

Historical Review of the Doctrine of Grace

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[0 : 00] So, as I said, I don't intend to say anything particularly new.! Very sorry if you didn't hear the talks that Steve has given previously.

! I'm following on from them. We've been looking at justification by faith. We've been looking at grace. And I thought that we would look at it from the point of view of history.

Because these things, although they're there in the Bible, people have debated them down through history.

We're fairly slow people, aren't we? We don't always understand things straight away. And this is true about the Church of Jesus Christ over the centuries. Things that...

People don't always ask the difficult questions straight away. So, for hundreds of years, perhaps people never asked some of the questions that we're going to look at.

[1 : 07] But when they do come up, it all has to be done afresh. What do we mean? Is this right? Is this wrong? Is this a correct way of putting it? Is this not a correct way of putting it? So, that's what we're just going to touch on this evening.

So, first, you'll want to know, what do we mean by grace? We're going to talk about grace. What do we mean by grace? And what I'm going to mean this evening by it is this thought, that what God does for sinners, even though they don't deserve...

That's basically what I'm... My vocabulary this evening. What God does for sinners, even though they don't deserve it. And you might think, has...

Do I stand in a relationship with God where I am conscious that God has done for me what I don't deserve? And if you'd say, yeah, that's right, he's done for me what I don't deserve, you've received grace from God.

God has dealt with you in grace. So, for an example would be forgiving the thief on the cross. You know the story, I'm not going to look it up. The man who looked across to Jesus and said, Lord, remember me when you come in your kingdom.

[2 : 20] And Jesus said, today you'll be with me in paradise. And you think, what did the thief deserve? He deserved to be dying on the cross.

That was... He said that himself. We can't complain. But Jesus dealt with him in a way better than he deserved.

He gave... He did for that sinner a wonderful thing that he didn't deserve to have done for him.

That's what I'm meaning by grace. And what am I meaning this evening by justification?

I'm meaning God treating people as if they'd been taken to court and found not guilty. So, as if they'd been taken to court.

Look at all this you've done. Look at all that you've done. Look at all that you've done. Look at all that you've done. And the court has said, for some reason, not guilty. Now, why the court would say that...

[3 : 24] I mean, there are a variety of reasons why a court might say that. One of them is that you hadn't done the things. Another reason might be if you bribed the judge. There's all sorts of reasons why a judge might say that.

But this is my... This is the idea of justification. That the court says, not guilty. Now, how could we get to a place where God says, not guilty, not guilty, not guilty.

That's the question of justification. And Paul in Romans, you might like to just cast your eye on this. He quotes and says, this is what God is in the business of doing.

He's been doing it, not just in the New Testament, but in the Old Testament. And David, King David, who wrote the Psalms, he talks about this.

This is in the context of justification. And he says, there's a blessing. A blessing in the Old Testament. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.
[4 : 35] That's Romans 4, verse 8. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.

Or perhaps more technically, will not credit to him. It's up there on the screen if you can't find the place. But just think about that.

It's saying that God is in the business of seeing sinners, but saying, as far as I'm concerned, you haven't sinned. As far as I'm concerned, if we went to court, I'd say, not guilty.

And the question is, how on earth does he do that? Do you get my point? That's what he says. And the whole debate is, why does he say it? How can that possibly take place?

But there's no doubt it's a blessing, isn't it? Would you not count it a blessing if God said to you, I'm not counting your sins against you.

[5 : 37] As far as I'm concerned, they're forgotten. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never credit to him, will not count against him.

That's what I'm meaning by justification. And what do I mean by hammered out? Well, I mean that the church has always had the Bible, the teaching of Jesus and the apostles, but it's taken years of time and thought to ponder and to test and to put into words the ideas that are in the Bible.

And that whole exercise of pondering, perhaps debating, testing, and putting into words is what we would call theology.

It's, you might be a bit frightened by the word theology and you think so just for clever people, but actually everybody has theology. Everybody thinks about what Christian faith is like.

You know, put it into simple words. If somebody said, what do you believe? You might say, I believe Jesus died on the cross for my sins. Well, that isn't a quote from the Bible, is it? That's you sort of putting into a big melting pot together all the different things that you've heard and experienced and read and just coming out with one thing, Jesus died on the cross for my sins.

[7 : 03] You've done a bit of theology, really. That's what it is. And so we're looking at how that has worked through history. So I'm not a historian.

