

CHAPTER THREE

THE NATURE OF GRACE

On the first evening we discussed the problem of sin. Last night we spoke about God's grace. However, we did not finish these matters. Therefore, we will continue the two previous messages and cover the matters of grace and sin further.

First, we have to see what is the nature of grace. What characteristics does grace have? We treasure the love of God, for without God's love as the source, there would not be the flow of salvation. The flow of salvation issues from the love of God. At the same time, without God's mercy there would be no possibility of salvation. Because God has shown mercy on us, He has given us His salvation. God's salvation is the concrete expression of God's love. Hence, we treasure love, and we also treasure mercy. But the most precious of all that reaches us is grace. Love is indeed good, but it does not give any concrete benefit to us. Mercy is also very good, but it also does not bring us any direct benefit; however with grace there is a direct benefit. Hence, grace is more precious. The New Testament is filled, not with the love of God, nor with the mercy of God, but with the grace of God. Grace is God's love coming forth to accomplish something for the fallen, lost, and perishing sinner. Now we not only have an abstract love and a sentimental mercy, but we have grace to meet our needs in a concrete way.

We may think that it is wonderful enough if God is merciful to us. A fleshly or fleshy person will think that mercy is good enough. The Old Testament is filled with words of mercy. There are not many words on grace. When man is in the flesh, he thinks that mercy is enough, that there is no need for grace. He thinks this way because he does not consider sin to be something serious. If man were without food or clothing or housing, mercy would not be adequate; there would also be the need of grace. But the problem with sin is not a lack of food, clothing, or housing. The problem with sin is unrest in man's conscience and judgment before God. For this, man thinks that if only God would be merciful to us and be a bit more lenient, everything would be fine. If God would overlook our sins, it would be good enough for us. In our hearts we hope that God would be merciful to us and let us go. Man's concept is to let go and to overlook. But God cannot mercifully overlook our sins. He cannot let us get by loosely. He must deal thoroughly with our sins.

Not only does God have to show mercy on us; He has to give us grace as well. What issues out from God's love is grace. God is not satisfied with mercy alone. We think that if there were mercy and that if God would let us go and not reckon with us, everything would be fine. But God did not say that since He has pity on us He would let us go. This is not the way God works. When God works, He must do so in harmony with Himself. Therefore, God's love cannot stop with mercy. His love must extend into grace. He must deal thoroughly with the problem of our sins. If the problem of sins were something that could be overlooked, God's mercy would be sufficient. But to Him, letting us go and overlooking our sins are not sufficient. Thus to have mercy alone is not sufficient. He must settle the matter of sins thoroughly. Here we see the grace of God. This is why the New Testament, though not void of mercy, is full of grace. In it we see how the Son of

God, Jesus Christ, has come to the world to show forth grace and to become grace so that we might receive grace.

What is grace? Grace is nothing other than God's great work accomplished freely in His unconditional and boundless love for helpless, unworthy, and sinful man. God's grace is just God working for man. How does this contrast with the law? The law is God requiring man to work for Him, while grace is God working for man. What is the law? The law is God's demand for man to do something for Him. What is work? Work is man's effort to do something for God. What is grace? Grace is neither God requiring something nor God receiving man's work, but grace is God doing His own work. When God comes forth to do something for and on behalf of man, that is grace.

The emphasis in the New Testament is not on the principle of the law. In fact, the New Testament opposes the principle of the law because law and grace can never mix. Is it God who is working or is it man who is working? Is God giving something to man or is He asking for something from man? If God is asking for something from man, we are still in the age of the law. But if God is giving something to man, we are in the age of grace. You would not go to someone's home to give him money while you are there to collect money. Likewise, law and grace are opposite principles; they cannot be put together. If man is to receive grace, he must put the law aside. On the other hand, if he follows the law, he will fall from grace.

