



EXISTING TRENDS ON JUSTIFICATION FOR GRACE ALONE AS THE DOGMA IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

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Abstract

The point of departure for this study is to reassess the divergences in the theology of grace to determine its authenticity in theological spaces. Historically, the concept of grace has been explored and expounded upon by numerous theologians. Early Church Fathers, such as Augustine, emphasized grace as essential for salvation and spiritual growth. During the Reformation, Martin Luther and John Calvin further articulated the doctrine of grace, highlighting its role in justification by faith alone, apart from works. This theological development was critical in shaping Protestant theology and distinguishing it from Catholic teachings on grace and works. The concept of grace and its relation to individual salvation is undoubtedly the most debated issue in the history of Christian thought. The index of combatants is practically a Who's Who in Christian thought: Augustine versus Pelagius, Banez versus Molina, Luther versus Erasmus, Calvin versus Pighius, and Whitefield versus Whitely. These arguments have continuously positioned on the same issue: whether God's saving grace is attuned to human freedom. Deliberations of grace in Mormon thought are too frequently carried out in virtually complete inexperience of the progression of Christian thought on this subject. The misconstructions about grace are wide-ranging and so huge that it has turned out to be hard to draw a line of distinction between truth and deviation. Some of such fallacies are divergences in grace. Hence, when somebody affirms to have received the grace of God, as a believer, and his/her life does not echo Christ and his teaching overtly, the legitimacy of such a person's practice is debatable. In so doing, most professing Christians are not living up to God's standard and anticipation of fellow believers, some signs of limited understanding or erroneous outset of the grace that brings salvation are blamable for this melancholy. This study is undertaken to set the records straight. The researcher chose Karl Rahner's transcendental method for the analytical interpretation of grace. The approach uses the principle of Anthropological and theological understanding.

Keywords: Justification, Grace, Christian, Theology, Dogma

Introduction

The concept of grace is a doctrine that has become crucial in the teaching of Christianity after the advent of the New Testament Church anchored on Christ, who is the epitome of grace and truth. Grace is a key motif of the New Testament portion of the Bible and it forms the core of Paul's discussion in His Epistles. Owing to this Paul has been considered as "the apostle of grace" by some sages. Nevertheless, the usage of grace has developed over centuries and transformed radically, this is moderately due to the dynamics of language and the scarce or inappropriate



understanding of the concept in the Christian life. In modern Christian discourse, grace continues to be a topic of significant theological reflection and debate. It is commonly preached in churches and discussed in Christian literature, emphasizing its role in the believer's life. However, differing interpretations have emerged, leading to varied emphases on the nature and implications of grace.

During the sixteenth century, three theological principles came to identify the Protestant Reformation: *Sola gratia*, *sola fide*, and *sola scriptura*. *Sola gratia* (Latin, 'grace alone' or 'by grace alone') emphasizes that salvation occurs by God's 'grace alone' and not by human merit. *Sola fide* (Latin, 'faith alone' or 'by faith alone') is similar in that it emphasizes that people accept God's gracious offer of salvation by (or through) 'faith alone' rather than by human will or good works. *Sola scriptura* (Latin, 'scripture alone') emphasizes that 'scripture alone', rather than ecclesiastical authority or human opinion, represents religious authority. As such, it is sometimes called the 'formal principle' of the Protestant Reformation, or the 'scripture principle'.

The Concept of Grace

According to Douglas, grace is the favour displayed by the sovereign creator to human sinners. This favour he likewise understands as mercy. It designates an objective relation of undeserved favour by a superior to an inferior. It goes on to say that divine grace towards mankind goes together with the ideas of covenant and election¹. Grace is one of the central tenets of Christian theology, representing the unmerited favour and love that God extends to humanity. This divine gift is foundational to the Christian understanding of salvation and spiritual life. Grace is described in the New Testament as how individuals are saved (Ephesians 2:8-9) and as a transformative power that enables believers to live righteous lives (Titus 2:11-14).

Another denotation of *Charis* is favour, benevolence or goodness, liberality and generosity. This apparently is the more subjective meaning because it designates the inner sentiments of the superior towards the inferior². *Charis* is God's attitude towards human beings demonstrated through kindness, favour, and helpfulness. (Eph 2:8, John 1:16, 17). It is also an experience or state resulting from God's favour, state of grace, or favoured position (Romans 5:2)³. Grace possesses the meaning of an undeserved blessing freely bestowed on man by God, and still more particularly, the blessing of salvation, in all the rich significance of that term, freely given to sinful man in and through Jesus Christ.

¹ J.D. Douglas, *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Michigan; The Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, 1978), 426

² Robert W. Gleason, *Grace* (New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1962), 41-42.

³ Barbara Friberg, Timothy Friberg and Neva F. Miller. *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. Electronic Edition. Grand Rapids: Baker books, 2000.



The Concept of Grace in the Old Testament Theology

Grace⁴ was articulated by the Hebrew words "hen" and "Hesed." The Septuagint uses the word "charis" for the Hebrew "hen," which appears to be consequent from the common verbal stem "hmn," which originated in ancient Babylonian, Akkadian, and Assyrian, and also in Ugartic, Aramaic, Syriac and Arabic. It is used to denote "to find favour" or "to obtain favour," to pity the poor (Prov. 14:31), or the defenceless (Deut. 7:2)⁵. More dimly it may just signify friendly speech (Prov.26:25). At first the terms are not theological. In those passages where "hen" is related to the very nature of God as gracious and merciful and full of pity, "charis" is pointedly not used at all. Possibly, because the word "charis" in its classical and Hellenistic usage has a sensuous substratum in its denotation, a semi-physical sense of charm and gracefulness as something aesthetically pleasing, while the Hebrew "hen" never has this sense. In the Old Testament, the two words used to express the idea of God's mercy or grace are; free favour-*Chesed* (Lamentations 3:22) and Chen (Genesis 33:15-18; Jeremiah 31:2).

