



feeding ... gathering ... carrying ... leading. (Isaiah 40:11)

October 2, 2014

Dear family,

What follows are some notes that I did not have time to go through in my message on Sunday, but they will hopefully serve as a useful study outline for you of some the specific workings of grace in our lives. I am trying to capture the range of NT descriptions that are behind Jude's concern when grace is perverted. I've provided the alliteration for good measure for free – a gracious act indeed!

1. **Saving grace:** *"saved through grace"* (Acts 15:11) *"It is by grace you have been saved – this is not from yourselves – it is the gift of God."* (Ephs. 2:8) But part of this experience of saving grace is the instruction we receive for the totality of our lives. Listen to how Paul describes it to Titus (2:11): *"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say NO to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age, while we wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."* Do you see then that when Jude says that they change the grace, then what goes out the window is the instruction is righteousness that is the work of grace in us.
2. **Securing our grace:** *"this grace in which we stand"* (Roms.5:1-2) *"the true grace of God. Stand firm in it."* (1Pet.5:12) Grace secures us, or we could call this strengthening grace: *"the word of his grace which can build you up"* (Acts 20:32)
3. **Sanctifying grace:** this is grace's work in growing, maturing, promoting and encouraging and effecting our progress in faith and holy godliness, in pleasing God. Writing to the Corinthians Paul describes his conduct and character: *"We have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relationships with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace."* (2Cor.1:12)
4. **Serving or stewarding grace:** *"Use your gifts to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace."* (1 Pet. 4:10) *"The grace God gave me to be a minister"* (Acts 15:15). This is the enablement to minister – the charismata – the grace gifts. Paul's summation of ministry in his farewell to the Ephesians elders: *"If only I may finish the race and complete the task...of testifying to the gospel of God's grace."* (Acts 20:24)
5. **Sharing grace:** *"Grace given to me for you..."* (Ephs. 3:2) *"all of you share in God's grace with me..."* (Phils. 1:7)
6. **Sending grace:** the callings of God, commending to the word of his grace. Paul's testimony: *"God called me...by his grace and was pleased to reveal His Son in me."* (Gals. 1:15)
7. **Supplicating grace:** *"Spirit of grace and supplication..."* (Zech. 12:10) *"Throne of grace...find grace to help us in our time of need..."* (Hebrs. 4:16) Result of prayer: *"much grace was upon them"* (Acts 4:33)
8. **Supporting or supplying grace:** B.B. Warfield, the great reformed Princeton theologian, on Acts 9:11- Paul prepared by prayer for the reception of grace through Ananias, so Spirit of grace both prepares for the provision of grace through prayer. Prayer *"adjusts the heart for the influx of grace."* (Warfield)
9. **Speaking grace:** *"grace those who listen"* (Ephs.4:29) *"Let your conversation always be full of grace, seasoned with salt."* (Cols.4:6) Favor as well as flavor! So crucial that this grace is

expressed through us in a culture of contempt and anger. Are you surprised that when they changed grace the speech of the false teachers in Jude is *“speaking abusively...grumblers... faultfinders... they boast...and flatter”*?

10. **Singing grace:** *“With psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, with grace in your hearts to God.”* (Col.4:16) The hymnody and psalmody, formal and informal, liturgical and non-liturgical, ancient and modern – all of grace that must be turned into gratitude in song and antiphon. The range of grace that requires more range of human intonation as our heart wants to give all the keys of its grateful piano to God. If you are dull to worship you are dull to grace.
11. **Sustaining grace:** this is about special times of need – *“My grace is sufficient for you and my power is made perfect in weakness.”* (2Cor.12:9) – *“Let us approach the throne of grace...and find grace to help us in our time of need.”* (Hebr.4:16) *“God gives grace to the humble.”* (1Pet.5:5)
12. **Staying grace:** By staying here I’m not referring to the idea of an abiding grace, though it is, but in the sense of staying the hand of judgment. I would add this one because the grace of God is not just manifested in what he does do, but in what he doesn’t do – for example, by the delay of judgment. Maybe I can stretch something else under this category. God’s grace is manifest in what he gives and allows, in what he provides, but it is also in what he disallows, what he prohibits. The word that commands us not to, is a staying word of grace. Stop! Halt! No further! Do not transgress! Do not move that boundary! Thou shalt not! (It is crucial to understand the law as an expression of God’s love and grace. He loves us so much that he commands us not to engage that which he knows will destroy us and separate us from Him.) Genesis: all the trees (provision) except (prohibition) – equally evidences of grace. The fall is fundamentally a sin against grace. There is grace in giving, but also grace in the staying of things, the with-holding, the taking away of those things that are not going to promote spiritual growth in grace. Again, in Jude, if you remove the grace of God in its truth, you remove the commands of God.
13. **Suffering grace:** grace often brings God’s goodness in a way that doesn’t at first feel good to us. Phil.1:29: *“It has been granted (literally-graced) for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in him but to suffer for him.”*
14. **Suffusing** (welling up from within) **grace:** *“the grace that is in me”* says Paul – the grace that dwells within – the indwelling spirit of grace that rises within us, that *“overflows”* again to use Paul’s language. This grace that changes us, that makes us in turn, gracious.
15. **Sovereign grace:** *“grace might reign through righteousness...”* (Roms. 5:21). Now you can see that if grace goes, the belief in the sovereignty of Christ goes with it.

