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Pauline Charis

A Philological, Exegetical, and Dogmatical Study

BY RAYMOND F. SURBURG

(Concluded)

D. Misconceptions Concerning Pauline Grace

FRANCISCO ZORELL gives two definitions of grace that are not warranted by the context in which χάρις appears in the epistles of Paul. Under II:2 he lists the following definition: *Charis dicitur cumulus donorum nobis propter merita Christi datorum, redemptio, justificatio, fides, quorum donorum culmen sunt gratia sanctificans . . . cf. 2 Tim. 2:1.*" Under II:3 this meaning is given to charis: *Auxilium quoddam (supernaturale) quo nos Deus ad bona excitat, in actione adjuvat, in tentatione sustinet, brevi: gratia actualis. 2 Cor. 12:9; Col. 3:16; 2 Cor. 1:12.*"⁵⁰ Into these two definitions Zorell has introduced the Roman Catholic teaching of "actual" and "habitual" grace.

John A. McHugh lists Rom. 8:26; 11:5; Eph. 5:14 as proof for his church's position on actual grace and the following passages as setting forth the doctrinal position of the Roman Church on sanctifying grace: Rom. 5:2; 6:23; 8:17, 29; Eph. 4:24; Titus 3:7.⁵¹

Roman Catholic lexicographers and New Testament exegetes reflect the position taken by the Roman Catholic Church. While they recognize χάρις as meaning *favor Dei*,⁵² yet, as Paul Althaus points out, Roman theology discusses the subject of "grace" as an *effect* of Christ's work of redemption.⁵³

Roman Catholic theology asserts that grace is a supernatural gift of God bestowed on men through the merits of Jesus Christ for

⁵⁰ *Lexicon Graecum Novi Testamenti* (Parisiis: Sumptibus P. Lethielleux, Editoris, 1931), p. 1438.

⁵¹ "Index of Texts," *A Commentary on the New Testament* (The Catholic Biblical Association, 1942), p. 699.

⁵² Max Meinertz, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Bonn: Peter Hanstein Verlag G. M. B. H., 1950), II, 111; Joseph Bonsirven, *Théologie du Nouveau Testament* (Paris: Aubier, 1951), p. 294.

⁵³ Paul Althaus, *Die Christliche Wahrheit* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1949), II, 23.

their salvation. Saving grace is divided into actual or transient grace (also called helping grace) and habitual or sanctifying grace (also known as the grace of justification).⁵⁴

Through sanctifying grace, according to Rome, men are adopted as children of God and heirs of the Kingdom; it enables men to merit heaven by their works. Actual grace, on the other hand, bestows the necessary assistance to live as an adopted child of God and thus merit heaven. According to D. I. Lanslot, sanctifying grace "is an inherent quality and a disposition of the soul to partake of the intellectual life of God, that is, of His wisdom and holiness, a disposition which is created in the soul by the infusion on the part of God of the supernatural virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost, which always accompany sanctifying grace."⁵⁵ The relationship between these two graces is described in the following way:

Grace is absolutely necessary for salvation. Sanctifying grace is the higher life of the soul, and without it the soul is spiritually dead. Actual grace is given to man for every work in any way conducive to the supernatural life. By means of prevenient grace man prepares himself for justification through sanctifying grace; thus even the very beginning of salvation is attributable to God. Grace, however, does not compel man; he can and must cooperate with it, but he is able to resist it.⁵⁶

A modern Calvinist sets forth the Roman Catholic position as follows:

In general it may be said that they conceived of grace as mediated through the sacraments, and that they sought to combine with the doctrine of grace a doctrine of merit which seriously compromised the former. The emphasis was not on grace as the favor of God shown to sinners, but on grace as a quality of the soul, which might be regarded as both uncreated (i. e., as the Holy Spirit), or as increated, or wrought in the hearts of men by the Holy Spirit. This infused grace is basic to the development of the Christian virtues, and enables man to acquire merit with God, to merit

⁵⁴ George D. Smith, *The Teaching of the Catholic Church* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1949), I, 549, 584.

⁵⁵ *Catholic Theology* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1923), p. 142.

⁵⁶ Leo von Rudloff, *Everyman's Theology* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1941), p. 86.

further grace, though he cannot merit the grace of perseverance.

