

Grace, Life & Glory pt 1

By Jeff Noblit

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Anchored in Truth Ministries

1915 Avalon Ave.
Muscle Shoals, AL 35661

Website: www.anchoredintruth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/anchoredintruth

Take your Bibles and let's go to the book of Ephesians this morning and we're going to use one verse to kick off where we are going. As you know, we are in between our exposition of a book of the Bible; we finished Luke a few weeks ago, having spent about 5 ½ years and we're using this interim period to touch on some foundational truths that the church is built on and that our church in particular is built on. Now, our church can't be built on anything different than any other true church, there is only one church and one truth, but we are very intentional to be biblical in what we're about and how we do what we do and so we come to Ephesians 3:21 where I want to talk about why we have the name Grace Life Church. Why do we have that and where did it come from.

I did a little reading on church history this week. I read some things I had read before and there was an artist's rendering, an ancient artist's rendering of our early Baptist forefathers, they called them Anabaptists. The word Anabaptist just means baptism rejector; they rejected the infant sprinkling or infant baptism of the state churches of Europe. This was before America was discovered. And so these rag-tag band of people, they were lower class, they were poor, didn't have much, they weren't great writing theologians, they had some statements of their beliefs but the Bible had been printed in the common man's language finally and this group of people, and I'm convinced by the sovereign hand of God, took the Bible and began to study it and learn it and they were convinced that being sprinkled as a baby and being called a Christian because you remember of the official sanctioned state church, whether it was France or England or wherever, was not biblical. And they began to preach the Gospel and they began to preach it to whoever would hear and when a person would show that the Gospel of grace impacted their hearts and they became repenters of their sin and put faith in Jesus Christ, then they would baptize them and all the whole culture revolted against them and persecuted them. They hated them and they called them this derogatory name, Anabaptist. "Oh, being sprinkled into the state church is not good enough for you guys? You want to be baptized later and older in life? You say you want to wait until you see the evidence that one is a true convert?" The early Baptists called it baptism of disciples only and a child can't be a disciple; a baby can't repent; a baby can't believe; they're not able yet.

So very often they began to persecute these and in this artist's rendering I mentioned earlier, they showed these Anabaptist leaders tied to stakes and authorities from the state

church plunging spears into them and lighting fires so they'd be burned at the stake. And I thought about our heritage and thought, "What did these people hold to, these earliest of Baptists?" We're talking many of these 16th century Christians. Really you could sum it up in a couple of things. 1. Would be the authority of Scripture only. The authority of Scripture only. That is, they had grown weary of the state churches, Catholic and Protestant alike, that would say, "We follow the Bible but also the church has discerned some doctrines and precepts we must follow." And they saw that that got into a lot of heresy and error and man-centeredness, so the early Baptists, rag-tag poor folks, not like you big shot money people today, rag-tag poor folks reading their Bibles said, "No. No. The only authority will not be the pope, it will not be the archbishop, the only authority will be the word of God for us."

Now, as they studied the word of God, they had to build their churches on something so here's what they said, here's what it is. Now, they might not have used this terminology but without question this is the foundation stone upon which the early Baptists built their churches. Grace and life. Only when the Gospel of grace has impacted your heart and spiritual life has come into you, evidenced by repentance and faith, then we will baptize you. That's what they were about, the Gospel of grace and the Spirit imparting life and then you become a part of God's church.

Now, you'll remember me talking to you somewhat about Roger Williams. Roger Williams established the first Baptist church, not the first Baptist, but the First Baptist Church in America at Providence, Rhode Island. Do you know why Providence, Rhode Island is called Providence, Rhode Island? Because Roger Williams, who was kicked out of the Puritan colony because he rejected infant baptism and state religion in America. He said, "We don't need that. We need people in the church who have repented and believed, not just been sprinkled as babies." Don't you appreciate Roger Williams? That was a radical thought in that day. So they kind of ran Roger Williams out and he got some help from the Indians and he went to this remote wilderness area that became Rhode Island and he started the First Baptist Church there and, by the way, he was a staunch Calvinist Baptist and that's why the city was named Providence, Rhode Island because the sovereignty and providence of God led him there to do that. And here's what he would tell people, "You can come to my town and you can follow other religions but you must be willing to debate me in the public square. We're gonna talk about what truth is and disciple and evangelize each other and then if you show that you've repented and come to faith, then you can join my church. But you're not gonna join my church just because you're a citizen of Providence, Rhode Island. The grace of God through the Gospel has to have impacted your life and you have to be a repentor and one who believes."

