

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Theology Proper, Session 16, Communicable Attributes, Part 3, God is Gracious and Merciful

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This is Dr. Robert Peterson in his teaching on theology proper or God. This is session 16, Communicable Attributes, Part 3. God is Gracious and Merciful.

We continue our study of the doctrine of God. We're studying the attributes of God, specifically the communicable ones. We have said God is personal, sovereign, wise, truthful, faithful, holy, righteous, and loving.

Now God is gracious, merciful, good, or generous. God is gracious. By gracious we mean that God has deep compassion for all, especially his own people, and gives them undeserved favor, and thus the opposite of what they deserve.

He gives them the knowledge of him and eternal life. God's identity includes grace. The definitive Old Testament passage defining the name or character of God, Exodus 34:6 says, quote, the Lord is a compassionate and gracious God, Exodus 34 6. God's love, grace, and mercy are often linked and treated almost synonymously.

That's what I found when I studied the places that taught God is loving, gracious, merciful, good, and patient, or long-suffering. The standard definitions of those things, for example, mercy means God withholds his judgment. Well, a few times it does, but more often it is simply a synonym, and the Old Testament reminds me of Paul.

I guess I've got that backward. Paul reminds me of the Old Testament, where words are piled up for emphasis rather than for sharp distinctions. I'm not saying they're identical these terms, but there's a great overlap between God's love, grace, mercy, goodness, and generosity.

So, in Ephesians 2:4 through 10, God is loving, gracious, merciful, and kind. Likewise, Titus 3:3 through 8 combines these words. I should read one and not just make it up.

Titus 3:3 through 8, I will emphasize these. I'll call them the love language. In these verses, we ourselves are once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that,

being justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

God's goodness, loving-kindness, mercy, are they identical? I'm not saying they're identical, but they overlap and their meanings are similar rather than clearly distinct. Images of God that pertain to his love being gracious are father of orphans and widows, champion, Psalm 68 5. God is father of the fatherless and protector of widows, is God in his holy habitation, protector or champion of widows. Amazing.

Husband, Hosea 3:1. As Hosea is the husband of unfaithful Gomer, so the Lord is the husband of his unfaithful people Israel. And parent, Hosea 11. I think I have never read that, and I keep referring to it.

So, Hosea 11. When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt, I called my son. It's talking about the Exodus.

The more they were called, the more they went away. They kept sacrificing for the Baals and burning offerings to idols. Yet, it was I who taught Ephraim to walk.

I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them. What a beautiful picture of a parent teaching a little one to walk by holding his arms. I led them with cords of kindness, with bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws.

And I bent down to them and fed them. The word grace isn't used, but the concept is plainly there in this beautiful language of parent and child. God's grace shines as Ezra rejoices that God's grace preserves, quote, a remnant for the Jews, implied.

Ezra 9:8. Ezra is thankful that God has, quote, extended grace to them in the presence of the Persian kings, giving them new life so that they can rebuild the house of our God and repair its ruins. Ezra 9:9. The psalmist, too, delights in the God of grace. Psalm 84:10 and 11.

Better a day in your courts than a thousand anywhere else. For, quote, the Lord grants favor and honor. Psalm 84:10 and 11.

Grace characterizes the Trinity. The Father is the God of all grace. First Peter 5:10. The Son is full of grace and truth.

John 1:14. And the Spirit is the Spirit of grace. Hebrews 10:29. The Father is the God of all grace. 1 Peter 5:10. The Son, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14. The Spirit is, his name is modified. He's called the Spirit of grace. Hebrews 10:29. The Bible links Jesus and grace, and we are not surprised.

Quote, God's grace was on him as a boy. Luke 2:40. His humility in becoming a man shows grace. 2 Corinthians 8:9. In the first instance, as a boy, it probably showed God's favor, certainly not saving grace.