Again, Douglas asserts that the idea conveyed by these two words is that of God's mercy and favour. Grace is revealed in God's choice of and care for Israel⁶. The term "hesed" is translated as "charis" to express spontaneous goodness or grace in a specific relationship or ongoing fellowship (Gen. 19:19; 47:29; 1 Sam. 20:8, 2 Sam. 16:17)⁷. This word means the Self-Giving of God to Israel, God Himself in His good will towards men. The grace of God is but a personal relationship which God establishes between Himself and men. Grace (hesed) often ensues in the context of forgiveness (Exod.30:7), along with an expression which points to the covenant (Deut.7:9). The concept of hesed, that is, the fidelity of God, which abridges the attitude of Yahweh to Israel, is the adjacent phenomenon to God's saving action and saving grace in the Old Testament⁸. The typical hesed relationship in the Old Testament had been on the ground between God and Abraham, a man of faith who lived by fidelity to a personal relationship with God experiential through a web of obligations. Abraham is faithful in all that is required of him, even to the sacrifice of Isaac, the child of promise. Alternatively, there is similarly the loving kindness, stability and fidelity of God towards Abraham in keeping the covenant to which He has committed himself⁹.

⁴ It is used more than 25 times in the Psalms as an appeal to God's favour, kindness and benevolence to hear prayers (4:1); to heal (6:2); to redeem (26:11), to set up (41:10), to pardon (51:1), and to strengthen (86:16) in the corresponding needs.

⁵ It is used also in the sense of "to be merciful," e.g., that of the conqueror to the conquered (Josh. 11:20), or that of God to His people (Ezr. 9:8). It is used in the sense of "to request," or "to beseech," directed either to people (Gen. 42:21), (2 kings 1:13), or to God (Deut. 3:23; 1 kings 8:33).

⁶ The relationship to God by the covenant is designated in Exodus 20:6 and Deuteronomy 7:12. The concept of grace in the Old Testament is found in the texts which speak of God's relationship to Israel in the covenant (I Kings 8:23; Isaiah 55:3). Man can ask God to recall his favour. He can appeal to Yahweh's loyalty to his covenant. This happens typically when a man has desecrated the covenant and asks Yahweh to remain faithful in spite of the sin. Grace then takes the meaning of mercy (Isaiah 62:7; Jeremiah 16:5) as the letdowns of the people are stressed.

⁷ Douglas, *The New International Dictionary*, 526.

⁸ Gleason, Grace, 18-19.

⁹ Gleason, Grace, 23.



In the Old Testament, the Hebrew root that is generally translated as *charis* in Greek is *hen*. When used in the physical sense, it entails leaning over someone, an idea resonated in the impression that the Spirit litters over the waters of baptism. In the moral sense, it expresses the idea of “bending over” with favour, kindness, benevolence, protection, and love, as when the mother bends over the cradle¹⁰. In this sense, *hen* can be used to refer to the favour of God that translates into his provision for the salvation of man. Therefore, the concept of grace in the Old Testament has to do with the fidelity and loving kindness of God to his chosen people whom he has elected for his purpose.

Mundi avers that in the Pentateuch, grace is narrowed to the phrase, to find favour in someone’s eyes. This phrase is used to speak of subjects finding favour with the King or a wife with her husband. Nonetheless, concerning Yahweh, it means more than someone pleasing to Yahweh. In Psalm 84:12, grace is a protective gift of God along with glory. In Proverbs 3:34 grace is where God bequeaths his favour on the humble. It brings out the aspect of being kind, gracious and merciful¹¹. In similar construction on a concrete basis, there are two words of relevance concerning the concept of grace, these are *Chen* (grace, favour) and *Chesed* (gracious favour, loving-kindness, covenant love). Both denoted the generous act of a superior to an inferior. But the former was more one-sided, might be given for a specific situation only and could be withdrawn unilaterally. The latter was a more relational term¹². In its religious usage, the recognition was deeply rooted that God’s initiative was a lasting commitment which excluded from the outset the possibility of any comparable response.

Gleason argues that the whole of the Old Testament is a progressive, providential preparation for the Christian concept of grace¹³. The scripture speaks strongly of sin and proclaims the grace which forgives and saves. “Jeremias throws more light that God’s grace often overpowers the faithlessness of the people and that while this seems to be an occasional experience in the Old Testament, it is unquestionably central to the declaration of Jesus. “With the prophets, this grace is promised, with Jesus, it is present and is already being offered.”¹⁴.

The grace of God was apparent all over the Old Testament by his providential acts among humanity. God’s grace was demonstrated when He clothed Adam and Eve while he sent them out of the garden¹⁵. The grace was much more than their problems and needs. It was overfull. One of

¹⁰ Gleason, Grace, 43.

¹¹ S. Mundi, *An Encyclopedia of Theology*, Vol 2, *Contrition to Grace and Freedom*, (New York; Burns & Oates Ltd., 1968), 409.

¹² J. D. G. Dunn avers that in Pauline writings grace (*charis*) “is a central concept that most clearly expresses his understanding of the salvation event as an act of wholly unmerited generosity on God’s part. For Paul, ‘grace’ does not mean an attitude or disposition of God;” but “the wholly generous *act* of God; ‘grace is God’s *eschatological deed*’. Grace has the meaning of the revelation of God’s salvation in Christ, and the election of Christians. “The grace of God which is given to us in Christ.” (1 Cor 1.4) (Jesus and the Spirit [London, SCM, 1975], 202.

¹³ Gleason, Grace, 15.

¹⁴ Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner’s sons, 1971), 157.

¹⁵ See Criswell proclaims the abounding grace of God that as sin abounded in the Garden of Eden in the first Adam, the greater grace of God did much more abound in the Garden of Gethsemane in the second Adam. When sin abounded in the days of the flood, Noah found grace in the sight of the Lord. When sin abounded in the darkness and slavery of



the oldest assertions about the God of Israel to Moses is that Yahweh is merciful and gracious. Exodus 34:6 refers to him as the God who extends grace to a thousandth generation¹⁶. Basically, the Old Testament flinches with the gracious acts of God to Adam and Eve in spite of their sins. The declaration of God's graciousness was also recurrent in many other illustrations apart from Exodus.

