



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## **A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)**

### **Chapter 8 The Doctrine of Grace**





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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 8.1 – The Doctrine of Grace

### The Meaning of the Term “Grace”

Since the word “grace” has been given many different meanings in church history, it is important that we understand how the word “grace” is used in the New Testament. The apostle Paul has given us the basic understanding of grace in these words: **“If by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work”** (Romans 11:6). The Greek word that is translated “grace” is *charis* (χάρις). The same word is used by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians: **“By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast”** (Ephesians 2:8-9).

In both of these passages the concept of grace is in contrast to works. Grace has to do with God’s love to us that is absolutely free. There is no work that we can do to deserve His love or favor. There is no way we can earn His love. There is no way that we can deserve or earn any blessing from God. If we add even the tiniest idea of deserved reward, then it is no longer grace. What we get from God is entirely a gift from Him to us; we cannot boast about any part we have played to gain such a favor. Thus, God’s grace is God’s favorable disposition towards us that originates entirely within God and cannot be deserved, earned, or merited in whole or in part by any of us through any action or inaction on our part. It is God’s grace that led Him to work out a plan of salvation for all of sinful mankind. It is by grace that He sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. It is because of Christ and His work that God freely forgives all humanity their sins. We have been saved **“by grace.”**

Notice how often the word “grace” is used in this sense in the New Testament. John writes: **“For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”** (John 1:17). The law is a two-sided agreement, in which God promises us certain blessings *if* we fulfill His demands. But grace is entirely one-sided: in His love for us, God gives us what we need without first requiring us to fulfill certain requirements.

In the early church there was a dispute between the apostles and some teachers who claimed that obedience to certain Jewish laws was necessary for salvation. The apostle Peter responded by saying: **“We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they”** (Acts 15:11). There is only one way of salvation, and that is by grace, not works. God’s law was intended to show us how incapable we are of saving ourselves by our own obedience. The Gospel (the Good News) of Jesus is **“the gospel of the grace of God”** (Acts 20:24).

Why is it that God forgives the sins of mankind? Paul says: **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”** (Romans 3:23-24). The first part of this sentence is God’s law that condemns us for our sin. But the second part is the Gospel: God declares us righteous and forgiven because in His grace (His undeserved love) God has sent Jesus as our Redeemer, who atoned for all human sin by His life, suffering, and death.

Paul emphasizes the contrast between grace and debt in these words: **“Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt”** (Romans 4:4). In other words, if you have a job and get paid for it, your pay is not a gift from your employer but a debt he owes you because of your work. You earned it. But that is not the way of salvation. You cannot work and earn your salvation by your work. Salvation is by grace, entirely by grace.

Just as grace is contrasted with works, so also faith is contrasted with works. Grace and faith go together. Since we are saved by grace, it is a free gift from God. The only way to receive a gift from God is by faith, that is, by believing in and trusting in what God is giving you. And, in fact, even the faith by which one trusts in God and in God's gift is a gift in itself. The Gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ has in itself the power to create and sustain the faith by which the gift is accepted. Paul says: **"Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace"** (Romans 4:16).

One of the most comforting sentences in the Bible is this statement of the apostle Paul: **"Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more"** (Romans 5:20). God's law shows us the abundance of our sin. But in His grace God has given us forgiveness in Jesus that more than covers all of our sin. God's grace is greater than the greatest of all sins. **"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"** (Romans 6:23).

If we could save ourselves by our own works, God would not have had to send His Son, and His Son would not have had to die. Paul says: **"I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain"** (Galatians 2:21). Jesus' death was altogether necessary for our salvation. **"In Him (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace"** (Ephesians 1:7).

In spite of this frequent usage of the word "grace" in the New Testament, there have been teachers among Christians who have understood grace in a different way. In particular, Roman Catholic theologians have claimed that grace is a gift that God gives to mankind so that we can save ourselves by loving God and loving our neighbor according to God's law. According to this understanding, we are not saved by grace alone, but by God's grace combined with our keeping of God's law.