So all that being said as introduction, let's go to Ephesians 3:21 and let's talk about grace, life and glory. Ephesians 3:21,

21 to Him [that's Jesus, of course] be the glory in the church and in Christ
Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Now, it would be the greatest of all travesties of biblical interpretation for you to come to Ephesians 3:21 and even dare to grasp what the author is saying without understanding all the glorious rich treasures of grace that he's already unpacked in Ephesians 1, 2 and 3 so far therefore based on the glories and the wonders of grace that Paul has been writing to these Ephesian believers, he comes to this summary climactic statement, "to Him," and I told you wrong, to Him, God the Father, "be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever. Amen." In other words, he's been talking about, he's been writing to them about the great glories of grace and how in grace God imparts spiritual life by which you are enabled to repent and believe and by God doing all of that, God manifests his great glory both through Christ and through the church forever and ever and ever.

Now, let's talk about this word "grace" for just a moment to get started. The word "grace, charis" simply means "favor." Just favor. Now, God has what theologians call common grace. Now, common grace is God's universal and non-saving grace. Common grace consists in the blessings given to humanity for our physical sustenance, our pleasure, our learning, our beauty; all these gifts God's commonly given to all of creation is an expression of God's goodness, it's his common grace. Now, common grace only helps you for time but not for eternity. You see, the Bible says God causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. I mean, a wicked man can go plow a field and plant his seed and a godly man can plow his field and plant his seed but the rain falls on both of them. That's God's common grace, just his goodness, and God is like that. That's one way and maybe the primary way in which the Bible says that God loves all men because he showers his love on all men through his common grace.

Now contrasting to that, the Bible speaks of what we would call saving grace. This is grace that's only given to those whom God saves. It's the eternal and absolute free favor of God bestowing spiritual and eternal blessings on the guilty and the unworthy. God gives common grace to all, but then God in a special way favors some with what we call saving grace. That's why you can preach in a congregation the exact same Gospel and one man over here is crushed and broken and repentant and comes to faith in Christ, another man over here yawns and can't wait to watch the ball game. One was wrought upon, one received the favor of God to come to his senses, and one did not.

Now, saving grace contains what we would call prevenient grace. Now I don't want you to get lost in all these theological terms but I do want you to have your thinking caps on in a more serious way this morning and in two weeks when I do the second part. I'm going to be helping a brother we've been mentoring and helping in his church next Sunday through Wednesday, but I'll pick it back up in two weeks. Anyway, prevenient grace means that this saving grace comes before any human action or response toward God. In other words, this grace offers or provides a work in your heart before you repent and believe. The Baptists faith and message adopted and embraced by every Southern Baptist Church states explicitly that regeneration comes first and then it is attended by repentance toward God in faith in Jesus Christ. So the next time you run into some Southern Baptist who says, "Y'all preach that doctrine of God's grace and God's election and God has to do it," say, "Well, it's in your statement of faith, goofy. I mean, it's right there." We don't know what we believe. It's been there for years. A few of us stand up

and start believing it like our forefathers and they think we're strange. No, you don't even understand your own statement of faith. Regeneration has attendance of repentance and faith. Grace comes first.

Grace is favor toward those who have no merit in them and no compensation is demanded from them. It's divine favor to those who are thoroughly ill-deserving and hell-deserving. It is completely unsought. It comes as a pure charity. At the first, it is unasked for and undesired. Did you hear that? When God's grace starts to work on a man, he hasn't asked for God to work on him. He doesn't even yet desire God to do a work on him. The fact that he begins to desire the things of God means that God is working on him. Now listen, you sit under my preaching a long time and you know I'm very balanced to very weightily warn, command and encourage people to do their responsibility of repentance and faith, however, the Bible requires us to humbly acknowledge that even the coming to desiring to repent and place faith in God started with God himself. Prevenient grace.

Grace cannot be bought, it cannot be earned, and it cannot be won by the creature otherwise it would not be grace. It would be some kind of partnership deal worked out between man and God. Romans 11:6 reminds us, "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace." Here's the point: if in some way, shape or fashion you have credit for the union you have with God through Jesus Christ, Jesus did 99% but in some way, shape or fashion you could say, "Well, I did the 1%," then it's no longer grace. There was some work on your part. That's why Paul says very clearly, "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace."

