



www.PreciousHeart.net/ti

Volume 3 – 2011

Practicality of Grace in Protestant Theology

Foreword

by Dr. Peter Lillback
President, Westminster Theological Seminary¹

It is my honor to introduce *The Practicality of Grace in Protestant Theology*. Here you have a selection of fifteen essays from the online journal *Testamentum Imperium*, edited by Dr. Michael G. Maness. The title of this collection reminds me of a maxim of Theodore Roosevelt: “Be practical as well as generous in your ideals. Keep your eyes on the stars, but remember to keep your feet on the ground.” This book achieves this balance by lifting our eyes to the glories of the gospel of the risen Christ, and by leading us into the spiritual struggles and physical traumas that confront believers in a world that groans for the adoption of sons (cf. Romans 8:19–22).

¹ Lillback is president of Westminster Theological Seminary, at which he earned his Ph.D., and serves there as professor of historical theology and church history. He also serves as the president of The Providence Forum (www.ProvidenceForum.org) and senior editor of the new *Unio cum Christo: An International Journal of Reformed Theology and Life* (www.uniocc.com). He has written several books and articles, including his magisterial *George Washington's Sacred Fire* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Providence Forum Press, 2006; 1,208p.), *George Washington & Israel* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Providence Forum Press, 2012); with David Hall, *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis (Calvin 500)* (P&R Publishing, 2018; 616p.), and with Charles Colson, Wayne Grudem, and Philip Ryken, *Biblical Perspectives on Business Ethics* (Basking Ridge, NJ: Center for Christian Business Ethics Today, 2012). See bibliography for more of Lillback's work.

This anthology is remarkable in my estimation for four reasons: (1) the diversity of the contributors, (2) the range of theological issues engaged, (3) the relevance of that theology to the deep issues facing people in a broken world, and (4) the practical application of those theological insights to the needs of the church. Let me briefly illustrate each of these points.

First, consider the diversity of the contributors. They represent Dallas Theological Seminary, Talbot Seminary, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, the US Naval Chaplaincy, the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, Temple Baptist Seminary, Banner Thunderbird Medical Center in Glendale, Arizona, Oklahoma Christian University, the University of Arkansas, Phoenix Seminary, a counseling ministry in Puerto Rico, North-West University, South Africa, Wake Forest University, Stellenbosch University in South Africa, and BPP Law School in Manchester UK. Clearly the global range of the online theological conversation of *Testamentum Imperium* is remarkable.

Second, reflect on the broad range of issues engaged herein under the themes of salvation in Christ and the process of sanctification. These two salvific blessings, justification and sanctification, were denominated the *duplex gratiae*, or double graces of the covenant of grace, by Protestant Reformer, John Calvin. These great theological truths are addressed from varying standpoints to be sure. But in the process, the richness of the theological heritage of the Christian faith shines with coruscating succinctness.

Thus you will encounter the classic Christian creeds, Trinity, Christology, and Ontology. But these weighty concerns lead to the Lordship of Christ, relationships, and reconciliation. Philosophers and knotty questions like election, predestination, and eschatology appear, yet they are brought into dialogue with covenant, fidelity, obedience, and forgiveness. The Bible's stories of Hagar, the woman at the well and the theology of Hosea are mined for spiritual nurture. Church historians will find insightful reflections on ancient, medieval, reformation and modern theologians.

You will find helpful and careful discussions of the nature of divine redemptive love, the shortcomings of the people of God, the relationship of the Lord's faithfulness to human obedience, suicide and the unpardonable sin, the significance of Luther's theology of the

cross for sanctification, the certainty of salvation and daily trust in God, the impact of identity in Christ for men facing sexual addiction, the value of understanding identity in Christ for women who have been sexually harmed, Christ's faith as the believer's faith through union with Christ, a critique of various understandings of the relationship of justification with sanctification, the impact of justification by faith on Christian counseling, the impact of the Christian's ultimate hope on suffering and meaning, and God's forgiveness that leads to freedom from shame. There is something useful here for every reader whether theologian or counselor. These themes will deepen your spiritual wisdom.

