

GRACE

PERSEVERANCE





GRACE
PERSEVERANCE

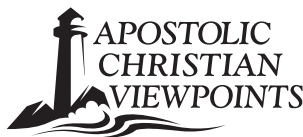
1st Edition, January 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----------------|
| 1. HOW SWEET THE SOUND... | <i>Page 4</i> |
| 2. JUSTIFICATION: RESPONDING TO GOD'S GRACE | <i>Page 6</i> |
| 3. SANCTIFICATION: LIVING IN GOD'S GRACE | <i>Page 10</i> |
| 4. JUBILATION: ETERNAL VICTORY BY GOD'S GRACE | <i>Page 15</i> |
| 5. COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS | <i>Page 16</i> |

This booklet is part of the Apostolic Christian Viewpoints series, a collection of writings prepared by a committee of the Elder Council of the Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarean).

These booklets are not intended as exhaustive works on their respective subjects. Rather, they are offered as an encouragement to those who currently embrace these views; and to those who do not, a call to consider these topics in the light of scripture ... and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. (2 Tim. 2:7).



EDITOR'S NOTE

This is the final instalment in a series of three booklets addressing aspects of Reformed theology that differ from doctrinal understandings of the Apostolic Christian Church. These booklets are not intended to be a systematic rebuttal of Calvinism, but rather an exploration of God's plan of salvation, in which the distinguishing concepts of Reformed theology are addressed as they arise.

The first booklet, "**Man before God**" addresses Man's spiritual condition before his Creator: spiritually deformed and polluted by sin (depravity) and yet retaining the volition with which God created him. This booklet also contains a glossary of theological terms that are often used when discussing Reformed theology. The second booklet, titled "**Sovereign God**", relates the story of God's love for all; a love that is integral to His holiness and does not jeopardize His sovereignty in any way. The third booklet, "**Grace & Perseverance**", focuses on how salvation is experienced in man: God's enabling grace reaching out to lost mankind is a gift that must be received and cultivated. The third booklet also contains a list of commonly asked questions about salvation.

1. How Sweet the Sound...

The path of human history is blazed with acts of violence, envy, lust, pride, and destruction. It is abundantly clear that human nature suffers a terrible condition: in times of great suffering, men will trample others to save themselves. In our fallen state, we seek to serve self above all else.¹ Nevertheless, despite our self-centered, rebellious nature, the God of all creation pursues our restoration. The message of God's amazing grace to fallen mankind is a central theme of the gospel that never grows old and never ceases to inspire wonder. This booklet will attempt to explore this topic; however, it will only scratch the surface of the infinite depth of God's grace. May a deeper understanding of God's grace, its purpose, and how it influences the lives of believers draw us into an ever-closer relationship with our Creator.

What is the Grace of God?

Although the word "grace" is often used in Christian circles, the precise, biblical definition may at times elude us. According to Strong's Concordance, the Greek word for grace, *charis*, can be rendered as good will, loving-kindness, or favor.² Implied in its definition is that grace is unmerited favor and, therefore, a gift. It is not a thing to be earned or achieved, for then it would not be favor but payment (Rom. 6:15, 23; note: death is the wage earned by sin, but eternal life is the gift of God for all under grace). Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Thus it is scripturally clear that salvation comes by grace through faith, specifically by the atoning work of Christ on the cross and his glorious resurrection; this grace is a gift from God because it is not earned but freely given. The evidence supporting this is that God demonstrated favor to mankind while we were yet in sin (Rev. 13:8; Rom. 5:8-10). Therefore, being a gift given by God, grace is something that must be received (Rom. 5:17).³

The depth and breadth of God's grace fills the believer with wonder and awe. All too often, however, its association is restricted to God's

¹ Reference AC Viewpoint Booklet, *Man Before God*, for additional insight into this topic

² Strong's G5485

³ Reference Section 5, Questions 1 and 2

forgiveness. While forgiveness of sin is a manifestation of God's magnanimity, grace encompasses forgiveness but is not limited to it.⁴ In other words, forgiveness is a subset of grace, not the other way around. This becomes immediately evident when we examine the full scope of God's work of salvation. For example, we often seek various reasons to pinpoint the exact moment that an individual has been saved. This view of salvation, however, is somewhat limiting. The Bible speaks of salvation in past, present, and future tenses. Consider the following examples. The truth is that salvation is an on-going work (Phil. 1:6), guaranteed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14), and completed at the end of our earthly lives (Matt. 10:22).

