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## Pauline Charis: A Philological, Exegetical, and Dogmatical Study

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## Pauline *Charis*

### A Philological, Exegetical, and Dogmatical Study

By RAYMOND F. SURBURG

**N**O word is more characteristic of Christian faith than the word χάρις, grace. It conveys the central and fundamental idea of the Christian religion.<sup>1</sup> In Lambert's opinion χάρις is the distinctive watchword of the New Testament; in fact, the words "grace reigns" might be placed over every page.<sup>2</sup> The New Testament scholar Moffatt asserts that the New Testament is a religion of grace, or it is nothing.<sup>3</sup>

The word χάρις has come to play an important part in the history of Christian theological thought. Although the Christian doctrine of grace was not expressly formulated in the ecumenical creeds of Christendom, it nevertheless is an integral part of the theological tradition of the Greek Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican, the Lutheran, the Calvinistic, and Arminian churches. In current theological literature one meets the terms "predestinating grace," "prevenient and subsequent grace," "infused grace," "common grace," "sacramental grace," "habitual and actual grace," "irresistible grace," and *sola gratia*. Today the phrase "salvation by grace" has many interpretations, ranging from the true Biblical teaching of full and free grace to the doctrine of salvation by grace and works as held by the Roman Catholic Church. An unbiased student of the history of doctrine must agree

<sup>1</sup> William Manson, "Grace in the New Testament," in W. T. Whitley, *The Doctrine of Grace* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1931), p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> J. C. Lambert, "Grace," in James Hastings, *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), I, 689.

<sup>3</sup> James Moffatt, *Grace in the New Testament* (New York: Ray Long & Richard Smith, Inc., 1932), p. 9.

with the observation of Hardman: "Conflicting interpretations of this doctrine [i. e., of grace] constitute one of the chief causes of the divisions between Catholics and Protestants; and it is the duty of all who would contribute in any way to the work of re-uniting the divided Church to try to understand the grounds of the opposition."<sup>4</sup>

The differences concerning the doctrine of grace in the various systems of current theological thought may be traced to basic departures from the meaning of the word χάρις in the New Testament. If there is one theological term which the Christian theologian and pastor needs to understand clearly, it is this one. The centrality of grace has well been stated by Theodore Engelder: "It lies at the center of the body of Christian doctrine. All other articles either lead up to or are based on it. And the perversion of any doctrine has its roots in the perversion of the doctrine of grace."<sup>5</sup> All current misconceptions of the doctrine of grace can find their correction only by a study of the Biblical usage of the term and by a return to its basic and fundamental meaning.

According to Easton, the word χάρις occurs no fewer than 170 times in the New Testament.<sup>6</sup> The apostle Paul employs the word about 100 times in 13 of his epistles.<sup>7</sup> Since some of the Pauline letters are among the earliest documents of the New Testament, it may be said that Paul was the first New Testament writer to employ the word. The following tabulation shows the frequency with which Paul used it:<sup>8</sup> Romans, 22 times; 1 Corinthians, 9; 2 Corinthians, 18; Galatians, 7; Ephesians, 12; Philippians, 3; Colossians, 5; 1 Thessalonians, 2; 2 Thessalonians, 4; 1 Timothy, 5; 2 Timothy, 4; Titus, 4; Philemon, 2.

Scholars generally credit Paul with giving a new meaning to

<sup>4</sup> Oscar Hardman, *The Christian Doctrine of Grace* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1947), p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> "Theology of Grace," *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, II (Dec. 1931), 882.

<sup>6</sup> Burton Easton, "Grace," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939), II, 1290.

<sup>7</sup> W. F. Moulton, *A Concordance to the Greek New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897), pp. 1003—04.

<sup>8</sup> Based on Moulton, *op. cit.*; Otto Schmoller, *Handkonkordanz zum griechischen Neuen Testament*, 6. Auflage von Dr. Alfred Schmoller (Stuttgart: Privilegierte Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1931), pp. 486—488.

this Greek word. It is one of the terms in the Greek of his day to which he gave a more spiritual meaning.<sup>9</sup> The Roman Catholic writers Steinmueller and Sullivan assert about Paul's use of the term grace: "Paul, however, may be considered the special Apostle of grace, its herald and its defender. He treats grace throughout all his Epistles, and in particular in his Epistles to the Romans and Galatians. He uses the word grace (Greek χάρις) more than one hundred times in his Epistles and constantly as a theological term."<sup>10</sup>

It will be the purpose of this essay to trace the history of χάρις in the centuries prior to Paul's day, to take cognizance of the various ways in which Paul employed it and gave to it a new signification, and to note the various Christian doctrines with which it is intimately interwoven.