If man is to follow the law, he must have God accept his works. If there is the principle of the law and of works and if man is to give something to God, he must give God what He demands. The Bible indicates that man's works should be a response to God's law. God's law demands that I do something. When I do it, I am responding to God's law. This is what the Bible calls works. But when grace is here, the principle of law and of works is set aside. Here we see that it is God working for man instead of man working for God.

Grace, which is God working for helpless, poor, and troubled man, has three characteristics or natures. Everyone who wants to understand God's grace must remember these three characteristics or natures. If we forget these three characteristics, we as sinners will not be saved, and we as Christians will fail and fall. If we see the characteristics and nature of God's grace, we will receive more grace from God for timely help. Let us consider briefly these three characteristics from the Bible.

What are man's works? Generally speaking, there are three things to man's work: (1) his wrongdoings, (2) his achievements, and (3) his responsibilities. The works of man that are evil are his wrongdoings, those that are good are his achievements, and those that he is willing to bear are his responsibilities. Here we have three things: of the things that man does, those that are not done well become his wrongdoings, those that are done well become his achievements, and those that he promises to do for God are his responsibilities. In terms of time, wrongdoings and achievements are things of the past, and responsibilities are things of the future; they are things that a man is responsible for. If God's grace is God working for sinful, weak, ungodly, and helpless man, right away we see that God's grace and man's wrongdoing cannot be joined together. Neither can God's grace be joined with man's achievements and responsibilities. Where the question of wrongdoing comes into play, grace does not exist. Where the question of

achievement comes into play, grace also does not exist. Likewise, where responsibility is, grace does not exist. If God's grace is indeed grace, wrongdoings, achievements, and responsibilities cannot be mixed in. Whenever wrongdoings, achievements, and responsibilities are mixed in, God's grace loses its characteristics.

GOD'S GRACE NOT RELATED TO MAN'S WRONGDOINGS

The first characteristic of God's grace is that it is not related to man's wrongdoings. God's grace is given to sinful man, to helpless, low, weak, and ungodly sinners. If the question of wrongdoing comes up and if it is stipulated that those with sin shall not have grace, then grace is basically annulled. God's grace can never be held back just because man has sinned. God's grace cannot even be reduced when man's sins increase. There can never be such a thing.

Man's mind, being fully of the flesh, is filled with the thought of the law. We may think that the ones who have achieved may receive grace but we, the sinners, as those without achievements, are unqualified to receive grace. In man's thought, wrongdoing and grace are at opposite poles. In man's thought, grace only comes where there is no wrongdoing. If you told anyone who has some consideration about God that God loved him and has given him grace, he would immediately wonder how this could be since he has committed so many sins. Man's thought is that grace can be received only when there is no wrongdoing. He fails to realize that this is absolutely wrong. Why? Because wrongdoing provides the best opportunity for grace to operate. Without wrongdoing, grace has no opportunity to manifest itself. Not only is wrongdoing unable to stop grace; it is the necessary condition for grace to be manifested.

In the same way, our poverty before the Lord is not a deterrent to grace. On the contrary, our poverty is a condition for receiving grace. Without being so poor, we would not be willing to receive grace. Every Lord's Day morning there are eight or nine beggars here in our meeting hall. They come every Lord's Day morning, and they are very punctual. When they come to you and you give them a coin or two, they smile and take it. But what would happen if you offered a coin to any brother or sister among us who is well groomed and who has a good upbringing, saying, "Here, take this. Find yourself two more coins and you will be able to buy some fritters on the street"? Surely he or she would not accept it. He or she would not only refuse it, but would consider it an insult. Therefore, being poor is a condition for receiving grace; in fact, it is the most necessary condition.

Man is very illogical. He says that he cannot receive grace because his sins are too numerous. No statement is more contradictory than this. No statement is more senseless. Because the sick are sick, they need a doctor; because the poor are poor, they need relief; and likewise, because man is a sinner, he needs grace. Hence, sin is not a deterrent. On the contrary, it is an opportunity. Our problem today is that we always think that we have to be in a condition that is different from where we are today. We think that we must be holier and better people today than yesterday if we are to receive grace.