Notice the false understanding of grace in this decision of the Roman Catholic Council of Trent: "If anyone says that men are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost and is inherent in them; or even that the grace whereby we are justified is only the favor of God, let him be anathema" (*Council of Trent, Session 6, Canon 11*). The Roman Catholic definition of "grace" is something that is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit and is inherent in us; this is generally called *infused grace*. *The Catholic Encyclopedia* says: "By definition, grace is a gratuitous gift infused by God into the rational creature with reference to the end: eternal life." In other words, God gives us grace so that we can save ourselves by the works we do.

Sometimes the word "grace" does refer to a gift or gifts of the Holy Spirit to the Christian, that is, various good works that God works in Christians. But it is not by such gifts of grace that we are saved. In his letter to the Romans Paul mentions various gifts God has given to individual Christians for the benefit of His Church, saying: **"Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them"** (Romans 12:6). Paul wrote to the Ephesians: **"To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift"** (Ephesians 4:7). The apostle Peter spoke in the same way: **"As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God"** (1 Peter 4:10).

Paul refers to the gift given to him for carrying out his ministry as **"the grace given to me by God, that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God"** (Romans 15:15-16). In another place he says: **"According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it"** (1 Corinthians 3:10). By these words Paul was not saying that he earned his salvation by doing this work that God had given him. Paul said: **"By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me"** (1 Corinthians 15:10). To the Ephesians Paul wrote: **"I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ"** (Ephesians 3:7-8).

On his third mission journey Paul was gathering a gift from his Gentile congregations to present to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem who were suffering from extreme poverty. He called this collection “grace” and the desire to give this offering “grace.” He wrote to the Corinthians: **“We urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. But as you abound in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us – see that you abound in this grace also”** (2 Corinthians 8:6-7).

### Questions

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1. Why does being saved by grace mean that we cannot save ourselves?
2. Prove from the Bible that grace is the opposite of works.
3. How many persons have been justified by grace? Prove your answer from the Bible.
4. Is the pay of a day laborer a gift or a debt? Explain your answer.
5. How much of our salvation can we attribute to ourselves?
6. What is the Roman Catholic definition of grace and why is it wrong?
7. How does the Bible sometimes use “grace” to refer to a gift from God?
8. What grace (or gift of grace) did God give to the apostle Paul?
9. What grace (or gift of grace) was Titus gathering from the Corinthians?



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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 8.2 – The Doctrine of Grace

### Salvation by Grace through Christ and the Holy Spirit

There is no such thing as salvation by grace apart from Christ and His work of redemption. The apostle Paul wrote that we are **“justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”** (Romans 3:24). Jesus Himself said: **“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”** (John 3:16). The little word **“so”** really means: **“in this way.”** This is the way God’s love for sinful mankind showed itself: He gave His Son to be our Savior from sin and death. The life and work of Jesus Christ is God’s grace in action. Paul says: **“God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”** (Romans 5:8). John wrote: **“In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him”** (1 John 4:9).

Some people may think that God in His grace could simply forgive sinners and take us all to heaven without the sacrifice of Christ. In fact, one of the opponents of the Lutheran Reformation, a man named Socinus, said: **“God can pardon our sins according to His supreme power, without having received a real satisfaction for them”** (quoted in F. Pieper: *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 18). That is the way many think God’s grace should act. But that would mean that God does not care about sin and does not care whether we sin or not. It would mean that God is a God without holiness, justice, and hatred of sin. God in His justice must punish sin, and He did so by punishing His own Son, Jesus Christ, for the sin of the world. Because of the sacrifice of Jesus, God can and does freely offer to the whole world of sinners the forgiveness of sins because of the life, suffering, and death of Jesus Christ.

The grace of God – His undeserved love for sinners – is displayed not only in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, but also in God’s gift of the Holy Spirit, who uses the Gospel Word to bring people to faith in Jesus Christ. Our coming to faith in Christ is also a gift of God’s grace for which we deserve no credit at all. This is what Paul wrote to his assistant Titus: **“But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life”** (Titus 3:4-7). From beginning to end our salvation is a matter of grace; it is God working through His Son and His Holy Spirit to give us eternal life. There is no doubt that this is what the apostle John meant when he wrote: **“Of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace”** (John 1:16). We have received one wave of grace after another!