- Titus 3:5 says that he *saved* us according to his mercy.
- Ephesians 2:5,8 and Romans 8:24 say that we *are* saved.
- Romans 13:11 speaks of a salvation that hasn't yet come.
- 1 Peter 1:9 correlates the end of our faith with the salvation of our souls.
- In Matthew 10:22, Jesus says that salvation is reserved for those who endure to the end.
- Romans 5:9 says that we *shall* be saved from wrath through Christ Jesus.

Why Has God Shown Grace to Man?

The Word tells us that all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). The end result of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), which constitutes an eternity apart from the Holy God. Therefore, all men stand in need of being redeemed from their sinful nature and the destruction it brings. The nature of God is such that He desires that all men should be saved⁵ (Eze. 18:32; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9) and, thus, has provided a means of redemption. This redemption is the salvation of which we so often speak and preach: being saved from the damnation we have rightfully earned through our sin. Although God's grace is not exclusively linked to His plan of salvation, it is often applied in that context. Therefore, this booklet will focus heavily on the effect of grace in the work of salvation.

Grace is irreducibly part of a restored relationship with the Creator. In fact, the very purpose for God's abounding grace is to provide a

⁴ Reference Section 5, Question 3

⁵ Reference Section 5, Question 4

means for restoration. Romans 8:3-4 tells us that the law could not make us righteous or holy; in other words, our best efforts to be restored in a relationship with the Holy God, through the keeping of the law, are nothing but filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). It was only through the atoning work of Christ on the cross and his shed blood that mankind could be saved (Rom. 8:3-4). Thus, grace serves to fulfill that which we could never do: forgiveness of sin (Rom. 4:5-8), blamelessness before God (Rom. 8:1), freedom from sin's bondage (Rom. 8:2), filling us with the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9), and an inheritance of eternal glory as joint-heirs with Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:16-17). The final product of grace is a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17) who lives for Christ and not self (2 Cor. 5:15). The intent, therefore, is not only for the individual to be forgiven and transformed, but that he/she would grow in grace and glorify God in becoming a participant of Christ's mission on this earth to edify the body and spread the gospel to the lost.

Grace is a constant companion on the believer's journey through justification, sanctification, and eternal jubilation.

2. Justification: Responding to God's Grace

What is Justification?

The Greek word for justification, *dikaiōma*, is defined as the "favorable judgment by which he [God] acquits man and declares them acceptable to Him."⁶ Romans 4 focuses heavily on the subject of justification by reviewing the example of Abraham. Direct conclusions of the case analysis include: justification is not of works but rather of faith (v. 2-3); faith in Jesus Christ is counted unto us for righteousness (v. 5); Abraham's justification preceded circumcision, which was a sign of his faith (v. 9-12); Abraham's justification preceded the Mosaic Law, thus proving that justification does not come by the law (v. 13-15); justification is of faith and, thus, it must be by grace because faith does not earn our pardon, having no work to boast of (v. 16). The characteristics of this case study provide a holistic view of biblical justification.

⁶ Strong's G1345

God, the Giver, Caller, and Justifier

It must first be established that the work of justification is initiated by God. First, by the reservation of his judgment; surely the longsuffering nature of God is grace unto mankind. Second, through the provision of a spotless, sacrificial lamb through His son, Jesus Christ; without the shedding of Jesus' blood there can be no forgiveness of sin (Heb. 9:22-26). Third, John 6:44 clearly supports this by saying, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." Jesus elaborates further by saying, "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me (v. 45)." Any man that has heard and learned of God is a benefactor of God's redemptive work and grace. Romans 10:13-15 makes it plain that the preaching of the gospel is predicated on God's sending of faithful disciples. Thus, to call upon the name of the Lord and be saved, we all must have experienced the call of God through His Word, whether by reading or through the preaching of his servants.

