

Grace.

A NEW TESTAMENT STUDY.

BY THE REV. JAMES WELLS, D.D., GLASGOW.

IV. Grace in Christ.

BEGINNING with the word, our study has led us on to the idea, and then to the doctrine of grace. This doctrine has a Godward, a Christward, and a manward side. Grace in God, grace in Christ, grace in us; that is the whole of New Testament Christianity. *Grace in God* was the theme of the last article; this shall be occupied with *grace in Christ*.

Ἐν Χριστῷ is the phrase which reveals the very core of the New Testament. The relation of grace to Christ is indicated by three prepositions, *συν*, *δια*, and *ἐν*. *Δια* and *συν* are not used often; but *ἐν* is used on nearly every page where grace is handled. A reference to *ἐν* in the Greek Concordance makes this very plain. The Authorized Version in many passages translates *ἐν* by *through* (Rom. vi. 23; 1 Cor. i. 4; Eph. ii. 7, etc.); but this mistake is not found in the R.V. In Eph. iv. 23, *ἐν Χριστῷ* is rendered *for Christ's sake*. The *in Christ* of the R.V. is much more impressive.

The grace of God thus comes to us through, with, or in Christ. All the grace that is, is 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.' As God is the ultimate fountain, so Christ is the only channel, of saving grace.

For in Christ we have the complete revelation of grace. There is not more grace in the Old Testament than in the New, but there is grace more fully manifested. And Christ reveals grace in the most gracious, alluring, and divinely popular way by His incarnation, human life, atoning death, resurrection, and high-priestly life in heaven. The brilliancy of this revelation of grace is emphasized in many ways. It is an *ἐπιφάνεια*, like the Epiphany of Christ's glory at His second coming (Tit. ii. 11, 13), or like the victorious outburst of the Oriental sun upon shipwrecked mariners who have spent the night in utter darkness and in the very jaws of death (Acts xvii. 20). The same word, *ἐπιφάνεια*, is used in these three passages. Grace fully revealed is thus not merely an idea, or an abstract truth, but an historical and

human fact, by reason of which theology becomes mainly a biography. Lord Macaulay would find in this peculiarity the chief explanation of the world-wide spread of Christianity. Faith in the Old Testament was an implicit trust in mercy mysterious; faith in the New is an explicit confidence in mercy fully manifested. It is as if we now had in our hand both the butterfly and its chrysalis. The old veils of type and symbol have been drawn aside (this is the exact idea of *ἀποκάλυψις*), and grace now stands forth like a newly unveiled statue upon which is poured the Eastern sunshine, which gives to every object it touches a resplendent clearness of outline of which we gain no hint in our murky clime. The apostle has also probably in his mind the utter contrast between the full manifestation of mercy to all men and the peeping, muttering mysteries which it was death to divulge, and of which the watchword was, 'Off, ye profane!' Add to all this the persuasion that in all the ages to come there is to be no other revelation of grace (Eph. ii. 7), that this is God's greatest and last means of slaying sin and winning sinners, and we then have the chief outlines of the Pauline doctrine concerning the revelation of grace in Christ.

While grace is through, with, or in Christ,—the complete Christ, 'our Lord Jesus Christ,'—its relation to His death is very plainly set forth in the Gospels, especially in the Lord's Supper; and it is emphasized in numberless passages in the Epistles. Every evangelical preacher who is sensitive to the prevailing atmosphere around him, is probably conscious of some restraint when he approaches the subject of the Atonement. Can it be doubted that present-day evangelical teaching often hesitates to dwell on Christ's death as the New Testament writers do? This tendency is, probably, a reaction against the ensanguined realism of some evangelistic hymns and addresses, which offends not a few devout people. But is there not a great danger in the other extreme? May we not lose much by yielding to an over-morbid refinement, or to a quasi-rationalistic desire to teach only

what we can fully explain? True, no man can answer all questions suggested by the death of Christ. But can we hope to explain as scientists all the truths which we need as sinners? Can we fully explain any of the mysteries that encircle even our physical life? Can we expect to preach with much confidence if we are haunted by the belief that we are confining ourselves to the 'suburbs of the gospel,' and rarely alluding to those truths which the New Testament regards as its very centre and citadel?

It is written on the New Testament page as with a sunbeam, that Christ is the only channel of grace: collateral or supplementary channel there is none. 'Of (ἐκ, out of) His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.' It has surely been made plain enough that the only condition of receiving grace is a real faith in a real Saviour, a whole faith in the whole Saviour. The notion that our possession of grace depends essentially or partially upon our connexion with ceremonies or outward institutions, is entirely opposed to the spirit and declarations of Holy Scripture. A fresh and full exegesis of grace is one of the most urgent needs of our age. It supplies the simplest and most effective methods of combating aggressive sacerdotalism. The New Testament doctrine of grace is the doctrine of spirituality, and of a spirituality intolerant of every tincture and jot of anything opposed to its nature. Witness the Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians. The apostle states the doctrine of grace very fully in its controversial form, both positively and negatively. We are saved only by faith, which is the attitude of the soul exactly answering to free grace: for faith is the self-renouncing, self-despairing, forthgoing, and clinging mood of the heart; it is the whole energy of the soul going out of itself for what it cannot find within itself, or anywhere apart from Christ. So far as the way of life is concerned, grace is thus opposed to law (John i. 17), to works (Rom. xi. 6), to debt (Rom. iv. 4), to self-salvation

(Eph. ii. 8), and to faith in rites and ceremonies (Phil. iii. 8, Heb. xiii. 9, etc.). The apostle never wearies of repeating, amplifying, and enforcing the central doctrine of salvation by mere grace, as the grand antiseptic and disinfectant against practical and speculative errors, and the chief means of drawing men to Christ. Some of his statements of this doctrine remind one of important documents drawn up by the most skilful lawyers, who, by iteration and reiteration of carefully selected phrases, shut out the possibility of any misunderstanding. Among the most notable illustrations of this method are Rom. iii. 19-26 and v. 16-21; Gal. ii. 16-21; Eph. ii. 7-9; and Tit. iii. 3-7. These and kindred passages surely prove that he who does not believe that salvation is by grace only, and through Christ only, is chargeable with schism, and is a dissenter from the one holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church. Ἐν Χριστῷ is the creed of creeds, for it is the creed of the Apostolic Church, and also of the Church of the Catacombs. This short pregnant phrase sets forth the soul's one life-sphere or life-element, to borrow the favourite phrase of German commentators: it reveals the inwardness of the Divine life, and the soul's residence in Christ. This phrase also presents to us the real mysticism of the faith as taught by Christ and the Apostles. Rightly understood, it also rescues the Reformation theology from many of the objections urged against it. Union with Christ is the root-idea in the doctrines of justification, adoption, and sanctification. When union with Christ gains its rightful place in our creed, these doctrines are purged of everything that might seem artificial and unreal, and thus commend themselves to the Christian consciousness. We then perceive that at the foundation of the faith there lies not a treaty of peace or a convention, not something that might be described as mercantile or legal, but a real union of life. The faithful are regarded and treated as one with Christ, because they are one with Him.