

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 284

November 1996

Contents

GRACE - I

THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

GRACE - I

Titus 2: 11-14; John 1: 14-18; Romans 5: 15-21

R.T. I thought there might be profit in looking into the expression in Titus that the grace of God has appeared, and the effect that it has had. It is a great feature of the dispensation in which we are, the dispensation of grace. We will be helped to see later the result it is going to have. I am not thinking only of the way grace has met us as to our sins and our debts, but of the formative effect that grace should have on us. The passage goes on to say, "the grace of God which carries with it salvation ... has appeared". I thought we might speak of that today - "has appeared". We may speak later of how grace teaches us, but we could speak now of how it has appeared and the effect that it has had as having appeared. The law came in on tables of stone, and there was a certain glory about it, but the incoming of grace required the Son, a divine Person, to bring it into expression, and the greatness of the One who has introduced it, you may say, ensures its continuance, as this passage suggests. The Scriptures we have read speak of grace having appeared, grace subsisting and grace reigning. It is the great power that is to dominate the dispensation. If our hearts were confirmed in it, what stability it would bring about, and a change of character in persons.

The epistles emphasise repeatedly the danger of not being formed in grace. Paul says to the Corinthians that the grace of God may not be received in vain (2 Cor 6: 1); to the Galatians that they had fallen from grace (Gal 5: 4); to the Hebrews as to the danger of any one lacking the grace of God (Heb 12: 15). I refer to this only to show the dangers, and, on the other hand, the importance of allowing grace to have its perfect work in bringing about formatively a character in the saints that would mark them off as of this dispensation. The danger with us, and with the Galatians and the Corinthians, is to fall back on another principle. I thought that contemplating in John's gospel the One who has brought it in might help us to be affected by the appearing of grace. John was affected by the glory of it - "a glory as of an only-begotten with a father, full of

grace and truth". We might have read in Luke, which deals more with grace as meeting our needs. It is important that we realise that grace has met our liabilities and our needs, producing a thankful spirit in us. But I think John would bring out a more formative side, that we become like the One in whom grace has been expressed.

As you follow through in John the persons who received it you see its formative character: the woman in John 4 left her waterpot, she had another principle, another power of life in her; the man in John 9 and others in the gospel had come not only to appreciate grace but to appreciate the One in whom it is expressed. This may be a starting point for us to get some sense of the One in whom this grace has reached us and how it is continuing, as it says in Romans, it is reigning. There is a wonderful foundation in righteousness, alluding no doubt to the death of Christ, but the foundation is there, that grace may reign; never to leave the throne but dominates and is the great power and principle that is to flow into our hearts to mark us off as being of this dispensation. I trust the Spirit may help us to be strengthened and will open up something of the glory of what has come in, to draw our hearts into the wealth of what is available for us.

L.McF. It carries with it salvation for all men. Do the thoughts of God have the whole creation in mind? The Lord Jesus came in as the Son of man to bring that grace into expression, do you think?

R.T. Yes, that is very beautiful. He came in in John's gospel as the Son of man who is in heaven. Thus He brought the wealth of heaven with Him, and, as you say, it carries with it salvation. What opposition He met at every turn, but the power of grace carries with it salvation. It clears liabilities under which man lay, but the end is that we may be formed in the character of this grace that is to fill our hearts. So in John it says, "the Word became flesh". What He brought into that condition, "the Word became flesh"! There is what is infinite about it; it is beyond what we can compass, but the grandeur of it is to affect us. What grace in such a One - "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us ... full of grace and truth".

E.F.C. It has been said that grace is the love of God away from home, having to be in difficult circumstances. The Lord Jesus came into that in manhood, did He not, into this world of sin and woe?

R.T. I think in John's gospel you can see where the home of grace was; it was in His links with the Father. He brought grace into those circumstances, as you said, away from home. John is full of that; the disciples went to their own homes but He had another home, with the Father and the Father's love, and John is impressed with that.

So that grace is not something that comes from earth but it is from heaven; it has come from the glory, and it comes to us in our need; love adapting itself to the need that we may have power in this scene of death to reign and to reign in life.

P.E.M. I recall you remarking that every one of Paul's epistles carries at the end a touch as to grace.

R.T. There is more than that; he begins them with grace and he ends them with grace: and he has the same touch of grace to Corinth as he has to Ephesus; grace does not make any distinction about our state because it has its resource in something else. So it would meet the state, whatever it is, be it Corinth or Ephesus.

Whatever he has had to say to them in the epistle he closes that grace may be with them. In one of them he says, grace be with your spirit (Phil 4: 23).

H.G.H. So it teaches us. That is your thought, is it not?

R.T. We will come to the teaching, perhaps, in another reading but I thought we might get some sense of how it has appeared. As you suggest, the effect of it is that we may be formed by this great power that has appeared, that we do not go back to law or the flesh or such things, but are attracted into this flow of divine grace that is reigning and is continuing through the whole dispensation in spite of what has come into it.

J.S. In Luke 4 the Lord was very deliberate in taking up the book. He found the place and, having found it, He sat down. Do you think He was establishing this great principle and never going to deviate from it, in view of a full result?