## I. THE USE OF ΧΑΡΙΣ PRIOR TO PAUL'S TIME

### A. Χάρις in Classical Usage

According to Ramsay, there are two words which may be said to incorporate the characteristics of the Greek spirit: χάρις and μυστήριον, the former used in the sphere of art and philosophy and the latter in the domain of religion.<sup>11</sup> Of the classical use of χάρις, Archbishop Trench remarks: "It is hardly too much to say that the Greek mind has in no other word uttered itself and all that was at its heart more distinctly than in this."<sup>12</sup>

This classical word derives from the same root as χαίρω, χαρά, χάριμα, χαρτός, and in its original and fundamental sense it is applied to anything which awakens pleasure or produces joy. We find it used both in an objective and in a subjective sense. Objectively it was employed to designate that which causes favorable regard: especially (a) grace of form and (b) grace of speech,

<sup>9</sup> Cf. G. Machen, *The Origin of Paul's Religion* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1928). In Chapter 7 words are discussed whose significance had been changed by Paul. F. Torm, *Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1930), p. 99.

<sup>10</sup> "Grace," in *Catholic Biblical Encyclopedia: New Testament* (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, 1950), p. 284.

<sup>11</sup> William M. Ramsay, *The Teaching of Paul in Terms of the Present Day*; 2d ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914), p. 404.

<sup>12</sup> R. Ch. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1915), p. 156.

graciousness. By an interiorizing process which is found frequently as a regular feature in the history of a language χάρις came to be used subjectively, to portray the favorable regard felt toward a person; therefore with the meaning of "favor," "good will," or "graciousness." From this meaning there developed by a natural step the designation of a definite expression of such favorable regard: "favor." Finally χάρις came to mean "gratitude," the response produced by favor. It was also used to designate the doing of a favor graciously, spontaneously, a favor rendered without the expectation of a return but emanating solely out of the giver's generosity.

A beginning toward the wonderful meaning which χάρις was to attain in the New Testament may be seen in the ethical terminology of the Greek schools, where it was used to imply a favor freely done, without claim or expectation of return. Thus Aristotle, in defining χάρις, stresses the point that grace was given freely without expectation of return (Trench, *ibid.*, p. 158). Χάρις was also used adverbially, in such phrases as χάριν τινός "for the sake of a person or thing," or in the phrase πρὸς χάριν τινί τι πράττειν "to do something to please another."<sup>13</sup> Robinson says that the Greek writers found pleasure in playing upon the various meanings of χάρις; for example, in such a saying as χάρις χάριν φέρει. (Ibid.)

Various meanings of χάρις, as will be shown later, were taken over from the ordinary language by the New Testament writers. But despite its importance as a term in Greek culture its classical usage did not anticipate its Christian meaning as found in the writings of Paul, for as Manson observes (p. 35): "At the same time none of them explains the religious force which the word has acquired on Christian lips. One reason for this is that nothing in Hellenic religion answered to, or anticipated the Christian sense of the goodness of God to men. The Hellenic mind might believe in propitiating the gods, averting their wrath, and earning their favour—its principle was, indeed, *Do ut des*—but Hellenic reason rejected the idea that God could love man with a love equaling, not to say excelling, man's love to God." Thus a writer

<sup>13</sup> J. Armitage Robinson, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: The Macmillan Co., 1904), p. 221.

belonging to the Aristotelian school writes: "It would be absurd to accuse God because the love one receives from Him is not equal to the love given Him."<sup>14</sup> While classical literature contains statements which describe the gods as man's source of the physical and the material, the moral and the spiritual, there is nothing in Greek religion resembling the New Testament conception of supernatural grace as found in the epistles of Paul and in other New Testament writings.

### B. *Χάρις* in the Septuagint

The Septuagint was the Bible of the Greek-speaking Jews in the time of Christ and the apostles. When the New Testament writers quote from the Old Testament, they usually employ this version.<sup>15</sup> A number of classical words experienced a development in the LXX, where they were wedded to Hebrew Old Testament religious ideas. The Greek translators of the Old Testament used *χάρις* almost exclusively for the Hebrew *חַן*, which carried the same double significance, namely (1) "grace" in the sense of beauty, either of body or mind, and (2) "graciousness" or "kindliness of disposition."<sup>16</sup> *Χάρις* is found in the LXX frequently as a translation of the Hebrew idiom *חַן נֶאֱמַר, εὐρεῖν χάριν*, to find grace or favor in the eyes of God or a superior. Twice *χάρις* is used to render *חַן נֶאֱמַר* and *נֶאֱמַר*, but in both instances not in reference to God.

The word *χάρις*, however, did not experience a development in meaning as certain other words did in the Septuagint. "There is a sharp contrast between the use of the words in the two Testaments."<sup>17</sup> In the LXX *χάρις* is never used to mean undeserved merit, which became a constitutive element in the Pauline concept. There is one passage in the LXX where *χάρις* is used

<sup>14</sup> Eudemian Ethics, 1238 B, cited by James Moffatt, *Love in the New Testament* (New York: Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1930), p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Barclay Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek*, revised by Richard Rusden Otley (Cambridge: The University Press, 1914), p. 381.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. E. Hatch and H. A. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint and Other Greek Versions* (Oxford: The University Press, 1897—1900), II, 1455; III, 195.

