

# *God's Purpose of Grace*

**Horatius Bonar (1808-1889)**

*To make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ; to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God; according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus, our Lord — Ephesians 3:9-11.*

*According to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began —  
2 Timothy 1:9.*

“THE fall” is a word with which we have become so familiar, that the event itself has lost its appalling magnitude of evil in our eyes. Yet what an infinite calamity was it in reality! What a triumph of the evil one! What dishonor to Jehovah! What desolation to this earth! The floodgates of iniquity had been burst open, and who could close them again or stay the overflowing waters? The torch which God had lighted upon earth had been extinguished, and who could rekindle it or dissipate the gross darkness now brooding over the desolate region, which had so lately been pronounced “very good”?

To the unfallen creation how fearful the disaster must have seemed! God's purpose appeared frustrated, his power baffled, his wisdom defeated, his very throne assailed. Who could now deem himself secure? Who might not in like manner fall? The highest creature-throne in heaven was no longer safe; for who could assure himself that this flood of evil now broken loose might not swell up till it left nothing but the throne of God untouched? What region, what station could be reckoned safe when this new creation had given way? What angel could feel secure, when man had fallen? Everything created seemed on the edge of ruin, and it was as if even the Creator's arm had lost its hold over the work of his hands, and was unable to arrest the universal collapse of creation into its former nonexistence, or rather into a state far worse and more terrible than that—SIN!

For scarce had God finished his six days' work, fashioning man in his own image and providing for his habitation a world of beauty, than man revolted, and this rejoicing earth began to sink back into its former chaos. Scarce had the morning stars concluded their glad song over the new-formed earth, than they were called to weep over its ruins. Scarce had the sons of God done shouting for joy over their newborn fellow-immortal, than they were called to mourn over his untimely and disastrous fall. The event seemed like a deathblow to the hopes of the universe; and if some new-lighted star had suddenly gone out, it could not

have left the circle which it enlightened in such hopeless gloom as did the apostasy of man. The former rebellion (of the angels) had indeed broken in like a flood upon the region of blessedness above, and carried off with one sweep a whole host of God's happy creation; and fearfully strange seemed that dark event which thinned the ranks of heaven's rejoicing myriads, which first made a portion of God's universe acquainted with sin, and disturbed the unbroken harmony of heaven. But then by the formation of man that breach seemed to be repaired, and harmony restored, never to jar again. A barrier seemed placed immovably against any future invasion of a like desolating flood. When, however, this was swept away—when the recovered harmony was marred again, the case might be deemed desperate. Each creative movement seemed only to end in more signal failure. Especially when this strange reverse was not the operation of ages or years, but the work of a moment, the case seemed doubly hopeless. What God occupied six whole days in building, was overthrown in the twinkling of an eye! It looked as if evil had the entire mastery over good, and the creature over the Creator—and as if all things must be left to fall inevitably to wreck, the universe to drift away from the control of the hand that formed it, and sin to prove omnipotent.

But the Creator was still upon his throne, and his scepter unwrested from his hand. He was still the King eternal, immortal, and invisible, God only wise, of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things. The time had now come for the forth-putting of his power, and the exhibition of the riches of his unsearchable wisdom and knowledge.

That very event, so appalling in itself and apparently so unforeseen, soon began to assume a very different aspect. Light broke, though but in a faint streak at first, yet sufficient to proclaim a blessed dawn and a glorious day. The creature's ruin, instead of appearing the result of accident, or as an irreparable disaster, began to develop itself as the first indication of a marvelous purpose of manifesting the character of the Creator, and laying far deeper and broader than before, the foundations on which a holy creation might be immovably based. The darkness was permitted, not only that it might furnish a contrast to the light, but that it might afford an opportunity for bringing forth that light into sevenfold brightness and beauty. God's mighty, original, eternal design now began to unroll itself. It became evident that the fall was no unforeseen occurrence, and its remedy no *afterthought*, no sudden expedient devised for the purpose of arresting an unexpected calamity. The permitted entrance of sin, through man's apostasy, was seen to be part of an everlasting design on the part of God for accomplishing ends which could not have been fulfilled, had sin not been allowed to enter.