Jesus didn't need saving grace. But in becoming a man, he's an example of grace. 2 Corinthians 8:9. Of the grace needed for the Corinthians to follow through on their desire to give to the poor saints in Jerusalem.

And Jesus makes atonement by God's grace. Hebrews 2:9. Peter teaches that Jews and Gentiles, quote, are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus. Acts 15:14. Indeed, the apostles confess that they all, quote, received grace upon grace from his, Jesus, fullness.

John 1:16. Also, at the start and end of his letters, Paul often prays that the Father and the Son would grant readers grace. Let's just do Romans. Romans 1:7. To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 16:20. Almost at the very end of the epistle, the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. It is the same.

We will not turn, but it is the same for 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 1:3. 1 Corinthians 16:23. Paul often prays that the Father and the Son would grant readers grace. We just, we make distinctions between God's grace in the case of praying for Christian readers.

I don't think it's initial saving grace, but rather what we call enabling grace or God's powerful love to live the Christian life. God is gracious to unbelievers. The display of his grace in the New Testament even eclipses that in the Old Testament as the prophets foretell.

1 Peter 1:10-11. Concerning this salvation, Peter writes, 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. Old Testament prophets prophesied of the grace that would come to believers when the Messiah has come. Salvation is not just for Israel but also for the world.

Titus 2:11. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people. They're not automatically saved, but it is God's will to save, and he wants the gospel to be proclaimed to all. The message of salvation in Jesus is so concerned with grace that it is called, Acts 20:24, the gospel of God's grace, Paul calls it.

The gospel of God's grace. The gospel is so grace-centered. Acts 20:24. And it's also called the message of his grace.

Acts 14:3. The word of his grace. Acts 20:23. Sorry, 20:32. Gospel of God's grace. Acts 20:24. Message of his grace.

14:3. Word of his grace. Acts 20:32. Grace reaches the unlikely, including Paul, a chief foe of the early church. 1 Timothy 1:13 and 14.

I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed from me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. God saves us by giving us his grace. In Christ Jesus, I'm quoting, before time began.

2 Timothy 1:9. Peter, a Jewish believer, learns that Gentiles are saved in the same way as Jews. Acts 15:11. "by grace through faith." Ephesians 2:8. God's grace produces salvation, viewed from many angles, including our new birth.

Ephesians 2:4 and 5. Our calling. Galatians 1:15, 16. Justification. Romans 3:24. And forgiveness.

Ephesians 1:7. In all those places, the word grace is used. New birth. Ephesians 2:4 and 5. Calling.

Galatians 1:15-16. Justification. Romans 3:24. Forgiveness. Ephesians 1:7. God's grace drives the Christian life.

We're not only saved by grace once and for all, we live by grace through faith. We must approach the throne of grace with boldness to receive mercy and grace to help us. Hebrews 4:16. We need grace to live the Christian life.

But we come humbly for, quote, God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. James 4:6. 1 Peter 5:5. Grace is God's unmerited love and his power. 2 Timothy 2:1. And it's thereby called enabling grace.

So, theologians, somewhat artificially, distinguish initial saving grace from enabling grace. And yet they're different. The one emphasizes God's love, and the other emphasizes his power.

The former is not without power, and the latter is not without love. But there's a distinct emphasis. Saving grace is his love when we deserve his wrath.

Enabling grace is not just saving grace. It is the grace that enables God's people to live for him. So, Paul could say God's grace makes him what he is, saving grace, and is effective through him, enabling grace.

By it, he works harder than the other apostles. 1 Corinthians 15:10. I worked harder than all of them. Oh, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me, he says.

And he learns a hard lesson. 2 Corinthians 12:9. God's grace is sufficient for me, for his power is made perfect in weakness. 2 Corinthians 12:9. God's grace is active and fruitful.

As Adam's sin results in humankind dying, so grace overflowed to the many by the grace of Christ. Galatians 5:15. In Galatians 5:20. When sin multiplied, grace multiplied even more. God's grace triumphs over sin, and as a result, so do we.