How awful is it then to sin against, to try to change, this saving, securing, sanctifying, serving, sustaining, sharing, sending, supplicating, supporting, supplying, speaking, singing, staying, suffering, suffusing, sovereign grace. Clearly, just these few scriptural quotes that I have given are sufficient to dispel any notion that grace is sweetly benign, or is something that is helpful now and again. Grace is not a commodity, a thing – but the very active and engaging presence and personality of God in our lives and circumstances. Invasion, infusion is what we should be thinking about. To sin against grace is to sin against the very nature and heart of God. Grace’s power, its penetration, its communication – every expression is proactively an expression of the nature of God ministering to the needs of man – it is strong grace according to the NT. It is a strong brew, and those who experience it are grace intoxicated, but more importantly, God-centered and God-adoring. This leads me to an important final but foundational point. If you like, grace is self-effacing. It points away from itself to the giver of grace. What is grace about, that the false teachers just don’t get? After all the purposes it serves that I’ve just mentioned, all its glorious operations, I can put it even more precisely. Is grace just for us? Is it all about us? In a word grace is for God. Let me explain in a way that helps you understand the nature of the offence in Jude.

One of the repeated words in conjunction with these false teachers in Jude was *“themselves”* (12, 16) Their lives are all about *“their own”* desires (16); for *“their own advantage”* (16) We live in a self-

absorbed culture, including Christian culture. Our decisions are suited to what works best for us, pleases us, conforms to our preferences, supports our traditions and perceptions, fits our comfort zones. This is true of how we often choose our churches, our missions, our vocations, how we express our spirituality. This raises an important point. Do we need God to experience this grace we need, or do we need grace to experience the God we desire. John Piper has put it this way: *“Is the ultimate treasure the grace of God or the God of grace?”* This is a key question he is asking, and it all has to do with who is at the center. What is the ultimate object and purpose of grace? To gratify me or to glorify God? Is the main issue that I receive grace’s works or that God receives my grateful because graceful worship?

As simple and foundational as this is, it is the most ignored truth. All doctrines start with the doctrine of God (e.g. evangelism – His nature before human need). This is true for the doctrine of grace. Again, quoting Piper: *“We cherish grace because it brings us to God, rather than cherishing God because he brings us grace.”* In other words, our worship is about the God of grace, not primarily about the work of grace described by all those fine words beginning with “S”! Every which way you look at grace, any description of grace, the ultimate purpose is a revelation of who God is. Grace is utterly God-horized, God-focused, God-centered. Grace’s ultimate homing instinct is the glory of God. He is totally self-sufficient so His grace to us is this brilliant overflow of His life. Grace is not pipetted or rationed or given in small portions – it is always amazing, always huge, always extravagant. When God’s life and love wash over us, spill over us, soak into us, we call it grace. Grace is not other to himself. We often limit our understanding of grace to the particular provision or answer or deliverance that we get. No the grace is himself – for that is always the best that he can give. In any case God, being God, is moved by his nature, his gracious and compassionate and loving nature, to continually show himself, give himself away, reveal himself so he can be known. Now do you understand the heinous and blasphemous nature of the sin against grace. It is the rejection of the personhood of God no less. And Jude presents this not as some kind of intellectual theological atheism but as awful unholiness that defies God’s personality and breaks relationship.

Here endeth the notes.

Pastorally yours,
Stuart