Man, the Believer, Responder, and Receiver

The pattern of call and response is a common theme throughout the Old and New Testament scriptures. "Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (Gen. 6:8) and was called to build an ark so that he and his family would be saved from imminent destruction (Gen. 6:13-21). Noah responded in faith to God's calling (Gen. 6: 22). Abraham was called from his father's pagan gods (Josh. 24:2-3) to follow the true God. Abraham was also called to leave his land and follow the Lord to see the land that would be given to his lineage (Gen. 12). Abraham responded in faith to God's calling (Gen. 12:4). Moses was called to lead God's people out of Egypt to Canaan, the promised land (Exo. 3:7-10). Notice that Moses resisted at first (Exo. 3:11,13; Exo. 4:1,10,13). The Lord's patience is thinned with Moses' initial response, so he gives him reassurance (Exo. 3:12), His name (Exo. 3:15), instruction (Exo. 3:16-18), miracles (Exo. 4:2-3, 6-9), guidance (Exo. 4:11-12), and a helper (Exo. 4:14-17). Ultimately, Moses responded in faith to God's calling (Exo. 4:18). Samuel was called (many times) by God to proclaim a prophetic message from God (1 Sam. 3:10-14). Samuel responded in faith to God's calling (1 Sam. 3:17-18). As a result of his faithfulness, God poured out His blessing upon Samuel (1 Sam. 3:19). The twelve disciples were

called to follow Jesus: Peter, Andrew, James and John while fishing (Matt. 4:18-19); Phillip (John 1:43); Matthew, also known as Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom (Mark 2:14). The disciples all responded in faith to Jesus' calling, leaving their occupations, possessions, and future hopes and desires; rather, they chose to follow the Messiah.

God is indeed the only one worthy of glory for His work of justification. God provided the means (Jesus' sacrifice), the time (reserved judgment), and the stimulus (Call to Salvation); man's only duty is to respond to God's grace for justification. This response is summarized by faith in Jesus Christ and his atoning blood (Acts 16:30-31). This faith response is characterized by humility and repentance (Acts 16:32-34; 2 Chr. 7:14). 1 Peter 5:5 makes plain that God dispenses His grace upon those who are clothed with humility. Because justification is one of many manifestations of God's graciousness, it is clear that the Lord will not justify the proud. In fact, James 4:6-10 teaches that humility is necessary for grace, submission to God is necessary for victory, seeking the Lord is necessary to be found of Him, cleansing hearts and hands (read: repentance), and godly sorrow are necessary to be lifted up by God. In addition, genuine repentance (i.e., turning away from sin) is required for God to justify the sinner. Repentance is central to the gospel message and is echoed throughout scripture, beginning with Christ's ministry (Matt. 4:17), extending to apostolic teaching (Acts 3:19; Acts 8:22), and concluding with Jesus' message to the churches (Rev. 2:5,16). The Holy Spirit convicts men of sin (John 16:8), which leads to the response of repentance or rejection (Rom. 2:4).

Two Ways Before Us Lie

Mankind's responsibility to receive the call of salvation and positively respond in faith is critical to receiving God's grace. As previously explained, God's grace is His gift; this gift will not be bestowed upon someone who is unappreciative or hostile to the Giver. The gift is to be received with humility, gratitude, and appreciation of its value. Forgiveness of sin is clearly conditional, highlighting man's need to respond properly. Consider Ezekiel 33:10-20, in which God says: 1) that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but desires that the wicked would repent; 2) if the righteous turn away from righteousness and commit evil (apostatize), they will die; and 3) if the wicked turn away from

wickedness and do good (repent), they will live. Forgiveness of sin is not irrevocable. Rather, justification is contingent on mankind's faith response characterized by humility and repentance.