When the angels kept not their first estate, they were at once consigned over to the judgment of the great day. There was no deliverance for them. Chains and darkness were

their portion and inheritance. Once fallen, they were fallen forever. Once condemned, they were forever doomed to lie under wrath. In their case God showed himself a consuming fire. Nothing of his character was displayed save his displeasure against sin, and his swiftness to avenge it on all the workers of iniquity. Righteousness shone out in this prompt act of recompense, but no further light was cast upon his character, no further discovery made of his infinite mind. He had spoken out once, and let the universe know how he hated iniquity. But that was all. There was manifested no mercy, no pity, no love, no grace. It had been seen how “glorious in holiness” he was in punishing it had not yet been known whether he could be glorious in love by forgiving. The infinite dimensions of his heart had not yet been seen. Neither had any security been given that sin should not infect the whole creation like a universal pestilence, seizing upon every creature that either had been or might be brought into being. Now, however, by the second grand revolt, a scheme was to be introduced, which, while it was to unfold the character of Jehovah in a way which could not have been done before, was also to afford security against all future inroads of the dreaded pestilence, and establish in holy peace forever that universe whose very foundations seemed to be giving way.

In the creation of man, no more of God’s perfections were displayed than in the creation of angels. Mercy had not yet been shown forth, nor, indeed, could be to an unfallen creature, for mercy is love to the miserable, and therefore could go forth to none but the fallen. Thus, the very goodliness of the newborn creation appeared as if it would impede the display of the Creator’s glory. Man, therefore, was permitted to fall. And then began the full display of God’s character, by the manifestation of his infinite love; and then it was that sevenfold luster began to be shed upon every other perfection, by the manner in which this love secured the deliverance of the object loved. The power, the wisdom, and goodness, the justice of Jehovah, rose up into new and awful grandeur, borne up by mercy, and with mercy crowning all. It was not the magnifying of one attribute at the expense of another—love at the expense of holiness; it was glorifying all the perfections of the Godhead together. It was a stupendous display of God’s character. It was a marvelous insight into the bosom of the Father.

The *grace*, that is, the free love of God was the center round which all this glory gathered. In redemption, we have the unveiling of this free love to sinners. In creation, it was seen that he could love the holy; in redemption, it is declared that he can love the unholy, and yet be holy himself; yea, be glorified in holiness; that in the very act of loving the unholy, he could manifest more holiness than in punishing them. The infinite dimensions of his paternal heart now began to disclose themselves. Until now, his character had only been partially revealed. But now in redeeming man, its hitherto undiscovered depths were displayed to view. Before the fall, the question was, Can God love the sinner? At the fall this was answered by himself, and it was declared that he could; that there was love in him, even to those who had entirely forfeited it, and stripped themselves of everything that could have attracted love. This was the dawn of day for a dark world. In this there was hope for the guilty. But the next question was, What will this love do for these worthless

objects? Will it content itself with mere compassion? God's first promise proclaimed it to be a love that would rest satisfied with nothing but the salvation of its object. It was love that could not rest till it had replaced the fallen creature in its former condition of blessedness and favor. But is it a love that will encounter obstacles, that will incur sacrifices in order to accomplish its end? The answer to this was God's gift of his well-beloved Son. God so loved the world that he gave his Son. Thus it was proved that there was nothing too costly for this love to part with in order to get vent to itself in the salvation of the beloved object. This unspeakable gift is alike the pledge and measure of the love. What infinite depths of undiscovered love were thus laid bare! But, is it a love that can survive contempt and rejection? Is it a love that can love on, even when it meets with nothing but hatred in return for all this lavish kindness—malignant enmity in requital of friendship so glorious, so amazing? The history of this world's six thousand years attests this. It has been proved that it is patient, unwearied, long-suffering love—love which many waters cannot quench, neither can the floods drown.

