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THE RICHES OF DIVINE GRACE From Lewis Sperry Chafer

INTRODUCTION

This Aspect of the saving work of the triune God, though restricted to those transformations which are divinely produced for the individual at the moment he believes, is not only supremely important since it defines the character of salvation, but is almost limitless in extent. The restrictions imposed demand that a clear distinction be made between that which has been divinely undertaken by way of preparation for the salvation of a soul, and the salvation itself.

Included in the sphere of preparation are such achievements as the finished work of Christ, the enlightening work of the Spirit, and all other influences which provide the righteous ground upon which a lost soul may be saved. It is no small undertaking so to deal with the sin question that there is infinite freedom accorded God in saving the lost; nor is it a small endeavor so to move the Satan-blinded individual that he will act by his own choice in the receiving of Christ as his Savior. These two problems, it will be remembered from previous statements, form the total of that which hinders the salvation of fallen men.

To satisfy the divine demands, a perfect redemption, reconciliation, and propitiation are required, while the problem on the human side is that of man's free, moral agency and the need of such influences as shall insure the right choice of the human will. A clear distinction is also required between the divine work in the immediate salvation of the soul and those responsibilities and activities which belong to the Christian life and service.

Many new realities are created by regeneration and all aspects of human experience are affected by the mighty transformation which salvation secures. With respect to the distinction between salvation itself and the life responsibilities which follow, Arminianism has again wrought confusion by its misunderstandings, assuming, as that system does, that the immediate salvation—whatever it is conceived to be—is probationary and therefore made to depend, with reference to its permanence, upon holy living and faithfulness. None would deny that a holy life becomes the Christian in view of the fact that he is a child of God and also of the truth that he is a member of Christ's Body; but to make sonship, which by its nature is interminable and is a position before God which rests wholly on the merit of Christ, to be conditioned by and dependent upon human worthiness is to contradict the whole order of divine grace and to make impotent man to be, in the end, his own savior.

The significant phrase, the "things that accompany salvation" (Heb. 6:9), may be interpreted as referring to those mighty positions and possessions which are wrought instantaneously and simultaneously by God at the instant an individual exercises saving faith in Christ. When recorded in detail—as they will yet be—it will be seen that there are at least thirty-three of these stupendous, supernatural divine undertakings and that the sum total of these achievements is the measure of the difference between one who is saved and one who is lost. The essential and all-determining fact that these divine accomplishments are wrought instantaneously and simultaneously and are never a progressive order or sequence, establishes the truth that all human beings may

be, at a given time, classified as either perfectly lost—God having wrought none of these features of salvation for them—or perfectly saved—God having wrought completely and finally all that enters into the immediate salvation of a soul.

There are no intermediate estates. Of no human being could it be said that he is partly saved and partly lost. In conformity with the New Testament, it must be maintained that all cultured, refined, educated, moral, and religious people—regardless of outward professions—who have not been saved by a personal faith in Christ are lost, and as perfectly lost as they would be had they none of these characteristics which, in their place, are of great value. It may be a problem whether an individual has entered into saving grace through Christ—and here there is need of a clear apprehension of the Biblical evidence of so great a change (2 Cor. 13:5; 1 John 5:13)—but there could be no problem involved with respect to the essential truth that, until perfectly saved by the infinite work of God, the soul is perfectly lost.

Similarly, the messages to be preached to these two classes—those perfectly lost and those perfectly saved—are, of necessity, different in every particular. It is to be doubted whether any text of Scripture will be found to be applicable to both classes alike. To the unsaved, God makes no appeal with regard to their manner of life; no improvement or reformation is required of them. Society and civil governments may press their claims upon unregenerate people as also upon regenerate people to the end that prescribed ideals may be realized, but this fact—in so far as it obtains—must not be confused with the uncompromised attitude of God in His relation to these classes.

He requires of the unsaved that they hear and heed the gospel only. Over against this, every divine injunction concerning a God-honoring faithfulness is addressed to the Christian and from the moment he is saved. There are no elementary, curtailed, or diminished requirements which are tempered to those who are beginners in the great responsibility of Christian living.

The Scriptures recognize “babes in Christ,” but they are not such because of immaturity; they are babes because of carnality (1 Cor. 3:1–2), and that form of carnality may be exhibited by those who have been Christians for fifty years.

Next to the delinquency of misstating the gospel with its immeasurable penalty (Gal. 1:8–9), is the so prevalent practice on the part of preachers of presenting Christian-life truth to the unsaved without warning them that such truth is not addressed to them. By this performance, every suggestion which might arise in the mind of the unsaved that a vital difference might exist between themselves and Christians is obliterated, and the unsaved are encouraged to believe that a Christian is one who merely acts in a certain way and such actions are all that God requires of any person. No matter how unimportant it may seem to the preacher, he cannot afford ever to address Christians about their specific duties and not remind the unsaved, if such be present, that the word being spoken can have no application to them. Such faithful discrimination will have the effect, at least, of creating a consciousness in the minds of unregenerate people that they are lost.