<sup>17</sup> Norman H. Snaith, "Grace," in *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1951), p. 100.

to translate חַסֵּד and denotes God's kindness toward men: "I will pour out upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pity." (Zech. 12:10)<sup>18</sup>

Concerning the use of χάρις in the LXX, Jauncey makes the following observation: "We therefore note, at this point, that the Hebrew word for grace has no special idea of *redemption* connected with it, but that חַסֵּד (LXX ἔλεος) has!"<sup>19</sup> In the LXX χάρις seems to be employed only in contexts where there were essentially no moral or religious implications. The Hebrew חַסֵּד, which designates the mercy, loving-kindness, or steadfast love of God, was not translated by the term χάρις but by ἔλεος (135 times). It is interesting to note also that in those passages where the Hebrew חַסֵּד is related to the nature of God as gracious, merciful, and filled with pity the LXX never uses χάρις. According to Torrance, "the reason for this seems to lie in the fact that *charis* in its classical and Hellenistic usage has a sensuous substratum in its meaning, a semiphysical sense of charm or gracefulness as something aesthetically pleasing, while the Hebrew חַסֵּד never has this sense."<sup>20</sup>

One must remember that in the Old Testament the idea of grace is not restricted to one Hebrew word and that therefore the Biblical teaching on grace "cannot be exhausted by the analysis, however minute, of any one word or expression."<sup>21</sup> Grace pervades the whole series of events involving Yahweh and the saints of the Old Covenant. However, in tracing the use of the word χάρις before the birth of Christ, Manson notes (p. 36): "But χάρις never in the LXX attains the constitutive fundamental sense it bears in the New Testament." So far as the language is concerned, the LXX did not furnish Paul with material for his message of grace. Yet despite the fact that Paul did not quote

<sup>18</sup> G. G. Findlay, "Grace," in James Hastings and John A. Selbie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), II, 313.

<sup>19</sup> Ernst Jauncey, *The Doctrine of Grace* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1925), p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1948), p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> Walter R. Roehrs, "The Grace of God in the Old Testament," *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, XXIII (Dec. 1952), 900-907; Jauncey, p. 17.

a single passage which contained the word "grace" from the Old Testament, Moffatt (p. 39) could assert: "For early Christians, to whom the Greek O. T. was a Christian book, the truth of divine favour and active goodwill was as plain in its pages as was the absence of 'grace'-language."

### C. Χάρις in Philo

Did Paul obtain his concept of χάρις from other Jewish writers, such as Philo? The latter flourished from 20 B. C. to A. D. 40 and endeavored to combine Jewish religion and Greek philosophy. A perusal of his use of χάρις reveals that he employed the plural form, χάριτες, to designate divine gifts or bounties in the realm of nature. For the Alexandrian thinker the universe and human nature were full of God's grace, or gracious favor. Philo thus says that God bestows sight, hearing, health, fire, and water as "gifts" or "charities." Furthermore, the bestowal of these charities is conditioned by human merit (Moffatt, p. 49). He claims that "the ever-flowing springs of the favor of God were stayed when evil began to prosper above the virtues" (Manson, p. 37). According to Moffatt (p. 50), there are three differences between the Philonian and the Pauline conception of χάρις: (1) Philo does not speak of "the grace of God" but distinguishes between the gracious name of God and Κύριος, a name which seemed to him "royal or ruling in the sense of punitive"; (2) Philo hypostatizes grace, something that Paul never does; and (3) Philo relates nature to grace, representing the universe and nature as the outcomes of divine grace, a teaching out of harmony with the New Testament, which never depicts the origin of the world nor the rational nature of man as the outcomes of divine grace. Torrance (p. 10) summarizes the Philonian usage as follows: "One must conclude that *charis* in Philo is in no sense different from *charis* in Hellenistic Greek, in spite of the fact that it is sometimes used to convey Judaistic thought. . . . *Charis* is always used in a semi-physical sense with quantitative and qualitative significance. At the same time it is detached from God, conceived as immutable, and hypostatized as the power behind the natural endowments of body and mind." It is evident therefore that Paul does not derive his concept of grace from Philo.



### D. Χάρις in Other Greek Writers of the Hellenistic Period

Nearly all the classical connotations continue in Hellenistic Greek. While there are new developments, they are generally within the confines of earlier usage or extensions of it. The basic classical idea of χάρις persists, and its relationship to χαρά is not forgotten.<sup>22</sup> The classical use of grace as that which charms or engenders pleasure is of frequent occurrence. In some instances it apparently even becomes a synonym for pleasure or even lust.

In Hellenistic Greek it tends to take on a more objective nature than it had in similar connections in the earlier history of the word in Greek. It is true that χάρις, in classical usage, had often meant a divine gift, a meaning it continued to have after Alexander's death. However, the idea of endowment or possession was giving way to the concept of that which bestows pleasure. An interesting and typical use of χάρις is illustrated by the following epigram: "Cypris with her Graces and her golden-arrowed boy bathed here, and gave grace in payment."<sup>23</sup>

During the Hellenistic period there is also noticeable a deepening of the psychological use of the word. Plutarch quite often uses it with πραότης, φιλία, ἐπιείκεια, especially with εὐνοία. In the Greek of the Koine it also has the sense of favor or good will as well as gratitude. As such favor it was often used for the regard or condescension of the gods.