It is thus, that through the fall of man, God's character has been opened up to us, and his name revealed in a way which otherwise could not have been accomplished. The exceeding riches of the grace of God have thus been displayed to us by means of the utter worthlessness of the object on which that grace was fixed. Grace can only show itself in connection with an object in which there is absolutely "no good thing." Let there be one good thing about it—one part not utterly naught—and grace has no room to show itself. Grace steps in when every other attribute retires. Grace takes for granted not that we *have* anything, but that we are destitute of everything; that "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint." With the righteous, grace has nothing to do. It hands them over to righteousness to be dealt with according to its decree. With those who can produce even one lingering remnant of goodness, one trace or token of holiness, it can have nothing to do. It has to do with the lost, the guilty, the hopeless, the undone. These are its objects. "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."

From the beginning, God's dealings with fallen man, have been such as to bring out the riches of his grace. At man's first sin, grace came forth. It does not matter whether the scene recorded in Genesis, at the first giving of the promise took place one hour, or many hours after the sin had been committed. The moment the sin was committed, grace stepped in to suspend the stroke of vengeance from the transgressor's head. Nothing but grace could have kept Adam one moment out of hell, or obtained for him the respite of a single hour. From that moment to this, grace has been flowing out to this fallen world; and in God's treatment of the sinner, its fullness has been displaying itself. One sin and one sinner were not enough for its development. It is "the manifold grace of God"; and hence, there must be sins innumerable, and of every various form and name, as well as sinners in number countless, in order to show forth its manifold nature, as well as its infinite dimensions. In every variety of situation man has been placed, and sin of every shape allowed to develop itself, in order that grace yet more abundant might be brought forth to meet it. Man has

been permitted to wander to the utmost lengths to which it is possible for a creature to go, in order to show what resources of grace there are in God to meet the utmost extremity of sin. At each successive outburst of human wickedness, grace has come in and taken new occasion to display itself; and the more that sin has abounded, the more has grace “over abounded.” The higher that the tide of iniquity has swelled, the higher has grace risen, far surmounting the utmost heights of sin. The wider that wickedness has spread its hideous circle, the wider has grace stretched her far ampler compass, proving that there is not one spot on this ruined world, even “the ends of the earth,” nor one being of the fallen race on this side of hell, to which in its boundless reach it cannot extend.

Nor is it enough to say that every sinner is a monument of grace, and every sin an occasion for the display of grace. This is true, but it is not all. Each sinner is so in a way *different from any other*; and hence there is a different development of grace in each. Each case is quite peculiar, and hence each case is a new, distinct, peculiar manifestation of grace. It is grace seen in a new aspect, and in a new light, such as it has in no other case ever been presented to us. It is not merely true, that the history of the ransomed multitude is a history of the “reign of grace”; but the story of each individual of all that glorious company forms of itself a distinct and peculiar history of the same. It is not as if we were merely called to contemplate and admire one dazzling blaze from one great central planet; it is the form and luster of ten thousand resplendent orbs that we are summoned to gaze upon; learning from each a different story, and gathering from each a peculiar display of the infinite power of God. Thus, each saved sinner is a trophy of grace in a way such as no other sinner is or can be. Each has a wondrous story to tell of the grace that sought and found him; and each has a story of his own, such as no other has or can have. It is of grace that all have learned to sing; but one has one thing to say of it, and another has another; all marvelous, yet all different! And then each single sin of each of these redeemed ones has been the occasion of a separate display of grace! What a history of manifold grace, then, does the life even of one ransomed sinner furnish! What, then, must be that manifestation of it brought out by the whole history of the great multitude that no man can number, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation!

But how far has this grace come? It has come the whole length of a sinner’s distance from God. It did not wait till the sinner sought it, ere it came forth. It came unbidden and undesired. Nor did it wait till some of the distance had been removed, or some of the hindrances surmounted by the sinner himself. It traversed the whole distance itself, and over-leaped, or rather leveled every barrier. It burst forth spontaneous from the bosom of eternal love, and rested not till it had removed every impediment, and found its way up to the sinner’s side, swelling round him in full flow. It does away the distance between the sinner and God, which sin had created. It meets the sinner on the spot where he stands, and it approaches him just as he is. It does not wait till there is something to attract it, nor till there is some good reason in the sinner for its flowing to him. No; unattracted, and without any reason in the sinner, it pours itself forth in all its fullness towards

objects whose only title is their utter worthlessness, and their possessing nothing for the holy eye of God to delight in.