Knudsen made a strong point to demonstrate the act of grace that it was not Israel who chose God but God who chose Israel, this motif runs through the entire Old Testament account¹⁷. This divine election was meant for a purpose in which the beneficiaries of God's grace have a part to play. Gleason observed that as the awareness of the Israelites people (concerning sin) grows, their prayers and expectations not only reflect their incapability to abide by the law in its veracity but also divulge the necessity for a divine medicine which is proficient in working in the innermost of man's soul to remedy his moral decadence¹⁸.

The Concept of Grace in the New Testament Theology

The writers of the New Testament developed the concept *Charis* not straight from profane Greek literature but from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. In Profane Greek literature, the core denotation of *Charis* is that which shines or sparkles, which pleases the eye. It can refer to corporal beauty, to the grace of personality, to art, music or poetry or to the pleasantness of life¹⁹. A commonly originated import of *Charis* in old Greek literature is perfection, that is, the objective perfection of a person, which renders him delightful and lovable. In profane Greek literature, this objective perfection is repeatedly corporal beauty which gives grace, charm, and sweetness to the one who retains it²⁰.

The customary New Testament term for grace is *Charis*. There were conjectures that it was Paul, the apostle of grace who hosted the word into New Testament Greek. This is because it transpires repeatedly in his Epistles and writings predisposed by him²¹. Schillebeeckx articulates that in the New Testament, the word '*charis*' (grace) is not reflected in Mark, Matthew, and the first and third Johannine epistles. In Luke, it is used eight times, but in total Pauline works 60 to 100 times. The explicit theological usage of *charis* in the New Testament is delimited virtually completely to Paul

Egypt, the grace of God did much more abound in the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb.... (*Great Doctrines of the Bible* Volume 2 [Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982], 60).

¹⁶ Karl H. Schelke, *Theology of the New Testament*. Volume 3. Trans: William A. Jurgens (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1973), 59.

¹⁷ Knudsen, Ralph E. *Theology in the New Testament: A Basis for Christian Faith* (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1964), 275.

¹⁸ Gleason *Grace*, 15-16.

¹⁹ Gleason, *Grace*, 41.

²⁰ Gleason, *Grace*, 41.

²¹ Schelke, *Theology*, 61; See Robert W. Gleason corroborated on this point that the noticeable notion of grace as the gift of God arises from these sources of Pauline theology. Consistent with Gleason, the semantic development of the concept grace is thought-provoking because, in the New Testament, there are many words which are used to designate divine gift; for example, holiness, life in Christ, eternal life, presence, inhabitation of the divine person (Grace [New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1962], 39).



and his school, although Paul does not per se offer an articulated theology of grace. the early development of a theology of grace started in the New Testament²². 'Grace' did not become the midpoint of theological thinking until the later works of Augustine.

Schillebeeckx elucidates on the deepness of the Jewish tradition of 'grace' in the Old Testament. He determines that God's lovingkindness and grace are seen chiefly, not as an inward disposition in God, but as God's love towards men, which is exposed in acts which are astonishing and unpredicted parades of love. A historical retort to the plentiful lovingkindness of God's love must be given in our righteousness and love for our neighbours. The other side of grace is thus judgment. In initial Judaism, salvation or forgiveness of sins originates only from God's grace based on the (gift of the) law and is given wholly to Israel. This root of the countenance and reception of God's grace is swapped by Christ, and protracted to the Gentiles as well²³.

Schillebeeckx abridges the New Testament view of grace as meaning "the benevolent and merciful love of God for men which brings salvation. The Greek *charis* on the other hand suggests what brings joy, offers or denotes benevolence, and offers a reply of gratitude. It is not an explicitly religious term, before its consistent presence in the Pauline writings, originally as a form of greeting. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all (1 Thess 1.1; 5.28). Schillebeeckx asserts that this greeting can be found in every letter in the Pauline corpus²⁴.

The word "charis" has become quite a different word in the Greek New Testament, so we may say that it depended upon Christianity to realize its full meaning and to elevate it to its rightful sphere. By the grace of God, the New Testament means His unmerited love towards man, which is revealed in the Person, words and works of Jesus Christ, that is the self-giving of God to man. It is identical to the Lord Jesus in person, word and deed. Our Lord did not utter the word "grace", but He is the Source of its conception through His teaching as in the "parables of grace" the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10), the lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7), the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), and the labourers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16). He is identified as the gracious and the decisive movement of God for the redemption of men in His Person. In Him the grace of God became an event, for He came to seek and forgive sinners not only by His words but also by giving Himself on their behalf, on the. He is the Redeemer who supplied in His Person, words and deeds the glorious content of the word "grace". The word "grace" appears in the New Testament 152 times, and 101 occur in the Pauline writings²⁵.

²² Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World* (London, SCM, 1980), 84.

²³ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 86-101.

²⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 102, 115.

²⁵ In Luke 4:22, the word "charis" carries us on to the peculiar Christian significance. When Jesus preached His first sermon in the synagogue of Nazareth, it is said that His fellow town men have wondered at the words of grace. The words of Christ were words of grace about grace. St. Luke uses the word "charis" in Acts 14:3 to characterize the good news or the message of salvation. In John 1:14, 16-17, grace signifies the outcome of the revelation of the Incarnate Logos in antithesis, to the Law in combination with truth and fullness, which help to give its distinctive significance. In Acts 6:8, it portrays the Spirit-filled man. Its prevailing may be seen in the church's growth in Acts 11:23. In 1 Peter, suffering is agreed as grace (2:19-20). 2 Peter 3:18 relates "charis" to "gnosis" (knowledge).



