

Captive's Corner



"Bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ"

2 Corinthians 10:5

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God's Grace and Government (How God's Forgiveness Relates To Sin's Consequences)

This title presents a very important and practical truth in Scripture. If understood, it would make more clear how God works in our life as well as make clear many commonly misunderstood passages in Scripture. It would also help us to experience Christ's life within us, being content, rejoicing, even giving thanks to the Lord in those difficult circumstances of our life which are simply the result of the sin we have sowed.

In Genesis 3 we find our first example of God's grace and government. Here we find a ruined, guilty, naked sinner cleansed of guilt and clothed by God's

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grace. God provides life and righteousness for the sinner through the bruised seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15, 21; John 1:29; 2 Corinthians 5:21). God's grace gives His Son as "the Seed of the woman" to be slain in order to furnish a robe of divine righteousness for the sinner who is naked of righteousness. However, as God's great grace clothed the man, God's

government drove him out of Eden. The flaming sword kept him out. Here we have a solemn, soul-subduing act of government. The coat of skin was the sweet pledge of grace; the flaming sword is the solemn sign of government. Adam was the subject of both. When he looked at the coat, he could think of divine grace, how God had provided a robe to cover his nakedness. When he looked at the sword, he was reminded of divine, unflinching government.

One might ask, "How was it that the Lord drove out the man, if He had previously forgiven him?" This same question may be asked throughout

the entire Word of God and throughout the entire history of God's people where the combined action of grace and government occurs. Today, the same question is asked in this form: "How could it be God's will for me to endure this hardship if God has forgiven me?" Sadly, some misunderstand and,

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thus, mistake God's forgiveness for being a ticket out of the consequences of their sin. The answer to the above question is clear and consistent in the grace-

government truth. Grace forgives, but the wheels of government roll on in all their terrible majesty. Adam was perfectly forgiven, but his sin produced its own results. The guilt of his conscience was removed but not the "sweat of his brow." He went out pardoned and clothed, but it was into the midst of "thorns and thistles" he went. Adam could enjoy the precious fruits of grace while recognizing and being content with the solemn and unavoidable acts of God's government. This is just as true for believers today.

Grace and government are as distinct as any two things can be, but God's government does not keep man from experiencing the great peace and joy of His grace. Did the "thorns and thistles" which surrounded Adam interfere

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with that full forgiveness of which grace had previously assured him? Clearly not! God's government "drove out the man" but not until God's grace had pardoned and clothed him. He was sent forth into a world of gloom but not until God's grace had placed in his hand the

lamp of promise to cheer him through the gloom. He could bear the solemn decree of government only in proportion to experiencing the rich provisions of God's grace.

Sadly, many believers today think they must get out from under their difficult circumstances in order to abundantly enjoy and experience the new life in Christ they possess. However, notice that the book which has as its theme, "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I will say, rejoice" was written by the apostle Paul while wrongly incarcerated and awaiting possible execution (Philippians 4:4). All but one good brother (Timothy) had abandoned his side while incarcerated. Paul had learned to be content and, thus, experience abundant life "in any and every circumstance." He had learned the way of living with joy "in abundance or in suffering need." The only way is "through Christ who strengthens me" and "God's grace is sufficient for me" (Philippians 4:11-13; 2 Corinthians 12:1-10; 4:16-18).

A second example of God's grace and government is the ark and the flood (Genesis 6-9). Cain and his descendants show us the progress of man in his fallen condition, while the history of Abel and his immediate line unfolds to us in amazing contrast the progress of faith in the midst of such a corrupt world. Cain's line pursued very quickly the downward course until their evil brought down the heavy judgment of the throne of God's government. Abel's line, on the contrary, pursued through grace an upward course and was safely brought through the judgment into a restored earth. It is very interesting to see that before the governmental act of judgment proceeded, the family that received grace was safely

shut in the ark, the vessel of grace. Noah, safe in the ark, like Adam sufficiently clothed in the coat, was the witness of Jehovah's unqualified grace. Safe in grace, Noah could witness God's government as it poured its awful judgment upon a corrupt world. God in grace saved Noah (Genesis 6:8), and God in government swept the earth with judgment (Genesis 6:7). God is seen in both!

