



Once I received an invitation to preach in California. As the time drew near for my departure I started to become worried because I hadn't received a ticket for my flight from England from the churches who'd invited me to preach. But they were soon on the phone telling me not to worry, and telling me that I didn't need a ticket. This didn't relieve my concern; it just deepened it. Of course I needed a ticket! Everyone knows you can't fly without a ticket! What on earth were those people in California on about?

They then tried to explain to me about electronic ticketing. Apparently, all I had to do was to present myself at the airlines desk at

Heathrow Airport, tell them who I was, show them my passport, and they would then give me a ticket.

I'd never heard of this before, and I was rather sceptical. I wanted the comfort of a ticket in my hand before I left home. They again had to reassure me that it would be all right. 'It's all been taken care of at this end,' they said.

Of course, all my fears were unfounded. It had all been taken care of at the other end; the people inviting me knew it, and the airline knew it, even if I was a bit uncertain.

The grace of God is something like that—it has all been taken care of at the other end. One day I will set out on the most important journey anyone can take—from this life to the next. I will have to stand before God, and he will say, 'Who are you?'

I will answer by giving him my name.

'Oh, yes,' God will reply, 'you're the one my Son died for, the one whose sins he paid for; you're the one Jesus loved and saved. Come on into heaven, you're welcome because of what Jesus has done for you.' Salvation is all taken care of by Jesus

the Saviour. This is a great comfort to a sinner like myself who is always full of doubts and uncertainties. Has Jesus taken care of your salvation?

When God planned the salvation of sinners he did it in such a way as to take into account our doubts and fears. Electronic ticketing was new to me, and this was why I was uncertain, but it did mean that I could never lose my ticket. All I had to do was to turn up, and it was waiting for me. Salvation by grace means that we can never lose our salvation. Because it has all been taken care of at the other end, and because Jesus has done it all, there's no possibility of us ever losing it.

## What is grace?

Grace is the free, unmerited, undeserved favour of God to sinners. Grace is needed because of both the character of man and the character of God. Though man was created in the image of God, able to know and enjoy him, he sinned and was separated from God. Since then sin has dominated all his actions. Every one of us is now alien to God our Maker and, because of our sinful characters, we can do nothing about it. God's character, on the

other hand, is such that he cannot condone or overlook sin. His holiness, truth and justice demand that we must be dealt with as we are, and that sin must be punished.

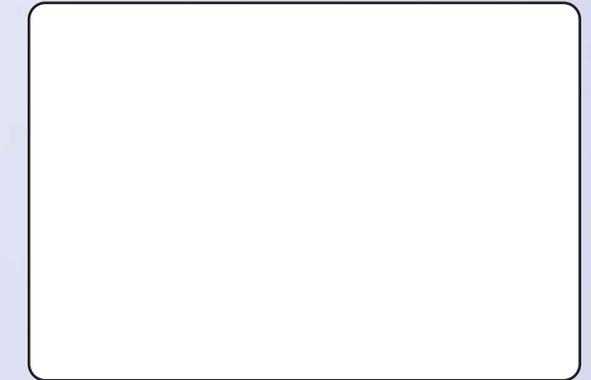
These two factors, taken on their own, would condemn all of us to an eternity in hell. But God's character is also such that, though he hates sin, he loves the guilty sinner who deserves his judgement. Divine love has therefore planned salvation, and divine grace has provided it.

## How grace works

'But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved' (Ephesians 2:4-5).

In these verses we find three great gospel words—love, mercy and grace. Out of God's love and mercy flows grace. Grace is not some abstract idea; it is God at work. Grace is God loving the unlovely, pardoning the guilty, and saving the lost. Grace is the unique work of God. We don't deserve grace, because our sin is our own fault. What we deserve is hell; but in

Christ we receive grace and every blessing and benefit that flows from it. Salvation by grace is for eternity. It depends upon what Christ has done, not on what we do; therefore it can never fail or lose its power.



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