But what does grace expect from the sinner? Simply that he be a recipient of its boundless fullness. It asks no recompense *afterwards*, just as it sought no recommendation *before*. It does not calculate upon receiving an adequate requital in order to compensate for its freeness before. No. It never supposes anything in man but unworthiness, nor could it do so without losing its character as *grace*. No doubt, when once it comes into contact with the sinner, it flings and fastens round him bonds of resistless love; it sets the whole soul in motion towards the God of grace, but this not as a matter of recompense, but simply a necessary and inevitable result. It is *grace* entirely from first to last. It was grace when it first thought of the sinner; it was grace when it found and laid hold of him; and it is grace still when it hands him up into glory.

But what is the *extent* of this grace? It is boundless. Like the heart of which it is the gracious out-flowing, it is altogether infinite. No amount of sin can impede its course, or arrest its resistless flow. Transgressions of scarlet and crimson dye, in a moment disappear before it, and become like snow or wool. Mountains of iniquity are leveled at its touch as the small dust of the balance. An ocean of guilt evaporates as a drop before its glowing warmth, and becomes as if it had never been. No number, no extent, no enormity of abominations can withstand grace so free, so abundant, so omnipotent. Where is the sinner on this side of hell that is beyond its reach? What mountains of sin can it not level; what valleys of iniquity can it not exalt, till the highway between the sinner and God is made straight and plain, so that none need mistake it or stumble upon it, or imagine that it is not for him?

But how has the distance been removed? How have these mountains been swept away? How have mercy and truth met together? How have righteousness and peace kissed each other? The apostle answers, "He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." And again he tells us, "Him God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past." It is by the blood of sacrifice that the channel has been opened up through which grace might find its way to us. Nothing but propitiating blood could effect this. Grace was from eternity in the Father's bosom, but it was, if we may so speak, pent up, and could find no vent to itself till the death of God's own Son opened up a righteous way. It is then through blood that grace reaches us, the blood of a sin-bearer, a substitute; blood that proclaimed God's infinite love of holiness, and infinite abhorrence of sin; blood whose shedding proclaimed to the universe that not one jot or tittle of God's inexorable law had fallen to the ground. It is by this accepted sacrifice that grace now flows freely down to the chief of sinners. It is thus that the distance between the soul and God is done away with. It is thus that God can speak peace to the unrighteous and be righteous still; yea, be more righteous than before—be glorified in every holy perfection. The law has been magnified, and its uttermost penalty exhausted by another as our substitute, and thus the lawful

captive is permitted to go free, and in his freedom God is glorified.

But how does this grace become connected with individuals so as to save them? It is free in itself, but may not its coming to the soul be a matter of merit or purchase? No! The link that binds it to the soul is as free as itself. "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." It is by believing God's declaration concerning the grace that a way is opened for its entrance. And this believing is the result of the Holy Spirit's teaching—the effect of his almighty power. In believing it we become recipients of it, just as by our unbelief we were rejecters of it; and this change, this reversal of our attitude in reference to grace is through the mighty power of God. There is nothing that the natural man is so unwilling to admit or so unable to comprehend as grace. In our dealings with each other, equity, law, justice are supposed to mingle, but grace is not admitted. Hence we are far more ready to introduce the former than the latter into our dealings with God, and we more easily understand principles of legal right and claim, than principles of simple grace. The natural *mind* is as much a stranger to the very idea of grace as the natural heart is opposed to it. Hence unbelief of this grace is our besetting sin. It is the rock upon which sinners stumble and are lost. They will submit to anything for salvation but grace. They would do anything to be saved, but take it freely they will not. They prefer to perish. Hence the necessity of the Spirit's taking of the things of Christ, and showing them to the soul.