This can only be obtained as a free gift of God.⁵⁷

In his translation of 1 Cor. 15:10 Francis Aloysius Spencer reads into the verse a later terminology. He writes: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and the grace He infused into me has not been void. On the contrary, I have toiled much more than they all — yet not I myself, but the grace of God that is in me."⁵⁸ While it is true that Paul in this passage portrays grace as acting dynamically upon individuals, this grace is always conceived of as transcendent, "not defined as a substance or force or any other sort of static and uniform quantum."⁵⁹ The mode is not mechanical or impersonal.

James Moffatt maintains that there is absolutely no philological evidence to substantiate the Roman Catholic position which describes grace as acting as a natural force.⁶⁰ The difference between the Pauline understanding of χάρις, in contrast with the interpretation of Rome, is well stated by a Roman Catholic scholar:

The Scripture texts, as the Catholic Church has always understood them, indicated that such has been the course selected by God, and so she always expressly held by the primitive traditions, from which the Church could not possibly recede. When, therefore, the early Protestant Reformers, making light of all traditions, and boldly sweeping aside all the theological development of the past ages, come forward, denying the existence of any internal supernatural quality infused by God, which should be called "habitual" or "sanctifying" grace, and maintaining that the state of grace was characterized by nothing but an "external" imputation of justice, made by the Eternal Father, of the merits of the Redemption of Jesus Christ, the Church could not refrain from defining as a dogma of faith (Trid., sess. 6, can. 11) that habitual grace must be understood as an "inherent" divinely infused perfection.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1941), p. 429.

⁵⁸ *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, ed. Charles J. Callan and John A. McHugh (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1946), p. 472.

⁵⁹ A. S. Martin, "Grace," in James Hastings, *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), I, 508.

⁶⁰ *Paul and Paulinism* (London, 1910), pp. 37 f. Cf. also R. C. Mackintosh, "Grace," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, VI, 365.

⁶¹ E. L. van Becelaire, "Grace, Doctrine of (Roman Catholic)," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), VI, 368.

In the light of the foregoing statements it is not difficult to understand the assertion of Lanslot (p. 141): "There is probably no point of Catholic theology more furiously assailed by Protestants than its doctrine of grace; their assaults led them to the most monstrous absurdities. . . . Hence the great abyss between us and others outside of the pale of the Church in regard to the doctrine on grace."

Roman Catholic theology in failing to maintain the sharp distinction of χάρις as God's unmerited favor and grace as a gift of God (*donum gratiae*) has introduced confusion into the article of justification by faith. All who teach grace in the sense of infused grace as either the sole or a contributing cause of justification succumb to work-righteousness.⁶² The pernicious mingling of grace and the gifts of grace, set forth in the *Decisions of the Council of Trent*, which has anathematized the definition of justifying grace as gratuitous *Dei favor*, violates the teaching of Paul that places faith in opposition to works.

III. THE DOCTRINES ASSOCIATED WITH ΧΑΡΙΣ IN THE PAULINE LETTERS

A study of the context in which Paul employs χάρις will reveal that this word appears in connection with such important doctrines of the Christian religion as revelation, anthropology, Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology.

A. Revelation

Χάρις is related to revelation by Paul. It is Paul's constant contention that the message he proclaimed was not the product of his own thinking and philosophizing but was made known to him by revelation of Jesus Christ. In Eph. 3:2-8 the apostle deals with the relationship between grace and divine revelation. In the words of James Moffatt's translation:

For surely you have heard how the grace of God which was vouchsafed me in your interests has ordered it, how the divine secret was disclosed to me by a revelation (if you read what I have already written briefly about this, you can understand my insight into that secret of Christ which was not disclosed to the sons of

⁶² John Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1934), p. 244.

men in other generations as it has now been revealed to His sacred apostles and prophets by the Spirit), namely, that in Christ Jesus the Gentiles are co-heirs, companions, and co-partners in the Promise. Such is the gospel which I was called to serve by the endowment of God's grace which was vouchsafed me.⁶³

In this passage Paul links the apostolic message with the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit has revealed truths to men of other generations as well as to the apostles, of whom Paul considers himself one. It was due to a manifestation of God's grace that this honor was bestowed upon Paul to be the channel of further revelation.

