

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA.55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

Otis Q. Sellers, Bible Teacher

A STUDY IN DISPENSATIONAL TRUTH

In view of the relationship which **Isaiah 26: 10** has to God's present method of dealing with mankind, every lover of God's truth should make sure that the principle set forth in this passage is imprinted upon his mind and given a place in all his thoughts. If so it will bring about a better understanding of the time in which we live and the divine conditions under which we exist. In this passage we are told: "**Let favor be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord.**"

From this, one would be inclined to think that God would never show favor to anyone since it does not produce good results, yet the testimony of the Word is that this is what He is now doing.

The Hebrew word which is translated "favor" in this passage corresponds in every way to the New Testament word for "grace." Both words mean the love and favor that are shown to the undeserving. The word "grace" as used in the Bible represents the uncompromised, unrestricted favor of God toward those who do not deserve it. This explains why we never find in the Bible any mention of a "covenant of grace," a phrase that is quite prominent in Reformed theology. Covenants are compromising and restrictive; they always involve two parties, and God has not covenanted with anyone to be gracious unto them. He is gracious in His nature, and He is free to act in grace whenever and however He pleases.

From one simple statement in Ephesians 3:1 we learn that God's present dispensation is one of grace. However, it needs to be carefully noted that the word translated "dispensation" in this passage is the Greek word **oikonomia**. This word means "administration," and complying with the often hurled challenge to "Define your terms," I will further say that "administration" as used in this study means a method of dealing. And let it be known that I am using this word in order to fully reveal my thoughts. I have no feelings of fellowship with those teachers who use the word "dispensation" as if there were some great mystery hidden in it, a mystery that is known only to a few who have been initiated into it and are on the inside.'

It is from the word **oikonomia** that we get our English words "economy" and "economics," both of which have to do with administration and management. In its earliest use this Greek word had to do with the management of a house or household, even as "house" and "law" clearly set forth. Nevertheless, by the time the New Testament was being written it had taken on a much wider meaning.'

Basing their arguments upon this early meaning and confusing a household with a family, some have argued that a dispensation or administration of God must be limited to His dealing with His own children. This is not sound teaching since it is not based upon all the facts that the Bible clearly reveals.

The word *oikia* occurs 95 times in the New Testament and *oikos* is found 114 times, but not once in these 209 occurrences is it limited to family members. Why then should anyone attempt to limit *oikonomia* to a family just because the root *oikos* forms the first part of it? In Romans 16:23 we read of "Erastus, the chamberlain (*oikonomos*) of the city." This is sufficient for all who allow the Word of God to settle a matter to show that an administration is not limited to a family, not even to a household.

That God's present method of dealing with all mankind is entirely gracious is a truth that is declared by the Apostle Paul. The truth of this is witnessed to and demonstrated by all human experience. I challenge any man to say and then furnish proof that God has ever done anything to him except to show him favor that he did not deserve.

It is my firm conviction that grace as the total principle of God's dealing with mankind began with Paul's declaration in Acts 28:28. If grace does not accomplish anything in the life of an individual, God will not turn to another method of dealing. I remember well the deacon in one church which I pastored who would earnestly pray: "Lord beat me until I stop sinning." And I was inclined to agree that it would have been good if God had applied the rod, but this was something God would not do as long as His method of dealing is absolute grace.

It is quite evident that absolute grace was not God's sole method of dealing with men in the Acts period. Even the true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ during that period had no assurance that the Lord would be gracious to him in every detail of his life, as 1 Cor. 11:30 clearly shows. When sickness or death is the portion of one because of his sins, it is an act of justice, but certainly not one of grace. Furthermore, the man out of Christ in the Acts period never knew when the sword of God's wrath might fall upon him. See Acts 12:23 for a clear example of this.