### E. Χάρις in First-Century Greek

Imperial inscriptions originating in the first century indicate an interesting development in the use of χάρις. It is frequently employed to portray the imperial favor shown by some deed of gift or benefaction bestowed on some community or city. This favor, as Wetter points out, is often accompanied by such descriptive adjectives as "divine," "immortal," "godlike," and "eternal."<sup>24</sup> Thus an imperial inscription describes certain beneficiaries of Gaius Caligula as extremely fortunate because they were reaping

<sup>22</sup> See James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), article on χάρις: P. Oxy. 14.1672,6 (A. D. 37—41).

<sup>23</sup> Cyrus, *Greek Anthol.* 9.623, as quoted by Torrance, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> G. P. Wetter, *Charis: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des ältesten Christentums* (Leipzig, 1913), pp. 18, 19.

fruits of the abundance of the grace of Gaius Caesar. Another inscription speaks of Nero conferring freedom on the Greeks and refers to it as a gift of "grace." The praise of the benefactions of the emperor in some of the inscriptions from the imperial period reminds one of the Pauline praises of the riches of divine grace. Wetter regards the signification that χάρις acquired in the first-century Greek as the starting point for the understanding of Paul's use of the term.

There is a second development of the use of χάρις in the Greek of Paul's day to which attention should be directed. In the first-century magical papyri, says Wetter (pp. 46 ff., 100 ff.), it is employed in the sense of "charm," "magical power," and is often found in association with δύναμις, νίκη, πνεῦμα, and ποῦξις as one of the forms under which man could invoke supernatural help. It is Wetter's contention that this magical use of χάρις points to a higher mystical or religious sense. It was current in certain religious circles, from which it passed into Christianity. Cremer-Kögel, however, avers that there is no proof for this assumption.<sup>25</sup>

## II. THE USE OF ΧΑΡΙΣ IN THE WRITINGS OF PAUL

### A. *The Inherited Use of Χάρις*

When Paul wrote his letters to congregations and to individuals, he had inherited a wealth of meanings for the Greek χάρις. These may be divided into two classes: (1) the purely Hellenic significations, which were familiar to all who were conversant with the Greek of the first Christian century, but which to some extent were to recede into the background as a result of the special meaning Paul gives to the word; (2) the meanings which the concept grace has in the Old Testament.

Easton (p. 1290) warns of the danger of trying "to construct on the basis of all the occurrences of the word a single doctrine that will account for all the various usages." The same New Testament scholar asserts (p. 1292): "Most discussions of the Biblical doctrine of grace have been faulty in narrowing the meaning of grace to some special sense, and then endeavoring to force this special sense on Biblical passages."

<sup>25</sup> *Biblich-theologisches Wörterbuch des neutestamentlichen Griechisch* (Stuttgart-Gotha: Verlag Andreas Perthes, 1923), p. 1125.

New Testament Greek dictionaries give the meaning of the word under a varying number of subdivisions. Habert, in *Theologiae Graecorum patrum vindicatae circa universam materiam gratiae*, lists 14 different connotations, as does Schleusner, *Novum lexicon G.-L. in N.T. A Greek-English Lexicon* by Arndt-Gingrich gives five basic meanings and usages of χάρις. Liddell and Scott indicate four main and several special usages. Cremer-Kögel, *Biblisb-theologisches Wörterbuch des neutestamentlichen Griechisch*, may be regarded as giving a threefold division. *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* by Abbott-Smith ascribes three different meanings to New Testament χάρις. A fourfold division is also followed by J. H. Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, and Schmoller, *Handkonkordanz zum griechischen Neuen Testament*, while a threefold division is employed by Ebeling, *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*.

An examination of the nearly 100 occurrences of the word χάρις in Paul reveals that he employs it with a number of connotations. In several passages it is used in its purely classical meaning of thankfulness, that which gives occasion for gratitude, translated by "thanks" in the English versions (Rom. 6:17; 1 Cor. 15:57; 2 Cor. 2:14; 8:16; 9:15; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 1:3). Ralf Luther remarks: "Die Grundbedeutung des Wortes (Gnade ist, was erfreut) bleibt im N. T. überall bestehen — auch in dem Sinne, dass ein Mensch, dem Gnade gegeben ist, erfreuend, anmutend auf seinen Mitmenschen wirkt."<sup>26</sup> In 2 Cor. 8:4, for example, χάρις is employed by Paul in the classical sense of "favor," when he portrays the Corinthian Christians "begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints" (RSV). In 1 Cor. 16:3 it refers to the money gift sent by the Gentile Christians to Jerusalem. In 2 Corinthians 8 Paul uses the term three times (vv. 6, 7, 19) to designate the gift made by the European Christians for the Judean relief. In Eph. 4:29 Paul writes: "Let no unwholesome words ever pass your lips, but let all your words be good for benefiting others according to the need of the moment,

<sup>26</sup> *Neutestamentliches Wörterbuch*, 11. Auflage (Berlin: Furche Verlag, 1937), pp. 74, 75. Cf. also A. Stewart, "Grace," in James Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), II, 254a.

so that they may be a means of blessing (ἵνα δω χάριν) to the hearers."<sup>27</sup> Here the King James Version does not interpret the meaning of χάρις. It renders this verse: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." In Col. 4:6 the phrase ἐν χάριτι may be rendered "gracious."