I can't remember dates. I really marvel at people who can. What I would say is to do this, that I'm saying this evening properly, listen to Mike Reeves on theologynetwork.org.

I don't know, then the next bit is unquenchable flame. Then Luther, justification one, removing the shackles. If you Google Mike Reeves justification, you'll get it.

He's got four lovely talks on this subject. He does it properly, so this is sort of an advertisement for listening to him do it, really. Here's a timeline.

Does it show up properly? Yes. Timeline of years. So the timeline begins with Christ. 2,000 years later, you are here.

[8 : 06] And the people that I'd like to light on this evening are somebody called Pelagius 383, I think.

He was a British monk. And Augustine 354 to 430. Augustine was a professional philosopher, actually.

He was a professional speaker and lecturer, sort of university lecturer. He became a Christian. And he pretty quickly became bishop of Hippo.

Hippo was in the North African coast. He was bishop of a seedy seaside town. To all your own conclusions there. And the other person I'd like to look at is Luther.

So you can see he's a lot, lot later. But he took the ideas that had been hammered out by Augustine. 15, I have to look because it's too small on my screen. 1483 to 1546.

[9 : 11] Luther was her own Catholic monk. And he was also a university lecturer. He was a very thoughtful man. And a man with a very tender conscience.

And the question in his mind is, how can I be declared right by God? How can I face God and find that he's not angry with me? So that's the timeline of it.

So let's go back to the time of Pelagius and the time of Augustine. I pressed the button. Did anything happen? Oh, no, nothing happened.

Pardon? Oh, what is grace? Ah, yes, yes, yes. Okay, yeah, what is grace? Yes, beg your pardon. Pelagius and Augustine. I would just boil it down to saying, what is grace?

And Luther, the question, how does justification work? So those are the two issues. I'm sure it's much more complicated than that. But just trying to make it very simple.

[10:17] Those are the two questions that we'll look at. So let's come to Pelagius, the Pelagian idea versus Augustine's idea.

So these two guys debated. I'm sure they're both nice people. But one of them turns out to be the baddie and one turns out to be the goodie. But that's in terms of ideas.

It's not necessarily saying that they were nasty people. There's Pelagius. There's a picture of Pelagius. He went to Rome.

The center of the Catholic Church, the center of the worldwide church was in Rome. And he was rather upset and angry about the moral standards of what he found there.

And he felt from God, I'm sort of putting words into his mouth now, that his mission was to say to people, sort yourselves out. Get rid of your sins and your vices and turn and repent.

[11:26] Clean yourselves up. Clean up your act. Which is fair enough, isn't it? But when he tried to spell that out and write it out and tell it to other people, what it came out like was this.

If you try hard enough, you can do it by yourself.

So use it. You can make effort. So use it. And then what that seems to say is this, that, okay, we'll choose to do good.

We'll put in all our effort. And when we get to heaven, what will that be like? Well, heaven will be a just reward for the effort that we've put in.

Okay, do you understand Pelagius' idea? It starts off very commendably, but this is what he's saying to sinners, to you, clean your act up.

[12:32] You can do it. You have the power within you to make yourself better, to make yourself pleasing to God. And when you get to heaven, God will say, well done, you deserve that.

Okay, got the idea of that? Now, Augustine heard about this and he said, actually, I don't think the Bible says that at all.

In a number of ways, from a number of points of view, that is not a good way to spell out the Christian message. And Augustine says things like this.

He says, you can't do it yourself, because we are all bound up in Adam, and Adam moved from innocence to sin.

That's what he did. Why did he do it? Crazy man. But he did that. And now we're his children, and we are in the place that he left us. We're in the place of sin.

[13:45] That has big implications for what we can do, and what we can choose to do, and how successful we can be at doing it.

And Augustine says, yeah, okay, you're free to do what you want, but I can tell you what you're going to want. What you're going to want to do is sin. Because that's where you are.

You don't have the capacity to choose to do good. And if I tell you, the more I tell you, do good, clean up your act, the more frustrated you'll get, because if you're thinking clearly, you cannot do that.

You are, you have, you know, a little bit like, if your parents emigrated to Australia, you'd grow up in Australia. Adam emigrated to sin, and we all grew up as sinners.

That's where we're at. And sinners can't choose to do good. They just choose to do evil. So, yeah, you've got free will, says Augustine, but it's free to do what you want, but what you want to do is sin.