My friends, if you want to be a magistrate, there is the matter of qualifications. If you want to enter a school, there is the matter of standards. If you want to be a doctor in a hospital, there is the matter of capability. If you want to do business, there is the matter of skill. Qualifications, standards, capabilities, and skills are indeed useful in certain things. But if man wishes to come to God, qualifications, standards, capabilities, and skills are out of the question. Only when I am a helpless sinner, standing on the lowest ground, can I receive grace. Man misses grace not because he is too sinful, but because he is not low enough. He is too proud and too moral. This is precisely where the greatest problem lies. We are great in all kinds of sins. At the same time, we are very great in the sin of pride. On the one hand, we have an absolute need; on the other hand, the ground we stand on is one on which we cannot receive the grace we need. This is due to nothing other than our pride.

Romans 5:20 tells us that "Where sin abounded, grace has super-abounded." The Word of God shows us that where sin is, grace is also. Where sin abounds—not that it has really abounded, for all men sin alike, but that sin has manifested itself more abundantly—the grace of God abounds even more. The word abound in the original language has to do with the idea of overflowing. I do not know if you have ever been to the seashore or riverside. When high tide comes, a water line is left on the shore or bank. But if a flood comes, it overflows the water line. When the water is at the water line, we say that there is only a normal rise of the tide, but if the water rises above the line, there is a flood. This is what abound means here. Sin is so high, but grace is higher and even covers sin. Hallelujah! Sin is high, but grace is even higher and has covered sin. This is God's grace. Man has the strange thought that to receive grace, he must be without sin or wrongdoing. But there is no such thing. Although our wrongdoings are quite serious and can rise quite high, God's grace rises even higher. Since the grace of God is here to deal with the problem of wrongdoings, they are no longer a problem.

What is the nature of God's grace? God's grace is just God coming in the sinner's position to take upon Himself the consequence of his sins. Please remember the definition that we gave earlier, that grace is God working for man. If we do not have any wrongdoings, we do not need God to do anything for us, and as a result, we do not need God's grace. But because we have sinned and because we have problems, He has to come and solve our problems. Hence, we need grace. If I say, "Since I have sinned, I cannot receive grace," it is like saying, "Because I am too sick, I am too shy to see the doctor. I will see the doctor when my temperature is down a little." Since there is no such patient in the world, there should be no such sinner in the world either. Thus our wrongdoings are the condition for us to receive God's grace.

Since the problem of sin is taken care of by God and since He takes the responsibility to deal with our wrongdoings, any sin we have, whether great or small, is no problem before God. Both great sins and small sins pose no problem, for both can be solved by God's work and by God's work alone. The great sin is taken care of by God's work. The small sin likewise requires God's work. If it were up to us to deal with our sins, we would distinguish between great sins and small sins. But if our sins are taken care of by God, they will be taken care of regardless of whether they are great or small. Since they are taken care of by God, it makes no difference at all to us. All that we are doing is receiving grace.

Earlier we saw why man cannot receive grace. Recall Peter's words in 1 Peter 5:5: "In like manner, younger men, be subject to elders; and all of you gird yourselves with humility toward one another, because God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble." God gives grace to the humble. If you humbly confess that you are a sinner, your wrongdoings will not deter you from receiving God's grace; rather, they will cause you to receive His grace. As long as you humble yourself before God, God's grace will flow to you. Thank God that the grace of God flows down to us; it is not pumped up to us. No one can ever pump God's grace up to himself. Therefore, all those who are high have to come down.

Who are the sinners and who can receive grace? The Bible shows us clearly in Romans 3:23-24 that "all have sinned," but the all who have sinned are "justified freely by His grace." The Bible shows us that once man sins, spontaneously he can receive grace. Without being a sinner, he cannot receive grace. Man thinks that those who have sinned cannot receive grace. But God says that because man sins, he can receive grace. It is so obvious: since man has sinned grace comes. Never think that when sin comes, grace goes away. Sin is one of man's great mistakes, but to think that sin blocks man from receiving grace is a greater mistake.