Paul, however, also invests the word χάρις with a new meaning, bringing it to its highest and most exalted conception. In fact, as Lambert asserts (loc. cit.): "It was the use which Paul made of the term that determined its significance for Christianity ever afterwards." Torrance says (p. 26): "*Charis* in the New Testament is primarily a Pauline word." The apostle puts into this word the basic message of the Gospel. After a study of Paul's employment of χάρις one will agree with William Dau, who says: "Entering upon a consideration of the term grace, we find that not the term but the use of the term in the New Testament represents a revelation within the Revelation."<sup>28</sup> Kirn contends that "for Paul, however, grace is the fundamental concept of the Gospel."<sup>29</sup> Speaking of Paul's use of χάρις, Cremer's lexicon, p. 1120, says:

The import of this word has been in a peculiar manner determined and defined by the special use of it in the New Testament, and especially in the Pauline Epistles. We cannot affirm that its scriptural use seriously differs from or contradicts its meaning in the classics, for the elements of the conception expressed by it are only emphasized in a distinctive manner in Holy Scripture; but by this very means it has become quite a different word in the N. T. Greek, so that we may say it depends upon Christianity to realize its full import, and to elevate it to its rightful sphere.

### B. *The Source of Paul's Unique Conception of Grace*

Paul's doctrine of grace goes back to Jesus Christ Himself.<sup>30</sup> The explanation for the new and distinctive meaning which he gave to χάρις must be sought in his experience on the road to

<sup>27</sup> Richard Francis Weymouth, *The New Testament in Modern Speech* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1943), p. 455.

<sup>28</sup> "Grace," *Theological Quarterly*, IX (July 1905), 131.

<sup>29</sup> O. Kirn, "Grace," *The New Schaff-Herzog Religious Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1909), V, 41.

<sup>30</sup> H. A. Kennedy, *The Theology of the Epistles* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1923), p. 54.

Damascus, an experience that he possibly has in mind when he pens these words: "For the God who said, 'Out of darkness light shall shine,' is He who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," 2 Cor. 4:6. (Weymouth, p. 421)

Some scholars, however, hold the view that Paul obtained his doctrine of grace from Judaism. Thus Lacey says: "The idea of Grace was not one of the new elements imported. The Church sprang from the Synagogue fully armed in this regard."<sup>31</sup> Headlam: "His doctrines of Justification, of Predestination, of Free-will and Divine Grace, were influenced by his early education."<sup>32</sup> This means that Paul took over the ideas concerning grace contained in current Rabbinic and Philonian theology, based on the teaching of the Old Testament. The writer of the article on "Graces" in *The Encyclopedia Americana*, on the other hand, states that Paul was influenced in his understanding of grace by pagan conceptions, according to which men were the recipients of the favors of the gods and could accomplish nothing in such fields as oratory, poetry, and music without this help. Paul, it is said, was specifically affected by the Roman philosophers who described religion as a gift of the gods.<sup>33</sup>

This theory, however, is not in accord with the evidence presented by Paul in his epistles. Before his Damascus Road experience Paul had trusted in the Jewish system of law, but after that he came to depend solely and completely on the mercy of God and realized that a life could be built not on a legal system of religion but only on God's grace. As a Pharisee he had endeavored to earn his salvation by zeal for the Law, which led him to furious opposition to Jesus of Nazareth and made him guilty of great crimes against the Christians of Palestine. Near Damascus he experienced an act of spontaneous grace. From the day of his conversion Paul always regarded Christ as "the Lord of grace." That he had not brought about his own conversion or

<sup>31</sup> T. A. Lacey, in *Church Quarterly Review* (Oct. 1907), p. 77, as quoted by Jauncey, p. 45.

<sup>32</sup> A. C. Headlam, *St. Paul and Christianity*, p. 15, as quoted by Jauncey, p. 45.

<sup>33</sup> "Graces," in *The Encyclopedia Americana* (New York: Americana Corporation, 1952), XIII, 103.

his vocation as a Christian missionary, he makes very plain when he writes: "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me that I might preach Him among the heathen" (Gal. 1:15, 16). The same thought is expressed later: "And last of all He was seen of me also as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God, which was with me." (1 Cor. 15:8-10)

It is Paul's firm conviction that this grace accompanied him through his entire ministry. To quote again the testimony of the apostle himself: "According to the grace of God which is given me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation" (1 Cor. 3:10). It was to this same grace that Paul ascribes the ability to conduct himself properly in the world: "For this is what we boast of, the witness of our conscience that in holiness and sincerity before God, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have lived in the world and especially toward you," 2 Cor. 1:12.<sup>34</sup> The same grace of God enabled Paul to bear the thorn in the flesh with which the messenger of Satan buffeted him. On the basis of Paul's letters Kennedy (p. 52) correctly observes: "That is invariably the note of his experience, the Divine condescension and mercy to one who had no claim whatever upon them. What moves his soul is the loving hand stretched out to arrest him in his folly, the hand of Christ by which he was grasped."