[14:52] And you might say, that's a bit negative, isn't it? That's a bit harsh about human nature. But I'm going to stick with that, because that's exactly what Paul said in the passage in Ephesians, isn't it?

He said, we all lived in that sort of way, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature, following its desires and thoughts, like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

The Bible has this very negative view of the moral capacity of ordinary men and women. So Augustine says, you can't do it by yourself.

You need God's grace. And grace isn't you trying harder. Grace isn't God saying, this is what you've got to do, and then you doing it.

Grace is different than that. Grace is God saying, you can't do this. I've got to do, I've got to scoop you up in my arms. I've got to pour my forgiveness onto you.

[16:02] I've got to lift you from where you are in Adam, and I've got to bring you into Jesus Christ. And Augustine says, that's the bottom line.

That's what grace, that's what you need, because you can't do it yourself. And that's what God's grace achieves. And I've got a quote from Augustine in his commentary on John 15, 6, in which he

says, this is quoting John 15, 6, which says, you did not choose me, but I chose you. And Augustine says, we were not chosen because of our goodness. For we could not be good without being chosen.

For salvation is not by grace, if our goodness came first, it is by grace. And therefore, God's grace did not find us good, but makes us good.

Do you get the point that these two guys are making? Pelagius is saying, you can do this, you can do it all by yourself. And Augustine says, sadly, no. And Pelagius says, grace is just God giving me a little push in the right direction, I do the rest of it myself.

[17 : 24] And Augustine says, actually, grace is God giving you salvation. It's from his generosity, bottom line. If it weren't for him, I'd be completely sunk.

You get this Pelagius, Pelagian thinking, Pelagianism, and Augustine, Augustinian thinking, those two different ways of thinking about grace.

Does that make some sort of sense? Okay, here are the classic texts, which spell this out. So, we read this.

It is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.

It's there, just in those, he hits the nail on the head, just in those few words, isn't it? How are people saved? By grace. It's not from yourselves. It's not that you've, you've made up the effort yourselves.

[18 : 34] It's the gift of God. And it's not by your good works. Because if it were, you'd be able to say, look what I've done. And God says, no, I'm not going to do it that way.

It's not by works, so that no one can boast. Do you get the idea? Nobody can get to heaven and say, well, I deserve that. And John 15, 16, just quotes this, Jesus saying to his apostles, you did not choose me.

It wasn't your free will that thought it was a good idea to follow Jesus. Bottom line, I chose you and appointed you to bear fruit, fruit that will last.

Okay, that's Pelagius versus Augustine. What is grace? It's God giving me salvation out of his generosity.

God choosing to do so. Yeah? Okay, second idea. The traditional, medieval, Roman Catholic idea versus Luther's idea.

[19 : 49] So, being historical, Roman Catholic theology has moved as well. At this particular point, it moved, well, it moved in a couple of different directions.

But at the point where Luther, we've come now to, whatever it was, many hundreds of years later, Luther is thinking, okay, Augustine taught about grace, but here I am, and I'm trying to sort this out for myself.

How can I be, how can God say to me, I'm right, I'm right before him, I'm not guilty. And the idea that was current at the moment actually had come from Augustine, because he'd been good on grace, but he hadn't quite got the hang of this, this bit about justification.

And what was being taught was infused righteousness, infused righteousness. when you infuse something, if you put a bit of it in, I don't know, what do you infuse in cooking?

Do you, can you infuse stuff into a cake? Sort of drip it in there? You infuse a tea bag, don't you? Yes. This is the idea of something being put into us.

[21 : 10] And the Bible does talk about God pouring his love into our hearts. That's what he said, pouring his love into our hearts, but that's not really to do with justification, but that's the nearest they could get to it.

And they were talking about infused, well maybe God infuses his righteousness into us. So, they're thinking justification works like this. God gradually puts a bit more of his righteousness into us. So, I get a bit better and then I get a bit more better and I'm having something infused into me. And this is what, this is the theory, this is what justification is.

So, justification is God doing something inside me which can grow and he's making me righteous. Whoops, I think there was another sentence that perhaps will pop up later. So, that's the theory that Luther is growing up with and checking and critiquing.

[22 : 26] It's a sort of traditional medieval Roman Catholic view. And you knew he'd be thinking, can I find any of this righteousness inside me?