Some believe and teach that fallen sinners still have a free will to do something good in the sight of God and that one can contribute something (even the tiniest bit) to one’s own salvation. Anyone who believes this does not have a correct understanding of grace. Grace ascribes salvation entirely to God and gives no credit at all to man. Redemption is God’s work alone. Conversion is God’s work alone. This truth is taught most clearly by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, where we read: **“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just**

as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Ephesians 2:1-5).

We are saved by God's grace alone. But God's grace comes to us in various ways and through various persons. The Bible says that Jesus is our Savior. We are "**justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus**" (Romans 3:24). When Joseph was told to name Mary's Son Jesus, the angels said to him: "**You shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins**" (Matthew 1:21). Jesus understood this, for He told Zacchaeus, the tax collector who climbed the tree: "**The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost**" (Luke 19:10). On another occasion Jesus said: "**I did not come to judge the world but to save the world**" (John 12:47).

The apostle Paul told the Thessalonians "**to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come**" (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Paul wrote to Timothy: "**Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners**" (1 Timothy 1:15). The letter to the Hebrews says: "**He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them**" (Hebrews 7:25). Thus, we can say we are saved by grace. We can say we are saved by Christ. There is no contradiction between these statements.

We can also say we are saved by the Gospel Word of Christ, for the Gospel is the means by which God's grace in Christ reaches us. Paul told the Romans: "**I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes**" (Romans 1:16). Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "**It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe**" (1 Corinthians 1:21). He also wrote: "**I declare to you the Gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you**" (1 Corinthians 15:1-2). James, the brother of our Lord, gave the same testimony, saying: "**Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls**" (James 1:21). It is the Holy Spirit who uses the Gospel to bring us to faith in Christ, for it is written: "**No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit**" (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Since the Holy Spirit uses the Gospel to bring us to faith in Christ and thus save us, it is also appropriate to say that the Holy Spirit saves us through baptism, or that baptism saves us, because the Holy Spirit uses baptism to create faith in Jesus in our hearts. Paul refers to baptism in his words to Titus: "**He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing (baptism) of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior**" (Titus 3:5-6). Just as the waters of the flood lifted up the ark and saved Noah and his family, so "**there is also an antitype which now saves us – baptism**" (1 Peter 3:21).

In some contexts Paul even speaks of himself and other servants of the Lord as saving those who hear their Gospel preaching. He says, "**I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some**" (1 Corinthians 9:22). Paul wrote to his assistant pastor, Timothy: "**Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourselves and those who hear you**" (1 Timothy 4:16). James, the brother of our Lord, tells the Christians in his care that they can all be saviors in this sense. "**Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins**" (James 5:19-20).

James also maintains that we can say that faith saves, for he writes: "**The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven**" (James 5:15). This agrees with what Jesus said on several occasions. To the weeping woman who washed His feet Jesus said: "**Your faith has saved you. Go in peace**" (Luke 7:50). To a blind man whom He encountered near Jericho Jesus said: "**Receive your sight; your faith has made you well**" (Luke 18:42). Faith in Christ, which in every case is a work of God by God's grace, receives the salvation God through Christ has won for every sinner.

God, in His Word, uses all of these expressions: Grace saves. Jesus saves. The Gospel saves. Baptism saves. Preachers of the Gospel save. Faith saves. All of these statements are true in their own way. And in every case God receives the whole credit for our salvation. One of the reasons that Baptists and others do not believe in baptismal regeneration or that baptism saves is that they think of baptism as a work of man, rather than as a work of God. Since they call baptism a work of man, they say that it cannot save us because we are saved by faith, not by works. They rule out baptism as a way by which God saves us, even though Scripture clearly says that baptism saves.

Salvation by grace emphasizes the truth that salvation is a free gift from God. But even though salvation costs us nothing, it cost Jesus His holy life in a holy death. Salvation is so costly that the only thing precious enough to save sinners was the giving of the life of the holy Son of God as our ransom. Martin Chemnitz, one of the faithful Lutherans at the time of the Reformation, wrote: "Outside of Christ there is no grace or mercy of God toward sinners" (*Loci Theologici*, Vol. II, p. 549). That is why the apostle Peter told the Jerusalem Jews: "**Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved**" (Acts 4:12). The apostle Paul taught the same thing: "**In Him (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace**" (Ephesians 1:7).