And what, then, is the effect of grace, believed by the sinner? Peace with God and a holy walk with him through this wilderness. Being justified by faith we have peace with God. The perception of God's gracious character, the belief of his forgiving love, removes the gloomy dread of him which the awakened conscience entertains, and we see in him a Being such as we can rejoice in, such as we can hold fellowship with, even in the full consciousness that we are the chief of sinners. Acquaintanceship with God produces peace as its immediate and sure result, and the soul being at peace with him delights to walk with him in holy fellowship and filial trust, seeking to be entirely like him whom he loves, and to spend and be spent for him who has removed his sins from him as far as the east is from the west.

But there are "riches of grace" in God, which "eye hath not seen nor ear heard"; riches of grace which, for their full development, are reserved for the ages yet to come (Eph. 2:7). We are told of the "grace that is to be brought us at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13). Eternity alone will unfold these unsearchable riches, and disclose all their unfathomable depths. What openings up are yet to be made of God's marvelous grace! What a reserve of rich discovery is in store for the ransomed multitude, when out of the bosom of eternity new treasures of grace shall unroll themselves, as if all that is past had been as nothing when compared with what is still to come!

If such be the "exceeding riches of the grace of God," past, present, and to come, what ample encouragement is held out to sinners! There is grace enough in the bosom of the Father for the

chief of sinners. His love flows freely out like a full river, and ail may come. Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely. This love is *free*, and no amount of sin in us can straiten it, or make it insufficient to meet our case. It takes us just as we are, and brings to us its message of peace.

True, many refuse, but this does not alter the invitation or diminish the grace. Nay, *all would refuse*; not one would listen, or believe, or turn, were it not for the forth-putting of that mighty power of the Father, by which he wrought in Christ Jesus, when he raised him from the dead (Eph. 1:19). It is the resurrection-power of God alone that can raise the dead in sin. And it is this that brings out the hidden depths of the love of God. It is this that shows us yet deeper riches of grace than could have been conceived. For it brings to light that deep purpose of eternal love which resolved to bear with all rejection and refusal; which resolved to put forth an overcoming power, and take possession of the very hearts that had resisted and scorned his love. The riches of grace seen in the glad tidings of great joy are unutterable; but the riches of grace brought out in subduing the very souls that had for years rejected these, are deeper—vaster still. And every soul that has been drawn by the Father owns and feels the amazing grace that sent from above, and took him, and drew him out of many waters. He owns the deep love that at first sent the message of peace; but he also owns the deeper love that made that message effectual—that won his heart—that subdued his whole man—that wrought love in him in whom there had been nothing but enmity before. Take, for instance, a people to whom some faithful messenger of God has for many a Sabbath preached the glad tidings of the kingdom. Each message that he brought proclaimed the free love of God. Long it was rejected. At length the Spirit was poured out, and the Father drew many sinners to himself. Was not this a new store of love that had hitherto remained unopened? Was not this a fuller gushing forth of the fountain of love? There was love manifested before in the message, even when not a soul was converted; but the conversion of so many souls was an additional manifestation of love. This was bringing into view an inner circle of love—the love that led not merely to the opening of a way of salvation, but of actually saving—the love of the Father in “drawing” (John 6:44, 65); the love of the Son in “quickenings” (John 5:21), and the love of the Spirit in “renewing” (Titus 3:5).

Oh, surely the God in whom there are such “riches of grace” is just the very God for a sinner to go to. The grace thus manifested is just the very thing that he needs; and the knowing this grace must be enough to dispel his fears. To know this free love, to go with assured confidence to that God in whom it is, as soon as we have heard that it is there, and to sit down among his children simply as those who have believed his love—this, this is blessedness—this, this is the foretaste of being forever with the Lord.

To this we are invited. To this the gospel calls each weary child of Adam. It is into our Father’s house, and into the fellowship of our Father’s love, that the Spirit fain would lead us, knowing that there is enough and to spare. And, oh, who would not enter in and rejoice forever? Whosoever will, is the word that salutes the ear of the far-off wanderer, and beckons him home. Whosoever will, is

the inscription above the gate. Whosoever will, is the word of welcome that greets him as he enters the long-forsaken dwelling.

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blest us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ, to himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:3-5).*



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