R.T. He says there "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your ears." It was there in all its fulness. The passage had often been read before no doubt, but never read in the way in which He read it. There is a beautiful touch in that passage too; it says, "he has anointed me".

Think of the Spirit being in it too! What wealth has come in with the grace that has appeared; it was there that day to meet the needs and to draw people as delivered to come to be followers of the heavenly One.

J.A.P. It is "the words of grace" in Luke 4 and He stopped at the passage about vengeance; He did not read that. What would you say?

R.T. It is because He was emphasising what was there "today". There will be another day for vengeance. But, as you say, He stopped at that word and said, Today this is fulfilled. It was there for them. He mourns about it later and says if they had known what was for their peace. They did not grasp it but they wondered at the words of grace. They did not grasp it but they wondered at the words of grace. He was opposed in that ministry but He just went through their midst: He did not bring in the day of vengeance. They would have taken Him to the brow of the hill but He just passed through them in His grace. It brings out the infinite character of grace that the very circumstance into which it came never set it aside, but it triumphed over them.

L.D.P. Why are grace and peace so often linked together?

R.T. I think they go together: the more we are formed in the character of grace, there would be more peace, do you think?

L.D.P. The Father also is mentioned - grace and peace from God our Father.

R.T. Yes; a number of things are put with grace in the Scriptures, and peace is one of them. It comes very much into Paul's greetings, grace and peace be with the brethren. I think these things go together. We may see later how the effect of being formed in grace promotes peace; it is opposite to contention. Grace would silence these features of the flesh and make way for the enjoyment of

peace. Do you think the glory of it is in the One who has introduced it? The law came in and there were angels there; it was written on tables of stone. It says, "the law was given by Moses", but here is a divine Person come into those conditions, "became flesh, and dwelt among us" and He brought something in which John finds hard to define, He brought in something that was wholly new but very attractive.

G.D.R. As related to ourselves, would you say that it is supply? Long ago someone asked a question to define grace, and the reply was supply.

R.T. Yes, I think so. I think grace is a never ending supply. It says, Let us draw near to the throne that we may find grace for seasonable help (see Heb 4: 16). If we just got some impression of the fulness of it - "of his fulness we all have received"- it would connect with what you are saying; the supply is always there, more than the difficulties. We have in our time come against some very difficult circumstances, but whatever comes into the dispensation there is grace to meet it.

J.S. Would you say more about fulness as linked with grace.

R.T. It is "for of his fulness" and "full of grace and truth", very rich and full expressions. Would you say something about it?

J.S. The law perfected nothing, it exposed man's state, but does it lead us to the thought of all that was in this blessed Person? He is to become a new source of supply, is He not? John is speaking reflectively; everything is to come from this wonderful new source of supply.

R.T. Yes, the law perfected nothing. It was just and good but there is no fulness about it; it was all written down and that was it. The idea of fulness brings out that there is an inexhaustible supply in a Person who has come near to us. He became flesh, He has come near to us and brought that fulness within our reach. The fulness is available today, as it was at the beginning of the dispensation, because of the One in whom it is shining.

C.F.D. So that the introduction of grace awaited the incoming of Christ.

R.T. I think so. Say some more.

C.F.D. The law of Moses has been referred to and the necessity for law, but the Lord Jesus introduced an entirely new line, which awaited His ministry in manhood to come into expression. The early part of Luke has been referred to - the grace that was there became manifest in the words that proceeded from Christ and it brought in an entirely new line of things which really involves a divine attribute. Is that right?

R.T. Yes, indeed it is. The whole of heaven was moved as He came in. I think the reference in Titus to the grace of God having appeared is an allusion to the incarnation; there may be more in it, but there would be that in it. And you can see, as you said, in Luke how the whole heavenly host was moved that something new had come in; they said a Saviour is born who is Christ the Lord, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace", (Luke 2: 14). Something had come in that had never been before; the answer to the fall, you may say, came in in the incarnation, and was available in the whole of His ministry. Amid all the opposition it carried with it salvation, it remained in all its fulness through every day.

D.M.W. Are we helped then to see that His title, the Word, awaited this One coming in to express it? It would help us to see that this title 'the Word' is connected with the roll of the book in what God would bring in according to His own mind, and thoughts, and purpose expressed in a Man here.

R.T. Yes, very good. So that it brings in substantiality in the Word, in One who came here in whom the will of God and all that God had ever required from man was perfectly expressed and made way for the outshining of this grace towards men in its fulness. Have you some more to say about the Word?

D.M.W. I was thinking of our brother's thought that it awaited the incoming of this One before it could be expressed. 'The Word' would

indicate that to us, would it not, the expression of everything that was in God's heart and mind?

R.T. It was always there. Although there was a period of law, there was grace there; otherwise man would not have survived. Grace was there but for it to be expressed in its fulness it required a divine Person, the Word.

D.M.W. So Moses could not take them into the land, could he?

R.T. Why?

D.M.W. For our own education, that he was representative of the law. It waited on a divine Person fully to fill things out and to make known the mind of God for man.

R.T. It would help us to be committed to this formative line of grace, that we may come into eternal life, as Romans goes on to, and preserve us from falling back on these other principles, as the Galatians did. But the charm of "the Word became flesh", is to draw us to be kept under the influence and the power of what has come into expression in this glorious Person, is it not?