One last example from Genesis of the combined action of God's grace and government: The entire history of Jacob illustrates this subject. Long before Jacob was born, the sovereign grace of God had secured to him an exalted position which no man could deprive him of. However, not satisfied to wait for God's time and way, he decided to get the first place his own way, by his own efforts in deceiving his father (Genesis 27-28). What was the result?—The rest of Jacob's life is a display of God's governmental reply in the chapters that follow:

We would do very well to remember that no exercise of grace can ever interfere with the relentless forward movement of the wheels of government. It would be easier to cut short the ocean's tide with a feather or to check the whirlwind with a spider's web than to hold back by any power (angelic, human, or demonic) the mighty movement of Jehovah's governmental chariot.

also a subject of God's government, and we would do very well to remember that no exercise of grace can ever interfere with the relentless forward movement of the wheels of government. It would be easier to cut short the ocean's tide with a feather or to check the whirlwind with a spider's web than to hold back by any power (angelic, human, or demonic) the mighty movement of Jehovah's governmental chariot.

This is a deeply solemn and sobering thought. Grace pardons—yes, freely, fully, and eternally pardons. But what is sown must be reaped. A man may be sent by his master to sow a field with wheat, and through ignorance or gross inattention he sows weeds instead. His master hears of the mistake, and in the exercise of his grace he pardons it freely and fully. What then? Will the gracious pardon change the nature of the crop? Absolutely not! In due time, when golden ears of corn should cover the field, the servant sees it covered with weeds. Does the sight of the weeds make him doubt his master's grace? Absolutely not! As the master's grace did not alter the nature of the crop, neither does the nature of the crop alter the master's grace or the pardon which flows from it. This is a further illustration of the difference between grace and government.

It matters not who you are; as is your sowing, so will be your reaping. Grace pardons, and it may make you higher and happier than ever; but if you sow weeds in spring, you will not reap wheat in harvest. This is as plain as it is practical. It is illustrated and enforced both by Scripture and experience.

This is a brief but most comprehensive statement of God's great governmental principle, a principle of the gravest and most practical nature as well as the widest application. It matters not who you are. As is your sowing, so will be your reaping. Grace pardons, and it may make you higher and happier than ever. But if you sow

weeds in spring, you will not reap wheat in harvest. This is as plain as it is practical. It is illustrated and enforced both by Scripture and experience.

Look at the case of Moses. He spoke wrongly at the waters of Meribah (Numbers 20). What was the result? Jehovah's governmental decree did not allow him to enter the Promised Land. However, the boundless grace of God brought him up to Pisgah where he saw the land (Deuteronomy 34). What then? Jehovah buried his servant! What grace shines in this! God Himself buried Moses. Was there ever such a burial? May we not say that the grace that dug the grave of Moses is only out-shone by the grace that occupied the grave of Christ? Yes, Jehovah can dig a grave or make a coat. In addition, the grace that shines in these marvelous acts is only enhanced by being looked at in connection with the solemn declarations and acts of the throne of God's government.

Now look at David "in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" and see the most striking display of grace and government (2 Samuel 12:10-12). In an evil hour, David fell from his holy elevation. Under the blinding power of lust, he rushed into a deep and horrible pit of moral pollution. There, in that deep pit, the arrow of conviction reached his conscience and drew forth these words from his broken heart: "I have sinned against the Lord." This was followed by the clear and ready response of that free grace in which our God delights: "The Lord has put away your sin" (2 Samuel 12:13). This was absolute grace. David's sin was perfectly forgiven. However, as the soothing accents of grace fell upon the confession of his guilt, the solemn movement of the wheels of government was heard in the distance. No sooner than mercy's tender hand removed the guilt "the sword" was drawn to execute the necessary judgment. This is deeply solemn. David was fully pardoned, but Absalom rose in rebellion. The luster of grace and the dignity of

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government are both divine. David was permitted to tread the courts of the sanctuary as a subject of God's grace (2 Samuel 12:20). However, he was also called to climb the rugged sides of mount Olivet as a subject of God's government (2 Samuel 15:30), and we may safely assert that

David's heart never had a deeper sense of divine grace than at the very time in which he was experiencing the righteous action of divine government. The sin of sowing weeds may be forgiven (grace), but the reaping must be according to the sowing (government).

Well, enough has been said so that you can easily pursue this subject for yourself. The Scriptures are full of it, and human experience illustrates it every day. In fact, our very own lives are illustrating it, aren't they? You can experience the fullest enjoyment of grace, knowing the pardon of all your sins, walking in happy, unclouded communion with God, experiencing His life within and through you, and all the while suffering in body or circumstance the consequence of past sins (Galatians 2:20; Philippians 2:13; Ephesians 3:16-21). This is, again, God's grace and government. What a deeply important and practical subject this is. You will find it very beneficial to your soul to study and meditate upon it, not only on the page of God's Word but also on the page of human experience. Look for it as you spend time in God's Word and as you observe reality all around you.

We are indebted to C. H. Mackintosh for this Captive's Corner. Much of its content has been taken from the Mackintosh Treasury, page 420-424.

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