In line with Douglas, in the New Testament, the two corresponding Greek words for grace are; *eleos* (Romans 9:15-18) and *Charis* (1Cor. 1:14). The divine love of God and inventiveness reached their utmost expression in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Sinners having transgressed God's law cannot expect anything from God. God is said to be the 'God of grace' and Christianity to be, a religion of grace²⁶.

Jeremias argues that the foremost characteristic of the new people of God gathered together by Jesus is their awareness of the boundlessness of God's grace²⁷. "Grace has been described as "God's Riches At Christ's Expense"; it is a wide-ranging word with endless reach carrying an infinite depth of significance, demonstrating unrestrained favour to the undeserving²⁸." Grace is for all whom because of transgression have forfeited every claim to divine favour, and have lost all capacity for meritorious action. God's grace is infinite, boundless, immense, unspeakable, unimaginable and unsearchable. It is the spring and source of all benefits received from God (Rom. 11:6). Regarding 1 Peter 2:19, 20; grace implies that "which is beyond the ordinary course of what can be expected, and therefore commendable²⁹."

In a further expression, Mundi maintains that this phrase is limited to Luke, Paul and the epistles. The term was an important concept for the salvation brought by Jesus Christ. It seems to be a technical term which was developed chiefly by Paul. We can observe that it converted to a kind of refrain, a greeting form used in the opening of epistles. ("...grace to you and peace...")³⁰. One of the features of grace in the New Testament is that it stands in general for the whole salvation spontaneously bestowed by God in Christ. When applied to the relationship between God and Man it meant both the salvation granted by God and the thanks offered by man.

Emphasis of Grace in Pauline Theology

Paul's view of grace differed only in one particular, that persons were justified that is, entered into a covenant relationship with God through the saving action of Christ Jesus, not through works of the Law of Moses. Paul's notion of grace in no way implied that persons were free to do whatever they pleased and it is unlikely that those who understood Paul to teach libertinism were Jewish Christians since they would have understood that the covenant relationship offered by grace required conduct in conformance with the terms of the covenant, namely those requirements stipulated by the new law of love delivered by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount³¹. Paul taught that one's covenant relationship to God was not offered on conditions, it has always been offered in unconditional love or by grace. Nevertheless, one had to observe the terms of the covenant relationship once entered³².

²⁶ Douglas, *The New International Dictionary*, 426.

²⁷ Jeremias, 178.

²⁸ Herbert Lockyer, *All The Doctrines of the Bible* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1964), 173.

²⁹ Lockyer, *All The Doctrines*, 163-164.

³⁰ Mundi, *An Encyclopedia*, 410.

³¹ John Piper, 'Love Your Enemies.' (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 100-33.

³² Morna Hooker, *A Preface to Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 38-40.



Paul echoes at length on grace in his letter to the Romans and here the aspect of gratuitousness is brought out in particular. He refers to this grace as the saving power by which he as an Apostle was appointed. (Rom. 1:15). Accordingly, the Christians in Paul's understanding can be called participants in the grace as seen in Philippians 1:7. It attests consequently that grace has fundamentally the character of salvation contrary to a past ruled by sin and particularly in contrast to the vain effort to achieve justification by works done under the law (Gal. 2:21; 5:4). In the dominion of grace justice is achieved through the spirit and because of faith (Gal. 5:4,5). Nevertheless, this grace is not given to all at once but only to those who are called and chosen to receive it. (Gal. 1:6,15; Rom. 11:5). And even here it doesn't come to all in the same way. Paul points out further that grace that is given through baptism is a gift (Rom. 3:24), which varies from the works of the law. He refers to the fall of Adam and the grace which came in Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:12-21) and contends that grace is greater than sin and its victorious march cannot be held back by sin. Hence, the upsurge of sin in the time of the law only served to validate all the more the riches of grace (Rom. 5:20).

Paul in his writings, declared the Christian Gospel as an economy of grace, and Jesus Christ as the Dispenser of grace. Paul as Pharisee had ought to earn salvation by his zeal for the law, but through the revelation of Jesus Christ to him near the gates of Damascus, he discovered he was persecuting the "Truth," and in need of God's grace. The commandment which was unto life, Paul found to be unto death (2 Cor. 12:7-9).

The absolute freedom of Christ's grace was another element in the apostle's conception. This brings us to his characteristic antithesis between grace and law. "We are not under the law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14). We are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom 3:24). The grace that saves us has nothing to do with the law's works (Rom. 11:6), it is the "free gift" of God by "the one man Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:15; Eph. 2:8). The grace of Christ is marked by its sin-conquering power (Rom. 5:20-21). It rises, superior to the law, showing its power to master sin, which is the transgression of the law (Rom 5:20), for it removes the guilt; and it breaks the dominion of sin over the sinner's heart (Rom 6:14,18). "Charis" means "the Gospel" Col.1:6, and the divine favour shown in Christ (Eph. 1:6).

It is a stream of endless benefaction, flowing from an inexhaustible fountain; the riches of Christ which are unsearchable (Eph. 1:7; 3:8). Grace attained a universal status in the New Testament in the sense that it was not restricted to the nation of Israel. Paul's life was a public demonstration of this gospel of grace which proclaims the acceptance and acceptability of both Gentiles and Jews on the basis of trust in the faithful work of Jesus Christ which justifies (or sets right) sinners)³³. This is not on the basis of works of the Mosaic law but faith in God's provision for all.

