

Is Your Notion of God's Grace Actually Biblical? Let's See

I can speak no further about the glorious grace we have been given in Jesus Christ without speaking of one of the great heroes of the message of divine grace, Martin Luther. How we need people like him today—men and women who understand what it is for the parched, rule-bound, self-loathing, empty soul to be touched by the grace of a loving and eternal God. This is the story of Martin Luther, and I tell it briefly here so that we may remember not only a period in our history but the journey of a great soul from that bondage to spiritual freedom. Perhaps, armed with this story, we can remember also the many souls in need of just such grace today. Perhaps, dear reader and fellow seeker, this may even include you.

Let me say also that rehearsing some of the life history of Martin Luther does not mean that I in any way endorse or agree with all of his writings or attitudes. Luther, especially later in life, expressed an especially virulent and unrelenting anti-Semitism, which is both reprehensible and wrong. None of this, however, changes the significance of the revelation of justification by faith that God gave him and that he gave to the world.

Martin Luther was born in 1483 to a stern, steely family who lived among a hard and superstition-bound people in Germany. It was an age that forged exceptional men and women, but only if they survived it unmarried and unbroken. Martin Luther was such a man.

Luther was a gifted and highly intelligent child, but he remembered his early years mainly for the harsh parental discipline he endured. He once reported, "My mother caned me for stealing a nut, until the blood came. Such strict discipline drove me to the monastery, although she meant it

well." Of his father, Luther remembered, "My father once whipped me so that I ran away and felt ugly toward him until he was at pains to win me back."

Still, there was a deep strain of Christianity practiced in the Luther home, and it left its mark on young Martin. Hans, his father, prayed nightly at the bedside of his son that Martin would live pleasing to God. Martin's mother, Margaretta, was a woman of constant, consistent and fervent prayer, and Martin remembered that weeping voice of supplication and her unending stream of communication with the almighty God for the rest of his life.

Hans Luther was a miner, so the whole family knew well that they must do everything in their power to please St. Anne—according to tradition, the mother of the Virgin Mary—who was the patron saint of miners. This was part of the superstition and unbiblical mysticism that spread over the whole of society. Men labored their whole lives in hope that a saint who ruled their profession might have mercy upon them and give them both safety and success. It was the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church in those days, and it left men subject not only to a scowling God, but also His unhappy Son, Jesus Christ, and a host of saints whose pleasure must be sought with offerings and prayers in order that one's life might go well.

Luther sought divine approval through works as he had been taught. His search for divine approval became absurd. Hoping to confess every single sin he might ever had committed, he once confessed to an older priest for six hours straight.

His mentors at the university thought they knew what he needed and suggested that he study God more deeply and earn his doctorate. In order to do that, he had to immerse himself in the Bible more comprehensively than he ever had. So Luther was driven to the Bible, and it changed him. Now he spent his days fulfilling the daily disciplines of a monk, also studying the

Bible in its original languages and without the veneer of tradition—what Scripture actually said, not what the theologians and doctors of the Roman Church were teaching, but rather what the pure Word of God revealed.

The great revelation had finally come to Luther: Men cannot earn their way to God's grace by works of the flesh. The justice of God could never be met by the natural efforts of mere men. God in His love made a way for His own justice to be answered: the sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon a cross! Now men are justified by believing the work of heaven's crucified Lamb. In short, it is divine grace that connects man to God. It could never be by means of works or religious systems or a man harming himself to impress an angry deity. Grace is a gift, and it comes from a God who loves men and women more than the receivers of that matchless gift could possibly fully embrace or imagine.

Once these truths pierced Luther's soul, he was a man possessed by God. He was free from all the torment of so many years, and he was aflame with a simple truth: the just shall live by faith. Or as he began to speak of it to the many who followed him: *sola scriptura*—"only by Scripture," *sola fide*—"only by faith," *sola gratia*—"only by grace."

 *Adapted from Grace by Rod Parsley, copyright 2018, published by Charisma House. This book gives a clear understanding of God's true intentions for law and grace, and helps you live more powerfully by avoiding destructive extremes and prepares you to live in the presence of God around you and the glory of God within you. To order your copy, click on this link.*

Prayer Power for the Week of Jan. 6, 2019

As we embark on a new year, take time to reflect on the basic tenets of our faith and express your gratitude to God for revealing truths to His servants who boldly stood for the

gospel and paid a heavy price to pass these down to us. Continue to pray for an outpouring of God's Spirit on all flesh, world-wide revival beginning in our own cities, godly wisdom and protection for those in authority over us, and the peace of Jerusalem. Read: Romans 1:17, 5:1; Galatians 3:11.