

John 1:3,16-17 God's Grace in Creation and in Redemption

John's gospel is good to give to new Christians. It is shallow enough for a little child to paddle in, but deep enough for an elephant to swim in (NB not original!) Whoever we are it is a gospel we can read and study. We study the Scripture, *so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work* (2Timothy 3:17). We also study the Scriptures because, *Also know that in the last days there shall be perilous times* (1Timothy 3:1). We are seeing two powerful trends in the world today, both of which are moving Western society away from the Judeo-Christian values it was built upon. The first is a return to the pan-sexuality of ancient Rome, and the politics of sexuality, which is exerting control in the court room, in education and in religion. The second is a rise of Gnosticism within the church, including evangelical churches, which together with the Catholic Church is heading towards a one world religion. Gnosticism essentially puts experience before the Scriptures. This is why more than ever Christians need to study the Scriptures, and take heed to the call of the Reformation, Sola Scriptura. And we need to walk every day with Jesus.

The prologue in John 1 can be divided into two halves: 1) God's Word in Creation (1:1-11); 2) God's Word (Jesus Christ) in Redemption (1:12-18). The Word who was actively involved in Creation is now actively involved in Redemption. I want to talk this morning about God's grace:

1. God's grace in Creation – 1:3 *All things were made through Him*
2. God's grace in Redemption – 1:17 *grace and truth came through Him (Jesus Christ)*

Grace can be described as getting to blessing we do not deserve; it is God's underserved favour to sinners. A good acronym for GRACE is: God's Riches At Christ's Expense. Grace is the means by which God puts sinners right with himself: *all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus* (Romans 3:24). But grace is wider than redemption, it also includes creation.

1. God's Grace in Creation – common grace

This week in *Our Daily Bread* said: *A few winters ago, my hometown experienced an unusually long blast of bone chilling temperatures that finally gave way to the warmer weather of spring. For two weeks straight, the outside thermometer dipped to well below the zeros degree mark. On one particular bitter cold morning, the sound of chirping birds broke the silence of the night. Dozens, of not hundreds, sang their hearts out. If I didn't know any better, I could have sworn the little creatures were crying out to their Creator to please warm things up! Bird experts tell us that the multitude of birdsongs we hear during the late winter mornings are mostly male birds, attempting to attract mates and claim their territories. Their chirping reminded me that God fine-tuned creation to sustain life and make it flourish, because He is a God of life. Psalm 104 marvels at God's flourishing earth. V12 says, The birds of the sky nest by the waters; they sing among the branches. From singing and nesting birds to a vast ocean, teeming with creatures beyond number (v25), we see reasons to praise our Creator for the lengths he has gone to ensure that all life thrives.*

This is a reflection on the grace of God in Creation, which includes human beings, as Jesus said: *He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.* That's grace. There was a news item this week about a team of scientists who have been researching animal and plant life under the Arctic ice. They are very concerned that they could be destroyed by human beings (e.g. drilling for oil). The point is that our Universe is finely tuned. This is called the Goldilocks Principle, because the conditions on earth are 'just right' for life. Scientists call it the Anthropic Principle. If the Earth was nearer to the Sun, we would burn up; if it was further

away we would all freeze; but it is just right. If the colour of the Sun were redder or bluer, photosynthesis by which plants make their food would be impossible, but it is just right. The balance of forces between atoms is just right: if it were greater everything would collapse, if it were smaller everything would fly apart.

How can the Anthropic principle be explained? Some scientists call it the Anthropic Coincidence: *If we didn't live in a Universe capable of supporting life, we wouldn't be here to think about it, so we might as well not ask why!* Yet people who believe in God, including many scientists, see this as evidence of a Creator God, who has created conditions in His Universe just right for life. We should be thankful to God for all the good things he has provided: *O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endures for ever* (Psalm 136:1).

2. God's Grace in Redemption – special grace

Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17). God saves us as we turn from our sins in repentance and put of faith in Jesus who loved us and died on the cross, taking all our sins, and rising again from the dead. In the previous verse, John says, *For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses* (John 1:16-17a). Stop there! Try and put yourself in John's shoes. We can imagine John thinking about Israel's history, which we read about in the Law (Torah), such as the great deliverance from Egypt in the Exodus; God's provision in the wilderness (water, bread, meat); victory in battle such as against the Amalekites, when Moses lifted his staff, and the victory at Jericho. John was thinking of grace on top of grace, the way God had preserved and saved His people all the way through history, even when they fell into idolatry. God never gave up on them.

But modern Christians have a problem with John 1:17. Starting in the early church, and heightened during the Reformation, Law and grace have been seen as opposites. (The KJV even adds the word *but* in John 1:17, though it is not in the Greek; modern translations have mostly dropped it.) The Old Testament is "Law", and is dangerous, and is to be avoided. Now Jesus has come, we are under "grace". Phew! An Evangelical pastor is typical in commenting on this verse, *One of the most dangerous things for a person is to take the Law and make it the pattern of their lives, because it just crushes you, or it makes you proud and self-righteous, and that's even uglier.* But this, in my view, reflects a great misunderstanding.

What did God say to Joshua? *This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success* (Joshua 1:8 cf Psalm 1). Let's get this right: the Law was given as an act of grace to guide men and women to the way of forgiveness, relationship with God, and most importantly to point them to the Messiah (Romans 10:4). David said, *Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long* (Psalm 119:97). Why did he love it? No doubt for many reasons. But I believe mostly because it pointed to Messiah. Peter said, *Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories* (1Peter 1:10-11). So David could prophecy concerning the resurrection of Christ, *For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption* (Psalm 16:10). John says, *the law was given through Moses*, but now grace has reached its climax in the coming of Jesus Christ, who is *full of grace and truth* (John 1:14). Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised again on the third day according to the Scriptures (1Corinthians 15:3-4). Hallelujah!