Therefore, the first thing we must see is that man's wrongdoings cannot stand in the way of God's grace. With God's grace, there is no problem because of wrongdoings. On the contrary, God's grace is there to deal with man's wrongdoings. God is giving grace because man has sinned.

GOD'S GRACE NOT RELATED TO MAN'S ACHIEVEMENTS

Now the second issue arises. Not everything that man does is sin. In God's eyes, all of man's acts are sins, but in man's eyes, many things he does are achievements. Some consider that since they are such extreme sinners, they cannot receive grace. Others think that because they sin, they have to improve themselves before they can receive grace. Please notice that there is a difference here. The first group says that they have sinned and are therefore unqualified to receive grace. This group is absolutely in the negative realm. The second group is a little more positive. They say that they are sinners and will only receive grace if they act better. They think that they have to attain a certain standard of conduct and certain achievements before they can receive grace. In the mind of the first group, the problem is hindrance from grace. In the mind of the second group, the problem is how to obtain grace. Some think that wrongdoings will hinder us from receiving God's grace. Others think that achievements will enable us to obtain God's grace.

Friend, do you know what grace is? Grace is unconditional. It is free, and it is not given based on any reason. It is God's work of love which He bestows on us, the sinners. If God's grace were related to man's achievements, the nature of grace would immediately be lost. As long as a trace of achievement is allowed to remain in us, God must reward us according to our achievement. God is righteous. And since He is righteous, He is just. He has to reward and recompense man according to his achievements. But if God's giving is a recompense or reward, it is not grace. As soon as achievements come in, recompense must also come in and grace is out. If a man gives you a month's labor and you give him a month's wages, the payment cannot be considered a gift; it is a recompense. He has done something for you; it is his achievement. If it is an

achievement, the payment is not grace, but recompense. Once recompense comes in, grace goes out.

Romans 4:4 makes the matter very clear: "Now to the one who works, his wages are not accounted according to grace, but according to what is due." Wrongdoings do not stop us from receiving grace; on the contrary, they afford us the opportunity to receive God's grace. Achievements do not help us to receive God's grace; on the contrary, they annul the nature of God's grace. Unless it is free, it is not grace. Unless it is given without reason and cause and unless it is a gift, it is not grace. If there is some reason or some cause involved, if there is a price involved, or if there is some work involved, the matter of recompense immediately comes in because God is righteous. Once recompense comes in, the nature of grace is lost.

If you are standing on a position that is above God, or even one that is equal with God, you cannot receive grace. That is why Romans 4 says clearly that no one can come before God and say that he has done this or that and, therefore, unashamedly ask for grace. If a person says that he is not like others who have extorted money or who are so unrighteous, that he fasts at least twice a week, that even though he may not have tithed, he at least offered up one-twentieth of what he has, he cannot receive God's grace. What is grace? Let me say this in an emphatic way—grace is receiving without having a reason to receive. Once there is a reason, it becomes recompense. If you have any achievements, the matter of recompense comes in and grace is out. We must pay much attention to this matter.

There is still another sentence in Romans which is very clear on this point: "But if by grace, it is no longer out of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace" (11:6). Someone in my family once said that we should give a gift to a certain doctor at the end of the year. When I asked why, I was told that two months earlier my two younger brothers were sick, and they were cared for by that doctor. Because the doctor was a friend, he would not accept any money for his services. Therefore, we were to buy him something. "In that case," I said, "we are not giving him something, but returning something." Why? Because there was a work and a debt. Strictly speaking, our giving was a returning of what we owed.

My friends, if we had any achievements before God, whether these achievements were great or small, God's salvation to us would become a payment of debt and would no longer be grace. Thank God that there is no one who can claim any achievements before God. Thank the Lord that we are saved by grace. If I, Watchman Nee, were saved by my achievements, I would never say, "God, I thank You for giving me grace." Instead I would say, "God, I am saved because You have paid back Your debt." I could proudly claim that I am saved by achievements. Why is it that no one can save himself by achievements? It is because God wants to remove all pride from man, that man may do nothing other than thank and praise Him. Once the matter of achievements arises, grace is no longer grace.