In verse 2 of this passage there occur the words: "If so be that ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given unto me toward you." According to J. Armitage Robinson (pp. 75—76), the phrase "the grace of God which was given unto me" is a favorite phrase that does not refer to a spiritual endowment for Paul's own personal life but rather to the Gospel of God's mercy to the Gentile world. Thus in describing his visit to the Jerusalem apostles St. Paul says: "When they saw that I had been entrusted with the Gospel of the Uncircumcision . . . and when they knew the grace which was given unto me . . . they gave the right hands of fellowship to me and Barnabas, that we should go unto the Gentiles and they unto the Circumcision" (Gal. 2:7-9). In Col. 1:25 we read: "According to the dispensation of God which was given me for you."

B. *Anthropology*

In Paul's teaching on *χάρις* he also touches upon anthropology. In Romans 5 the apostle enunciates the doctrine of original sin, rejected by many theologians in the past and in the present.⁶⁴ Clearly Paul states that by one man, Adam, sin entered into the world and death by sin. All men inherit sin and so become subject to death. But Jesus, the second Adam, has undone the harm of the first Adam. And through the grace of God there has come redemption from sin and its curse, death. To quote Paul again:

⁶³ *The Bible: A New Translation* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1922), p. 242.

⁶⁴ Shelton Smith, *Changing Conceptions of Original Sin* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), pp. 164—197.

"But the free gift is not like the transgression; for if through the transgression of that one man the rest of men died, much more did the grace of God, and the gift given in His grace in the one man Jesus Christ, overflow unto the rest of men" (Rom. 5:15).⁶⁵

"For if through the transgression of one, death reigned as king through the one, much more shall those who receive the overflowing grace and the gift of righteousness reign as kings in life through One, through Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:17. *Ibid.*, p. 410). Sin and grace are in antithesis. "But where sin abounded, grace superabounded; in order that as sin has ruled as king in death, so also grace might rule as king in righteousness which issues in eternal life, through Christ, our Lord — ours!" (Rom. 5:20b, 21. *Ibid.*, p. 410)

C. Christology

Grace is related to the great and vital Christological facts of the incarnation, the suffering, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the second coming of Christ. It was grace that furnished the Savior. Every stage in the earthly life of Christ from His conception to His ascension is marked by grace. It was due to grace that a lowly position and a life of want were allotted to the Redeemer (2 Cor. 8:9). In Titus 2:11-14 *χαρις* is connected with the two comings of Christ, His incarnation in the flesh and His return at the end of time, termed "epiphanies" by Paul. Lenski (*ad loc.*) renders this passage thus: "For there has appeared the grace of God, saving for all men, educating us, that after denying (once for all) the ungodliness and the worldly lusts we live sobermindedly and righteously and godly in this present eon, (ever) expecting the blessed hope and epiphany of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, He who gave Himself for us, so as to ransom us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for Himself a people select, zealous for excellent works." The first epiphany of God's grace in the incarnation was designed to achieve the ransoming of lost mankind. In Rom. 3:24-26 Paul states it this way: "All have sinned, all come short of the glory of God, but they are justified for nothing by his grace through the ransom provided in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as

⁶⁵ Helen Barrett Montgomery, *The New Testament in Modern English* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1924), p. 410.

the means of propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith." (Moffatt's Bible translation, p. 190)

The resurrection of Christ is brought into close relationship with χάρις in Rom. 4:25—5:2, where justification, peace with God, and access to God are depicted as fruits of the resurrection of Christ. Those who enjoy these spiritual fruits are said to "stand in grace."

In 2 Tim. 2:1 he speaks of ἡ χάρις ἡ ἐν Χριστῷ, whence it becomes ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Χριστοῦ as in a number of Pauline greetings.

D. Soteriology

By soteriology we mean the application of the salvation earned by Christ to the heart of the individual. In the writings of Paul the basic idea of χάρις is the loving-kindness, favor, and good will of God as it is made manifest to the sinner.

