

The Reign of Grace

By [Abraham Booth](#)

THE gospel of Reigning Grace, being a doctrine truly divine, has ever been the object of the world's contempt. It was of old a stumbling-block to the self-righteous Jew, and foolishness to the philosophic Greek. Paul, who was a resolute assertor of the honours of grace, and indefatigable in preaching Christ, found it so by repeated experience; and that not only among the illiterate and profane, but also among the learned and the devout. Nay, he had frequent occasion to observe, that the religious devotees of his age were the first in opposing the doctrine he preached, and the most hardened enemies against the truth of God. The polite, the learned, the religious, were all agreed to load both his character and his doctrine with the foulest reproaches. Nor was this treatment peculiar to Paul, but common to all his contemporaries, who espoused the same glorious cause, and laboured in the same beneficent work. The doctrine they preached was charged with licentiousness. Their enemies boldly affirmed that they said; *Let us do evil that good may come*. Thus were their character and their labours impeached: that, as hateful to God; these, as destructive to man.

But what was the ground of this impious charge! Were they loose in their morals, or scandalous in their lives. No such thing. Had they not as much regard for practical religion and true morality as any of their objectors! More, far more than they all. Did they never mention good works as necessary to answer any valuable end in the Christian life? They often pressed the performance of them, as absolutely necessary to answer various important purposes, both in the sight of God and man. What then could be the reason of' so hateful a charge? Because their doctrine was not in the least adapted to, gratify the pride of man. They taught, that without the atonement made on the cross, and the grace revealed in redeeming blood, the state of the best men would have been absolutely desperate, desperate as that of the devils, and of those already damned. And as the apostles were free to declare, that the state of the most respectable part & mankind was evil, dreadfully evil, evil as to those things, for the sake of which they most highly esteemed themselves; so they boldly preached a perfect Saviour, and s finished salvation, to the most worthless and vile.

These primitive teachers and infallible guides were not in the least acquainted with those terms and conditions, prerequisites and qualifications, the performing and attaining of which are, by many, accounted so necessary to acceptance with God. They knew but of' one way in which a sinner might be accepted of God, and justified before him; and that was entirely of grace, through the perfect work of Christ alone. The way of justification which they taught is absolutely pure and

unmixed. In their doctrine, on this important subject, grace does not only appear; it shines, reigns, triumphs: it is the *only* thing. There is not discernible in it the least tincture of those notions which foster pride, or cherish self-esteem. All those fine distinctions, invented by the proud philosopher, or the self-righteous moralist, which tend in any degree to support the opinion of human worthiness, and to obscure our views of divine grace, are by them entirely set aside, and totally annihilated. The most shining deeds and valuable qualities that can be found among men, though highly useful and truly excellent, when set in their proper places, and referred to suitable ends, are, as to the grand article of justification treated as nonentities. In this respect, the most zealous professor, with all his laboured performances, stands on a level with the most profane. The apostolic truth addressing an to whom it comes, as guilty, condemned, perishing wretches, leaves no room for preference or boasting in any; that so the whole glory of our salvation may be secured to that grace which is infinitely rich and absolutely free.

At this, the devout Pharisee and the decent moralist are highly offended. Such doctrines being advanced, they think it incumbent upon them to stand up in defence of what they call an holy life: and to support the sinking credit of good works, as having a considerable efficacy in procuring our acceptance with God. This many persons frequently do, much more by talking about their necessity, than by performing them. Now they think it their duty to rail at the preacher as an avowed enemy to holiness; nor will they spare to give him the honourable title of, *A friend of publicans and sinners*. Now innumerable slanders are cast on the doctrine of grace, as being licentious; and on the ministers of it, as opening the floodgates of all iniquity. For they suppose that every thing bad may be justly expected from those who openly disavow all dependence on their own duties; and whose hope of eternal happiness arises, not from services which they perform, but from grace which the gospel reveals, not from the worth which they possess, but from the work which Christ has wrought. Thus they despise the gospel under the fair pretence of a more than common concern for the interests of holiness.

Nor is this the only offence which the gospel gives. For as it is entirely inconsistent with the natural notions of men concerning acceptance with God, and contrary to every scheme of salvation which human reason suggests; as it will admit of no copartner in relieving a distressed conscience, or in bringing deliverance to a guilty soul, but leaves every one that slights it and seeks for assistance from any other quarter, to perish under an everlasting curse; so the pride of the self-sufficient kindles into resentment against it, as a most uncharitable doctrine and quite unsociable. Nor can the faithful dispensers of sacred truth fail to share in the honour of these reproaches. For while they dare to affirm that this gospel, so hateful to the sons of pride, exhibits the only way of a sinner's access to his offended Sovereign; and that all who oppose it, and all who embrace its counterfeit, are left in the hands of divine justice without a Mediator; they are sure to be accounted persons of contracted minds, and very far from a liberal way of thinking. They are considered as the dupes of bigotry,

and little better than the enemies of mankind. He, indeed, who pretends to be a friend to revealed truth, but is cool and indifferent to its honour and interest; whose extensive charity is such, that he can allow those who widely differ from him in the capital articles of the Christian faith, to be safe in their own way; may enjoy his peculiar sentiments without much fear of disturbance. But though such conduct may be applauded, under a false notion of Christian candour, and of a catholic spirit; though it may be the way to maintain a friendly intercourse among multitudes whose leading sentiments are widely different; yet it will be deemed, by the God of truth, as deserving no better name, than a *joint opposition* to the spirit and design of his gospel. For such a timid and lukewarm profession of truth is little better than a denial of it, than open hostility against it. To seek for peace at the expense of truth, will be found in the end, no other than a wicked conspiracy against both God and man. Such, however, as love the truth, will boldly declare against all its counterfeits, and every deviation from it: and, whatever may be the consequence, they will say with him of old; *Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel, let him be accursed.*