Thus, in God offering his free gift of grace unto all, men must exercise their own will to receive the gift in faith. Sadly, God's loving pursuit is often rejected,⁷ which is frequently seen throughout scripture. For example, God's life-bringing wisdom is personified in Proverbs 1:22-25 as calling the sinners and being refused, reaching out the hand and being disregarded. Verses 29-30 go on to say that they "did not choose the fear of the LORD: They would none of my [God's] counsel: they despised all my reproof." In addition, Jesus, himself, wept over the repeated resistance of Israel. Consider his heart-wrenching words, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. 23:37). Israel's recurring rebellion against the Lord's goodness and grace is a common theme in the Old Testament and reminds us of the God-given ability we have to receive or reject a relationship with our Creator, who is so intent on pouring his love upon His children. Therefore, we are exhorted: "To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Heb. 4:7b). The onus is on the individual to harden not his heart and hear the Lord's voice.

An additional, secondary point on resisting grace is found in the experience of many believers. Although experiential data must not usurp the authority of God's Holy Word, it may be used to support the veracity of biblical teaching. In this case, we empirically see many people wrestle with accepting God's grace. Some may struggle to accept that it is a gift and not to be earned. Others still wrestle with God's willingness to offer it to them, based on the depth of their sin. We see many hear the call of God's grace and, despite being moved by it, reject it.⁸

⁷ Reference Section 5, Question 5

⁸ For example, King Agrippa's response in Acts 26:28

3. Sanctification: Living in God's Grace

What is Sanctification?

After the penitent sinner has been justified by grace through faith, God's work of salvation is far from over (Phil. 1:6). The newborn believer must then live and grow in God's grace (1 Pet. 2:1-3). This process of maturing toward the goal of Jesus' example is God's refining work of sanctification (Eph. 4:13). The output of a sanctified believer is readiness for the Master's use, edifying His Church and furthering His Kingdom (2 Tim. 2:21).

A New Life with a New Purpose

Ephesians 2 reminds the believer in Jesus Christ that he/she was once dead in sin and living a life fulfilling the desires of the mind and body (v. 1-3). However, God has made the believer alive together with Christ in His great love, reiterating that we are saved by grace through faith and not of ourselves: it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:4-8). Therefore, none can boast of ourselves, but rather we boast in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross (Eph. 2:9; Gal. 6:14). The Word says that "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). This leaves no room for even a trace of the old man of sin in the transformation we experience in Christ.

The significance of holy living in the life of a saint cannot be overstated. Romans 12:1 commands us to "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." To give ourselves as a holy offering to God necessitates sanctification and transformation by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). Romans 12:9-21 proceeds to give a glimpse of what true, holy living looks like. Needless to say, it conflicts with mankind's innate, selfish nature and, thus, requires the grace of God to live out. We are encouraged by God's promise that if we walk in the Spirit, we shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:16). Ephesians 2:10 speaks of the end result of this work of salvation: a workmanship created in Christ Jesus that God has foreordained to live in righteousness. This verse shows that God's will in saving man is that we would be blessed in living a life of purposeful work to the glory of God. Sanctification is necessary for the believer to be purified, consecrated, and prepared for God's use (2 Tim. 2:21).

The word saint—*hagios* in Greek—refers to one who has been sanctified and made holy (or set apart for God’s use). 1 Corinthians 1:2 says, “to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.” Ephesians 2:19 says that we “are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” These verses communicate the definition of a saint: a believer who has been sanctified in Jesus Christ, and is no more estranged from His Creator. No additional requirement is laid out in scripture to acquire the “title” of saint.