The following distinguishing epithets are suggested by Paul's references to grace: (1) *supernaturalis*: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you" (1 Cor. 16:23; cf. Titus 2:11); (2) *medicinalis*: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9); (3) *salutaris*: "The grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men" (Titus 2:11); (4) *forensis*: "justified by His grace" (Titus 3:5); (5) *seria*: "Receive not the grace in vain" (2 Cor. 6:1); (6) *sufficiens*: "Where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly" (Rom. 5:20); (7) *libera*: "By grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8); (8) *resistibilis*: "Receive not the grace of God in vain" (2 Cor. 6:1).⁶⁶

For both the individual Christian and the church the beginning of the plan of salvation is traced back to God's eternal gracious election. According to Paul, the key word in the doctrine of election is grace. Thus the apostle writes to his fellow laborer: "It is he who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our deeds but according to his own purpose and grace, given to us in Christ Jesus ages ago but now manifested by the appearance of our Savior Christ Jesus," 2 Tim. 1:9, 10 (Ballantine, p. 359).

⁶⁶ Suggested by Conrad Emil Lindberg, *Christian Dogmatics*, trans. C. E. Hoffsten (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1928), p. 297.

In the great Trinitarian doxology that opens Ephesians, Paul pens a hymn of praise to God's fathomless grace. In it grace and predestination are brought into relationship. "Even as He elected us in Him, before the world's foundation, to be holy and blemishless before Him in love, having predestinated us to adoption through Jesus Christ for Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, for the glory-praise of His grace which He graciously granted us in the Beloved One" (Lenski, ad loc.). According to Paul, the contemplated purpose of the divine counsel of election or selection is that God's grace, freely bestowed in the Beloved One, should be gloriously manifested and eternally praised. In the election passages cited Paul attributes the divine election as well as its carrying out solely to the grace of God, which is in no wise conditioned by the works of men or anything meritorious in them. Thus the works of the sinner do not enter into the economy of God whereby He confers salvation. Paul declares: "Just so at the present moment there is left a faithful 'remnant,' chosen beforehand by God's good grace. But if their position is the result of grace, it is not a reward for any work that they have done. Otherwise a gift would be no longer a gift." (Rom. 11:5, 6)⁶⁷

The spiritual blessings flowing from the election of grace—conversion, justification, or forgiveness of sins—are all ascribed to grace. *Χάρις* plays an important part in Paul's conception of man's conversion. Thus in the Ephesian epistle he writes: "But God, who is so rich in mercy on account of the great love He has for us, has made us, though dead because of our shortcomings, live again in fellowship with Christ—it is by His unmerited favor [*χάρις*] that you have been saved," Eph. 2:4, 5.⁶⁸

Grace is intimately bound up with the doctrine of justification by faith on which Paul has much to say in Romans and Galatians. According to him, the believer is justified by faith alone, apart from the deeds of the Law. There is a definite relationship between *χάρις* and faith, for Paul clearly asserts in Rom. 4:16: "For this

⁶⁷ J. W. C. Wand, *The New Testament Letters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944), p. 93.

⁶⁸ Charles B. Williams, *The New Testament: A Translation in the Language of the People* (Chicago: The Moody Press, 1949), p. 426.

reason it is a matter of faith, so that the promise may be made sure as a matter of grace to all his descendants" (Verkuyl, p. 383). In another place Paul teaches: "They are now being justified by His grace through the deliverance that is in Christ Jesus," Rom. 3:24. (Montgomery, p. 406.) "I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification were through the Law, then Christ died to no purpose" (Gal. 2:21, RSV).

Justification takes place because the sins of men are forgiven out of grace. "In Him and through His blood we enjoy redemption, the forgiveness of our trespasses, to the measure of the wealth of His grace, which He poured out on us with the gift of the greatest wisdom and insight," Eph. 1:7. (Verkuyl, p. 486)

Grace is also connected with what Lutheran theologians call the "means of grace." Baptism and grace are brought into intimate relationship in the following Pauline passage: "He saved us, not because of any deeds that we had done in righteousness, but because of His own pity for us. He saved us by that washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit which He poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour; in order that being justified by His grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life," Titus 3:5-7 (Montgomery, p. 586). Salvation is depicted by Paul as transmitted through the washing of regeneration, or Holy Baptism. God saved us by Baptism, which is called a bath of renewing and regeneration, in both of which the Holy Ghost is the Actor. That is the reason God could employ Baptism as a means (*διὰ*) and why Baptism is not merely a picture or a symbol but a true means of grace.