Am I justified? Is there anything, has God begun to drip righteousness into me? Can't see anything. All I can see inside is sin. And he thought about this and there came, as Steve had said, this eureka

moment where he, it dawned on him, justification is not based on what God has dripped inside me but based on something God has done outside me.

Luther, is saying justification comes to us from outside ourselves. Can't look inside and see it. It's something outside. And he talked about an alien righteousness.

Not meaning alien as in alien versus predator but meaning something outside myself. So, he, the righteousness of which the Bible speaks comes from outside, strangely, in an unexpected way. And as Luther understands it, he's saying this righteousness comes from Jesus Christ dying on the cross. So, if I want to see the reason for justification, I don't look at what God might have dripped inside me.

[24 : 00] I look to what Jesus did outside me. and it's because of what he's done that I am justified. So, in other words, this blessing becomes ours not from us but because we belong to Christ as he talks about being like a wife and a husband and I have a quote which I'll look up in a moment.

A wife and a husband share together. What the husband, what belongs to him, when they become married he shares with his wife and what the wife has she shares with her husband.

The wife might be in debt but the husband pays the debt. The husband might be very rich and he enriches his wife and Luther says we come to Jesus Christ and his righteousness becomes ours.

God says not guilty, not because of what we've done, but because of what Jesus has done.

Justification puts me in a different place but it does not itself change my character.

Justification does not change my character, it's the way God looks at me. Good works are a fruit of justification, good works are not the cause of my justification.

[25 : 29] It's quite a subtle thing, Steve took us through that, but this is one of the things that Luther grasped. If I come to God and say accept me, I don't say accept me because I can see I'm getting better.

I say accept me because of what Jesus did on the cross for me. God so Pelagius versus Augustine, what's grace about and medieval Roman Catholicism versus Luther, what is justification about?

How does it come? What does it do? That's all I'm going to say. I'll be willing to answer some questions in a minute, probably by saying I don't know. what's the spiritual value of all these things we've been thinking of?

I've thought of some points. To do with assurance of salvation. So for some people, particularly if they've been brought up in a certain style of teaching, they will lack assurance of salvation.

They will not be sure that they're Christians. They will not be sure because they have got the idea that God accepts us because we've begun to get a bit better.

[26 : 53] And they'll look inside themselves and say I don't think God's done that for me. And the value of the teaching I've just been lighting on, touching on, is that it says to be assured of salvation.

I don't look inside myself to see am I getting a bit better, but I look at Jesus Christ and I say am I trusting in him? Is he my only hope? Do I believe he died on the cross for sinners?

Am I pinning my hope on him? And if the answer to that is yes, then you can be assured of salvation, whether or not you can see much going on inside yourself.

Do you see the point there? Assurance of salvation. Hope for the future. future. If the bottom line of my salvation is not that I have made, in my free will, have made a good choice and I'm working hard at it, if my hope for the future is that Christ saves me and God has chosen me, then it makes things very different as we look forward.

because I'm not relying on my reliability, but on Christ's ability to keep his promises. If he died for my sins, if he says, put your trust in me, I'll raise you up at the last day, I'll do that, then our trust is not in ourselves but in Christ and we have a hope for the future.

[28 : 34] Gratitude. I think if we grasp this, it ought to make a huge difference to the gratitude that we have. Because you see, Pelagius would have been saying, well I'm get to heaven and I've done quite a lot of it myself, I'm half grateful to God, I mean he did 50% of it or something.

But on the understanding that I've just been speaking about, God's done the whole thing. It's all gift, it's all grace. And that should make me hugely grateful.

My salvation is not partly the result of my own effort but is it completely a gift. Including my response, including my faith, including even my obedience, it's all come from God.

And we should look back and say, thank you Lord for what you've done. And worship, when we begin to grasp the scope of grace and the wonder of being justified simply by Christ and by trusting

in him, we find that God, the God I worship is kinder than I could have imagined and wiser than I can fathom.

And the plans of his goodness for me go beyond the dimensions that my brain can cope with. Why am I here as a Christian?

[30 : 13] Because God in his grace decided he would do that before the worlds were made. Why, what do I have to look forward to?

I have to look forward to an amazing future which God has planned for me. I can't understand how it could stretch so far back.

I can't understand how it can stretch so far forward. I can't understand how it can envelop me so completely. And yet this is what God has planned. So, there's my thoughts on the spiritual value of it.

Assurance, hope, gratitude, worship. worship. Let's go. Thank you.