Now three things about grace I want to mention here. First of all: God's grace is eternal. 2 Timothy 1:9, "who has saved us and called us with a holy calling," that means all of those he has chosen to favor with saving grace, he has called them "not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity." That means from way way back in eternity past before anything was created, God possessed a saving favor toward those he would save. All from eternity past. You were indeed the apple of God's eye before time began if you're a Christian. Do you know what this does to us? This humbles us. This causes us to feel the grand and glorious wonder and preciousness of our God and the salvation he has offered us. It's eternal. Secondly, it's free. It's free. Romans 3:24, "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." Now thirdly. Not only is it eternal and is it free, this grace is sovereign. Hebrews 4:16, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." If grace reigns on the throne and here Paul writing personifies grace to help us understand, so grace is pictured as a person sitting on the throne, but if grace is on the throne, then grace is sovereign because one who sits on the throne is sovereign. As a sovereign, it is perfect and righteous and proper that he acts on his own will and outside of any other influence or power. God's grace acts as God determines it to act, period, with no external influence coming to bear on it. Satan can rant and rage and accuse and find fault with every single Christian who has ever lived on the earth but God says, "My grace is

sufficient and when I point my grace to one of my children it cannot be thwarted. I am sovereign in the grace I extend to my children." By the way, there's no way you can rightfully and properly hold to the eternal security of the believer if you do not hold to sovereign grace. That's the only way you can be eternally secure.

Grace is on the throne and it is sovereign. In other words, grace is not on the Walmart shopping rack to be examined and handled and chosen by men if it suits them. Grace is on the throne of the universe and is bestowed when and on whom the perfect beautiful Sovereign chooses and pleases to do so. Romans 3 reminds us, again, that all men are born unrepentant and unbelieving rebels against God all of whom fully and absolutely deserve eternal condemnation and the Sovereign one who sits on the throne in his love and goodness dispenses common grace to all these unbelieving rebels. God day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, decade after decade, century after century, has to shower goodness on men who do not believe in him and who rebel against him.

Common grace is an expression of that love and if any of these under this influence of common grace will repent of their sin and embrace by faith the Son, Jesus Christ, they will be eternally saved. Did you hear that? If any of those under the influence of this continual showering of common grace would come to their senses and be a repentor of their sin and place their whole and only faith in Jesus Christ to save them, God will save them. But none of them will. Day after day, month after month, year after year, decade after decade, century after century, God has poured forth his goodness and not one under the influence of common grace has ever come to his senses and repented of his sins and believed on Jesus Christ, and God would have been 100% perfectly just to have cast and condemned every single soul who has ever walked this planet other than his Son Jesus to eternal damnation.

In that case, in that scenario, God then exercises his divine right as Sovereign to extend saving grace to some of these undeserving, unrepentant, unbelieving rebels and by God choosing to extend some saving grace to some of these, there are spiritual and eternal blessings manifested in their life which shows the love and the goodness of God. It's as if God stands in heaven with arms open wide and said, "Please, turn from yourself. Turn from your indulgence. Turn from your wickedness and embrace me and the provision of my Son. My arms are open wide. Who will come?" And none come. So God chooses as Sovereign – now listen to me, young people, when you talk to somebody and they says, "Well, y'all believe in that election, that predestination." Look, God is sovereign. He can do what he wants. You don't have to defend God, just proclaim his truth. Spurgeon said, "You don't have to go around as an apologist for God all the time. Jesus is a lion, just let him loose." Just let him loose. Just let the truth loose and see what it will do. As Sovereign, no one, he is, look, he is absolutely totally 100% unaffected by all the rantings and ragings and reasonings and cryings of men. He is sovereign. He does as he pleases. By the way, you don't want any other kind of God than that. You don't want any other kind of God than a true Almighty Sovereign God.