D.M.W. Would you say that, as we ask ourselves the question, How do we learn grace? that it can be learned only through this blessed One?

R.T. Yes. John says here, "we have contemplated his glory". You get the impression reading this passage that John finds it difficult to frame it into words; he saw something that was entirely new he says, "as of an only-begotten". As has been referred to already, behind the fulness and expression of grace is the idea of relationship of the Son with the Father. The Son here in manhood but bringing the wealth of heaven and, you may say, the grace of the economy, as we may speak of it later, into expression, to have a formative effect upon the spirits of men.

J.A.P. Perhaps this is a poor word, but the Lord really had to contend for grace in John's gospel. It says about the disciples that they wondered that He spoke with a woman (John 4: 27); and clearly in chapter 8 the same thing, and chapter 9, He went right forward

almost without support in the disseminating of this great matter. Is that right?

R.T. Yes, the support was from the Father. No other power could support grace; it had to come from heaven. It is found on earth, but grace flows from above. It must have a great fountain-head and that is in the Father. No one in debt or in bondage can show grace; it is something that flows from royalty really, from the richness and the glory of what God is, to meet all that may be opposed to it. In John the opposition was religious and Jewish and moral too, all against the working of grace, but grace met these things to bring salvation to hearts that would receive it.

L.McF. So in John 1 it says, "And looking at Jesus as he walked", v 36. This is a practical thing; it came into expression as He walked. It says, "Behold the Lamb of God". Then there were two who heard him and wanted to be with Him. What we are speaking of is very attractive, is it not?

R.T. It is: I think it is to attract us and to form us. As you say, John saw something so different about Him - "Behold the Lamb of God" and "a glory as of an only-begotten with a father". He saw something new coming into those circumstances of life in which men were and he is impressed with the fulness of it. And he says, We have received, the disciples received something. You can see that they were drawn into it; the Lord brings them into the fulness of it later. But John was attracted as to something of this fulness, enough to follow Him

G.D.R. The saints come into the great gain of what is royal; you said it has its source in royalty. But as we apprehend it for ourselves, is it displayed in the reflection of Christ in the saints? In your part of the world the Queen has what they call grace and favour there is something of a dispensation of full supply coming from that source, is it not? Would you say something as to grace and truth subsisting?

R.T. There is a footnote to that word (see John 1: 17). It is quite a long one, but at the end of it it says, grace has appeared and 'its so

taking place supposes its continuance'. That is a very fine note that grace having come in in Christ it is going through to the rapture. It supposes its continuance because of the One of whose fulness we have all received, and, as you say, it is also seen in persons who themselves become marked by royalty. The appeal and the formation of it would preserve us from falling below the level of what is true for the dispensation.

J.S. Is the thought of grace an operating principle? Is this not really the beginning of divine operations in the earth, and grace a great operating principle to bring about a result for divine pleasure?

R.T. I think that is a good way to put it that it is the operating principle. Had He used law we would have been shut out. It is very affecting the way it is put, "grace and truth"; we see it in the woman in John 8, do we not? If truth had been first she would have been condemned, but you see there grace and truth, "Neither do I condemn thee". Truth is maintained but grace was shown, grace was first. As you say it is the method in which divine love is operating today. Truth is never sacrificed, but there is grace there to keep us in the realm of the truth and to keep us livingly in the truth in contrast to its becoming a dead letter.

E.F.C. The Spirit is referred to too as the Spirit of grace (Heb 10: 29). Is He not the One who helps us to augment the expression of grace in the saints? Like the oil that comes down in Psalm 133 upon Aaron's head and down to his feet. The Spirit would help us, would He not, to continue this display of grace?

R.T. I think so. It is in His power that it subsists and continues, as you say. What we are reading in John 1, and what has followed from the death of Christ, has made room for a dispensation of grace, and that involved another divine Person coming here, the Holy Spirit of God, to maintain the level of the dispensation, and more than that, to maintain the saints at the level of the dispensation.

E.F.C. It is very serious to do despite to the Spirit of grace (which expression is in the context in Hebrews).

R.T. We may come to the practical side of that later, but there is need, I think, of just being attracted that grace has been established, never to be set aside. God has established it in a Person; He has established it in the economy, that grace reigns. Whatever arises in the dispensation there is grace to preserve us on the level that divine love has purposes.

H.G.H. Grace is really a part of an expression of love, is it not? It is through grace, through truth, we come to know God who is love.

R.T. It says, By grace are ye saved through faith (Eph 2: 8). Grace is a great operating principle. Love is His nature, but it is the way that God's love has expressed itself in our time, in grace in a Man; and in the economy God has expressed Himself in grace that there may be in this dispensation a vessel formed in which in the day to come He will display the glory of His grace.

H.G.H. So the law in a sense demanded it, Love thy neighbour as thyself?

R.T. Yes, but grace has brought in the way in which it can be effected, has it not?

H.G.H. It is like a commodity from God, is it not?