Theological Tussle between Paul and James

It is time and again held, nonetheless, that the teachings of James contradict those of Paul on this theme, and visibly uphold the doctrine of justification by works in Jas. 2:14-26. Many efforts have

³³ Ben Witherington, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on St Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 90-91.



been made to synchronize the two. Some advance on the postulation that both Paul and James speak of the justification of the sinner, but that James underscores the fact that a faith which does not manifest itself in good works is no true faith, and therefore is not a faith that justifies. This is indisputably accurate. The variance between the depictions of Paul and James is undeniably due partly to the nature of the opponents with which they had to address. Paul had to deal with legalists who sought to base their justification, at best partly, on the works of the law. James, on the other hand, had problem with Antinomians³⁴, who claimed to have faith, but whose faith was purely a rational assent to the truth (2:19), and who repudiated the requisite of good works. As a result, he underlines the truth that faith without works is a dead faith, and therefore not at all a faith that justifies. The faith that justifies is a faith that is fruitful in good works. But it may be opposed that this does not clarify the entire trouble, since James overtly utters in verse 24 that a man is justified by works and not only by faith, and demonstrates this by the instance of Abraham, who was "justified by works in that he offered up Isaac" (verse 21). "Thou seest," says he in verse 24, "that faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect." It is quite apparent, nonetheless, that in this circumstance the author is not speaking of the justification of the sinner, for Abraham the sinner was justified long before he offered up Isaac (cf. Gen. 15), but of an additional justification of the believing Abraham. True faith will manifest itself in good works, and these works will testify before men of the righteousness (that is, the righteousness of life) of him that owns such a faith. The justification of the just by works confirms the justification by faith. If James actually meant to say in this piece of his letter that Abraham and Rahab were justified with the *justificatio peccatoris*, on the basis of their good works, he would not only be in clash with Paul, but would also be self-contradictory, for he unequivocally says that Abraham was justified by faith. Paul mentioned principally present justification, the transfer from the system of the law of Moses to the lordship of Christ Jesus³⁵. Paul's denunciation of works pointed to ceremonial works of the law of Moses; while James referred to works only in the sagacity of works of love. James's denunciation of faith entailed mere intellectual assent that was not apparent in works of love; where Paul referred to faith in the sense of faith manifest in love. Likewise, James did not refute faith a role in justification, but found a collaboration between faith and works which justifies a person (James 2:22). Nonetheless, James used "justified" to mean "is finally judged righteous"³⁶. Paul did not use "justification" in this sense³⁷. However, Paul would agree that

³⁴ See Davids 1982, 47-51; James seems to be battling the similar distortion of Paul's teachings (Reicke 1974, 34-35). James's adversaries contended: "You say you have good deeds, but we have faith" (see James 2:14). They claimed as well that persons are "justified by faith alone". In Romans and elsewhere Paul declared that "a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28 [KJV]; 9:32; Gal. 2:16). Equate James's view: "You see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith alone" (James 2:24 [KJV]). However, James is replying not to Paul, but purely to a slogan resultant from Paul (Jeremias 1954-55, 368-71). To grasp James in clear terms is that he energetically discards the notion of faith alone (Davids 1982, 50). He maintains that "faith works together with (synergei) deeds . . . works perfect and fulfill faith (James 2:22).

³⁵ Morna Hooker, *A Preface to Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 32-33.

³⁶ Leonard Goppelt, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck Ruprecht, 1976), 208-11.

³⁷ Reicke, Bo. *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*. (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Bible Series, 1974), 34.



judgment is "according to deeds" (Rom. 2:6; 4:10; 1 Cor. 3:12-17; 9:23-27; 2 Cor. 5:10; 6:1; Phil. 2:12; 3:8, 14).

Augustinianism Theology of Salvation Through Grace Anchored by the Holy Spirit

St. Augustine's perception of salvation raises historical as well as contemporary concerns. Chadwick portrays Augustine's struggle in his life as a series of false steps in self-assertion³⁸. Augustine refers to himself in book 1 of the confessions as, 'scattered' in a place of 'disintegration', until God gathers him and us all up. Augustine wrestles with an epistemological question of, 'how we know what we know'. In Confessions, (2.2.24) he wrestles with his ambition for the things of this world as summed up in 1 John 2:16. He struggles with the philosophical descriptions of God and the world. He is unable to think of God as anything other than a 'material' thing. Confessions, (7:112). He uses the language of conversion to describe a growing awareness of a non-material divine understanding, and argues that 'a thing can exist that is not material' and uses the example of Moses who heard God say to him, 'I who I am'. (Exodus 3:14), (Confessions.7:123). Augustine comes to the conclusion of conversion by divine humility by which God does not ask us to ascend to him of our own strength, but he descends to us out of his mercy (grace) to carry us to him. He sums his understanding of faith as a quest for faith and understanding whereby Christians are to look up to the one so high above them, but down to the God crucified at their feet (Confessions.7:128). A focus on Augustine's convictions on faith, his views on materialism, moral questions and the two cities can contribute to a better understanding of salvation through grace³⁹.

McGrath points out that the resources of salvation are located outside humanity in God himself an affirmation of Augustine's salvation by grace⁴⁰. In his confessions avers, "As I was saying this and weeping in the bitter agony of my heart, suddenly I heard a child's voice from the nearby house as if it might be a boy or girl saying and repeating over and over again 'pick up and read, pick up and read'. At once my countenance changed..." (Confessions VIII.12.29)⁴¹. This conviction was the initial point of faith for Augustine and had the power to take him to the full awareness of the Christian faith. Augustine commences by first confessing his wicked ways since he beheld salvation as the gracious act of God, a form of liberation from all systems of corruption.

Augustine maintains that the Holy Spirit is typically the love of the Godhead and the gift of God himself which is given by his unmerited grace as he inhabits human hearts. He added that the Holy Spirit makes us dwell in God and God in us. From the above argument, the concept of salvation starts to arise⁴². Augustine asserts that the gift of the love of God spawned in the hearts of humanity owes its origin to the self-giving of the Holy Spirit which bears unswervingly on his clear view that salvation is due to nothing other than God's unmerited grace. The Holy Spirit is seen as the

³⁸ H. Chadwick, *A very short introduction*. (New York; Oxford University Press, 2001), 24.

³⁹ Augustine. *Confessions*, Trans, Chadwick, H., The World's Classics, (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1992).

⁴⁰ McGrath A., (1993), *Christian Theology, An Introduction*, 4th Ed, Oxford; Blackwell Publishing, 36.

⁴¹ Augustine, *Confessions*.