### Questions

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1. What did God in His grace decide to do in order to save sinners like us?
2. Why did God not just simply forgive all sinners by His supreme power?
3. In what way is the Holy Spirit's work a work of grace?
4. Since we are saved by God's grace, why do we say that Christ is our Savior?
5. Why can we also say that we are saved by the Gospel?
6. In what way did the apostle Paul save those who listened to him?
7. Why do Baptists reject baptism as a way by which God saves sinners?
8. Defend this statement: "God saves us by grace through Christ's redemption."





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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 8.3 – The Doctrine of Grace

### God's Grace in Christ Is Universal Grace

Jesus Himself taught that God's grace is universal when He told Nicodemus: **"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved"** (John 3:16-17). God's intention and desire from eternity was to save the world through His Son. From the beginning God intended and desired to save the world, that is all sinners (who all deserve to die because of their sins) in this one way: through giving His own Son into death in place of the sinful world.

What can be clearer than the words of the apostle Paul to Timothy: **"God our Savior...desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"** (1 Timothy 2:3-4)? The word "**men**" in this passage does not exclude women and children, for here and in many other places in Scripture the term "**men**" refers to all mankind, all humanity. The apostle Peter taught the very same thing: **"The Lord is...not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"** (2 Peter 3:9).

This was not a new teaching, for even in the Garden of Eden the promise of a Savior was given to the entire human race, which at the time numbered only two persons, Adam and Eve. But they heard God curse their enemy, Satan, who had tempted them to sin, and God promised them that a Savior (the Woman's Seed) would come to utterly destroy Satan and take away his power. To Satan God said: **"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel"** (Genesis 3:15).

When God chose Abraham to be the father of the nation from whom this Woman's Seed would come, He promised that this Savior would be a blessing for all. God said to him: **"In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"** (Genesis 12:3). He repeated this promise, saying to Abraham's son Isaac: **"In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed"** (Genesis 26:4), and to Abraham's grandson Jacob, saying: **"In you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed"** (Genesis 28:14). Through His prophet Ezekiel, the Lord God even swore in making this testimony: **"As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live"** (Ezekiel 33:11).

Because it was God's desire and intention to save all human beings, His Son Jesus died for all persons on the cross. John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, announced this in advance, publicly calling Jesus **"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"** (John 1:29). After spending a few days with Jesus, a number of Samaritans were convinced: **"This is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world"** (John 4:42). The apostle John testified: **"We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world"** (1 John 2:1-2). The apostle Paul taught the very same thing: **"There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all"** (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

Because of these clear words from Jesus and from His prophets and apostles, we must say that God is favorably disposed towards all mankind in, through and because of Christ's atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world. In Paul's grand comparison between Adam and Christ in his letter to the Romans, the

universality of sin is matched with the universality of God's love for sinners in Christ. **"Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more"** (Romans 5:18-20). Adam's sin brought about the condemnation of the whole world. So also the work of Christ brought about the justification of the whole world. Even though the sin of the world was huge, God's grace in Christ's sacrifice is even more huge; it was sufficient to cover every sin and then some. Notice that the term **"many"** in this passage refers to **"all"**, as the context makes clear. Again, Paul says: **"God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all"** (Romans 11:32).

We know from Scripture that not all persons will reach the eternal destiny of salvation that God has desired for them. But this does not change the fact that God wanted them and wants them saved. This does not change the fact that Jesus died and atoned for them all, and that the Holy Spirit earnestly and seriously desires to save them all. This is clear from the words of the apostles Paul and Peter. Paul warned the Romans: **"Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died"** (Romans 14:15). Even one who could be destroyed by a Christian's lack of love is one for whom Christ died, because Jesus died for all. Similarly, Paul warned the Corinthians: **"Because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?"** (1 Corinthians 8:11). The apostle Peter was even more explicit, saying: **"There will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction"** (2 Peter 2:1). Even those who will be destroyed in the final judgment are among those who have been bought (redeemed) by the Lord. All of these passages show without a doubt that God's grace is universal, with no exceptions.