R.T. Well, it is how He has come out, no demanding but grace is supplying. I suppose the new covenant (into which Israel will come) is an expression of it, in a sense. But in our day it has come in, it has appeared and it subsists through the dispensation in the One in whom its fulness is expressed. "Of his fulness we all have received, and grace upon grace." It is a continuing thing through the dispensation; the grace that we have received today, and in the exercises that we have had it is to form us so that there is another addition to it, "grace upon grace".

H.J.G. Would verse 18 show us that it could not come by any other, "the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him". It could not come any other way than through that One.

R.T. That is very beautiful. I was impressed in this scripture with the relationship that lies behind the outshining of grace; "as of an only-begotten", and the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father". That is where it finds its source, is it not? A very fine expression that, the bosom of the Father", and that is where the Son lived as this gospel speaks about Him. Our brother referred to the Son of man, but the Son of man who is in heaven, a stranger here in the circumstances of men, but displaying a character that belonged to heaven and had its source in the Father's bosom.

C.F.D. So while grace is on the throne - grace reigns - it is through the principle of righteousness. So that grace is operating, shining out, the glory of it. We sometimes sing,

O the glory of the grace,
Shining in the Saviour's face!

(Hymn 438).

It is all there, but underlying it is righteousness. Would that be right?

R.T. Yes, and I wondered if the righteousness in that setting may be an allusion to the death of Christ. In Romans you are struck with the abundance of grace. John speaks of the fulness of grace upon grace, but Romans brings it into the scene of need and speaks about the free gift in grace and the abundance of grace, and grace reigning, as the fruit of the death of Christ. It says in Hebrews, "so that by the grace of God he should taste death for every thing", Heb 2: 9. So that grace is shining out, you may say, in a greater fulness today than it did even when the Lord was here in the days of His flesh. His death has laid the foundation in righteousness that grace may shine out in its abundance in a scene of sin and upon sinners that we may come into this blessed realm of eternal life.

C.F.D. So "where sin abounded grace has overabounded". It is wonderful to see how the overabounding of grace has covered everything to meet the righteousness of God.

R.T. If we think of that expression for a moment that "by the grace of God he should taste death", what love was behind that, but what an

outshining of grace. I think that that is where the foundation in righteousness was laid, so that grace can reign. Righteousness has not been sacrificed. It brings a certain substantiality into the thought of grace. Grace is not something that men would call weakness. I think the power of grace is that He who tasted death has laid a basis in righteousness in the laying down of His life that in resurrection there may be a reign of grace, persons brought under its reign to enjoy the great thoughts that were in the heart of God for us.

J.A.P. It was one of the greatest glories of David's kingdom when he said, "I will shew kindness", 2 Sam 10: 2. A great administration took place there and brethren were recovered through it, were they not?

R.T. I think you see it very beautifully in David as a type. Whatever came in, in the main he fell back on his links with God - another spirit. It is said about some of the other worthies that they had another spirit in them. I think grace would form us in that so that when we come to Romans it speaks of the overabounding character of it. The free gift can never be earned or be merited, but it is shining out from the throne in all its blessed fulness. As we said earlier, whether it is to Corinth or Ephesus, it is shining in its fulness because it has its source in the heart of God and His love.

C.F.D. Would you say a word as to "so also grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"? "To eternal life" - how does that work through?

R.T. I think in the setting in Romans it is to make you superior to the influences of death that are around. Paul is dealing in the chapter with what has come into the race and the bondage that has come in, but I think that grace reigning through righteousness brings us into an area that is beyond the bondage of death. What would you say about it?

C.F.D. I think that is very helpful because "to eternal life" would suggest an atmosphere into which the person comes where there is the operation of grace through righteousness. So it is "to eternal life". Do you think that behind that is the suggestion that it is

something that is entered into and enjoyed by the person where these features are functioning?

R.T. Yes; I think grace brings us into a realm where another kind of life is enjoyed. The law brought in death and bondage, but grace reigning, and the free gift and abundance of grace, persons come out in another character which finds its life in this area of eternal life, superior to the limitations and the bondage of death that lies upon the race. So it is through Jesus Christ our Lord.

J.S. Do you think Mephibosheth is one who was formed by grace?

R.T. Yes; the teaching will come out in persons in the way they have been marked by it. I thought that in this reading we would get some impression of fulness, the wealth that is continuing through the dispensation, that whatever the circumstances, however long the dispensation or whatever sorrows have to be met, grace is reigning, there is grace to meet whatever circumstance may arise.

L.McF. So the character is seen in the assembly at Antioch: they were called Christians. I suppose this feature of grace could be seen.

R.T. Did Barnabas not see it, it says "seeing the grace of God", Acts 11: 23? I wonder what he saw? What would he see?

L.McF. He saw it in persons.

R.T. Did he see persons there who were not envious of one another, persons who were not projecting themselves? He saw the grace of God: he saw another character. It brings out the formative side that we are speaking of, the substantiality of it in persons. It is very fine that he looked on the brethren and put that name upon them, Christians as you say. He did not just say, he is a fine brother, or, he has nice manners, or whatever, but he saw the grace of God shining in persons.

D.M.W. There would have been something peculiar with them, a peculiar people as we had in Titus.

