

GRACE, FAVOUR

I. In the Old Testament

a. Vocabulary

Grace involves such other subjects as forgiveness, salvation, regeneration, repentance and the love of God . “There are ‘grace-words’ which do not contain the word ‘grace’ (Moffatt); see [Dt. 7:7; 9:4–6](#). The OT ‘grace-words’ are:

(i) ḥesed , in [RSV](#) usually ‘steadfast love’, occasionally ‘loyalty’. This is translated in [AV](#) as ‘mercy’ (149 times), ‘kindness’ (38), ‘lovingkindness’ (30) and ‘goodness’ (12). Luther translates it by *Gnade*, the German word for ‘grace’. Despite that, it is not quite the equivalent of grace. It is a two-way word, and can be used of God and man. Of God, it certainly implies grace. Of man, it implies steadfast love to another human being or to God. It is often found in association with the word ‘covenant’, and denotes the attitude of faithfulness which both parties to a covenant should observe. For God’s ḥesed, see [La. 3:22](#); for man’s, [Ho. 6:6](#). Snaith suggests ‘covenant love’ as the nearest Eng. equivalent.

(ii) ḥēn, ‘favour’ ([RSV](#)). This is not a covenant word and not two-way. It is used of the action of a superior, human or divine, to an inferior. It speaks of undeserved favour ; in [AV](#) it is translated ‘grace’ (38) and ‘favour’ (26). Examples of

man’s ḥēn are found in [Gn. 33:8, 10, 15; 39:4; Ru. 2:2, 10](#). God’s ḥēn is found in [Je. 31:2](#) ([RSV](#) ‘faithfulness’, [AV](#) ‘lovingkindness’). No-one can show ḥēn to God (as one can show ḥesed, for no-one can do him a favour).

b. The law

(i) [Jn. 1:17](#) puts the law into sharp antithesis with grace. See [Tit. 2:11](#), which also states that grace came into the world with Christ. That does not mean that grace was non-existent in the OT, but merely that it is not in the foreground, and that it is concerned chiefly with Israel. The Bible often uses antithesis where we would use comparison.

(ii) The idea of promise is developed in the NT in [Gal. \(3:16–22\)](#) and in Hebrews. It shows that grace is prior to law. God dealt with the Patriarchs as individuals by way of promise, and with the nation as a whole by way of law. The law was not primary, but it clarified and emphasized the kind of ḥesed that God expected of his covenant people.

(iii) Grace is found, however, in the law itself. The election of Israel to be God’s people is attributed in the law to God’s free choice, and not to Israel’s righteousness ([Dt. 7:7–8; cf. 8:18](#)). The initiative in the Sinai covenant comes from God, just as much as did the covenant of grace with Abraham. Then there is the statement in [Ps. 19](#) of the converting or restoring power of the law.

c. The prophets

Repentance is the chief point of interest in the prophetic writings. Typical passages are [Am. 5:14](#); [Ho. 2:7](#); [6:1](#); [14:1](#); [Is. 1:16–18](#); [Je. 3:1](#), [7](#), [12–14](#). The prophets are often accused of a doctrine of repentance which lays stress on human willpower, as did the Pelagian heresy. But the prophets regarded repentance as inward ([Joel 2:13](#)). Ezekiel, who demanded that the individual should make himself a new heart ([18:31](#)), also recognized that a new heart can only be a gift of God's grace ([36:26](#)). With this agrees the 'new covenant' passage in [Je. 31:31–34](#).

d. The Psalms

The word *hēn* is almost absent from the Psalms, though its cognates appear. *hesed* is very often found, e.g. [Pss. 5:7](#); [57:3](#) ('steadfast love', AV 'mercy'); [89:33](#) (AV 'lovingkindness'). In the Psalms also is found the increasing use of the cognate word *hāsîd*, which is found in, e.g., [Pss. 12:1](#); [86:2](#) ('godly man'); [79:2](#) ('saints'). The plural of this word (*h^asîdîm*) appears as 'Hasidaeans' in [1 Macc. 2:42](#); [7:13](#); [2 Macc. 14:6](#); it really meant those who were loyal to the covenant, the rigorous, devout, law-keeping party in Judaism, from whose ranks came the *[PHARISEES](#).

II. In the New Testament

a. Vocabulary

Gk. *charis* was the normal word used to translate Heb. *hēn*. The nearest corresponding verb, *charizesthai*, was used to denote forgiveness, human as well as divine ([Col. 2:13](#); [3:13](#); [Eph. 4:32](#)). *eleos* represents the Heb. *hesed* and has the meaning of 'mercy'. It is not used very often, and occurs largely in passages based on the OT, such as [Rom. 9:15–18](#), [23](#); [11:30–32](#). 'Grace' is preferred to 'mercy', because it includes the idea of the divine power which equips a man to live a moral life.

b. The Synoptic Gospels

Quite apart from the word *charis*, which is never placed on the lips of [Jesus](#), the idea of grace is very prominent. [Jesus](#) says that he came to seek and save the lost. Many of his parables teach the doctrine of grace. The parable of the labourers in the vineyard ([Mt. 20:1–16](#)) teaches that God is answerable to no-one for his gifts of grace. The parable of the great supper ([Lk. 14:16–24](#)) shows that spiritual privilege does not ensure final bliss, and that the gospel invitation is to all. The prodigal son was welcomed by his father in a way he did not deserve ([Lk. 15:20–24](#)). Repentance is stressed as a condition of salvation ([Mk. 1:15](#); [6:12](#); [Lk. 24:47](#)). Faith also has its place (e.g. [Mk. 1:15](#); [Lk. 7:50](#)), although there is no theological statement on Pauline lines.