By receiving the grace of God through faith, which is wrought in us through Baptism, Christians enter into the proper relationship to God once more, into that of sons. "The result is that we are acquitted by His grace, and can look forward to inheriting Life for evermore."⁶⁰ Thus the glorification is ultimately the result of God's grace.

There are a number of aspects of sanctification (in the narrow sense) ascribed to grace. Christian service flows directly from God's

⁶⁰ J. B. Phillips, *Letters to Young Churches* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1948), p. 155.

grace. Thus Paul claims that it was solely because of God's grace that he labored so long and effectively in a ministry extending over many years. "I labored more abundantly than all the rest, yet not I but the grace of God that is with me." Paul further attributes his own blameless walk in Corinth and his pure and holy motives for evangelization as solely due to the grace of God (2 Cor. 1:12). In Titus 2:11-14 grace is depicted as a force that works in Christians, illuminating their intellects, warming their hearts, and strengthening their wills. This wondrous grace, intended to save all men, educates redeemed humanity to deny ungodliness and live a God-pleasing life of sensible self-mastery and integrity.

E. Ecclesiology

Paul relates χάρις to ecclesiology. In Ephesians, Paul's "church epistle," the office of the apostleship and the work of the ministry are connected with χάρις. "It is of this gospel I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God, bestowed on me by the energy of His power," Eph. 3:7 (Montgomery, p. 516). What are his gifts? "And His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ." (V. 11, RSV)

In a magnificent passage (Eph. 4:8-13) Paul writes:

To me, who am utterly inferior to all the Brethren, was this gift granted, to proclaim to the Pagans the inexhaustible wealth of Christ, and to make clear to them what has been kept secret for so long ages by the Divine Creator of the universe, namely, the precise manner in which His plan is to be worked out. The purpose of the concealment was that now at last through the instrumentality of the Church even the angelic Rulers and Powers in the heavenly sphere might learn fresh lessons in the intricate pattern of the Divine Wisdom revealed in the plan of the ages, which He had made in Christ Jesus, our Lord. It is as we have faith in Him that we can play our own part in this plan with boldness and confidence. (Wand, pp. 116, 117)

Here the apostle has interwoven time and eternity, heaven and earth, the Creator and the work of grace by means of the Gospel, faith and Christ. They are centered in the mystery of the *una sancta*,

in which the Gentile believers and the believing Jews should all be embraced.

F. *Eschatology*

The belief in the second coming of Christ is an essential in the Pauline theology. At the return of Christ the glory of the Lord will be revealed. "Through Him also we have had our access into this grace in which we have taken our stand, and are exulting in the hope of the glory of God," Rom. 5:2, 3 (Montgomery, p. 409). This hope, made possible by God's χάρις, has great value for the Christian life, because it comforts the believer in the day of tribulation and motivates him to a life rich in good works. (2 Thess. 2:16, 17)

From our study it thus becomes evident that without the grace of God there would not have been a redemption by Jesus Christ. Without grace there could be no Gospel. Baier in his *Dogmatics* states it well: "Among the sources and causes of the salvation of men which revealed theology finds as the subjects of its concern, the grace of God holds first place."⁷⁰

The Pauline conception that grace is *favor Dei propter Christum* and that all the gifts of the Christian life are the result of it, is the hub around which all other Christian truths revolve, for they are either presuppositions or consequences of it. The church that would remain loyal to the revelation of God must guard the distinctive meaning of χάρις. When individuals and church bodies drifted from the truth of divine revelation, it always was because Paul's teachings about universal grace and *sola gratia* were obscured. Concerning this development Theodore Hoyer asserts:

So the Jews in the day of Christ; so the Judaistic teachers in Apostolic times; so the Roman Papacy; and so it is today. The Church, therefore, which would cling steadfastly to the revelation of God, must guard this doctrine with particular care. Salvation by grace without works, that was the center of the Reformation.⁷¹
Seward, Nebr.

⁷⁰ John William Baier, *Compendium theologiae positivae*, Pars tertia, cap. I, sec. 1, ed. Carl Ferdinand William Walther, III (St. Louis: Officina Synodi Missouriensis Lutheranae, 1879), 3.

⁷¹ *The Abiding Word*, ed. Theodore Laetsch (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), II, p. 234.