R.T. Very good. They could not be understood by worldlings; they could not understand the lack of ambition about them and the lack of

aspiring after worldly goods and these things. They were living on another principle, were they not? He saw something there that proceeded from the glory, proceeded from God, had its source in the Father.

J.Mcl. These persons would form a beautiful base for the glad tidings to go forth.

R.T. Yes. It gives substantiality to them, does it not? It is the effect of the glad tidings in persons. They have received the free gift. So that it makes nothing of us: it proceeds from God as a free gift in its abundance whatever the circumstances and the state, to form a character that has its origin, produced as we have said by the Spirit, in what has come from heaven.

E.F.C. So that the atmosphere in which we are today is probably the best place we could be to touch the essence of eternal life, do you think?

R.T. I think it has been said that the enjoyment of eternal life involves the brethren and it is that grace might reign to eternal life. Eternal life in a sense is an atmosphere, is it not?

E.F.C. It is a remarkable system of relationship and being, an out-of-the-world condition of things.

R.T. A heavenly order of relationship and being. It is something entirely foreign to the world, and it is formed in persons. It is an atmosphere that grace has produced in which growth can take place and breathe freely, you may say, the atmosphere of eternal life.

S.E.MacC. To know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ (John 17: 3).

R.T. That is the eternal life. I remember that it was said that persons were trying to say that eternal life was the name of a person. But the truth is a Person is it, He is the true God and eternal life; it shines in a Person. So does grace, it is radiating from a living Person and the Person is God and yet come into manhood's condition that there may be a flow and an understanding of this fulness of grace.

S.E.MacC. Is that also seen in Joseph; he was in charge of the supply and second only to Pharaoh, but what supply he had for his brethren, and for all of Egypt too.

R.T. There was a fulness that the famine could not exhaust. The famine tested the resources but there were resources with Joseph as they went to him. I think, as you said, these brethren come eventually to receiving grace upon grace. Well, has it reached us? It is to have this formative character about it. Is there something built up in us of this other character, that we are here in the enjoyment of what has come into display?

A.S.H. Is there beauty attached to it? It speaks of the gift of grace. There is nothing but the love of Christ attached to it, it is free.

R.T. Very beautiful. The way He has displayed it reveals God's heart that when man could do nothing, grace has provided everything, that we may come into the atmosphere in which God would have us to live.

J.A.P. The elder son said, "Behold, so many years I serve thee, and never have I transgressed a commandment of thine; and to me hast thou never given a kid that I might make merry with my friends: but when this thy son, who has devoured thy substance with harlots, is come, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. But he said to him, Child, thou art ever with me, and all that is mine is thine. But it was right to make merry and rejoice, because this thy brother was dead and has come to life again, and was lost and has been found." Luke 15: 29-32. We do try to earn this; we have to judge that.

R.T. I think it is good to call attention to that: we cannot earn it. The younger son received something that was greater, the robe, the ring and the shoes. What a display of grace, the father coming out with the resources of his love to make the son suitable for the house. I think that is what grace would do; it makes us assembly persons. It brings us into this area of eternal life of which we have spoken, but it brings us into assembly character and features so that we are at home among the brethren, in the enjoyment of what flows from God. It is not something we can work up to, but grace has had a formative

effect upon the saints so that we are at home with one another in the enjoyment of divine love.

G.A. I was thinking of Matthew 5, "for he makes his sun rise on evil and good, and sends rain on just and unjust. For if ye should love those who love you, what reward have ye?" vv 45,46. God's grace is giving the opportunity for all men to adjust themselves, would you say?

R.T. Yes, His goodness comes into it; it is there for all men. But He would specially have us to be affected by the grace that comes to each of us individually. Paul had it; he said, "By God's grace I am what I am", 1 Cor 15: 10. He did not fall back on his abilities in dealing with the brethren, not even in dealing with Festus and Agrippa, but he called attention in a sense to what the grace of God had formed in him, "by God's grace set out in Paul before these monarchs was irresistible. Agrippa says, You almost persuade me, as seeing there the formative effect of grace in Paul. I have always been impressed that Paul falls back on what grace has wrought in him and not on his own abilities in those difficult times.

K.N.P. From that standpoint can you think of grace as being victorious? There is something wrought there in persons who have an appreciation of how grace has come in and come to them. That should be so with us, should it not?

R.T. Yes. I think we need help to realise that grace will not run out; it is reigning, it is on the throne. However long the dispensation and however difficult the times may be, every circumstance that may arise in the dispensation is to be met in the power of grace rather than in the power of what is academic or what is legal. These things have worked in the recovery, and have brought in a good deal of sorrow and confusion, but I think things are to be met in the power of grace reigning, and that this power working would save the brethren.

G.D.R. Would you think that the result of all this is to bring in this wonderful principle of peace? You referred to peace and the conditions in which we can gather at such an occasion, and our

relationships happy and free, but peace flows out from this, does it not, the peace of the Christ presiding in our hearts (Col 3: 15)?

R.T. Yes, I think so. It makes way for enjoyment of the assembly, and the assembly in its totality will be seen. as a great vessel of grace. But then the personnel of it are formed in the true grace of God to be displaying the features of the heavenly Man.