So this act of God choosing to extend saving grace to some of the all who are undeserving, unrepentant and unbelieving rebels, is his work as Ephesians 2:10 reminds us, "For we are His workmanship," he does the work, "created in Christ Jesus." And what's the sphere in which the work required to make us righteous children of God, what's the sphere in which that is accomplished? It's in Jesus Christ. He's the one who manifests the grace of God toward us. We're his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, "for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

So thinking back to our biblical moorings, thinking back to our heritage as Baptist people, we understand from studying church history this is a foundational doctrine they held to, the doctrine of grace, and that God – listen, here's what the early Anabaptists were saying – God saves and builds his church through his Gospel, not through man's creation of an authoritative state church. Are you listening to me? Amen? Aren't you glad for that? Aren't you glad in America today we don't have a state church where by law you're required to be sprinkled and the authority of the church to declare you a Christian because you're in the church, because you were sprinkled as a baby? Aren't you glad somewhere God in grace acted on some poor, on the sideline, off-scourings of the world people to open the Bible and say, "Wait a minute, that's not what the book says"? God saves men by grace through the preaching of this Gospel, not through the ordinances of the state church.

Now, that's our introduction. I. Grace existed eternally in the heart and mind of God. Grace existed eternally in the heart and mind of God. In other words, grace is one of the eternal attributes of God. It's a part of what makes God God. By attributes you could use the word "a quality"; it's one of the qualities of just being God. God didn't wake up one morning in eternity past and said, "Do you know what? I think I'm going to try some grace today." No, he's always been a God of grace. It's just who he is. You can't not make him a God of grace.

So grace is this wonderful attribute of God. Again, God is God. God is not who we think him to be, God is not who we feel he should be, he is who he is. That's why in the Old Testament God says, "I am that I am. What I am is what I am. It's what I always am. I am and I am and in the past am, in the present am, in the future I am. I am who I am. I can't change." And that's one thing God can't do, he can't change from being God and he can't change the nature of who God is because he's so perfect and beautiful he would never do anything against perfection and the beauty and the wisdom of what he is because he's the ultimate of perfection, beauty and wisdom and a part of that is he's a God of grace.

His attributes are not separate from his essential nature. His attributes emanate from that nature. Grace existed in the heart and mind of God before his grace was ever displayed in the world through his Son. Grace, that is, his unmerited favor to unrepentant, unbelieving rebels, is a beautiful attribute of the very nature of the heart of God and there are several parts to this and I know you might won't remember a lot of this but maybe the Spirit of God will let you grab onto some things so that you will leave here treasuring and glorying in the wonder of God and the wisdom of God and the beauty of God in our salvation. But one of these several parts is the essence. In other words, the essence of God being holy

includes that he is a God of grace. In other words, if you take grace out of God, you lose the composite that is his holiness, almost like if you take the transmission out of a car, you really lose what a car is. You don't have much left. If you take some of these essential attributes out, you don't have God anymore. It's part of the very essence of who he is.

Also, God's grace means he has a desire to extend that grace. In other words, it's who he is and he further desires to extend grace which includes, of course, showing unmerited favor to unbelieving, undeserving rebels. It's just a part of who he is.

So it's the essence of him, it's a part of his desire, thirdly, it's wisdom. It's part of his wisdom. In other words, he has the inherent wisdom to devise the plan – now listen to me – whereby he might cause you unrepentant, unbelieving rebels, to obtain a righteousness before him the only true righteous God. There is no way on earth that could happen unless God had a plan to get that done. We could take all the minds of the world of all time and say, "Can you figure out a way whereby we can stand righteously before an infinitely holy God?" They'd never get started. Only God's wisdom could do that.

So it's his essence, desire, he has the wisdom to prepare a plan to reach sinners, and then also it includes his will. He had the will to initiate the plan. That's one of the reasons why I love Christmas. I love Christmas. I just love Christmas because when he came, it's on. I mean, the plan was settled from eternity past but we live in time and space history and all of a sudden the longing, the yearning, the prophets prophesied, the teachers taught, the nation of Israel yearned, "When is the Savior coming?" Boom! He's born and it's on, buddy. It's just a little short time now when redemption's work will be finished for those he eternally favored. I love Christmas.

Well, lastly, not only his essence, his desire, his wisdom, his will, but he has the power to execute the plan. The power to get the job done. We call this effectual. He is effectual. He can complete what he sets out to do. So God has this component part of him that is grace, this capacity – now listen to me – to favor those who are unbelieving, unrepentant rebels, and he has the power and the will to get it done for them in their place. You might say, "What do I have to do?" You're just a good wretch whereby he might illustrate the power of his grace to make a wretch righteous. That's what you are.