Grace to Endure

The believer has been born-again by water and of the Spirit (John 3:5) and is empowered by the Holy Spirit to live a sanctified life (Acts 1:8; John 1:12). It would be both unwise and unrealistic, however, to think that temptations will no longer come or that life will be without struggle after this new birth. Rather, the scriptures clearly communicate that we have an adversary who is as a roaring lion, roaming to and fro, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8). It is, therefore, imperative that we remain sober and vigilant, because only those who endure faithfully to the end will receive the crown of victory (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10). However, nowhere in scripture is this endurance implied to emanate solely from the new believer in Jesus Christ. Rather, the scripture is clear that the power to endure is rooted in continued faith, trust, and dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit. We can only be strong if we trust in the Lord and the power of his might (Eph. 6:10). We are instructed to put on the whole armor of God, that we may be able to withstand evil and stand victoriously (Eph. 6:11-20). It is clear that God’s grace is essential to remaining faithful through temptation.

God has made many promises to defend, guide, and equip His people; it is important to note that many of these promises have a condition attached. Consider the following:

- God will direct our paths if we trust in Him with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding (Prov. 3:5-6)
- God will keep us in perfect peace if our mind is fixed on Him (Isa. 26:3)
- No one can stand against us if God is on our side (Rom. 8:31)

- We will receive everlasting life if we believe in God's only begotten son, Jesus the Christ (John 3:16)
- We will receive wisdom from above if we ask it of God in faith (James 1:5-6)
- Jesus will come in to us and dine with us if we hear his voice and open the door (Rev. 3:20)
- We will sit with Jesus on his throne if we overcome (Rev. 3:21)
- We will be presented holy and blameless if we continue in the faith (Col. 1:22-23)

These are but a few examples of God's abundant and glorious promises. There is a responsibility associated with each one to trust in the Lord, humble ourselves before Him, fix our hearts and minds on Him, believe in Jesus Christ, ask in faith, listen attentively to His voice, and overcome the world with its sinful allures. By God's grace, we can fulfill these promises and experience the manifold, rich blessings of God's goodness. Therefore, to endure faithfully to the end, the believer must walk in the Spirit, trust in His leading, and be obedient to His commandments. In so doing, he can escape temptation (1 Cor. 10:13), be purified by the Word (Eph. 5:26), and grow in grace (2 Pet. 3:17-18). Failure to do so threatens to drive a wedge between the erring believer and the Holy God. We are encouraged, therefore, to take heed lest we fall (1 Cor. 10:12).

Grace to Restore

Oh, the abundant grace of God, who is faithful to restore us if we should stumble in the flesh.⁹ The Lord's patient grace is seen working in His straying Church in Revelation 2-3. As Jesus addresses His Church, he repeatedly commends faithfulness and rebukes sin, urging repentance and restoration, "or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place" (Rev. 2:5). The sincere desire of our loving Father is that His children would be safe and blessed in a restored relationship with the Holy One. As a father corrects his son, so the Lord God rebukes and chastens his children out of love (Heb. 12:5-11; Rev. 3:19). From His abundant grace and love, God seeks to restore his children who are wrestling with sin.

⁹ Reference Section 5, Question 6

Falling from Grace

The Word of God repeatedly speaks of potential and actual apostasy, or the abandonment of faith.¹⁰ This was unfortunately an all-too-common occurrence with God's covenant people in the Old Testament. Time and again, the children of Israel were led astray by false prophets and teachers and turned to serve other gods, violating the first and second commandments. Hosea 11:7(a) records God's words to His people: "And my people are bent to backsliding from me." What a tragic, recurring theme in Israel's history. Understandably, many warnings were given to the Israelites to encourage faithfulness, lest they should fall from God's favor. Both Moses and Joshua cautioned the nation against forgetting the goodness of the Lord (Deut. 8:11-17; Josh. 24). The result of Israel's apostasy was always met with calls of repentance by God's messengers. Continued rejection of these prophetic urgings resulted in famine, disease, enslavement, or death.

