

Grace - God's love, compassion and kindness towards us

The word 'grace' is one of the most important words found in the New Testament. It means God's loving disposition towards us as sinners. God's 'grace' is almost another word for God's love. This grace is the foundation of our salvation. So Paul can say that 'we are justified freely by his grace' (Romans 3:24); 'where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more' (Romans 5:20); 'by grace you are saved through faith' (Ephesians 2:8).

But the word 'grace' is also used in another way in the New Testament. It means the godly character being reproduced in Christians; Christ living in his people by his Spirit and making them like himself – gracious. Luke records that as Jesus grew up 'the grace of God was upon him' (2:40), and that the people wondered at the 'gracious words' that he spoke (4:22). John says that Jesus was 'full of grace and truth' (1:14). The most common benediction bestowed on Christians in the letters of the New Testament is 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ' (e.g. Romans 16:20; 1 Cor. 16:23).

From this understanding of grace comes the reminder and the exhortation that all of us as Christians are 'to grow in grace' (2 Peter 3:18). Our lives should manifest the grace of God in love and compassion and kindness.

One such 'grace filled' Christian was John Fletcher, rector of the parish of Madeley in Shropshire, England. Fletcher was born in Switzerland in 1729. Later he came to England as a private tutor and met John Wesley and the 'Methodists.' Wesley recognised Fletcher's gifts and talents and at his suggestion Fletcher was ordained into the Church of England ministry. He was rector of Madeley from 1760 until his death in 1785. Such was the measure of Christ's grace in his heart that in his lifetime, and since, he was known as 'the seraphic Fletcher.'

During the years of the American War of Independence in the 1770s, there was much popular agitation in England against the war. When Republican pamphleteers attacked the government, Fletcher wrote a stirring defence of the government and the monarchy. His pamphlets were shown to Lord Dartmouth, Secretary of State for the Colonies, who passed them on to King George III.

The King and his government decided to reward Fletcher for his work and a commissioner was sent to Madeley to convey the news to John Fletcher. The commissioner offered Fletcher a choice of rewards. He could have a larger parish with more income, or a monetary gift, or promotion to higher office in the Church. But each of these offers Fletcher quietly declined.

The commissioner was puzzled, having never met a man with so little worldly or personal ambition as John Fletcher. Finally, in some desperation, he said to Fletcher. 'What then do you want?' Fletcher replied. 'All I want is more grace.'

But grace is not in the giving of a King's commissioner or any civil servant or Church dignitary. Grace is found only in close communion with our Lord Christ. Let it be our desire always to want only 'more grace.'

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