⁴² Cited in G. Bonner, "Palegianism and Augustine", *Augustinian Studies*, Vol.23 (1992): 28-49; 361-366.



agent by which the triune makes his dwelling within human hearts and this is ultimate to Augustine's view of God's grace.

Consistent with Augustine human beings are enabled to love God only through God as he resides in people's hearts and gives them the capacity to love. Again, he substantiates that God's saving grace may be seen to consist in God's infusing the sinful human heart with the ability to love both God and neighbour. Augustine forms a significant connection between the Holy Spirit as a Gift and his characteristic notion of God's unmerited grace⁴³. He does this by drawing on 1 John 4:19 and Romans 5:5. Through the aforementioned scriptures, Augustine tries to substantiate his fundamental persuasion that man must turn to God and love God only by God acting to bring love to the sinner's heart. He goes on to say that the exclusive working of the Holy Spirit as a gift and the love with the Godhead, leads to the generation of the love of God in human hearts wholly as a gift and consequently absolutely by grace.

Augustine perceives the Holy Spirit as the consummation of the Father-Son relationship which exists in love and makes possible the welcoming of the redeemed sinner into fellowship with God through spawning the saving love of God within the human heart. Furthermore, he says, salvation which is initiated on the grace of God, is only possible by the self-giving of God in the person. In maintaining Augustine's argument of God's unmerited grace, is his claim that the love of God is found only in God and hence must be given by God and that it is not merited by human effort, but impacted within and received by the human heart through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Inyaregh emphasizes that the phrases "those he predestined, he also called" "those he called, he also justified" and "those he justified, he also glorified" reject any notion that any person could take part in one of the steps without the others⁴⁴.

Human Contribution in the Grace of God

Erickson confirmed that from Adam we only have a bad example and that Adam's sin reduced man's freedom⁴⁵. In so doing, God's grace is necessary, thus, Augustine argues that only through the power of the Holy Spirit, who acts to facilitate works of righteousness through kindling an inner love of God, can human beings be assimilated into affiliation in the divine life.⁴⁶ He further asserts that since such partaking in God necessitates that God acts first in graciously sending the Holy Spirit to dwell within, the Pelagian soteriological approach is questioned since in their pride they fail to appreciate that the goodness of their changeable soul comes by contributing in the unchangeable good and not by their own will.

⁴³ Bonner, "Pelagianism and Augustine", 29.

⁴⁴ Abel Aor Inyaregh, "Justification for Eternal Security of Believers and Impossibility of Apostasy in Romans 8: 28-31" *African Journal of Religion, Philosophy and Culture (AJRPC)* Vol. 5, 1 (June 2024), 39; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-7644/2024/v5n1a2>

⁴⁵ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology Vol.3* (Michigan; Grand Rapids, 1985), 909.

⁴⁶ Quoted in P. Cary, *Inner Grace: Augustine in the Traditions of Plato and Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 76-80.



Augustine fashions an effective foundation from which to argue that humankind's highest good, participation in God's changeless eternity and beatitude, requires that only God can activate its grasp through the absolutely gratuitous gift of the Holy Spirit given to engender a love of God from within. He adds that the Holy Spirit features conspicuously as the energetic connection between grace and love which ultimately enables humankind's participation.

Divergent Theological Underpinnings on the Theology of Grace

In church history, there have been significant debates over the nature of grace. The papable arguments transpired between Augustine and the Pelagians and between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. For Augustine, grace was absolutely indispensable so as to start, linger and complete the salvation of faith. Pelagians Douglas understood grace not as a supernatural power at work in the human soul, but as the usual running of the human abilities. Consequently, from their controversy, man could at will accept salvation and later if he desired, forsake his salvation⁴⁷.

Within Roman Catholicism, grace has habitually been depicted as a power transferred through the priestly ministry and sacraments by which justification and sanctification are achieved. Consequently, individual faith and works go hand in hand. This is superficially the view also maintained by the Anglican Church. Protestant Reformers such as Luther and Calvin revived the spirit of Augustine (354-430)⁴⁸, who underscored the sovereignty of God. Specifically, Augustine defended God's sovereignty in reaction to Pelagius' view of God and salvation. Pelagius (354-420/40) left no writings, so we rely upon Augustine for what he considered to be so frightening. Pelagius thought that God fashioned people with the capability to do all that is necessary for salvation. Although their ability is God-given, people must take the initiative for their salvation. People are free to choose that which is good and evil, without the help of God. Pelagianism was finally measured as a heresy because it was thought to belittle God's sovereignty by underlining how people can earn or merit salvation⁴⁹.

Augustine was in the same way against what he called semi-Pelagianism. Semi-Pelagianism upholds that God is required to act graciously in the lives of people so as to support their salvation.

⁴⁷ Douglas, *The New International Dictionary*, 426.

⁴⁸ Roger E. Olson says that in one of his final treatises, titled *On the Predestination of the Saints*, the bishop of Hippo affirmed unconditional election (absolute predestination) and denied free will that could limit or resist the work of God's sovereign grace in those whom God has chosen to save out of the "mass of perdition." During the Protestant Reformation Luther and Calvin hark back to this later writing of Augustine's. None of them, however, entirely denied the human role of salvation; they simply gave priority to divine grace and attributed even human choices and actions—insofar as they are meritorious—to God (*The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity* [Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2002], 271).

⁴⁹ L. Berkhof says that Pelagius digressed much further from the scriptural depiction of the application of redemption than any of the earlier Church. It may even be said that he forsakes the biblical foundation which was sacred to them, and reasserted the self-sufficient principle of heathen philosophy. His notion of sin and its results led him to repudiate the absolute necessity of the grace of God in Christ unto salvation, and to consider it quite thinkable for man to obtain salvation by keeping the law. He did not altogether despise the "help of grace" or the "divine assistance," but even considered this desirable "in order that what is commanded by God may be more easily fulfilled" (*The History of Christian Doctrines* [Michigan: Baker. Book House 1980], 207).