Please remember that God cannot withhold grace from man because of his wrongdoings. Nor can He reduce His grace to man because of his wrongdoings. He has to give, and He

cannot reduce His giving. Grace is not related to wrongdoings. What about achievements? In grace there is no possibility of mixture with anything, even in the nature of achievements. Grace is not God's payment of debt to us. It is not that God owed us and that now He is paying us back. Some may say, "Mr. Nee, we are not so extreme. Even though we dare not say that we come to God only by our achievements, you have to believe that we need some achievements before God. It is impossible to have nothing at all. We should do a little work, and then God can make up our lack. We will do our best, and God will make up the rest." My friends, we cannot say this. Grace is not God's payment of a debt. In the same way, neither is grace God's overpayment of a debt, as if God owed you five dollars, but is now returning ten to you. Grace is like someone giving you a new garment. It is not like someone patching up your torn garment. If grace is a patching up, it has lost its standing, and its nature is annulled.

Let me repeat again, grace has nothing to do with achievements. Man naturally sees that some people are better and others are worse. Therefore, he thinks that the better ones require less of God's grace and the worse ones require more of God's grace—a bigger patch for a bigger hole and a smaller patch for a smaller hole. But such a concept does not exist in the Bible.

Who has sinned? I believe all of us know the phrase by heart: "For all have sinned." Why is it that all have sinned? It is because they "fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). If the Bible were to say that all have sinned because all have broken the Ten Commandments, there would be a difference between great sinners and small sinners, for some may have transgressed nine commandments, while others may have transgressed only one. If the Bible were to say that all have sinned because all have fallen short of society's customs or the law of the land, there would still be some who are good and some who are not so good. But strangely enough, the Bible says that all have sinned because all have fallen short of the glory of God. What then is the glory of God? If you want to understand what the glory of God is, you have to understand Romans 1 through 8. God's grace is linked to God's glory. Grace seeks out man on the lowest level, and glory brings man to the highest level. Romans 1 through 3 tells us how man has sinned. Then after giving the way of salvation by the Lord Jesus in chapters three through five, the crucifixion with Christ in chapters six and seven, and the work of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of chapter eight, Romans tells us the following at the end of chapter eight, "Whom He foreknew, He also predestinated...whom He predestinated, these He also called; and those whom He called, these He also justified; and those whom He justified, these He also glorified" (vv. 29-30). Salvation is God pulling a sinner from the mud of sin and taking him all the way to glory. Although we are justified, we know that justification is not enough. Justification is not the goal of God's salvation for us. God will not stop until we are in glory. Hence, Romans 1 through 8 begins with sins and ends with glory.

What does it mean to fall short of the glory of God? It means that one cannot enter into glory. All have sinned because they cannot enter into glory. If all have sinned because they have not honored their parents, you could find some "great" dishonoring ones, some "mild" dishonoring ones, and some "little" dishonoring ones. Perhaps for the 400 million Chinese, there are 400 million classes of dishonoring ones. But in falling short of

the glory of God, that is, in failing to enter into glory, you and I are exactly the same. You may be a moralist, and I may be a criminal. As a criminal I cannot enter into glory, but neither can you as a moralist. Hence, before God all have fallen short of His glory, and no one is qualified to enter in.

You can go to the street and tell anyone that he has sinned. If he says that he has not sinned, you can ask if he thinks he can enter into glory. Of course, he will not know what glory is. If we are in God's light, and if we have a little knowledge of the Scripture, we will know that we are not qualified to enter in. None of us can enter in.