K.A.K. I was thinking of the way the assembly picks up on this and stimulates divine Persons in regard to further grace. Abraham could beseech for Lot, having been a recipient of it: Abigail meeting David, and others. It may be anticipating something of what you have before you, but I was thinking of the way in which the supply goes on.

R.T. I think that is very fine. It is not just something that comes in for an emergency, but it is reigning. It is a predominant, governing, principle and I think it issues in administration. I think it makes administrators. Romans, I think, would be doing that, making administrators who are formed in the true grace of God as having proved the abundance of it and the richness of it, they themselves are coming out in this heavenly character.

P.E.M. Do we see that in David? He says, "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul", 2 Sam 9: 1. After all David had been through, I might have wanted revenge.

R.T. Yes, a wonderful opportunity to vindicate himself, was it not? These things crop up in our own lives at times and in the history of the assembly, but the assembly is able to fall back on this heavenly grace that has appeared and fills the dispensation; it says that it might reign through righteousness. The reigning of it would suggest that it is the first thing, it is the dominating principle. As we have seen it was in the Lord, and so it is reigning in the dispensation through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is not reigning through a text or what we know, but it is a living, well-known Person, Jesus Christ our Lord. So we are under His authority; we are not in liberty to impose our own principles and our own way of dealing with things, but we are under the authority of the Lord, and under responsibility, too, to

display what is reigning and what marks the throne as we ourselves have been formed in it.

C.F.D. Do you think that that shines out in a remarkable way in Stephen in the Acts? Before he said anything, the Spirit of God records that those in the council saw his face as the face of angel (Acts 6: 15). Right in that council he was bringing the expression of grace that he really got in heaven, do you think?

R.T. I think he is a beautiful example of the display of grace and truth. He did not minimise matters but at the end of what he said he bows down, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge". What an indictment to the nation was Stephen's testimony, and what an effect it had on Saul, it seems. He was affected by the grace of that man who in the presence of such opposition, perhaps unparalleled since the time of the Lord, there is one who comes out in His features, kneeling down - "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge". Well, that is shining through the dispensation. It is striking, in looking at some of the martyrs' history, how many of them quoted the words of Stephen at the end of their lives. Time and again as they were being persecuted and their life was ebbing out, many of them quoted Stephen's words, "Lay not this sin to their charge". So what an indictment God is going to have against the lawlessness of man: there has been displayed in persons something of the grace of Christ shining out in conditions of adversity.

D.M.W. Do you think the Lord, who set forth everything perfectly here as the exponent of grace, was standing and ready as the source of it to help Stephen in grace do that? He looked into an open heaven and saw his Lord standing and he drew on the source of grace and was able to say those beautiful words.

R.T. It is very beautiful that he should say that he saw the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing. He brings that into expression. It was not only for his own soul, as if he was telling those people that the Lord was there ready to bless them. He was there standing in all His grace, supporting His servant, no doubt, to come out in that character, but too an indictment to the nation that

the One whom they had crucified was there displaying in His servant His attitude toward them. And think of Peter's preaching, three thousand saved at once, just days after they had crucified the Lord of glory, three thousand persons saved. What an outshining of the abundance of grace!

P.E.M. "Having fixed his eyes on heaven", it says. What a view Stephen had of the Originator of that wonderful grace!

R.T. Well, it is a good word for us as to our eyes - are they fixed on the source? We look at the difficult days and at the persons, but as you say, he fixed his eyes on heaven. So that our eyes are fixed on where grace is reigning, on the throne, on the source of grace that we may draw the needed supplies day by day to come out in our measure in His character.

G.D.P. I do not know whether it fits in with your subject, but I was thinking of the parable of the talents. One said, Thy talent has produced another talent, and so forth, but one said, "I knew thee that thou art a hard man", and he lost everything, did he not?

R.T. I think that is very good. So that he did not know his master. I think there is a fine touch in what has been said, that not only are we brought to know the grace of God but we are brought to know the God of grace. There is a lot in that remark, but we not only know what has shone out but we are brought to know the Person in whom it has shone out. That was the difference in these men, one of them knew the God of grace and he fitted himself to rule in the coming kingdom, so that the features and the formation of grace in us now is going to have its time of display. God is forming administrators in His grace in view of that coming day. So that is what we have here in Romans, that it is through Jesus Christ our Lord we know the source of the grace.

NEW YORK

3 November 1995

THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

John Spinks

John 7: 53; 8: 1-11; Daniel 2: 31-36,44; Genesis 37: 5-7; 1 Samuel 16: 11-13

I would like help to say a little as to the supremacy of Christ; it is a thought that runs through Scripture. In Genesis 1 we have the thought of dominion given to the man, and it is clearly God's mind that the assembly should be associated with Christ in this great matter, "let them have dominion", Gen 1: 26. Then in the last chapter of Revelation you have the Man, "I Jesus" - wonderful - and those who are in consonance with the Spirit in saying, "come, Lord Jesus". What a wonderful result brought about by the presentation of this blessed Man, the Man of God's choice.