Romans 5:21. Grace produces holiness, for our union with Christ's death breaks sin's sway over us, and our union with his resurrection produces a new way of life. Romans 6:1-4. The Puritan said we get the whole Christ. The meaning is sufficient for justification and sufficient for progressive sanctification.

The Holy Spirit dispenses spiritual gifts to us in grace. Romans 12:6. And we must use them, quote, to serve others as good stewards of God's varied grace. 1 Peter 4:10. I love that passage.

God's grace is viewed as manifold. It not only saves, it equips. And the spiritual gifts we have are forms of God's active grace.

In the context, the gift of giving, which Christians are to engage in without grumbling, and the gift of speaking the word of God as if it were the oracles of God, which it is. I am chagrined somewhat that newer translations took out the word oracles; the ESV put it back in. What is it saying? Preachers must preach the word of God as it is, in truth, the oracles of God.

The meaning is as if they were handling the very words of the living God, which we are. God's grace is reflected in believers' lives. Titus 2:11-15. Which includes using gracious words that build up others, Ephesians 4:29-32. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Ephesians 4:31. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, as God in Christ forgave you.

If the golden rule was due unto others as you would have them do unto you, Ephesians 4:32 is sometimes called the platinum rule. Forgive each other as Christ, in Christ God forgave you. God's grace pertains to the past, to the present, and to the future, although we too often consign it only to the past.

Ephesians 2:8. You have been saved by grace through faith, and that salvation not of yourselves, it's a gift of God, not a result of works that no one may boast. God's grace does pertain to the past, it pertains to the present, as we quoted before, Hebrews 4:16. Since then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, something no Old Testament high priest ever did. Jesus, the Son of God, I love it.

Jesus is his human name. Son of God is a divine title in Hebrews. In other words, the human divine Christ.

Since then, we have a great high priest who's passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses. The meaning is, we do have a high priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, with this major qualification, yet without sin.

Here comes the present grace verse. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Grace is past.

We receive grace now from the throne of grace to live for God. And yes, grace is future.

I don't know this verse, but I know this verse. 1 Peter 1, verse 13, therefore preparing your minds for action and being sober minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. We haven't seen anything yet.

We have grace in the past that put us right with God. God gives us enabling grace that we might live for him. Such an outpouring of God's grace awaits at the revelation, the return of Christ.

We cannot even begin to take it in. I've sometimes heard believers expressing with honesty their fear of the second coming. This has concerned me, but I understand.

First John speaks of not being ashamed at him at his coming. Will I be ashamed? Will I have to confess some sins when I see him again? I use a human comparison. Think of the human person older than you who loves you better than anyone.

Okay, there's that relationship. They're older. You esteem them highly.

You are overwhelmed with their love and acceptance of you. What would you do if in your day it came to your knowledge that you had wronged them in a way you didn't realize? Would you run away from them? No, you wouldn't. You'd want to get immediately to a phone, send them an email, a text in some way, communicate to them.

Why? You know that they love you dearly. Your relationship is solid. You want to make it right.

Well, we cannot imagine the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and if it were true that we needed to confess certain things, we would run to him even more than to the human being, our senior human being who loves us the most. Grace is past, present, and future. In other words, it is all in all.

We're surrounded by grace. We're smothered in a good sense by grace. Christ's goal is for the church to be so that in the coming ages, the Father's goal is that he might display the immeasurable riches of his grace through his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:7. The Lord, through his apostle Peter, urges us to set, "our hope completely on the grace to be brought at the revelation of Jesus Christ." 1 Timothy 1:13. There's that future grace idea again.

Our God is merciful. By merciful, we mean God sees our affliction and moves to relieve it. That's what I found was the more common meaning than withholding judgment we deserve.

That's biblical, and sometimes mercy expresses that, but more commonly, it means God sees our affliction and he is moved by it, and he moves to relieve our affliction. God's qualities of love, grace, mercy, goodness, and patience overlap. Mercy is an expression of God's love and goodness.