The thirty-three divine undertakings in the salvation of a soul, which are here designated as *the riches of grace*, represent all that God can do to satisfy His own infinite love for the sinner. If at first consideration this statement seems to be extreme, it, in due time, will be demonstrated to be true. As asserted of an earlier point in this treatment of Soteriology, the primary motive which actuates God in the salvation of the lost is the satisfying of His own love. To the end that infinite love may be gratified, He accomplishes infinite transformations.

Compared to this, the thought that men are rescued from their plight, though an achievement which transcends all human understanding and naturally appeals to the mind of man, is secondary to the extent that man is secondary to God.

The truth that the salvation of men affords an opportunity for God to gratify His infinite love for His creatures, is a theme which is too often neglected. It will always be remembered that because of His divine character of holiness, God can do nothing for sinners until satisfaction for their sin has been secured—this is accomplished in the finished work of Christ—and that because of God’s recognition of the free, moral agency of man, God can do nothing apart from man’s own elective choice of Christ as Savior—even though that choice is engendered in the heart of man by the enlightenment of the Spirit.

But when these fundamental conditions are met, every barrier is removed and infinite love instantly responds by lavishing on the man who exercises saving faith the whole measure of divine benefit, even the riches of grace in Christ Jesus. This, it will be seen, is no less than the greatest thing that Almighty God can do.

One consideration alone will serve to demonstrate this truth, namely, that the saved one is destined to be conformed to the image of Christ. Infinity can conceive of nothing beyond that exalted reality, nor can omnipotence accomplish more. To be conformed to the image of Christ, to have been purified to infinite perfection by the blood of cleansing, to have received the gift of eternal life, to be clothed upon with the righteousness of God, and to have been constituted a citizen of heaven disposes practically of all that enters into the estate of fallen humanity. This great transformation is well described by the words: “giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.” (Col. 1:12); yet, of all these marvels, none could be greater than that of being conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29; 1 John 3:2).

Another revelation, which as perfectly demonstrates the truth that salvation in its immediate aspect is the supreme divine achievement, is recorded in Ephesians 2:7. In preparation for this declaration, the Apostle has mentioned one out of all the believer’s possessions, namely, the gift of eternal life—announced by the words, “has made us alive together with Christ”—and from all the believer’s positions, one, namely, “in Christ Jesus,” and these two represent the great reality of eternal salvation.

The answer to the question of why God should undertake the measureless benefit for which these representative possessions and positions stand, is that by so great salvation God may manifest the attribute of grace, which could be manifested in no other way. Ephesians 2:7 declares: “That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.” There was that in God which no created being had ever seen. They had seen His glory, His majesty, His wisdom, and His power; but no angel or man had ever seen His grace. Other attributes might be subject to a variety of demonstrations; but the manifestation of grace is restricted to what God may do for those among men who, in spite of the fact that they deserve His judgments, are objects of His grace.

As every other attribute or capacity of God must have its perfect exercise and exhibition—even for His own satisfaction—in like manner His grace must also have its infinitely perfect revealing within the restricted undertaking by which He saves the lost. To say that a sinner is saved by grace is to declare that, on the ground of a Substitute’s death and in response to faith in that Savior, God has wrought a work so perfect in its entirety and so free from the cooperation of other beings that it is a complete all-satisfying-to-God demonstration of His grace. A statement of this kind may be made as easily as words may form a sentence; but who on earth or in heaven is able to comprehend the infinity of such a salvation?

This demonstration, it should be added, will, by the very nature of the case, have its outshining in the life of each individual thus saved. It may be assumed that, had but one of all the human family been selected for the supreme honor of exhibiting eternally before all created beings the infinity of sovereign grace, the salvation of that one would be no different than the salvation of any one of the unnumbered throng from every kindred, tribe, and people who are saved by grace.

Too often it is assumed that divine grace in salvation is a willingness on the part of God to complete in each person's life what, perchance, may be lacking when the individual's own merit has been duly valued, the thought being that, as some, because of human virtue and faithfulness in character, are possessed of more worthiness than others, less grace would be required for those of supposed merit than would be required for those of little or no merit.

The truth, already treated at length is that all men are now divinely reckoned and declared to be "under sin"—a state in which no merit of man is accepted by God—to the end that a standardized grace, wholly complete in itself, may be bestowed upon all alike. Were men permitted to contribute the smallest fraction toward their salvation, it would cease to be a grace manifestation and become an imperfect display of one of God's most glorious attributes.