We see that falling from God's grace is a possibility, has been a reality, and is often cautioned against:

- John 6:66 - many of Jesus' disciples abandoned him permanently
- John 15:1-6 - any branch (i.e., believer) that does not abide in Christ and bring forth fruit will be broken off, withered, bundled up, and cast into the fire to as kindling
- Acts 1:25 - Judas fell from his apostleship by transgression
- Acts 5:1-11 - Ananias and Sapphira are stricken by God for lying to the Holy Spirit
- Galatians 5:4 - believing we are justified by the law is to fall from grace
- 2 Thessalonians 2:3 - a great "falling away" will come before Jesus returns
- 2 Timothy 2:16-18 - Hymenaeus and Philetus err from the truth, teach heresy, and overthrow the faith of some
- Hebrews 12:14-17 - exhortation against failing of the grace of God

These examples should serve as a sobering reminder of how terrible it is to stand against the Holy God. This is precisely what sin

¹⁰ Reference Section 5, Question 7

produces: a fractured relationship with the Holy One of Israel. Yes, God is Love! We must not forget that God is Righteous. God is Just. God is Holy and, thus, cannot tolerate sin. Romans 11:16-22 is a humbling reminder to us of how carefully we must walk before the Lord, depending on the Holy Spirit each step of the way. The analogy is that Gentiles were grafted into the tree because of Israel's unbelief. However, we are cautioned against boasting against Israel. Note verses 21-22 (emphasis added): "For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, IF thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." May we indeed continue in His goodness and grace, and thus abide in Christ.

Greater is He that is Within Us

Although apostasy is possible, the gentle Father gives us encouragement through His loving support. Romans 8:31-39 speaks to this truth. If God is for us, who can stand against us? God loves us so much that He didn't even spare His only Son; what else will He not give to sustain us? God is the justifier. Christ is the intercessor. Moreover, nothing listed in Romans 8:35, 38-39 can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. This list is exhaustive and essentially covers all externalities. The one thing not present on that list is *us*. No external force can separate us from God. It is only from within that the believer can turn away from God's goodness and choose to return to a life of sin and rebellion. This choice is difficult to fathom when we consider how good and loving God is. We, the faithful who remember God's grace, are more than conquerors because He loves us. Thus, the believer is secure, but not unconditionally secure.

4. Jubilation: Eternal Victory by God's Grace

God's grace is present with the believer each step of the way, encompassing Christ's atoning work on the cross, conviction of sin, justification through faith, the spiritual rebirth, sanctification, spiritual growth, and endurance to remain faithful. Therefore, is it a surprise that the grace of God will be the resounding theme in the courts of heavenly glory? Not one creature will boast in the presence of God (1 Cor. 1:29). Although the believer chose to humbly receive God's free gift of grace, not one will say, "I'm so glad that I chose to be a good person. I'm so glad I did the right thing."¹¹ Of our own choice we did not have the *power* to be a good person or do the right thing. It is only by the grace of God that we will be in His presence (1 Cor. 15:10; Tit. 3:7). It is only fitting then that the saints in heaven will bow in reverence and worship to the Holy God on His throne and cry out, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing... Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever" (Rev. 5:12-13).

What joy! What eternal jubilee! Praise God that by His grace the saints which have not defiled their garments can be counted worthy to walk with Him in white (Rev. 3:4). Praise God that by His grace the redeemed will glory in the goodness of God throughout an eternity of praise (Rev. 7:9-12). Praise God that by His grace He shall dwell among His people and they shall no longer hunger, nor thirst, nor experience the beating of the sun; for the Lamb will feed the saints, lead them to living waters, and wipe away all tears from their eyes (Rev. 7:15-17). Praise God that by His grace we can experience eternal victory because He has overcome the world (John 16:33). His grace has already won. Has it won your heart? Will you receive Him?

