its force upon *him*. We find out later, in 1 Timothy 2:14, that when Adam sinned and ate of the fruit of the tree, he knew what he was doing. The decision was *Adam’s*; the fault was *Adam’s*; the blame was *Adam’s*. And he *knew* that. Yet Adam tried to push it onto Eve. Now, Eve goes on immediately to blame the serpent; there is plenty of blame-shifting occurring in the coolness of the garden.⁴ But Adam’s is treachery. He had *sung* over Eve. She had been his delight and his joy. She had been the one for whom he was to forsake all of created reality in order that he might be one with her. And he tries to throw her on the sword of divine justice in a pathetic attempt to save his own skin. It is no mistake that when God confronts Adam and Eve in the garden, they are covered. In Genesis 3:7, we are told that, immediately upon their fall, Adam and Eve saw that they were naked and so they sewed fig leaves together to cover

3. “The Lord, however, determined that his anger should, like a deluge, overflow all parts of the earth, that wherever man might look, the atrocity of his sin should meet his eyes.” John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, ed. John King, 22 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 1:173.

4. See Currid, *Genesis*, 1:125–26.

themselves. They were ashamed. Back in Genesis 2:25, Adam and Eve's unembarrassed nakedness around each other was a tangible manifestation that they were not ashamed; that there was no part of them that needed covering; no part that required obscuring. And now they have clothed themselves.⁵ There is a part of each that is not *for* the other. Blissful, singing communion is gone.

But that is not the most trembling part. Genesis 3:9 records: "And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?" God calls out for Adam. God knows where Adam is, of course. God sees and knows all things; there is nothing hidden before Him. God knows where Adam is. But Adam and Eve are hiding. Verse 8 had told us that when Adam and Eve heard God's voice and became aware of His presence, they hid. This is the God in whose image Adam was made—the God who had breathed life into him. And Adam is afraid of Him. That is what Adam says in verse 10: "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was *afraid*."

Adam is not just alienated from the world around him, and he is not just alienated from his wife, Eve. Adam is alienated from God. He hides from His presence. He *fears* his Maker. And it even gets worse. Previously, we noticed Genesis 3:12, where Adam sought to bring Eve into condemnation in order to spare himself. Consider that verse again: "And the man said, The woman whom *thou* gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat."

Adam is also blaming God.⁶ He is blaming God's benevolence and abundant blessing for his own transgression. Sin has come into this world of wondrous bliss and it has destroyed everything. Of course, God has mercy on Adam and Eve. He will continue to care for them and He makes them marvelous promises. But sin has destroyed everything. And, let us be specific—Adam, by his sin, has destroyed everything. Later, in Genesis 3:24, we see that God casts Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden. In fact, we see that God has a gracious purpose in that exiling of Adam and Eve, but He casts them out nonetheless. And

5. See Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology, Volume 2: Man and Christ* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2020), 352–53.

6. See Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, 1:164; Currid, *Genesis*, 1:125.

eventually, Adam will die. In Genesis 3:19, God had told Adam that he would have to labor and toil for his food: “Till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”

The dust that God had gathered up to form man; the dust that God had gathered together to shape into a body into which He would breathe the breath of life; the dust that God had gathered up in order that it might play some part in bearing God’s own image—it will go back to the ground. Everything is ruined.

Now, we do not have the time to explore this at any length, but consider this: When God the Son came in the flesh, He took to Himself a human nature. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism says, the Son took to Himself “a true body, and a reasonable soul.”⁷ Humanity, in all of the blessedness in which God made it without the defilement of sin, was made so marvelously well that it can be taken into union with the Son of God. Humanity can be, with Jesus’s deity, in one person. It is the crown of God’s creation. That is what Adam had—sinless humanity, undefiled. And he ruined it. He is estranged from God and he is bound for disintegration.

In life, there are those moments when things change—and they change for the worse; and immediately, you *know* that. But you cannot push backward against the moving seconds; you cannot undo what has been done; you cannot make things as they were ten seconds ago. You have said something that you should not have said; you have done something that you should not have done; and no matter the horror or the revulsion you feel at the result, you cannot change it. The moment has come; it has changed everything, and what has been made wrong can never be made right again. How Adam must have felt that way! How deep the dread must have been! How sickening—and there is nothing that Adam can do. No way that he can fix it or change it. He has ruined his relationship to the creation, he has ruined his relationship with Eve, and he has ruined his relationship with God. That is what sin does. It destroys. It *looks* appealing, but it *destroys*. Man’s struggles with the created order—the alienation of man from woman, and man from man;

7. WSC, Q. 22.