They alone, unassisted by God's contribution to their lives, are inadequate for salvation. Nevertheless, people can initiate their salvation, collaborating with God by applying or attaching their will to grace. Augustine thought that semi-Pelagianism made people's will the active ground of salvation, and that too was thought to disparage God's sovereignty. Owing to the prevalent effects of sin, Augustine thought that people were completely reliant on God. Augustine thought that there was nothing whatsoever that people could do for their salvation. People are absolutely dependent upon God's grace for salvation and for living the Christian life.

In the Protestants' camp, the Reformers' school of thought determined that Roman Catholicism had permitted the leaven of Pelagianism, of works righteousness to infiltrate the church. Since the Pope and magisterium refused to renounce their heretical dogmas and practices, Luther, Calvin, and others sensed obligatory to protest and ultimately break away from the Roman Catholic Church. Only then would Christianity be able to return to the original teachings of the Bible about God's sovereignty and salvation by grace alone. To overturn centuries of worsening leadership and doctrine in Roman Catholicism, schism was essential to cleanse and revive true Christianity.

Calvin and the Reformed tradition definitely represent the strongest version of Augustinianism, particularly in Calvin's verification of double predestination⁵⁰. Double predestination avows that God foreordains both those who will be saved (elect) and those who will be damned (reprobate). There is no conditional election; God does not predestine people for salvation based upon any foreseen faith or merit. On the contrary, election is unconditional, and grace is irresistible. Calvin, camping with Luther, held that people are saved by grace through faith. Faith is a result of grace and cannot be considered the result of human effort. Puzzlingly, faith is still a task, anticipated by God, irrespective of how one interprets the concept of task. In upholding salvation by grace through faith, neither Luther nor Calvin totally repudiated human involvement in salvation.

Inyaregh taking a queue from Luther and Calvin asserted that assurance is confirmed for the power of God can redeem a soul and preserve that soul forever. It is attested that Calvinism, is primarily a Biblical idea with Biblical backing, but in the same way, it is a rational tide in the salvation process. Equally, if God was going to save a mortal who was unable to save himself and go through all the trouble of having His Son sacrificed to afford that redemption, then He would also seal in His power and make available the gift of perseverance⁵¹.

Roman Catholics, of course, battled the Protestant Reformation for several explanations. Among those ins and outs, they distinguished the probable 'mythic' problems of barely conceived religious authority, inclined by individualism, at the Council of Trent. Still, Roman Catholics like the Anabaptists did not always diagnose the methodological erudition of Luther and Calvin. Hitherto, both Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians continue to attack the principle of *sola scriptura*, disagreeing with the historical, social and cultural unfeasibility of its individualistic approach to scriptural authority and interpretation⁵². Definitely, they cogitate *sola scriptura* both naïve and

⁵⁰ See John Calvin *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.21.5, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 926.

⁵¹ Inyaregh, *Justification for Eternal Security of Believers*, 34-35.

⁵² For example, see Robert Sungenis, *Not by Scripture Alone: A Catholic Critique of the Protestant Doctrine of Sola Scriptura* (Santa Barbara: Queenship Publishing, 1997); Joel Peters, *Scripture Alone? 21 Reasons to Reject 'Sola*



hazardous to church unity as well as to how Christianity may be applied in life and ministry. The Protestant apologia for sola scriptura similarly continues today, mostly among conservatively oriented Christians concerned with safeguarding scripture wholly, vis-à-vis, other potential religious authorities.

While *sola gratia* charmingly elevates the primacy of God's grace for the salvation of people, it does not eliminate the human undertaking in addition to the divine gift necessitated for salvation, holistically and realistically considered. A more holistic and realistic way of conceptualizing salvation is with *solus gratia* rather than *sola gratia*. God's grace is chiefly, rather than solely, involved with providing the gift of salvation to people. People still have the task of receiving God's gift. *Sola fide* makes sense most in the company of *sola gratia*, which stresses the superiority of God's grace, God's initiative, and God's sovereignty in the salvation process. It does not entail, however, that people do not have a task allied with reconciliation with God. Surely salvation is made possible by the atonement of Jesus Christ and the authorization of the Holy Spirit. People are counted as righteous because of the "alien righteousness" of Christ; the impelling cause of it is God alone, through the work of the Holy Spirit⁵³.

Grounds for the doctrine of justification from eternity.

Abel Inyaregh avers that eternal Security is absolutely a Biblical and theological doctrine. The New Testament attests to the irreversibility of the eternal security of believers (Jn.6:35-40)⁵⁴. Some Reformed theologians also speak of justification from eternity, but at the same time decline to subscribe to the Antinomian construction of this doctrine. The grounds on which they believe in justification from eternity deserve fleeting reflection⁵⁵.

Scripture speaks of a grace or mercy of God which is from everlasting, Ps. 25:6; 103:17. Now all grace or mercy that is from eternity must have as its judicial or legal basis a justification that is from eternity. But in answer to this, it may be said that there are eternal mercies and loving kindnesses of God which are not based on any justification of the sinner, as, for example, His plan of redemption, the gift of His Son, and the enthusiastic suretyship of Christ in the *pactum salutis*. Inyaregh underscores that the doctrine of eternal security informs that once a person experiences salvation, nothing can cause him to lose that status⁵⁶.

In the *pactum salutis* the guilt of the sins of the elect was shifted to Christ, and the righteousness of Christ was imputed to them. This implies that the burden of sin was lifted from their shoulders and that they were justified. Now there is no hesitation about it that there was a sure imputation of

Scriptura' (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 2001); and John Whiteford, *Sola Scriptura: An Orthodox Analysis of the Cornerstone of Reformation Theology* (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 1996).

⁵³ Martin Luther, Two Kinds of Righteousness, in Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor, 1958), 88.

⁵⁴ Inyaregh, *Justification for Eternal Security of Believers*, 29.

⁵⁵ Louis Berkhof *Systematic Theology* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1972), 517-525.