### C. *The Pauline Use of χάρις*

Paul was fully aware of the fact that with the coming of Christ a new covenant superseded the old covenant. He also knew that the full revelation of the plan of grace was to be found in the new covenant, which had been implicit from the beginning in all of God's dealings with the Children of Israel. The grace of God, which was formerly revealed by Yahweh in His dealings

<sup>34</sup> William G. Ballantine, *The Riverside New Testament* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1934), p. 301.

with the covenant people, manifested itself in its highest degree in the life and work of Jesus. "In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9), so that Paul can speak of "the grace of God" and "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." According to Findlay (p. 314), Paul, in 22 instances, writes of "the grace of God" ("His grace"); in 15, of "the grace of Christ." Thus Paul portrays the Father and the Son as the Fountain of grace. While in certain passages he describes the Father as the perennial Source of all grace, this χάρις showed itself in Christ. Thus Paul reminds the Corinthians of "the grace of God given you in Christ" (1 Cor. 1:4), or he avers that "grace reigns through Jesus, our Lord" (Rom. 5:21). Both in the salutations (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; Col. 1:2) and in the benedictions (Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 16:23; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 6:18) the apostle speaks of the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." In 2 Thess. 1:12 grace is referred jointly to God and Christ. On the basis of the Pauline usage it is proper to say with Findlay (p. 314a): "Christ is the expression and the vehicle of the grace of the Father, and is completely identified with it, so that God's grace can equally be called *Christ's*." In its New Testament sense χάρις has reference "to the being and action of God as revealed and actualized in Jesus Christ, for He is in His person and work the self-giving of God to men. . . . Grace is in fact identical with Jesus Christ in person and work and deed." (Torrance, p. 21)

The fact that Paul depicts χάρις as originating in God and as mediated through Jesus Christ precludes the identification of grace with the person of the Holy Spirit. This equation was made in the Church of England's Forty-two Articles of 1553, but was omitted from the revision of 1563, when the Articles were reduced to 39 in number. The old Eleventh Article reads as follows: "The grace of Christ, or the holie Ghost by him geuen, dothe take awaie the stonie harte, and geueth an harte of flesh. And although those that haue no will to good things, he maketh them to wil, and those that would euil thinges, he maketh them not to wille the same: Yet neuerthelesse he enforceth not the wil. And therefore no man when he sinneth can excuse himself as not worthie to be blamed or condemned, by alleging that he sinned unwillinglie, or by compulsion." (Hardman, p. 32.) In his study of grace N. P.

Williams suggests that "the Spirit" and "grace" be considered synonymous terms, contending that Peter Lombard, who died about 1160, made the same identification.<sup>35</sup> While it cannot be denied that there is a close connection between grace and the activity of the Holy Spirit, one must demur from this absolute identification because Paul describes the grace by which mankind is saved as the grace of all three Persons of the Holy Trinity. Furthermore, this identification cannot be accepted because it fails to recognize the necessary distinction between a person and his function.

The special use of χάρις, as developed by Paul under divine inspiration, has "reference to the mind of God as manifested toward sinners, His redemptive mercy, whereby He grants pardon to offenses and bids those who have gone astray return and accept His gift of salvation and everlasting life" (Stewart, p. 254a). In a number of passages Paul depicts the grace of God whereby men are saved as a personal attribute or quality in God, one of the divine perfections. It is connected with the mercy of God as distinguished from His justice. Grace in its primary sense in Paul is *favor Dei*. When Bultmann writes: "God's 'grace' is not a quality, not His timeless kindness, and what the Gospel brings is not enlightenment as to God's hitherto misunderstood nature as if till now He had been wrongly conceived as wrathful and ought henceforth to be regarded as gracious,"<sup>36</sup> he can easily be understood as setting up a false antithesis. Walter Bauer's *Wörterbuch* lists a whole series of passages that show χάρις employed by Paul in the sense of *favor, grace, gracious care or help, good will*. Among others the following passages describe the gracious disposition of God toward sinful men: Rom. 3:24; Gal. 1:15; Eph. 1:6 ff.; 2:5, 7, 8; 2 Thess. 1:12; 2:16; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 2:11.<sup>37</sup>

Paul's distinctive use of χάρις proceeds from the conviction that man's salvation rests upon God's mercy as a free gift. It is favor contrary to man's desert. Thus "as of grace" and "as of debt" are

<sup>35</sup> *The Grace of God* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1930), p. 110.

<sup>36</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Frederick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), I, 288.