I wish to bring out from this first Scripture the supremacy of grace. Every attribute of God has been set out in a particularly precious way in Christ. He has not set it out in a book, or in those tables of stone: every attribute of God, as well as His holy nature, has been perfectly displayed in Jesus. He is the One who thought it not an object of rapine to be on an equality with God; but emptied Himself, taking a bondman's form. So this section begins with the Lord going to the mount of Olives; that is where He would draw His resources. Every one went to their home, but Jesus went to the mount of Olives. Every resource that the Lord had was from heaven, from this spiritual realm. What came into manifestation was these precious relations he had with His Father. The whole of the revelation of God hinges on it, "a glory as of an only-begotten with a father" (John 1: 14). So the Lord had recourse to that holy realm at every opportunity. Then we find Him teaching in the temple. What

would He be saying? No doubt we can bring Luke's gospel in here – “they wondered at the words of grace which were coming out of His mouth” (Luke 4: 22); it was the teaching of grace. I love to think of that chapter in Luke; the Lord coming into the temple, taking up these holy Scriptures and reading them in a way in which they had never been read before - “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your ears.” Think of God looking forward to the moment when Christ would come in, the very Man of whom the Scripture spoke, bringing forward the divine choice. Think of that blessed Man taking up the prophet Esaias, unrolling the book until He came to the verse on which hinged the whole dispensation of grace. Why did He choose that Scripture? The Father told Him to. That is the truth of the matter, the Father told Him to. He did everything under direction - wonderful! Then He rolled up the book, delivered it up to the attendant and sat down; the deliberate action of a blessed Man who is establishing this great principle of grace. Could anything hinder divine movements? Nothing could hinder, the time had come. The fulness of time had come and God had sent forth His Son - wonderful grace!

Here in this section of Scripture we find a woman brought in and set in the midst, having been taken in adultery. No doubt in one sense she typifies the fallen nature of humanity; the woman in John 4 would be another example. Then we see the self righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, bringing forward this woman to test the Lord. Oh, the awful deceit of the human heart! The very fact that they were in a position of bondage under the hated Roman yoke was a testimony to their unfaithfulness, yet they sought to test the Lord; that they might have something of which to accuse Him. What is the Lord's answer? He stooped down and wrote with His finger on the ground. This is far superior to the writing on the tables of stone. This is a blessed Man who came in with a body in order to establish the great principle of grace, that grace might reign through righteousness. Everything the Lord did anticipated His death. It brings a very great meaning to the gospels when we take them up in that light. All that the Lord did and said in the way of teaching and

healing anticipated His death, so that grace is built on the foundation of righteousness. That is very fine, grace is built on a solid foundation. These men who sought to accuse this woman were themselves condemned by the law. As standing on the basis of their own righteousness, the ground they took condemned them. None of them was without sin. But then the presence of the Son of Man exposed them in a far greater way than law ever could. The presence of Christ fully exposed their self-righteousness and hypocrisy and they had to go out one by one beginning from the elder ones until the last. The elders, those who would have the greatest place among them, went out first, because really they had the greater sin. They had a certain knowledge of the Scriptures. God in His faithfulness had given abundant testimony in them to the blessed Man who was now standing in their midst, and they did not recognise Him. I suppose if they had repented they could have stayed and got the blessing, but it says they went out one by one until Jesus was left alone and the woman standing there. A wonderful picture, Jesus left alone but the woman retained for blessing. That is where we come in, retained for blessing. Because the second stoop involved His going into death and the ground being established in righteousness so that we should be retained in the presence of the Saviour - the woman standing there. It does not say anything about the subsequent history of the woman; that is not the point, the point is that a foundation is laid in the death of Christ for sinners to be retained in the presence of the Saviour. What wonderful grace, dear brethren! It is the ground on which we come in, grace from first to last. The ground established in righteousness and grace going right through this wonderful dispensation when "he shall bring forth the head-stone with shoutings: Grace, grace unto it!" Zech 4: 7. Grace at the beginning, grace right through, and grace will be the crowning touch. It is the Lord's superiority in grace.

I read in Daniel because it refers to the Lord's superiority in government. The One who came in in grace is the One whom God has highly exalted. The One who took up man's liabilities is the blessed Man who has been given the place of highest honour in

heaven. We see not yet all things subjected to him, but we see Jesus ... crowned with glory and honour (Heb 2: 8). It is wonderful that faith can look through the opened heavens and see Jesus, the One who glorified God on the earth, righteously placed in the highest point in the universe. What I want to bring out of this Scripture is that Christ is the only one fit to rule, and God is going to bring Him in in His own time. The image that was set up bears on the time of the gentiles. It is a time when God has been particularly favourable, especially to the western world. Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold. God had to do with him and he was converted. I mention that because I believe the grace of God was involved in it; God is giving man every opportunity to come into blessing. But there is deterioration; there is the head of gold and as it goes down there is deterioration. That is what we find at the present time, things are deteriorating. God in His grace has given man every opportunity to come into the blessings of Christianity and man has refused. We went out to see the Statue of Liberty the other day – the brethren will excuse my turning aside for a moment - there were copies of letters which had been written by persons who were coming to this country from lands where they had known oppression and difficulties. The letters were quite touching; they expressed feelings of hope and expectancy as the Statue of Liberty came into view. It was as if God had given them another chance. I thought that it epitomises the liberty that God has granted the western world. And how has this liberty been used? Have men used it to come into the blessings of the gospel? No, they have not done that; they have accepted all the benefits and turned their back on God. So God will take issue with this world; He will have to say to it in Christ. It says “the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth”. How we love to think of this! The time is coming, dear brethren, when this whole society which is morally crumbling will be removed in order to make way for the Man of God's choice. Christ will come in and take His rightful place in government. Meanwhile we need to be ready to give account of the hope that lies within us and in some way represent the grace of this dispensation. What ought ye to be, the Scripture says, in holy conversation and

godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God? (2 Peter 3: 11). We need to set out the grace that has taken us up and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace. I think, in one sense, grace would link very much with the anointing. Persons who are in the good of the grace of God would set out something that God would have in testimony, in order that others may be drawn to Christ where He is. I think the supremacy of Christ in grace makes way for His supremacy in government. If we are faithful we will have part in that government. It is a question of suffering at the present time, the vessel is formed through suffering. I look around a company like this and I can see that there has been much suffering, and that would be true of any company of saints. But what is it for? It is intended to form us in the grace of Christ in order that we may be fitted to share His place when He comes in glory. So it is a suffering time - let us accept it - but it is a forming time, the time of formation. One's thoughts go to Noah, as the preaching was being announced, the ark was being built. These two thoughts go together; the preaching, the great announcement of the gospel of the grace of God and along with it the vessel is being formed. The grace that has met us is the grace that forms us, it forms us in relation to the vessel that is going to come out with Christ in glory.

In Genesis 37 we have again a very beautiful type of Christ as One who is supreme. The earlier verses show that Joseph had a supreme place in his father's affections; he was given a coat of many colours. I think that would relate to the pathway of the Lord Jesus. The beautiful moral qualities of Christ drew out the expression of the Father's delight in Him: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight". In verse seven we read "behold your sheaves came round about and bowed down to my sheaf." The whole period of this dispensation is to bring us round to the Father's thoughts of Christ. That is my thought in this Scripture. Christ has the supreme place in the Father's affections, and all God's dealings with us, all these actings of grace, are intended to bring us round to His thoughts of Christ. Then we can think of the way in which Joseph

worked to bring his brethren round. All the suffering that he underwent did not alter his disposition at all. We have been reading here locally that the suffering path of Christ never altered His disposition, never altered His thoughts towards His brethren. How wonderful! Joseph is sent out from the vale of Hebron to seek the welfare of his brethren, and the first thing he does when they are brought into his house is ask them of their welfare (Gen 43: 27). I was impressed by that. Although he had met with such hostility, such envy and bitterness, he never ceased to think of the welfare of his brethren. That is grace; it is never deflected by the circumstances in which it finds itself. It is the activity of grace that brings us round to the knowledge of Christ as supreme in the affections of the Father.

I just close with a reference to 1 Samuel 16, because here again we have the supremacy of Christ. Here we see Him in type anointed in the midst of His brethren, supreme in the sphere of love. A certain process of elimination had taken place before this. Even a spiritual man like Samuel tended to choose the wrong man. How often in our histories we have been governed by what is outward; it is native to us, and has often deflected us. But here Samuel is brought round to God's thoughts. He asks "Are these all the young men?" The answer comes, "There is yet the youngest remaining, and behold, he is feeding the sheep". That is beautiful. In one sense the Lord came in after every other man had been tested. The time previous to the incarnation was a time of testing of man; God tested man under every condition and all failed, none could answer to God's thoughts. But here is one who is brought from the sheepfolds - how wonderful! Think of the grace of the One who came to serve; He took a bondman's form and came to serve. I love to think of it, taken from the sheepfolds to be anointed in the midst of his brethren. "And Samuel said to Jesse, Send and fetch him; for we will not sit at table till he come hither". God willing we will soon meet again for the Lord's Supper and every heart will be attuned to the incoming of Christ. I have to admit that I have often partaken of the Supper without a real sense of the Lord's presence. May these

things become more real to us, dear brethren, and may we know what it is to hear the voice, typically of the Spirit, saying, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he". There is no other. May it be that the Lord has a greater place in our midst. It is the place that belongs to Him; the place that was accorded to Him in the divine purpose. His place in the midst will soon extend to the universe; He will be the focal point. Presently it is enjoyed in the assembly, in the sphere of love.

In John 20 the Lord refers to His disciples as His brethren, those He has a special claim on. I think love is sovereign. The disciples in that chapter represent those who have been the subjects of the purposes of God's love, and the Lord is supreme in the midst of such a company. Is there anything more precious, dear brethren, the Lord in the midst. The thought of what remains runs through these scriptures, and we have the Lord's precious promise: "Where two or three are gathered unto my name, there am I in the midst of them", Matt 18: 20. May it be that we experience these things in a greater way, and the precious truths that are all embodied in Christ become more real to us. If we have Christ we have everything, if we have not Christ we have nothing. May it be that Christ becomes more to us. May we accord Him the place of supremacy in every aspect of our lives, in our households, in our local assemblies, that He may have the first place in all things. That is what is divinely predicted of Him. May it be true of each one of us, dear brethren, that He may be supreme in every heart and in every life. For His Name's sake.

NEW YORK

4 November 1990