No thoughtful person will conclude that a fallen being could, under any circumstances or to any degree, cause a divine attribute to become an experienced reality. Man may become the recipient of grace, but he cannot contribute to it in the sense that he enables it to become what it is. No more conclusive setting forth of this sublime truth will be found than that recorded in Romans 4:16, "Therefore it is of faith [nothing on man's part], that it might be by grace [everything on God's part]; to the end the promise might be sure to all the [Abrahamic] seed" (that which is of the flesh, Israel, and that which is of the Spirit, the elect from among the Gentiles). On what other basis than faith on man's part and grace on God's part could any divine promise or purpose be *sure*?

In concluding these introductory words, it may be restated that saving grace is that which God accomplishes on the ground of Christ's death—accomplished and provided as a divine responsibility—and in response to the individual's faith in Christ—a human responsibility.

This general division of this theme will be presented in three parts:

- (1) the estate of the lost,
- (2) the essential character of God's undertakings, and
- (3) the riches of divine grace.

I. THE STATE OF THE LOST

The word *lost* is used in the New Testament in two widely different ways. An object may be lost in the sense that it needs to be found. This use of the word does not imply that a change in the structure or character of the lost object is thereby indicated. It is lost only to the extent that it is out of its rightful place. Israel wandering from their covenants were styled by Christ as "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:6). In like manner, a Christian who is out of fellowship with God because of sin is misplaced; yet he remains unchanged with respect to the essential realities which make him a child of God—eternal life, imputed righteousness, and union with God. The God-given illustration of this wonderful truth is declared in the threefold parable of Luke 15. A sheep is lost and is "found." It was a sheep all the time, but was out of its place. A coin is lost from its place in the woman's head-dress and is "found." It was the same coin all the time. A son was lost and is "found." And he was a son in every step of his wanderings.

On the other hand, a person may be lost in such a manner as to need to be *saved*. "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). It is because of the fact that in salvation the structural changes are such as to demand divine provisions and divine creative powers, that the transition from the lost estate to that of the saved can be wrought only by God.

The body of truth now being considered contemplates at least four reasons why those who are of this fallen race are lost:

1. The lost soul has attained to none of the eternal realities that make a Christian what he is. All that may be said of the unsaved is *negative*. No Scripture makes this clearer than Ephesians 2:12, in which the Ephesian

Christians are reminded of the lost estate from which they were saved: “That at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.”

2. Individuals are lost, also, because of the fact that they are born with a fallen, sinful nature. This is no doubt the most condemning feature of man’s lost estate. When Adam sinned, he experienced a conversion downward. He became an entirely different kind of being. After the fall, he could propagate only “in his own likeness,” and his first son was a murderer. Adam—in whom Eve is reckoned as one—is the only human being who ever became a sinner by sinning. All other members of the race commit sin because they are born sinners. Though this evil nature remains in the Christian as long as he is in the world, it was judged for the Christian by Christ on the cross (Rom. 6:10), and its condemnation removed.

The death of Christ unto the sin nature is also the ground of the believer’s deliverance by the Holy Spirit from the power of inbred sin. It is true that men are lost because of personal sins; but, since personal sins are the normal fruit of the evil nature, they should never be made the only, or even important, basis upon which a soul is lost. In reply to a claim that he is lost because of personal sin, an unregenerate person might easily assert that he had never been one percent as evil as he might have been, therefore he is only one percent lost.

The lost estate consists primarily in a fallen nature, which is one hundred percent evil. An effort to be good or to form a worthy character is a poor remedy for a fallen nature. Only the grace of God acting on the ground of the death of His Son will avail.

3. Again, men are lost because of a decree which God has made concerning all who live on earth—Jew and Gentile alike—in the present age, which age is bounded by the two advents of Christ. It is written: “What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin” (Rom. 3:9); “But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe” (Gal. 3:22).

The phrase “under sin” means, as stated above, that God will accept the merit of no person as a contributing factor in his salvation. This decree, which eliminates all human merit, is essential if salvation is to be by grace. This does not imply that a good life is not of value in its place; but the issue under consideration is the problem of how a holy God can *perfectly* save those who, in His sight, are *perfectly* lost. He disregards that which men deem to be good—and some possess more of this goodness than others—that He may replace it with the perfection of Christ. What, for the moment, seems to be a complete loss, thus in the end becomes an infinite gain. Since, by the very way in which He saves the lost, God is preparing the material for a heavenly demonstration of the unsearchable riches of His grace (Eph. 2:7), the inclusion in this salvation of any human element is impossible.

4. Similarly and finally, men are lost because of the fact that they are under the power of Satan. Only the Word of God can speak with authority on this theme. But four passages need be cited:

2 Corinthians 4:3–4. This text declares that the unsaved are blinded in their minds by Satan, lest the saving gospel of Christ should shine unto them.