God shows mercy when he sees the misery. Exodus 3:7, of his people in Egyptian bondage. He rescues them through his servant Moses and brings them to the promised land.

An image of God pertaining to his mercy is husband. You say, wait a minute, husband has done double and triple duty with the attributes of God. Amen and amen.

Hosea 2:14 to 23. Hosea 11:9 to 11. Haven't read enough from Hosea.

Hosea 2:14 and following. Therefore, behold, I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her. There, I will give her her vineyards and make the valley of Achor, a door of hope.

And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. And in that day declares the Lord, you will call me my husband, and no longer will you call me my bale. For I will remove the names of bales from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more.

And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. Then, I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land. And I will make you lie down in safety.

And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and injustice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness.

And you shall know the Lord. I will have mercy on no mercy, skipping down. I will say to not my people, you are my people.

And he shall say, you are my God. God is merciful. At times, God displays mercy, but by withholding deserved judgment.

This is partially true. As far as the meaning of mercy goes, God certainly does that. And sometimes it means mercy, just not all the time or even usually.

Psalms 103:10, God has not dealt with us as our sins deserve or repaid us according to our iniquities. Technically, the word isn't used, mercy, but the idea is surely there. It's a biblical idea.

Sometimes mercy is only given upon repentance. Deuteronomy 10:17. At other times, God's mercy is the motive for repentance. Joel 2:13. After Mary learned she will give birth to the Messiah, she sings of God, God, quote, his mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear him.

Luke 1:50. God's mercy, evident in the Old Testament, overflows in the New Testament. This is especially true of Jesus, who has compassion for the crowds, quote, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Matthew 9:36. Jesus shows abundant mercy to the afflicted.

In duress, they call out to him as son of David, Messiah. And repeatedly in mercy, he heals the blind. Matthew 9:27-29. Luke 18:35-43. And cast out demons.

Matthew 15:22-28. Matthew 17:15-18. Mark 5:1-20. Heals the blind. Matthew 9:27-29. Luke 18:35-43. Cast out demons. Matthew 15:22-28. 17:15-18. Mark 5:1-20. Supremely, God's mercy brings salvation.

God freely gives it, as Moses states. Exodus 33:19. Quoted in Romans 9. Romans 9. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. Paul later cites Moses to show that salvation, quote, does not depend on human will or effort, but on God who shows mercy.

Romans 9:16. God plans to make known the riches of his glory, quote, on objects of mercy that he prepared beforehand for glory, close quote. Jewish and Gentile believers. Romans 9:23-24. Paul joins mercy, love, and grace in Ephesians 2:4-5. Quote, but God, who is rich in mercy because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses.

You are saved by grace. Mercy, love, grace. Identical? No.

Correlative? Yes. They are inseparably related to one another, and they have as much the effect of piling up words for emphasis as they are to have discrete nuances of meaning. God's mercy excludes human effort to save.

God saved us, quoting Titus 3:5, not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy through the washing of regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Titus 3:5. God's mercy elicits praise. 1 Peter 1:3-4. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Because we have received God's mercy, and because we always stand in need of mercy, we freely and generously give it to others. Matthew 6:9-13. Matthew 18:21-35. The great parable showing the guy who was forgiven a huge amount by God going out and shaking down his fellow Israelite who owed him a little tiny bit.

The Lord was not pleased. No, Christians are experts in forgiveness and mercy, showing mercy because they have been forgiven, and to them God has been merciful. Ephesians 4:32. The platinum rule forgiving each other as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Indeed, Jesus asserts that his people are marked by mercy. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Matthew 5:7. In our next lecture, we will hope to conclude God's patience or long, oh, God's goodness, excuse me, or generosity.

His patience or longsuffering and the fact that God is glorious, thereby completing our study of the communicable attributes of God, upon which we will then talk about God's works.

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