Third, this set of articles manifests the relevance of theology for addressing the weighty issues of the human predicament facing believers in this imperfect and fallen world. Here you will wrestle with redemption, sin, the unpardonable sin, the people of God, the community of faith, salvation's certainty, divine faithfulness, the cross, identity in Christ, the faith of Christ, Latin American liberation theology, feminist theology, hermeneutical contextualization of the cross, justification by faith, union with Christ, sanctification, ultimate hope, and forgiveness. You will be enriched personally by contemplating these carefully considered themes.

Fourth, *The Practicality of Grace in Protestant Theology* lives up to its title. Here, the practical application of great Protestant theological insights clearly connects with the critical concerns of many in the church. Reading this anthology will enable you to immerse yourself in real and often thorny issues of life in Christ, such as: love, shortcomings, human obedience, suicide and salvation, certainty and trust, addiction, sexual abuse and rape, personal faith, law and grace, failure and growth, Christian counseling, suffering and meaning, and freedom from shame.

These relevant emphases are not only due to the insights of the practically minded contributors, but also because of the theological leadership of the editor of the collection and the founder of the online journal. The real-world focus of the articles emanates in part due to the labors of the editor and the founder of the journal. The first, Michael Maness, has served as a prison chaplain and the second, Kevaughn Mattis, is a trained attorney. Their life experiences have

given them an eye and a heart to select the best of their journal's writings to bless the contemporary church's troubling concerns.

Undoubtedly, there will be disagreements with viewpoints and positions taken by various writers. There may be those who take issue with the contextualization of Luther's theology for Liberation theology and Feminist hermeneutics. Some will disagree with the critical assessment of Federal Vision theology and Lordship Salvation. Some will find too much Calvinism in some of the articles. Some may question why certain politically and theologically charged issues of our day are not addressed herein. Some may find internal tensions between one author and another who have contributed to the volume. Such responses are expected and inevitable given the range of writers as they address vexing issues from differing communities and theological perspectives. The diversity will sharpen your thinking and deepen your understanding of views maintained by Protestants today.

This, however, is evident. The authors are not flummoxed by the difficult themes they address. Each reflects the historic Protestant spirit that recognizes that authentic Christians consider themselves not as fulfilling the dreadful mandates of a strict task-master, but as joyfully meeting the debt of sincere gratitude. They consciously address their themes from the vantage point of divine grace. They recognize their greatest contribution to the reader is to engage them with the unmerited favor of God in Christ. For this alone offers living hope to the daily lives of those struggling with the burdens of sin in a world lapsed far from its pristine glory.

Indeed, these essays echo the message of William Wilberforce who once described real Christianity:

It makes no sense to take the name of Christian and not cling to Christ. Jesus is not some magic charm to wear like a piece of jewelry we think will give us good luck. He is the Lord. His name is to be written on our hearts in such a powerful way that it creates within us a profound experience of His peace and a heart that is filled with His praise.

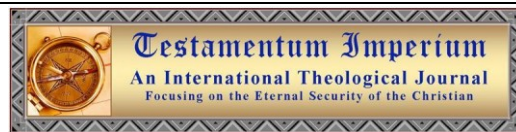
Wilberforce added, "What a difference it would be if our system of morality were based on the Bible instead of the standards devised by cultural Christians."

This is the kind of Christianity our authors wish to impart as they enable us to consider the amazing grace of God that meets us in every

Testamentum Imperium – Volume 3 – 2011

need when we turn afresh to Christ. For it is our God’s grace alone in Christ alone that enables us to sing from the heart, “I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.” I commend this book to you as you seek to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

Dr. Peter A. Lillback, President
Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia
February 8, 2019



www.PreciousHeart.net/ti