Ephesians 2:1–3. The testimony at this point is that the unsaved are “children of disobedience”—being in the headship of disobedient Adam—and that everyone is energized by Satan. In contrast to this it would be well to note Philippians 2:13, where, by use of the same word, the Christian is said to be energized by God.

Colossians 1:13. This text points to the striking fact that a soul when saved is translated out of the power of darkness, in which darkness it naturally dwells.

1 John 5:19 (R.V.). The *cosmos*, it is asserted, including the unregenerate (as being a part of it), “lieth in” the wicked one. The word *wickedness*, found in the Authorized Version, is better translated *evil* or *wicked one* (note the preceding verse where the same word occurs). Likewise, the phrase *lieth in* is deeply suggestive, indicating as it does that in some measure the unsaved are *in Satan*, while the Christians are *in Christ*.

There is strong enough intimation with regard to the condemnation that rests upon the unsaved in the Scriptures, to assert that when they are saved it is from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13), from wrath (1 Thess. 5:9; John 3:36), from death (2 Cor. 7:10), and from destruction (2 Thess. 1:9).

II. THE ESSENTIAL CHARACTER OF GOD’S UNDERTAKINGS

Before entering upon an enumeration of the thirty-three supernatural divine achievements which constitute the riches of grace, it is important to observe something of the essential character of these riches. Of these, seven vital singularities appear: (a) they are not experienced; (b) they are not progressive; (c) they are not related to human merit; (d) they are eternal in their character; (e) they are known only by revelation; (f) they are wrought by God alone; (g) they are not wrought by man.

1. They are Not Experienced. This is not to imply that these riches are not real; it is rather to point out that they do not manifest their reality to the emotional nature or through the medium of the nervous system. No better illustration of this fact will be found than is afforded by the supreme divine undertaking of justification; for, obviously, justification is not felt. There is no sensation which gives corroborative evidence that the believer is justified; it rests wholly on the testimony of God. So, likewise, it is with all these riches. They are not such as human experience can identify.

2. They are Not Progressive. This feature of these riches is of major importance. Since it is the way of almost every human experience, it is natural to conclude that whatever God may undertake will begin with immaturity and progress by degrees to eventual completion. However, in the case of these riches, it will be discovered that the process is different. Every divine undertaking is instantly wrought to that degree of infinite perfection which it will exhibit in the eternal ages to come. Sonship well illustrates this truth. There are many features of the relation between father and son which are subject to progression and change; but sonship itself knows no advancement or development. A child is as much a son at birth as he is at any subsequent point in his existence. Thus it is with every divine accomplishment that enters into the immediate salvation of men.

3. They are Not Related to Human Merit. Beneath this truth, which truth is foreign to all human processes of life and experience, is the sovereign purpose of God to do all that He does according to His own good pleasure, and this He is free to do because the believer is seen to be—as he really is—a member in the Body of Christ, and therefore qualified to be blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus. Whatever would be accorded the Son of God will be accorded a member in His Body. It is thus that these riches of grace are built solely on the merit of the Son of God, and, for that reason, are as abiding as the merit on which they rest.

4. They are Eternal in Their Character. As stated above, the work of God for the believer is based on the enduring perfection of Christ and is not, therefore, subject to the variations which characterize a vacillating human experience. As in the case of imputed righteousness, wherein no trace of human worthiness can be included, every work of God in the immediate salvation of the lost is divinely sustained and consequently eternal in its nature. The gift of eternal life is of that divine nature which has existed from all eternity and will exist forever. God’s election of believers is never an act of chance or luck.

5. They are Known Only by Revelation. Human imagination and speculation can serve to no degree in attaining to the knowledge of all that God achieves when His love is released by the death of His Son and by the faith of the sinner. No title deed or earthly record ever tabulated such treasures. Their knowledge-surpassing blessedness can be approached only as they are considered one by one in the light of all that God has declared respecting them.

6. They are Wrought or Produced by God Alone. By their very nature, the riches of grace are of necessity the work of God for man. Who could so save himself that he will be on a peace footing with God forever, and eternally justified? Who can translate himself out of the power of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God's love? Who can constitute himself a citizen of heaven, or write down his name there? God alone is able to save, according to those marvels which He declares are the portion of all who put their trust in Him.

7. They are Not Wrought or Produced by Man. In certain respects this declaration is but the negative of the preceding assertion; however, it may be observed that one who is a sinner can take no step in the direction of his own redemption. He who is on earth can devise nothing for himself in heaven. He who is only a creature cannot conform himself to the likeness of his Creator.

He who is of time cannot design and execute for eternity. Salvation is more than the continued existence of a good man; it provides the most radical transformations, the acquiring of infinite possessions, and the entering into positions which are in the sphere of heaven and of God. "And you are complete in him" (Col. 2:10).