Two months ago, while I was in Hong Kong, the world tennis championship was there. The tennis pavilion where the match was held could hold only five to six hundred spectators. Another eight hundred people could not get in and had to stand outside. The problem was not whether they had money or not, whether they were male or female, or whether they were masters or slaves. None of them could go in. Whether one was rich or poor, educated or illiterate, male or female, made no difference. The difference between them and those inside did not lie in their being rich or poor, male or female, educated or illiterate. The problem was that they could not get in.

In the same way, whether or not you are moral or whether or not you are gentle is not the question. The question is whether or not you can enter into glory. All those who cannot enter into glory are sinners and are disqualified before God. God has leveled everyone before Him. We have a plot of land in Jen-ru. Recently we needed to put some grass on it. To do that I had to hire some workers to level the ground. The question today is whether or not we can enter in. Regardless of whether or not you are moral, you cannot enter into glory. God has leveled everyone. Why has God leveled everyone? Galatians 3:22 tells us that "the Scripture has shut up all under sin in order that the promise out of faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." God has shut up all under sin. Everyone has become a sinner, so that all who believe in Jesus Christ may receive the grace of God. God has leveled everyone so that He might bestow grace on everyone.

Romans 11:32 says, "For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all." God has shut up all in disobedience. He has leveled them all. For what goal? The goal is that He might show mercy to all. Hence, before God achievements can have no place at all. Everyone stands on the same ground.

Romans 3:9 says, "What then? Are we better? Not at all! For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin." God's verdict is that both the Jews and the Gentiles are all under sin. There is absolutely no chance for achievements to have a place. In the portions of the Scriptures that we have just read, we see that all have been shut up in sin and disobedience in order that we may go to God to receive grace and mercy. What is God's grace? God's grace is His giving to man not according to what he deserves. God's grace does not give to man more than what he deserves or better than what he deserves. Grace is simply God giving to man what he should not have and does not deserve.

GOD'S GRACE NOT RELATED TO MAN'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Now we come to the third matter, man's responsibilities. God's grace can never be tied to man's responsibilities. What are man's responsibilities? Suppose I give a brother ten thousand dollars to send to a certain place, but because I am afraid that he will lose the money, I charge him, saying, "You are responsible for this money." What do I mean? I mean that if he loses the money, he has to pay it back. This is the meaning of responsibility. Wrongdoings are matters of the past. Achievements are also matters of the past. But responsibilities are matters of the future. If God is to give us grace, it cannot be tied to responsibility. When I ask a brother to take ten thousand dollars to the bank, that money is not his, so I tell him that he is responsible for the money. But if this money is a free gift to him, can I say, "You are responsible for it"? Surely not. Once I give the money away to him, the money is his. What he does with the money is up to him even if he throws it into a river or a trash can.

Some have said that prior to our salvation we did not have good works and were unable to save ourselves. There was no other way to be saved except to have God's grace save us. But now that we are saved, they say, we should do good works, for if we do not do good works now, we are again doomed to perish. Many think that salvation is of grace, but that maintaining salvation is of our merit and work. This is what I mean by responsibility. Many think that if we behave properly after we are saved, our salvation will be preserved, and if we do not behave properly, God will take back His salvation. If salvation can be taken back, is it grace anymore? If it is grace, there is no question of past merit, present work, or future responsibility. If we bring in future responsibility, then again it is no longer grace.