<sup>37</sup> Walter Bauer, *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch*, 4. Ausgabe (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Topelmann, 1952), col. 1592. Arndt-Gingrich, p. 885, col. 2.



antithetical concepts, the one excluding the other. "Now to the one who works, his wages are not reckoned as a gift but as his due. And to one who does not work but trusts Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness" (Rom. 4:4).<sup>38</sup> Ernst De Witt Burton asserts that χάρις in this sense, as grace contrary to the deserts of men, had never before been used in classical or Old Testament Greek.<sup>39</sup> Similarly works of the Law on man's part and grace on God's part are opposites. Thus Paul teaches: "We are justified gratuitously by His mercy through the ransom that Christ Jesus provided, whom God put forward as a reconciling sacrifice in His blood through faith," Rom. 3:24.<sup>40</sup> In Gal. 5:4 Paul expresses this contrast: "All you who aim at justification by Law are dissevered from Christ; you have fallen away from grace." (Verkuyl, p. 482)

An important element in the Pauline conception of χάρις is his stress that its manifestation toward sinful men was an act of self-sacrifice on Christ's part. "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, how, when He was rich, He became poor for your sakes, so that you by His poverty might grow rich," 2 Cor. 8:9 (ibid., p. 461). In Phil. 2:5-11 Paul shows to what condescension Jesus stooped out of love even for those who were His enemies. "It is in this quality of self-sacrifice most of all," asserts Lambert (p. 681), "that the grace of Christ in the New Testament differs from the mercy of God as revealed in the earlier dispensation."

Another aspect emphasized by Paul in his portrayal of χάρις is its abundance. Thus he writes: "But where sin abounded (ἐπλεόνασεν), grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). "Abounded" means "existed in abundance." However, the second word ὑπερπερίσσευσεν, which also means "to exist in abundance," carries with it the added idea that the abundance is more than sufficient. "Where sin existed in abundance, grace was in super-

<sup>38</sup> Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949), p. 169.

<sup>39</sup> *New Testament Word Studies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1927), p. 72.

<sup>40</sup> Gerrit Verkuyl, *Berkeley Version of the New Testament* (Berkeley: James J. Gillick & Co., 1945), p. 381.

abundance, and then some more added on top of that."<sup>41</sup> Paul thus proclaims the existence of enough grace in God's heart to save and keep every sinner who ever lived and will live.

A closely related aspect in Paul's concept of grace is its universality. In setting forth the universal nature of the salvation procured by Christ, Paul writes: "For if through the transgression of one single man the mass of mankind have died, all the more has God's grace, and the gift made through the grace of the one man Jesus Christ, been abundant for the mass of mankind," Rom. 5: 15, 16. (Weymouth, p. 362)

Paul's meaning of *χάρις* also includes the element of the spontaneity of the favor shown by God to sinful men. It is fundamental to a complete understanding of Pauline *χάρις* to recognize that the benefit conferred by God is not earned by the receiver as his due; it is that to which the receiver has no right, but which the giver generously bestows out of goodness. "This spontaneous character," said Stewart (p. 254a), "along with the more or less direct reference to the *pleasure* or *joy* either designed or experienced . . . is always implied, and, singularly enough, comes out more clearly in the scriptural than in the classical use of the term."

Does Paul make *χάρις* synonymous with love or with mercy? John Schmidt identifies love with grace when he writes: "God is agape (1 John 4:8). This agape-love is interchangeable with grace in the New Testament usage. Both express the free gift of God's love, a gift that reveals most clearly the character of the Almighty."<sup>42</sup> The fact, however, that grace, mercy, and love occur together in the same passage would seem to indicate that there must be a difference between these terms. In Eph. 2:4, 5, these three words appear severally and have individual and specific connotations: "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in misdeeds, made us alive along with Christ — by grace we have been saved — and raised us up with Him and made us sit with Him in the heavenly heights in Christ Jesus" (Ballantine, p. 325). While these

<sup>41</sup> Kenneth Wuest, *Golden Nuggets from the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1943), p. 81.

<sup>42</sup> *The Riches of His Grace* (New York: American Tract Society, 1940), p. 29.

terms are synonymous, each is distinctive and should not be confused.<sup>43</sup> Paul defines mercy as that compassion in God which moved Him to provide for a Savior to the lost. Divine love is the broadest term, the motivating purpose back of all that God does in saving man. Χάρις is God's love extended to sinners in their guilt and unworthiness, pardoning guilt for Christ's sake. In distinguishing between these three synonyms, R. C. H. Lenski writes: "Grace deals with the cause, the guilt; mercy with the consequences, the wretched death in which we lie. All three are active in our restoration. Paul names them in proper order. Having described us in our pitiful deadness, mercy is applied, to remove this consequence of guilt; it is the mercy of love, with its full knowledge and blessed purpose; and this love also in the form of grace, as wiping out our guilt and its penalty of death."<sup>44</sup> In comparing χάρις with ἔλεος, Cremer-Kögel (p. 1124) has the following: "*Eleos*, though adopted into the N. T. treasury, leaves untouched an essential aspect of the scriptural or N. T. conception of grace, inasmuch as it is used to express the *divine behavior towards wretchedness and misery, not towards sin*. It is just this aspect—the relation of *grace* to sin—which must not be overlooked; in this freeness of grace—the *spontaneous inclination*, which does not lie in *eleos*—is for the first time realized." According to R. F. Weidner, love may not be identified with grace. While it is true that the new dispensation of grace rests upon the death of Christ, which may also be regarded as a proof of God's love (Rom. 5:8), yet Paul teaches that it is in the dispensation of grace that this love was first recorded.<sup>45</sup> In Rom. 5:2-5 the apostle speaks of the love of God shed abroad in the hearts of those who stand in grace, and in 2 Cor. 13:14 the love of God comes after grace.