Today, the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ can know with full assurance that God's sole method of dealing with him will be to show him love and favor which he does not

deserve. This is clearly revealed in Ephesians 4:32, where, if the two occurrences of **charidzomai** are translated honestly, it will read: "**Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, dealing graciously one with another, even as God for Christ's sake deals graciously with you.**"

This same truth is declared in Colossians 3:13 where the word *charidzomai* is found two times. If these two occurrences are faithfully rendered it will read: "**Bearing with one another and dealing graciously among yourselves. If anyone should be having a complaint against any, according also as the Lord deals graciously with you, thus also do you.**"

However, I anticipate **an often-asked question**: "Do you mean to tell us that a believer can live as he pleases and God will pay no attention to it? And my answer is: "No, I do not mean to tell you any such thing, but I will tell you that anyone who is living as he pleases does not qualify as a believer in Jesus Christ." The believer lives to please God. A question that tests anyone's faith is: "How do you please to live?"

There are many who want to believe that we are now living under a divine administration under which every transgression and disobedience receives a just recompense of reward, and since they believe that it is that way they insist that this is the way it is. They then try to prove this by scrutinizing the lives of wicked men for indications of dire happenings, cases of severe illness, fatal accidents, and tragedies, then pointing to these as evidences of divine wrath expressed against sin. However, such things as these happen in the lives of all men, the godly as well as the ungodly and they should not be judged to be divine retribution for sins committed. Under grace God may heal a man of illness, but He does not lay illness upon anyone. **His present administration is not one of divine justice - it is entirely gracious.**

This answers all such questions as "Why doesn't God destroy Satan?" "Why did not God stop Hitler?" and "Why did God permit this terrible thing to happen?"

In due time - His time, not ours - God will destroy Satan, but do not expect it under His present administration of grace. He did not stop Hitler for this would have been an act of divine justice and would have meant the ending of His long display of grace. He is not ready to end it yet. Since man is having his unhindered day we can expect terrible things to happen. God's judgments are not now in the earth. However, the time will surely come when the prayer recorded in Amos 5:24 will be answered and judgment will run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. His judgments will yet be in the earth, and when they are, the inhabitants of the earth will learn righteousness (Isa. 26:9). May God speed that day.

From the testimony of Scripture we learn that from the moment of Paul's great pronouncement in Acts 28:28 God's administration has been one of grace. Since then He has either been passively gracious or actively gracious, but ever since the close of the Acts period, if He could not act in grace, then He has not acted at all. And all this gracious dealing with men has been in spite of the fact that He announced long ago through Isaiah that if favor (grace) is shown to the wicked they will not learn righteousness.

This tells us that God's present purpose in manifesting grace is not intended to produce a world filled with believing, righteous inhabitants. This will be accomplished by God in due time, but it will not be the outcome of God's administration of grace.

"What then is God's purpose in His present manifestation of grace?" This is the question that many will ask. And the answer to this must begin by declaring that God's present purpose has to do with Himself, His own glory. He is writing into the history of His long dealings with mankind a complete and absolute record of the grace that is inherent in His character. Today under an administration of grace and by the performance of multitudinous acts of grace, He is establishing this record. However, all these things are done in secret and the record will not be made known until that day when Jesus Christ shall be manifested in all His glory, and the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

In Luke 6:35 we have a declaration concerning God from the lips of the Lord Jesus which tells us: "**He is kind to the unthankful and to the evil.**" This could be more accurately translated "the ungrateful and the wicked," but no matter how it is rendered, it still tells us that grace is inherent in God's character.

"Not so!" millions will cry out, alarmed at the very suggestion. "God is kind only to the grateful and to the righteous," they insist. But the Lord Jesus has declared otherwise, and we choose to believe Him. It is the truth of this declaration that God is now establishing. He is producing by means of gracious acts a record of grace that will stand as a perpetual witness of the undeserved favor He showed in the time of man's greatest sin. This witness is an absolute necessity if men ever come to a complete and balanced knowledge of the One who is the Judge of all the earth and the God of every grace.

Let us not hesitate to accept the admonition that Paul spoke to Timothy; "**Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus**" (2 Tim. 2: 1).

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