So grace is a wonderful attribute of God. Now, B. in our outline, not only under grace existed eternally in the heart and mind of God, B. in our outline, grace in the counsel of the Godhead. Now, I changed that. That's okay, the grace composition in the heart and mind of God. Let's break this down. As God began, if you will, composing, now we have to talk about things in terms of our time and development because that's the only way we can think about them; we can't think about things existing in eternity. So we'll talk about them as if they developed in the Godhead's minds and here's what he began to come up with. Now, I have 50 different Scripture texts and I could have many more to show you all this composite of all the grace he is going to exercise toward us.

First of all, in grace he chose us, John 15, Ephesians 1, Matthew 22, John 13, Acts 10, 1 Corinthians 1, 2 Thessalonians 2, Titus 1, 1 Peter 1, 1 Peter 2, 1 Peter 5, 2 Peter 1, 2 John 1 and Revelation 17. All speak and teach of his choosing us.

Secondly, he foreknew us. Now, foreknowing has the concept of not just knowing about you but having known you in intimacy. There was a sense in which from eternity past those God was going to save, he intimately had knowledge of you. That's why we were in Christ Jesus from the foundation of the world. So he foreknew us. 1 Peter 1, Romans 8, Romans 11.

Thirdly, not only chose us and foreknew us, these are all Bible words now, he elected us. In grace he elected us. It has the same close idea of predestination which we'll mention next. He chose those to whom would be the objects of his special saving favor from eternity past.

He predestined us. Chose, foreknew, elected, predestined us. Romans 8, 1 Corinthians 2, Ephesians 1. It means marked out beforehand for a later determined result.

Then in grace he called us. He chose us, he foreknew us, he elected us, he predestined us and it's as if Paul and the writers of Scripture can't emphasize this enough so they grab another term and say he called us. Now, it has a little more of the aspect of when he actually begins to apply the grace to our lives in calling us to himself. In calling us, this is taught in Romans 1, Romans 8, Romans 9, 1 Corinthians 1, 1 Corinthians 1:24, 1 Corinthians 7, Galatians 1, Galatians 5, Ephesians 4, Colossians 3, 1 Thessalonians 4, 2 Thessalonians 2, 1 Timothy 6, 2 Timothy 1, Hebrews 5, 1 Peter 1, 1 Peter 2:21, 1 Peter 3:9, 1 Peter 5, 2 Peter 1:3 and John 1:1.

In other words, he's saying, "I chose you, I foreknew you, I elected you, I predestined you, and at the right time I called you to myself." Because here's what God's saying: I am a God of grace from all eternity and I am going to exercise that grace to some in a saving way and absolutely nothing will thwart the fruition of my plan.

That's not all. Not only choosing, foreknowing, electing, predestining and calling in grace, he justified us. Romans 8. He, and it's used in the past tense in the text, he has caused you to be classified as a justified one though you in and of yourself in no way merit or deserve that classification. You're justified – listen – in Christ Jesus, not in you. Amen? God looks at Christ and says, "Son, of those we chose and foreknew and predestined and elected, have you worked out the problem of their sin?" And the Son says, "Yes, I did. I, my Father, died for them. I took the wrath that justly should have fallen on them. It has been expiated by me on their behalf." And the Father says, "Not guilty. They are justified." And it all was done because of the great grace of God that existed in the heart of God before time began.

Not only did he choose us, foreknow us, elect us, predestine us, call us, justified us, he sanctified us. There is a progressive sanctification but there's a positional sanctification. In other words, in grace God in time and eternity set you apart as one of his own that he

would pour out saving favor upon. You know, I always use the little silly illustration and we have some men in our church that catch lots of crappie and sometimes, not all the time, sometimes when they're filleting those crappie, they'll start setting some aside in a special stack. Do you know why? Those are sanctified crappie, they are set aside for a special role, they go to the pastor's house. That's what the word means. It means you set aside some for special use and God said, "Of all the creatures I've made from eternity past, in my grace, I have chosen to divinely favor some for special use. They're going to be my special children for all eternity."

Not only did he choose us, foreknow us, elect us, predestine us, call us, justify and sanctify us, he has glorified us. Again, it's taught in the past tense because as Jesus is now glorified by his Father in heaven, you in Christ are now glorified. You're just waiting to get in on the fruition of it. All that was accomplished in Christ Jesus. There is a very real sense – now listen to me – in the heart and mind of God, you were already glorified in Christ Jesus before time began.