This teaching presents a problem for the human mind. It is difficult for us to understand it. The human mind reasons that if God really wanted to save all sinners, then they would all be saved. And yet we know that many will not be saved. Any attempt to solve this mystery by the human mind leads to false teaching. Based on human reason, John Calvin and those who have followed his teaching in the Reformed churches wrongly teach that God's grace is not universal, that God does not want all persons saved, that Jesus did not die for all persons, and that the Holy Spirit does not really desire to bring all persons to faith in Jesus when the Gospel is proclaimed to them. John Calvin's human solution to this mystery is that from eternity God determined to save some persons and condemn others. In Calvin's view Jesus died only for those He intended to save, and the Holy Spirit seriously tries to convert only those God intended to save. What Calvin and the Reformed churches teach on these matters is directly contrary to the plain teaching of Scripture. Yet this is the only way they can make sense of the fact that some people are damned, rather than saved.

On the other hand, there are teachers who follow the reasoning of Jacob Arminius and John Wesley and say that God indeed wants all to be saved, that Jesus died for all, and that the Gospel is meant for all, but the difference between those who go to heaven and those who go to hell is that when confronted with God's Word, some choose of their own free will to accept it, and others choose to reject it. Why is this teaching a false teaching? It is a false teaching because God's Word teaches us that no one has a free will to choose to believe in Christ. We are all dead in sins and cannot contribute at all to our own conversion or our coming to faith in Christ. We are saved by grace alone, as the Bible clearly teaches.

In order to be faithful teachers of God's Word, we must teach both that God's grace is universal and that we are saved by grace alone. If a person is saved, it is entirely due to God's grace alone. If a person is lost, it is entirely their own fault. God wants to save all and Jesus died for all, but some reject God's grace and are lost. But those who are saved are just as guilty as the lost. This is what Jesus Himself taught. On the one hand He said: **"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws**

him... **No one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father**" (John 6:44, 65). On the other hand He said: **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under wings, but you were not willing!"** (Matthew 23:37).

It is vitally important and necessary that Christian preachers and evangelists preach the Gospel of universal grace. If we deny universal grace, we are no longer preaching the true Gospel: the Good News that God wants all to be saved, that Jesus has atoned for all sins of all person everywhere, and that God is offering total forgiveness of sins to all sinners, not just to a certain percentage of sinners chosen from eternity by God. God earnestly desires to bring about the repentance and ultimate salvation of every sinner. There is no secret plan on the part of God to condemn, pass by or ignore some sinners because He has predestined them to eternal damnation. Jesus said: **"Preach the Gospel to every creature"** (Mark 16:15). Jesus said: **"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"** (Matthew 11:28). Jesus said: **"Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations"** (Luke 24:47).

The missionary Paul taught: **"God...has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading with us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God"** (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). When Paul met people who did not know about Jesus, he told them: **"Through this Man (Jesus) is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses"** (Acts 13:38-39). Paul did not say: "To some of you is preached the forgiveness of sins." He did not say: "Some of you who believe are declared righteous." He preached universal grace in Christ Jesus. We must do the same.

God wants His forgiveness in Christ to be extended to all. But when this Gospel of God's grace, which is intended for all, is proclaimed, there are some who reject it. This is not due to a desire on God's part not to save them, nor to any lack in the Gospel, any lack Christ's atonement or any lack in the work of the Holy Spirit. In other words, God's Gospel does not force anyone to accept it or believe it. God's grace in the Gospel is not irresistible. It can be resisted, and it is resisted by man because of his ungodly desire to resist it and reject it. This is a person's own fault, not God's fault.

When God speaks and works in His uncovered majesty, He cannot be resisted. When Jesus speaks on the Last Day and commands the dead to rise, **"all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth"** (John 5:28-29). But when Jesus' Gospel is proclaimed in the present age, it can be resisted. That is why Jesus said: **"The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live"** (John 5:25). In this verse Jesus is speaking of unbelievers, that is, the spiritually dead. When these dead ones hear the voice of Jesus in the Gospel, some who hear it will come to spiritual life. But others will not really hear it or pay attention to it, and they will remain dead. God does not take the blame for these rejections and refusals; it is the person's own fault that they reject God's word.