¹¹ Reference Section 5, Question 8

5. Commonly Asked Questions

Question 1: *If mankind must receive the grace of God to have salvation, doesn't this act diminish the sovereignty of God?*

Many struggle with this concept, believing that receiving God's grace diminishes His sovereignty. This argument, as previously stated, stems from a skewed definition. The word sovereignty¹² is not explicitly used in the King James translation, although the notion is abundantly present and clear: God is omnipotent. Being omnipotent means that He is able to do anything, not that He is actively doing everything. The latter would lead to many logical fallacies, such as: if God cannot create free-will beings, how can He be omnipotent? The proper definition poses no such dilemma; that God has supreme power and authority is without question. In fact, His creation of and interaction with free-will beings is evidence of that. It would be much simpler for God to accomplish His will by directing every choice of man, rather than managing a complex relationship with him.

Question 2: *Isn't receiving the grace of God a work, thus implying works-based salvation?*

Scripture is crystal clear that we did not achieve salvation by our own works, so some extrapolate this to mean that mankind has no part to play in receiving God's grace. This argument is unreasonably applied; men do not praise the recipient of a charitable donation (as if they'd done something grand or worthy of the gift), but rather the giver. Likewise, God as the Giver receives all the glory for the work of salvation which is available to all men (John 3:16), a free and glorious gift!

Question 3: *If Jesus was without sin, why did He need grace?*

A key scriptural example that gives insight into the fullness of grace is found in Luke 2:40: "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him". This verse speaks about a young Jesus who was a recipient of God's grace. We can be sure that the grace referenced in this verse does

¹² Webster's Dictionary (1828): sovereign, *adj.*, supreme in power, superiority, efficacy, and authority

not pertain to forgiveness, since Hebrews 4:15 makes it clear that Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life. Rather, it conveys the love that the Father has for His Son; God's favor manifested itself in diverse and sundry ways in Jesus' earthly walk, but not by man's standard. He was born in a manger to a humble family. He did not possess many earthly goods and was often an outcast, rejected by His own people. Ultimately, He was tortured and put to a cruel, ignominious death on the cross. How did the Son experience the favor (grace) of the Father? Although He had nothing in this world, He was sustained by the love of the Father (John 15:9-11). Christ's joy was full because He abided in the Father's loving-kindness and favor.

Question 4: *Is God's saving grace, in fact, universally offered? What is wrong with believing that God arbitrarily offers grace to some and not others?*

The sincerity of the verses of God's marvelous love has been challenged time and again. In the light of the Word, however, this is an undeniable truth. Twisting this fundamental trait of God is to distort His all-loving nature into a selective form of arbitrary favoritism; the Word is clear that "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34-35). If God claimed that He desires that all men would repent, but did not offer his grace freely to all, then he would be unfair at best and, at worst, a liar. God is the very definition of justice, truth, and love. Therefore, we can trust in and rest upon His promises: the loving God has offered forgiveness for sin through the shed blood of His son on the cross to the whole world, that whosoever believes in the name of Jesus Christ should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16-17). This grace is offered to all; sadly, however, many reject it to their destruction.

Question 5: *Can men resist or reject the grace of God? Doesn't this tarnish the sovereignty of God?*

The question often comes as to whether the grace of God can be resisted by mortal man. Some posit that if mankind can interfere in God's divine work, then He cannot be a sovereign God. This is to misunderstand the sovereignty of God (reference Question 1 for additional information). One such example that describes the concept of sovereignty is found in Jesus' arrest; he rebukes Peter's aggression with these words: "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve

legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" (Matt. 26:53-54). Although Jesus had the power and authority to summon heavenly beings to decimate his captors, he chose rather to refrain from exercising this right so that the work of salvation would be completed. In like manner, God's omnipotence is not compromised when men exercise their own will. Rather, God is often seen accomplishing His will despite men exercising their own.