Now, here's what's happening in a lot of evangelical and Baptist pulpits today, they're saying, "Those 50 verses Noblit just threw out real quickly, don't pay any attention to those. Don't even look. Don't pay attention to those, you just worry about believing on Jesus and that's all that matters." Then why did he write all this? Do you know what this does? This causes us to marvel over him. This causes us to be humbled to the dirt at the incomparable superiority of God to us. This causes us to be deeply grateful. This causes us to love and treasure him. He's not just a big version of us. Are you with me this morning? He's not just a better idea of you, he's infinitely holy and transcendent beyond and distinct from all that we could fathom or think. He's just shown us a little of it in the way he saves us so that we'd be humbled and marvel over him. Perhaps not with the articulation I've been able to give you, but that's what the 16th century Baptists were saying to the state churches. They were saying, "God's going to build his church under the authority of the word and the preaching of his Gospel. We reject the church forcing people to join the state church by baptism when they're babies."

Alright, I'm going to end after this. Sub point B under grace existed eternal in the heart and mind of God. Well, I'm in point B. Let me go to number 2 and I'll end with this. I'm sorry. II. Grace manifested by the Son and applied by the Spirit. Again, a powerfully essential foundational concept to early Baptists. The early Catholic, even some Protestant churches of Europe in that day, would say God's grace oozes out to you as you work hard and obey the sacraments in the Catholic church or in the established church. When you come down to the priest, you get a little saving grace. When you take the Mass, you get a little saving grace. When you die, the priest has to come and do the last rites and you'll get the final saving grace. So they made the people radically dependent on the church system, not Jesus Christ, and the early Baptists, maybe not very brilliantly educated because few people were in those days, maybe not sophisticated writing theologians but there's enough writing to know they rejected that and said, "No. No, grace that saves us doesn't come through the church, it comes to any who hear the Gospel and repent and believe on Jesus Christ." And here's why they were martyred, here's why they were hated: because they undermined the church's authority over the people. If people are free from

the state church to get to heaven, well, they'll rebel. That's what the state church thought. So they hated the free offer of salvation to all men that these early Baptists were preaching.

Well, let's develop this out: grace manifested by the Son and applied by the Spirit. First of all, grace in the work of the Son. In Jesus Christ the Son, grace has perfection. That is, Jesus has the qualification, the perfection to be our guilt offering for sin. No other person had the perfection or the qualification to get that done. Only Christ. Only Christ could qualify before an infinitely holy God to be the sin offering on our behalf.

Secondly, grace being manifested in the work of the Son, his crucifixion. When he died on the cross, I used to teasingly tell you if somebody caught you in the street or the Shoals area and said, "What happened at the cross?" you should be able to say these two words; if somebody stopped you at the mall in Florence and said, "What happened at the crucifixion?" you should be able to say these two words. Should I start calling our elders by name and have them to tell you what they are? I wouldn't do that to them. Satisfaction. Substitution. That's it. Satisfaction. Substitution. He satisfied the wrath of God that was against us and he was our substitute in our place before the wrath of God and the judgment of God. Satisfaction. Substitution. That's what Jesus did on the cross.

He had the perfection to qualify, in his crucifixion he had the execution of the task fully taken care of, in his resurrection, he completed the task and verified our justification. Now he lives in his intercession, if you will, to keep us saved. So in every way, shape or fashion, the grace of God, God chose to have toward those he would save, was manifested in Jesus Christ. He accomplished it all on our behalf. John 1:17, "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ." Grace that fulfills all that is true about how an unworthy one can become righteous is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It is settled forever in him.

B. Grace in the work of the Spirit. Now, by grace is manifested and exercised in the person and work of Christ – now listen now, don't leave me. Listen, there'll be a quiz later. It was manifested in the person of Christ, grace is extended and applied to us in the person of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit applies the work of grace Jesus accomplished in our hearts in time and space history. Sometimes he applies it when a person is 7, 8 or 9. We don't see a lot of that but sometimes he does. Sometimes he applies it to a person's life when they're a teenager. Sometimes as a young adult. Sometimes as a medium age adult. Sometimes as a senior adult. I don't know. By the way, last time I checked, he's sovereign in how he does this.