Once a preacher came to talk to me who did not believe that once a person is saved, he is forever saved. I asked him why he thought so. He said that he believed that man is saved by grace, but if man does not behave properly after salvation, he will perish. "Is this then grace?" I asked. Then I gave him an illustration. Suppose we go to a bookstore together and each of us pick out the same book to buy. When you ask the salesman the price, he tells you that it costs sixty cents. You give him sixty cents and take the book home. But I dig into my pockets and realize that I do not have any money. I want the same book also, so I tell the salesman that I have not brought any money with me, and ask if I can take the book now and send him the money later. He says that it is fine to do so because we know each other well. Thus, I take the same book home also. You have paid cash, but I have postponed the payment. Let me ask you, was the cash transaction grace? Surely it was not, because the book was paid for with sixty cents. For man to be saved through good works is like a cash transaction. If you have done good works, you can go to God and He will say, "Fine, you can be saved." If a man is saved this way, his salvation is not through grace. Thank the Lord that no one is saved this way. How about my case of postponing the payment? This is like God advancing salvation to man. If man would not do good after salvation, his salvation will be claimed back from him. One would have to do good in order to keep his salvation. But this is not grace either. Grace is not a cash transaction nor is it like a postponed payment. In a cash transaction one pays now; with a postponed payment one pays later. But both have to pay. We do not purchase our salvation on credit. I told the preacher that if salvation is of grace, there is no need for good works. Then he asked, "Does this mean that we do not need good works anymore?" I said, "No. Christians need to do good works. But the good works that I

am talking about have nothing to do with salvation. The good works that I am talking about have to do with the kingdom, with the reward and the crown. Salvation is not bought, nor is it purchased on credit. Salvation is given freely."

What does it mean to give freely? The Lord Jesus said, "And I give to them eternal life" (John 10:28). Eternal life is given to us by God. Once I went to buy something at a friend's shop. He and I know each other very well, so he would not take money from me. He said that he would give me the item I wanted. I could not persuade him to take the money, yet he insisted that I take the item. In the same way, God says that He will give us eternal life. He did not say it only to come back and check on it. He did not say that it would be ours if we do good and that He would take it back if we do not do good. I do not mean that Christians should not have good works. I hate loose living, but this has nothing to do with my salvation. Hallelujah! Salvation is given to us; it is not bought by us. However, we should not despise good works. Good works are related to the kingdom reward, to the crown or punishment, but they have nothing to do with salvation. If salvation is of grace, the question of the future is out.

Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." What is a free gift? A free gift is a present. I cannot send a present to your house, and then later send you a bill for it. If it is a present, it is given absolutely free and cannot be changed.

Therefore, grace is not related to your past wrongdoings, your present achievements, or your future responsibility. If it is related to your future responsibility, it is not grace; it is a purchase on credit instead. Thank God that eternal life is not a purchase on credit. It is a gift. Thank the Lord that eternal life is God's gift in His Son Jesus Christ.

Since salvation is given to us by God, we must remember one thing after we are saved: salvation is obtained strictly through believing, and it is preserved apart from our faithfulness. Therefore, the condition for preserving our salvation is the same as the condition for obtaining salvation. Since salvation is obtained freely it is also preserved freely. Thank God that because the obtaining of salvation is free the preserving of salvation is likewise eternally free.

At the end of the book of Revelation, after the new heaven, the new earth, the kingdom, the lake of fire, Satan's end, and the great white throne have all been covered, the Bible says, "Let him who wills take the water of life freely" (22:17b). Thank the Lord that He has purposely put taking freely of the water of life at the end of chapter twenty-two. After we have seen the lake of fire, the second death, Satan's end, the kingdom, the new heaven and the new earth, we may fear that God would harden His heart again; but after all these things, God purposely stated that the water of life is free. There is no charge for it. Thank the Lord that we have grace through Jesus Christ, and that this grace is free. It is not related to our responsibility.

I have heard many times that we have to do good and repay God's grace. These are common sayings in the church today. But I have to ask where in the Bible is there a verse that says that we have to repay God's grace? This word is too contradictory. If there is repayment, there is no grace. And if there is grace, there is no need of repayment. Thank the Lord that in the whole New Testament we are never told to repay anything. It

is true that we Christians ought to have good works. But why should we have good works? Why do we have to suffer for the Lord? Why do we have to bear the shame? Why do we serve the Lord? As the Lord has dealt with us in love, so we deal with the Lord in love; but there is no thought of a trade here. It is not that God gives me so much and I give back so much in return. Because He has loved me, I cannot help but love Him; because He loved me, He was crucified for me; and because I love Him, for Him I bear the cross willingly. What He has given me has been given freely, and what I am giving Him is also given freely. The difficulty lies in man's legal mind. In everything he has the thought of bargain and law. Even the matter of salvation is seen from a bargaining perspective. Today if we work, serve the Lord, suffer reproach, or bear the cross, it is not because we want to pay back His grace—it is because we love Him. The love with which He has loved us has taken hold of us, captured our hearts, and constrained us to serve Him.