When we are tempted to find fault with God for the way He does and says things, we need to remember the Apostle Paul's words: **"O man, who are you to reply against God?"** (Romans 9:20). **"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!"** (Romans 11:33) **"For now we see in a mirror, dimly but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known"** (1 Corinthians 13:12). We must be willing to be **"casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ"** (2 Corinthians 10:5).

By saying God's grace is universal, we are not agreeing with the theory of universalism. Universalism states that God eventually will see to it that everyone in the whole world will attain and enjoy eternal

life. God's gracious will to save all persons everywhere does not mean that He is willing to save in any way whatsoever. God wills to save all only on the basis of Christ's obedience and His suffering and death. There is no other Savior but Christ. God wills to save all by conferring Christ's obedience through His appointed means of grace: the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. There is no salvation conferred on sinful humanity apart from that which is conveyed through the means of grace. God wills to have Christ's obedience received by the sinner through faith in Christ and in no other way. There is no other way to receive the salvation God wants us to have apart from faith in Christ.

We conclude this discussion of the doctrine of grace with this quotation concerning the unconditioned and unconditional Gospel: "The proclamation of Jesus Christ is about the love of God, a love which is all-inclusive and unconditional... God has been credited (by some men) with a conditional love, which places the condition of salvation back upon our own shoulders; because we try hard to fulfill the condition, and when we are not able we feign it... It is not because of us but because of Himself that God forgives us... I insist therefore upon this word 'unconditionally' because it seems to me very important in practice" (Paul Tournier: *Guilt and Grace*, pp. 189-195, emphasis added).

The *Augsburg Confession* mentions salvation by grace alone many articles. Article XVIII Concerning Free Will says: "*Without the grace, help, and operation of the Holy Spirit a human being cannot become pleasing to God, fear or believe in God with the whole heart, or expel innate evil lusts from the heart. Instead, this happens through the Holy Spirit, who is given through the Word of God*" (Book of Concord, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 50). "*Rejected here are those who teach that we can keep the commandments of God without grace and the Holy Spirit*" (Book of Concord, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 52).

Article XX Concerning Faith and Good Works declares: "*Our works cannot reconcile us with God or obtain grace. Instead, this happens through faith alone when a person believes that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who alone is the mediator to reconcile the Father. Now all who imagine that they can accomplish this by works and can merit grace despise Christ and seek their own way to God contrary to the Gospel*" (Book of Concord, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 54).

The *Epitome of the Formula of Concord* (1577) exalts God's grace in this way: "*It is God's will that people hear His Word and not plug their ears. In this Word the Holy Spirit is present and opens hearts that they may, like Lydia (Acts 16:14), listen to it and thus be converted, solely through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, who alone accomplishes the conversion of the human being. For apart from His grace our 'willing and exerting,' our planting, sowing, and watering, amount to nothing 'if He does not give the growth' (Romans 9:16; 1 Corinthians 3:7). As Christ says, 'Apart from Me, you can do nothing' (John 15:5). With these brief words He denies the free will its powers and ascribes everything to God's grace, so that no one has grounds for boasting before God (1 Corinthians 9:16)*" (Book of Concord, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 492, II Of Free Will).

## Questions

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1. What is meant by the term "universal grace"?
2. How many persons does God want to save? Prove your answer from the Bible.
3. How many persons did Jesus redeem? Prove your answer from the Bible.
4. How many persons does the Holy Spirit desire to convert? Prove your answer from the Bible.
5. Where does the Bible teach that God wanted to save even those who go to hell?
6. Why did John Calvin deny universal grace?
7. Why must we call Calvinism a false teaching?
8. What was the error of Arminius and his followers?
9. Why is it important that we preach the Gospel of universal grace?
10. When can the voice of God be resisted by sinful man?
11. What is the result of such resistance?
12. Whose fault is it when someone hears the Gospel but rejects it?
13. What is the difference between universal grace and universalism?