You could summarize it this way: the Father is the fountain of grace, the Son is the channel of grace, the Spirit is the bestower of grace. When we baptize somebody, you remember the phrase we use? "Here's Joe. He has counseled with church leadership and he has exhibited evidence of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." That means the Spirit has bestowed the grace on him whereby he's become aware of his sin and his need of a Savior. You see, when we're receiving someone in the church, we're receiving what God has wrought, not what we manipulated somebody to do. We're

looking for the evidence that God has wrought this. As Acts 2 said, "And the Lord added to the church." Do you know what's happening in evangelical life today? We've been adding people to the church instead of discerning who is God adding to his church. Once again, going back to the venerable early Baptists who stood against the state churches of Europe and said, "When you sprinkle a baby, that doesn't mean God has added them to the church. You've put them on a roll, you've made them a church member but God hasn't added them until they show the new birth, until they show repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ."

The Spirit of God comes in regeneration of the heart. It's a fanciful word perhaps but what it means is he comes in and bursts new life; he creates, actually it is a generation more than a regeneration. He generates a new thing in a person's heart that wasn't there before. Ephesians 2:5 says, "even when we were dead in our transgressions," listen, "he made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." You were dead and he made life come in, spiritual life. There is a sealing or a confirming work the Spirit does, that is, the Spirit of God brings the assurance that we're God's child. Ephesians 1:13, "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation - having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise." This new believing, this capacity to embrace, treasure and believe the truth about your sin and about Christ is evidence of the Spirit's sealing your heart for God because you would not have had a genuine acknowledgment and repentance of sin, you would not have had a genuine turning and embracing of Christ alone had the Spirit not enabled you.

Shall I say it again? I hadn't been a Christian very long and I went to a conference and the teacher got up and he said, "If you're doubting your salvation, let's nail it down. Ask the Lord to save you and when you get home, get you a tomato stake and go out to the side of your house and," he said, "drive that tomato stake in the ground and the next time the devil tells you you're not a Christian, you say, 'Devil, you see that tomato stake? I've asked Jesus to save me and here's the date I asked him and that's a witness and a testimony that I've been saved.'" How ridiculous. You mean the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit of God the Bible says bears witness that you're a child of God and you'd rather have a tomato stake than the Spirit of God telling you you're a Christian? Let that tomato stake stake tomatoes and you listen to what the Spirit of God tells you as you hear the word of God and read the word of God that you are a child of God. Don't you trust Jeff Noblit, don't you trust an evangelist, don't you trust any priest or pope or cardinal or sacrament or ordinance. You make sure the Spirit of God has wrought a sealing work in your heart that, yes, the biblical prescribed evidence is in my life, I am his and he is mine. The Spirit does that. You say, "Pastor, that can be hard work. I'm gonna have to pray through that. I might have to study." Yes, but you may go to heaven instead of hell. There are people going to hell trusting in a tomato stake. This was a prominent teacher.

There is the sanctifying work of the Spirit. 2 Thessalonians 2:13, "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation." Is that not clear? God has chosen you. After you

believed? No. God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation "through the sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth." The Spirit came and made you one of God's set apart ones by working in your heart, bringing you to repentance and faith, and then you expressed that faith in the truth. In grace when the Gospel is preached, the Spirit applies the Gospel in saving power to the soul. He brings life to the spiritually dead, conquers their rebellion, melts their hard hearts, opens their blind eyes and cleanses them from sin.

I'm going to close with this. A. W. Pink is a very trustworthy expositor. He has some very good books and commentaries. If you want a good book or commentary, if you find one A. W. Pink has written, you'll have a good one. In A. W. Pink's book on the attributes of God, he quotes G. S. Bishop and here's what G. S. Bishop said, "Grace is a provision for men who are so fallen that they cannot reach the bar of justice, so corrupt that they cannot change their own natures, so averse to God that they cannot turn to him, so blind that they cannot see him, so deaf that they cannot hear him, and so dead that he himself must open their graves and lift them into resurrection." That's what grace does.

Aren't you glad that 600 or so years ago some people read the Bible and they weren't trying to start a denomination, they were just saying, "What does the book say?" And they said, "Whatever else the book says, we know this to be true: the church is built on those who are objects of God's grace who show they have new life wrought by the Spirit and then we'll baptize them and we'll build a church." I think Grace Life is a good name for a solid church.

Let's stand together.