Thus the genuine gospel will always appear like an insult on the taste of the public. Wherever it comes, if it be not received, it awakens disgust and provokes abhorrence. Nor can it be otherwise. For its principal design is to mortify the pride of man, and to display the glory of grace; to throw all human excellence down to the dust, and to elevate, even to thrones of glory, the needy and the wretched; to show that every thing which exalteth itself against the knowledge of Christ, is an abomination in the sight of God; and that He who is despised of men and abhorred by the nations, is Jehovah's eternal delight. (Isa. xlix. 7 Matt. iii. 17) The ancient gospel is an unceremonious thing. It pays no respect to the academic because of his profound learning; nor to the moralist on account of his upright conduct. It has not the least regard to the courtier, because of his pompous honours; nor to the devotee, for the sake of his zeal or his righteousness. No, the potent prince and the abject slave, the wise philosopher and the ignorant rustic, the virtuous lady and the infamous prostitute, stand on the same level in its comprehensive sight. Its business is with the worthless and the miserable, whomsoever they be. If these be relieved, its end is gained. If these be made happy, its Author is glorified, whatever may become of the rest. Towards these it constantly wears the most friendly aspect, and rejoices to do them good. But the self-sufficient of every rank are treated by it with the utmost reserve, and beheld with a steady contempt. *The hungry it filleth with good things, but the rich it sendeth empty away.*

These considerations may serve to show us the true state of the case, as it stood between Paul and his opponents. The situation of things was much the same between Protestants and Papists, at, and for some time after the Reformation. Nor will the apostolic doctrine ever fail to be attended with strenuous opposition and foul re-preaches, while ignorance of its real nature, and legal pride, prevail in the hearts of men. Many, indeed, are the methods that have been devised, to render the unpalatable truth more generally acceptable, and to obviate *the*

offence of the cross. But what have been the consequences! The gospel has been corrupted; the consciences of awakened sinners have been left to grope in the dark, for that consolation which nothing but the unadulterated truth could give; and, instead of promoting holiness, the reverse has been awfully manifest. It therefore behooves every lover of sacred truth, to let it stand on its own basis, and not to tamper with it. To leave all its credit and all its success in the world, to its own intrinsic worth, to that authority with which it is closed, and to the management of that sovereign Being who ordained it for his own glory.

But however the doctrine of reigning grace may be despised by the self-sufficient, it will ever be revered by *the poor in spirit.* For by it they are informed of an honourable way of escape from the wrath to come, which they know they have justly deserved. To the sensible sinner, therefore, it must always be a *joyful sound.* And though such persons as are ignorant of its nature, tendency, and design, are always ready to imagine that it has an unfriendly aspect upon morality and good works, when preached in its glorious freeness; yet we may boldly affirm, that it is the grand instrument ordained by a holy God, for informing the ignorant, comforting the disconsolate, and rescuing the profligate from that worst of vassalage, the servitude of sin, and subjection to Satan. Such is the benign tendency of the glorious gospel! Such is its friendly and sanctifying influence on the hearts of men!

It will indeed be acknowledged that this doctrine may be held in licentiousness by those that profess it. But then it will be as confidently maintained, that whoever holds it in unrighteousness never received the love of that sacred truth, or experienced the power of it. For, to have a bare conviction of divine truth in the mind, and to experience its power on the heart, are very different things. The former may produce an outward profession: the latter will elevate the affections, turn the corrupt bias of the will, and influence the whole conduct. With the steadiest persuasion, therefore, of the holy nature and tendency of the doctrine of divine grace, as it is in itself, and as it operates on the minds and manners of all those who know it in truth; I proceed to give, not a full display, (that is infinitely too high for mortals,) but some brief hints concerning that grace which reigns; and of the way in which it is manifested, so as to demonstrate its power, glory, and majesty, in the salvation of sinners. This I shall do by endeavouring to illustrate that important and charming passage, recorded in Romans the fifth and twenty-first; **EVEN SO MIGHT GRACE REIGN, THROUGH RIGHTEOUSNESS, UNTO ETERNAL LIFE, BY Jesus CHRIST OUR LORD.** And while the author, conscious of his own insufficiency, looks up to the Spirit of wisdom for divine illumination, that he may write with all the precision and sanctity of truth, in opening the noble subject of the ensuing treatise; he would entreat the reader to peruse, with candour and impartiality, the contents of the following pages.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to RPM

RPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like RPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [RPM](#), please select this [link](#).