In the Pastoral epistles χάρις twice precedes ἔλεος in the salutations (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2). This could possibly be due to the fact that in the order of the manifestations of God's purposes of

<sup>43</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: Van Kampen Press, 1948), VII, 178.

<sup>44</sup> *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Philippians* (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937), pp. 414, 415.

<sup>45</sup> *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Burlington: Lutheran Literary Board, 1891), II, 118.

salvation grace must go before mercy. While it is true that the same individuals are the objects of both, being at the same time the guilty and the miserable, yet the righteousness of God demands that the guilt must be done away before the misery can be alleviated. God must pardon before He is able to heal. Sanctification can take place only when justification has occurred.

In Titus 3:4-7 a group of synonyms, such as χρηστότης (goodness), φιλανθρωπία (love to men), ἔλεος (mercy), and χάρις (grace) are found. Francis Pieper points out that it is essential and necessary that the exact meaning of these synonyms be kept in mind.<sup>46</sup> Each has a special signification and contribution to make in understanding God's attitude toward mankind. Edgar J. Goodspeed renders Titus 3:4-7 as follows: "But when the goodness and kindness of God our Savior were revealed, He saved us, not for any upright actions we had performed, but from His own mercy, through the bath of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit, which He has poured out upon us abundantly through Jesus Christ, our Savior, so that we might be made upright through His mercy and become possessors of eternal life in fulfillment of our hope."<sup>47</sup> In this passage Goodspeed translates both χάρις and ἔλεος with the word "mercy." In Titus 2:11 and in other passages (Rom. 3:24; 5:15, 20; 6:1, 14, 15; 11:5) he creates confusion by rendering χάρις as "mercy." In Rom. 5:15, where χάρις and ἔλεος occur in the same verse, Goodspeed reproduces both terms with "mercy."

The fundamental implication of grace as a kind and merciful disposition, showing itself in acts of unmerited goodness, especially toward erring sinners, brings grace into close relationship with the other divine attributes. It is allied to "compassion," which has as its objects the needy and unfortunate (2 Cor. 1:3); to "long-suffering," which bears with the unthankful and the evil (Rom. 9:22); to "patience," which defers the final punishment of sin. (Rom. 2:4)

Manson in his discussion of Pauline χάρις (p. 48) distinguishes

<sup>46</sup> *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), II, 8.

<sup>47</sup> *The New Testament: An American Translation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1923), pp. 403, 404.

between a primary and a derived use of the term. In its primary sense χάρις has to do with the act of divine intervention rather than with man's reception of God's grace. According to Paul, χάρις is the presupposition of man's entire relationship with God and is constitutive of the whole life of the child of God. The gracious attitude of God toward mankind is manifested especially through the Cross of Calvary. It is at the Cross that grace is really exhibited. "All have sinned and have come short of the glory of God. All are pronounced righteous by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God has set forth as a propitiation by His blood through faith, for the manifestation of His righteousness, because of the passing over of previous sins in the forbearance of God," Rom. 3:25. (Ballantine, p. 258)

Χάρις is also employed by Paul in what might be called a derived or applied sense. In these instances the focus of attention is upon a particular application of the grace of God. "Just as Paul thought of the grace of God as having actualized itself among men in Jesus, so in an applied sense Paul thinks of that same grace as laying hold of man in an act of forgiving and creative love" (Torrance, p. 30). Signifying the disposition and design to bring about the salvation of sinners, χάρις also includes the power or influence by which this purpose is realized, or actualized, in the life of the redeemed. Thus in 2 Cor. 12:9: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for My power [δύναμις] is made perfect in weakness." 1 Cor. 15:10 has been rendered: "But I have toiled harder, far harder than all the rest—no, no, not I! It was the work of the grace of God which was helping me."<sup>48</sup> The apostle uses χάρις a number of times to indicate the results or the effects of grace in the lives of men.<sup>49</sup> Thus Paul utilizes this word to describe the state of those who have come under the power of divine grace (Rom. 5:2; 2 Tim. 2:1) and for the evidences and tokens of such experiences, as when the alms gathered by the Christians are so labeled (1 Cor. 16:3; 2 Cor. 8:6, 19), or the sum of earthly blessings (πᾶσαν χάριν, 2 Cor. 9:8). Paul uses χάρις when speaking of

<sup>48</sup> Arthur S. Way, *The Letters of St. Paul* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1950), p. 49.

<sup>49</sup> W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Edinburgh: Oliphants, 1939), II, 170; Bauer, cols. 1593, 1594; Arndt-Gingrich, p. 886.

the power and equipment for the apostleship given him by the Lord. (Rom. 1:5; 12:6; 15:15; 1 Cor. 3:10; Gal. 2:9; Eph. 3:2, 7)

While Paul conceives of God's grace as acting dynamically upon men, he never permits it to lose connection with its original meaning—that grace is transcendent, always coming from without the person. Even in its applied or transferred sense, grace is never impersonal. Torrance (p.32) correctly observes about its essential nature: "The great characteristic of the Pauline χάρις is its intimate attachment to the person of Christ Jesus and as operating only within the personal encounter of Christ with men through the word and the Gospel."

*(To be concluded)*

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