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A THEOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF THE CONCEPT OF GRACE AND ITS
IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANS

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ABSTRACT

There have been various studies on the doctrine of grace in the field of systematic theology. This work, however, is predicated on the observation that most contemporary Christians simply receive grace as a free gift of God without paying due attention to its life implication and their responsibilities to live a practical Christian life. This has led to a great decline in the quality of life being demonstrated by most professed Christians. It is in this sense that this study presented a comprehensive view of the concept of grace. It examined grace from an historical-theological perspective using philological tools. It also investigated the belief and teaching of Baptist and Catholic denominations on grace. The study focused on the Old Testament and New Testament concepts of grace. It examined various views of Church Fathers and Reformers on the doctrine of grace and the interrelated doctrines. It also attempted a comparative study of grace in the Baptist Faith and the Catholic denomination. Contemporary works on grace are also included in the research. The doctrines of salvation, Trinity, freewill, Christian life and perseverance of saints are examined in relation to their consequences in the context of grace. Grace is not simply a free gift of God but also a call to spiritual responsibility of good works, holy living and obedience to the Great Commission. The fruit of the Spirit is the evidence of the Christian life and a product of God's grace. Fellowship with God continually renews divine grace; this, in turn, translates to the spiritual growth and maturity of believers. An appreciation of the gifts of grace should lead to Christian service and influence, both in the Church and society. Grace does not incapacitate man's freewill or initiative but places a demand on the regenerated man to do the will of God. This work can be applied in the field of practical theology - especially with respect to how Christians should respond to the grace of God through practical Christianity. It can be used for further research purposes in the fields of systematic, historical and biblical theology. The implications of grace highlighted in the study could also be used as basis for an empirical research.

5.2 CONCLUSION

5.2.1 Contributions of the Study

The doctrine of grace has been studied from an historical perspective and with the use of philological tools thereby leading to a comprehensive understanding of the concept. The work differs from others in the sense that it presents grace as a core doctrine of biblical theology which encompasses and cuts across several Christian doctrines. In the same vein, it has proposed a new definition of grace from the perspective of practical theology. Grace is not only the free gift of God that is instrumental to the redemption of mankind; it is also a call to spiritual responsibility of good works and obedience to the Great Commission as well as growth and maturity for believers. Grace is also a divine ability that broods on the free will of man to make it conform to God's will and also places demand on believers to demonstrate the life of Christ through imputed righteousness and divine endowments.

5.2.2 Application of the Study

This work can be applied to the understanding of practical theology - especially with respect to how Christians should respond to the grace of God in the concept of practical Christianity. The implications highlighted could also be used as basis for an empirical research.

Beneficiaries of grace should demonstrate the Christian life through the fruit of the Spirit, which is a basic evidence of regeneration and a product of God's grace. Fellowship with God continually renews divine grace; this in turn translates to the spiritual growth and maturity of believers. Every believer is endowed with the gifts of grace in order to do ministry, meeting the needs of people in the society and the Church. Grace does not only equip Christians to serve God in the body of Christ but also to influence and transform the world through divine endowments. Hence, the

impact of a regenerated person should be felt at home, at school, at work and all other areas of influence. To this end, believers have no basis for segregation and schism in any form.

Grace does not incapacitate man's freewill or initiative but redirects it to the will of God so that the regenerated man can make a godly choice between good and evil. Believers can no longer live for self or make decisions arbitrarily without acknowledging the God of all grace in order to please him in all things and at all times. The grace of God is the essence of practical Christianity which encompasses holy living, Christian influence and other aspects of the Christian life.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

This study could not explore the relationship of grace and the concept of election comprehensively; this is due to time and space constraints. The extremes of legalism and antinomianism, with respect to grace were not given due considerations for the same reasons. Further studies may look into these areas. An exegetical study of the concept of grace or its comparative study with African culture may also be given attention by other researchers in the future.