c. The writings of Luke

Both the Gospel and the Acts need special attention. Luke shows flexibility in dealing with the subject. Even the non-religious sense of the noun, of a favour done by one man to another, appears (Acts 24:27; 25:3, 9). The OT sense of 'favour' is seen in Lk. 1:30; 2:52; Acts 2:47; 7:10, 46. The dynamic sense of grace resulting in fearless courage and effective witness is seen in Acts 4:33; 11:23; 13:43 and is used in the context of the universal appeal of the gospel. Luke also brings together, in a way that even Paul does not, the terms 'gospel' ('word') and 'grace' (Lk. 4:22; Acts 14:3; 20:24).

d. The Pauline Epistles

The word 'grace' has a prominent place in the opening greetings and the closing benedictions of the Epistles, being added to the conventional Jewish greeting of 'peace'. The basis of Paul's doctrine is found in Rom. 1:16–3:20. Man is shown as a sinner, but by grace he is justified (Rom. 3:21–4:25), i.e. God in his grace treats him, though guilty, as if he had never sinned.

*FAITH is the human response to divine grace (Rom. 5:2; 10:9; Eph. 2:8). This faith is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8); the words 'not your own doing' may refer to *sesōsmenoi* ('saved'), but Paul is seeking to point out that the word 'faith' must not be thought to imply some independent action on the part of the believer. See also

2 Cor. 4:13; Phil. 1:29. This faith, although it implies that there is no salvation through the law, is not unethical. Faith is morally vital by itself. It works 'through love' (Gal. 5:6). C. A. Anderson Scott (*Christianity according to St Paul*, 1927, p. 111) says that from the moment that faith was active a transformation of ethical outlook was ideally there.

The believer's position in grace is explained, not by anything in himself, but by the will of God. The doctrine of *ELECTION has two functions: it checks human independence and self-righteousness, and shows that in bestowing favour God is perfectly free (Eph. 1:1–6; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 3:5). Every step in the process of the Christian life is due to grace — Gal. 1:15 (call); 2 Tim. 2:25 (repentance); Eph. 2:8–9 (faith).

In Rom. 8:28–30 Paul surveys the divine agency from the call to the final glory of the redeemed. He does not, however, overlook man's responsibility. Obedience (Rom. 1:5; 6:17) is a moral attitude, and cannot be made anything else. A man of himself turns to the Lord (2 Cor. 3:16). A. Stewart in *HDB* suggests that 1 Thes. 3:5 teaches that even perseverance is doubted. The two sides are brought together in Rom. 9–10. Ch. 9 contains the strongest possible statements of double predestination, while ch. 10 states that rejection by God is due to unbelief and disobedience. It must be remembered, however, that the primary

subject of these chapters is not personal salvation, but the collective functions of those chosen by God to carry out his purpose.

Rom. 6 uses the figure of baptism to teach the conquest of sin by grace. See also 1 Cor. 6:11; 12:13; Eph. 5:26; Col. 2:12; Tit. 3:5. H. Wheeler Robinson (*The Christian Doctrine of Man*, 1926, pp. 124–125) holds that believers' baptism is not merely illustrative symbolism but the objective aspect of what is subjectively faith. Others would argue that infant baptism is a means of grace, because the child is a symbol of human inability and helplessness. These views seem to contradict the unvarying Pauline emphasis on faith.

e. The other NT writings

(i) 1 Pet. The apostle emphasizes grace in chs. 1–2 by means of the usual variants of covenant election and inheritance; 3:7 has the unusual phrase 'the grace of life'. Grace is also used in 5:10 in relation to the believer's future glory.

(ii) Heb. The writer uses most of the 'grace-words'. In 2:9 the grace of God is related to the sufferings of Christ. The word *charis* is used in 12:28 of human thankfulness to God. Grace is viewed as a calling to consecration in 12:14–15. The striking phrase 'the throne of grace' in 4:16 unites the divine majesty and grace. Another fresh phrase is 'the Spirit of grace' (10:29).

(iii) The Johannine writings. There is surprisingly little directly about grace, but God's love is emphasized throughout. The idea of grace must be related to that of 'eternal life'. Faith is prominent, and John uses a Gk. phrase *pisteuein eis* (believe into) of real *FAITH in Christ's person. The 'grace and truth' which characterize the glory of the incarnate Word in Jn. 1:14 (cf. v. 17) echo the 'mercy and truth' (*hesed we'emet*) of Ex. 34:6.

We conclude with Moffatt that the religion of the Bible 'is a religion of grace or it is nothing ... no grace, no gospel' (*Grace in the New Testament*, p. xv).

BIBLIOGRAPHY. H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Christian Doctrine of Man*, 1926; N. H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, 1944, pp. 94–130; J. Moffatt, *Grace in the New Testament*, 1931; N. P. Williams, *The Grace of God*, 1930; C. Ryder Smith, *The Bible Doctrine of Grace*, 1956; H.-H. Esser, *NIDNTT* 2, pp. 115–124; H. Conzelmann, W. Zimmerli, *TDNT* 9, pp. 372–402; H. D. McDonald, *ZPEB*, 2, pp. 799–804.

J.H.SR.