If you speak of repayment, you are ignorant of the value of the grace you have received. If you borrow ten dollars from a friend today, you will want to repay him. If you borrow a hundred dollars, you will want to repay him as well. If you borrow a thousand dollars, or even ten thousand dollars, you might still want to repay him. But if you borrow a million dollars, you may not have the thought of repaying him. And if you borrow ten million dollars or a hundred million dollars from him, you cannot imagine repaying him. If you are going to borrow a trillion dollars from him, you do not even know how to think about repayment anymore, for repayment has become impossible. If you want to repay God today, it simply means that you do not know how much God has given you. You do not know the depth, length, height, and breadth of God's grace to you. If you realized just a little of the length, breadth, height, and depth of the grace that you have received, you would quiet down and give up the idea of repayment. You would owe the Lord willingly, saying, "I am a willing debtor forever." The grace that He has given us is too great. Even if we want to repay, there is no possibility to do so.

My friends, if you owe someone a hundred million dollars, would you have the audacity to buy him a ten-cent cookie and call it your "little token of appreciation"? Can this be even a "little token"? Our God has done so much for us. Dare we say that we are giving Him "a little token" as repayment? No! We can only say that God has freely given us so much. I am happy to be an eternal debtor. God has loved us with an eternal love. There is no limit to the length, breadth, height, and depth of His love to us. Are we going to repay God with a "ten-cent cookie"? We can only say that we accept His love willingly. I hate to hear men talk about repaying! I hate the thought of the law! I only wish that God's children would see that as God is grace to us, we may be grace to Him. As God has dealt with us generously, let us deal with God generously.

Hallelujah! There is no question of wrongdoings, achievements, or responsibilities. Salvation is nothing other than God for me. It is not I for God. Grace is what God has done for me. It is not what I have done for God. Please remember the peace and joy of a sinner and the peace and joy of a Christian do not lie in how much they love the Lord, but in how much the Lord loves them. Our peace and joy do not lie in how much we have done for the Lord, but in how much the Lord has done for us. We are not resting daily on what we have, but on what God is. We must be delivered from ourselves. We must see God in the light of the gospel. We have to see that we are resting on what God

is and what He has. We are resting on the grace and mercy of God. If we see this, we will not fail or be sorrowful. If we rest on ourselves, considering that we are quite good and that we love the Lord quite much, we will be like drifting sand; we will not be able to build a house on it. We cannot find any peace and joy in ourselves. We can only find them in the Lord, in God.

It is wonderful to realize that while we live on this earth, God is for us. Do you remember the words of Romans 8:31? "If God is for us, who can be against us?" I do not believe there is a better word for us than this. When I come to break bread on the Lord's Day, I do not ask myself whether or not I have behaved properly for the last few days. Rather, I ask if the Lord has loved me the last few days. Perhaps your condition for the last few days has been very poor. Perhaps you have been very cold in your emotions for the last few days. But you only need to ask if the Lord still loves you. If the Lord does not love you anymore, you can withhold your praise. But if the Lord still loves you, you have to praise Him. Have you noticed how the disciples were with the Lord for three and a half years and yet were so foolish in the end as to argue about who was greater among them? Yet the Bible says that the Lord, having loved His own, loved them to the uttermost (John 13:1). Thank the Lord that everything depends on Him. If it were up to your love, if you had to trust in yourself, it would be like putting a candle in a boat, launching the boat to sea, and sailing it in stormy weather. You can imagine how shaky that would be. Thank God that everything is grace. Everything depends on Him. May God grant us to truly know the characteristics of the grace of the Lord Jesus.