⁵⁶ Inyaregh, *Justification for Eternal Security of Believers*, 29.



the righteousness of Christ to the sinner in the counsel of redemption, but not all imputation can be called justification in the Biblical nous of the term.

The sinner takes delivery of the initial grace of regeneration on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ. Accordingly, the merits of Christ must have been imputed to him before his regeneration. But while this reflection leads to the end that justification logically heralds regeneration, it does not prove the primacy of justification in a temporal sense. The sinner can receive the grace of regeneration on the basis of a justification, preferably prevailing in the counsel of God and certain to be grasped in the life of the sinner.

Children likewise need justification, in order to be saved, and yet it is quite impossible that they should experience justification by faith. But though it is perfectly true that children, who have not yet come to maturity, cannot experience passive justification, they can be actively justified in the tribunal of God and thus be in possession of that which is absolutely essential. A New Testament theologian, Abel Aor Inyaregh anchored this notion in his work on “Justification for Eternal Security of Believers and Impossibility of Apostasy in Romans 8: 28-31” and I quote, “Biblically security texts-passages abound. Eternal Security permits a Christian believer to rest in the safety that as soon as they draw near to redemption and embrace the Holy Spirit’s indwelling, they are eternally sheltered in that salvation. There is nothing, they can do that can disengage them away from the promise of eternal life availed to them by God as stated in Romans 8:38-39”⁵⁷.

Grace in the Spirit of God (Pneumatology)

According to Whitacre, one of the main roles of the Spirit in John is as a witness to Jesus, by implication, it is the Spirit which testifies to Jesus (15.26), leads into all truth (16.12-15), and is the means by which Christians can know that God remains in them⁵⁸. This manifestation of the Spirit in the disciples is in contradiction with the hearts of those who oppose Jesus. It is because of the existence of the Spirit that believers are able to cognize Jesus and the testimony to him in the Scriptures, and to recollect his words and actions (14.25-6; 15.26-7). Following the same trend on the foregoing discourse, Scrogg upholds that to speak about Jesus Christ demands reflection on the work of the Spirit, which, exclusively in John, is inseparably connected with God’s act in Jesus Christ⁵⁹. Ridderbos backs up this notion in a different dimension, that the Spirit has nothing new to offer, nothing that Jesus has not brought. The Spirit will enable the disciples to witness to Jesus as he really was in his descended (not ascended) ‘glory’. Testimony about Jesus is conceivable for the disciples and the Evangelist because they have their eyewitness experience and the witness of the Spirit⁶⁰.

Berkhof uses *ordo salutis* (reasonable order) to designate the order through which salvation is found in Christ. He contends for a need for logical order and likewise in interrelations of different movements of the Holy Spirit in the grasp of the work of salvation. For him, the key emphasis is

⁵⁷ Inyaregh, *Justification for Eternal Security of Believers*, 34.

⁵⁸ R A. Whitacre, *Johannine Polemic: The Role of Tradition and Theology* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 98.

⁵⁹ S. R. Scrogg, *Christology in Paul and John* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 7.

⁶⁰ H. N. Ridderbos. *The Gospel of John* (Michigan: W B Eerdmans. (1997),.15-16.



not what man does in taking the grace of God but what God does. He deduces that the craving to make simpler the *ordos salutis* has led to unjustified restrictions⁶¹.

Grudem commenting on 'Regeneration' for salvation alludes to a secret act of God in which he imparts new spiritual life to the individual as portrayed in John 3:3-8). He sees this as totally a work of God and that human beings are passive objects⁶². Grudem augments that the exact nature of regeneration is mysterious to us –we know that somehow we who were spiritually dead in sin after the fall (Ephesians 2:1) have been made alive to God in a very real sense. He argues that we don't understand how this happens or what exactly God does to us to give us this new spiritual life. He connects this to the words of Jesus to Nicodemus, "...the wind blows where it wills, you hear the sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is of everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

Jesus gave assurances that the Paraclete would come (14.12-17, 26; 15.26; 16.7-11,13,14). After his death, Jesus will send 'another helper, who will abide with you forever' (14.16), 'the Spirit of truth' (14.17) which the world cannot receive. The Holy Spirit will teach them and remind them of Jesus' words. (14.26). Jesus will be leaving them, but he also promises his peace will remain with them (14.27; 16.33). Schillebeeckx describes the gift of the Spirit as "Easter grace". He says for Johannine theology, the Easter gift of the Spirit is the gift of a divine principle of life (6.63) through which a person is born (3.3,5,7) as a child of God after the earthly Jesus has departed⁶³.

Moule calls the 'farewell discourses' in Chapters 14-16, where the Spirit is mentioned as destined to come in the capacity of a 'Paraclete' ('Comforter') or advocate that He will "champion the cause of Christ in the apostles, and, through them, in the world". When Christ has 'gone', the disciples "will be invigorated and consoled by the perpetual presence of the Spirit. The Spirit takes the place of the visible presence of Jesus. There may be a future consummation of Christ himself, but for the time being "the experience of the Spirit" is "the mode of Christ's continued presence with his people" (John 14.18). The Spirit is the continuing presence and evidence of God's grace, revealed in Jesus⁶⁴.

Conclusion

The bottom line deducing from the trending discourse avers that the Holy Spirit anchors the sinner through the grace of God to have faith. Though God makes the first move in the redemption process, man's true repentance and steadfast faith/walk are required. That idea of salvation is brought about by the fall of man which terminated the communion between sinful man and the Holy God. Man is helpless in the attempt to bring back the broken communication and God reaches out to man by his grace. This grace takes various forms (Common, Specific, Prevenient, Irresistible,

⁶¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Reprinted (USA: Versa Press, 2012), 416.

⁶² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (University Press: England, 2003), 699.

⁶³ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, .418, 422-423.

⁶⁴ C. F. D. Moule, *The Holy Spirit*. London, Mowbray.1978, pp.36-7



and Efficacious, sufficient) but generally, it is God's favour and mercies extended to sinful man through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit indwelling the heart of man.

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