Question 6: *Is it possible for the born-again believer to sin?*

The question often arises: is it possible for a born-again believer to sin? While the scriptures certainly mandate that we live a life of abandonment to sin (Rom. 6:1-2, 12), scriptural examples indicate that the Christian is not impervious to sin (1 John 2:1). In Galatians 3, the Apostle Paul rebukes the Galatian brethren for reverting to the law as their source of salvation rather than the grace of God through Jesus Christ. He does not cease to refer to them as "brethren," but rather rebukes their sin and encourages them to repent (Gal. 5:1). Further along in his letter, Paul encourages the brethren thus: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1). May we never be deceived in thinking, however, that the Lord gives us license to sin.

Question 7: *Is it possible for the born-again believer to fall from God's grace and lose the precious gift of salvation?*

The idea that mankind has absolutely no role to play in God's work of salvation has given rise to the belief that a child of God cannot fall from His grace. This would make logical sense if it were not built upon the false premise that men have no responsibility to respond to the call of God.¹³ Others believe that men do have the ability to respond to the call of God, but once they convert cannot possibly abandon the marvelous grace of Jesus Christ. This notion is oft founded upon a personal experience that God is so good that none could taste His goodness and still develop a craving for the world's trifles. These positions, however, encounter a number of scriptural dilemmas:

¹³ Reference AC Viewpoint Booklet, *Man Before God*, for additional insight into this topic

Proponents of unconditional eternal security suggest that the Israelites were able to apostatize because they did not yet have their minds enlightened by the knowledge of Jesus Christ and, thus, were under the law and not under grace. This distinction was anticipated by the Holy Spirit and placed in the proper light in Hebrews 10:28-29: "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" These verses indicate that the punishment for apostasy under grace is much more severe than the punishment for apostasy under the law. Therefore, this scripture proves two things: (1) that it is possible for the sanctified believer to despise the shed blood of Jesus Christ and/or the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; (2) such an act is a punishable offense, worse even than physical death. Hebrews 6:4-8 also teaches the possibility of apostasy and the dire ramifications. Nevertheless, the Almighty God, in His infinite love, does not wish this upon anyone and has thus given us ample, practical instruction to live holy and God-pleasing lives.

For those who believe that apostasy is not possible, the aforementioned verses are often explained as hypothetical, which would be very disingenuous: God is TRUTH and thus when He speaks, there is infinite weight to His words.

Scriptural texts used to support the concept of eternal security are often taken out of context. Consider a common reference by proponents of eternal security:

"Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able

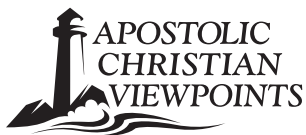
to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:34-39).

They would falsely consider these verses to be evidence of the impossibility of apostasy. Notice, however, that the context of these verses emphasizes the futility of external forces to separate us from the love of God. Whether these forces are physical or spiritual, they cannot separate the faithful believer from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Also notice that the decision of the believer to forsake His God and abandon the blood of the covenant and Spirit of grace is not a part of this list of futile forces. When these verses in Romans 8 are compounded with the aforementioned verses in Hebrews 10, the meaning of separation from God becomes clear: we, alone, can forfeit the grace which was so freely provided by Jesus' blood. May we take to heart this lesson and never take for granted God's grace which was bought at so steep a price.

Question 8: *Doesn't the idea of choice provide the opportunity for pride in a person saying, "I chose my salvation?"*

Certainly, Satan may tempt us with that idea; in the same manner, our enemy seeks to tempt us with pride whenever we exemplify the love of Christ through good works. We are nevertheless intended to "let (our) light so shine before men, that they may see (our) good works, and glorify (our) Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

For those who believe that God arbitrarily selects who is to be saved and who is to be damned, there is still opportunity for temptation from the enemy; in this structure, the saved could be lifted up with pride because they are the "Chosen" and thus superior. The unconverted, however, can be tempted with intense discouragement under this burdensome doctrine, believing that God hasn't saved them and thus clearly doesn't love or want them. As illustrated, this theology is not a trivial matter; the consequences are dangerous and can prevent others from seeking God or witnessing of Jesus Christ—with eternal ramifications.



APOSTOLIC
CHRISTIAN
VIEWPOINTS