

# **Standing in Grace**



# Standing in Grace

Jonathan Edwards

Edited by Don Kistler



**Soli Deo Gloria Publications**  
An imprint of Reformation Heritage Books  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

*Standing in Grace*

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**Soli Deo Gloria Publications**

An imprint of Reformation Heritage Books

3070 29th St. SE

Grand Rapids, MI 49512

616-977-0889

orders@heritagebooks.org

www.heritagebooks.org

Reprint 2022

ISBN 978-1-57358-131-8

This work was first published in 1865 by Alexander Grosart under the title *A Treatise on Grace* and was included as part of *Selections from the Unpublished Writings of Jonathan Edwards*. This Soli Deo Gloria edition includes spelling, grammar, and formatting changes.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in Publication Data

Edwards, Jonathan, 1703–1758

[Treatise on grace]

Standing in Grace: Jonathan Edwards's A Treatise on grace / edited by

Don Kistler. p. cm.

ISBN 1-57358-131-3

I. Grace (Theology) I. Kistler, Don. II. Title

BT761.3 .E38 2002

234-dc21

2002004051

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# Chapter 1

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*Common and saving grace differ not only in degree,  
but in nature and kind*

Such phrases as “common grace,” and “special or saving grace,” may be understood as signifying either diverse kinds of influence of God’s Spirit on the hearts of men, or diverse fruits and effects of that influence. The Spirit of God is supposed sometimes to have some influence upon the minds of men who are not true Christians, and it is supposed that those dispositions, frames, and exercises of their minds that are of a good tendency, but are common to them with the saints, are in some respect owing to some influence or assistance of God’s Spirit. But as there are some things in the hearts of true Christians that are peculiar to them, and that are more excellent than anything that is to be found in others, so it is supposed that there is an operation of the Spirit of God that is different, and that the value which distinguishes them is owing to a higher influence and assistance than the virtues of others. So sometimes the phrase “common grace” is used to signify that kind of action or influence of the Spirit of God to which are owing those religious or moral attainments that are common to both saints and sinners, and so signifies as much as common assistance; and sometimes those moral or religious attainments themselves

that are the fruits of this assistance are intended. So likewise the phrase “special or saving grace” is sometimes used to signify that peculiar kind or degree of separation or influence of God’s Spirit, whence saving actions and attainments arise in the godly, or (which is the same thing) special and saving assistance; or else to signify that distinguishing saving virtue itself which is the fruit of this assistance. These phrases are more frequently understood in the latter sense, that is, not for common and special assistance, but for common and special (or saving) virtue, which is the fruit of that assistance, and so I would be understood by these phrases in this discourse.

Special or saving grace in this sense is not only different from common grace in degree, but entirely diverse in nature and kind; and natural men not only do not have a sufficient degree of virtue to be saints, but they have no degree of that grace that is in godly men—these are the things I have now to show.

This is evident by what Christ says in John 3:6, where Christ, speaking of regeneration, says, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Now, whatever Christ intends by the terms “flesh” and “spirit” in the words, yet this much is manifest and undeniable, that Christ here intends to show Nicodemus the necessity of a new birth, or another birth than his natural birth; and that, from this argument a man who has been the subject of the first birth only has nothing of that in his heart which he must have in order to enter into the kingdom. He has nothing at all of that which Christ calls “spirit,” whatever that is. All that a man has who has only been the subject of a natural birth doesn’t go beyond that which



Christ calls “flesh,” for however it may be refined and exalted, yet it cannot be raised above flesh. It is plain that by “flesh” and “spirit” Christ here intends two things that are entirely different in nature, which cannot be one from the other. A man cannot have anything of a nature superior to flesh who is not born again, and therefore we must be born again. That by flesh and spirit are intended certain moral principles, natures, or qualities, entirely different and opposite in their nature one to another, is manifest from other texts, particularly Galatians 5:17: “For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and they are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things which ye would.” Verse 19: “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication,” and so on. Verse 22: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace. . . .” Galatians 6:8: “For he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” Romans 8:6: “For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” 1 Corinthians 3:1: “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.” So that it is manifest by this that men who have been the subjects of the first birth only have no degree of that moral principle or quality that those who are newly born have, whereby they have a title to the kingdom of heaven. This principle or quality comes out then in no other way than by birth; and the birth that it must come by is not, cannot be, the first birth, but it must be a new birth. If men who have no title to the kingdom of heaven could have something of the Spirit as well as flesh, then

Christ's argument would be false. It is plain by Christ's reasoning that those who are not in a state of salvation cannot have these two opposite principles in their hearts together, some flesh and some spirit, lusting one against the other as the godly have, but that they have flesh only.

The only principle in those who are savingly converted whence gracious acts flow in the language of Scripture is called "the spirit," and is set in opposition to "the flesh." This is that which others not only do not have a sufficient degree of, but have nothing at all of; this is further manifest because the Scriptures assert both. It negatively asserts that those who do not have the Spirit are not Christ's in Romans 8:9: "But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." And it also asserts positively that those who have the Spirit are His. 1 John 3:24: "Hereby we know that He abideth in us by the Spirit which He hath given us." And our having the Spirit of God dwelling in our hearts is mentioned as a certain sign that persons are entitled to heaven, and is called the earnest of the future inheritance (2 Corinthians 1:22 and 5:5; Ephesians 1:14), which it would not be if others who had no title to the inheritance might have some of it dwelling in them.

Yea, that those who are not true saints have nothing of the Spirit, no part nor portion of it, is still more evident because not only a having any particular motion of the spirit, but a being of the Spirit is given as a sure sign of being in Christ. 1 John 4:13: "Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit." If those who are not true saints

have any degree of that spiritual principle, then though they have not so much, yet they have it, and so that would be no sign that a person is in Christ. If those who do not have a saving interest in Christ have nothing of the Spirit, then they have nothing, no degree of those graces that are the fruits of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22–23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” Those fruits are here mentioned with that very design, that we may know whether we have the Spirit or not.

Those who are not true saints, and are not in a state of salvation, not only do not have so much of that holy nature and divine principle that is in the hearts of the saints, but they do not partake of it, because being “partakers of the divine nature” is spoken of as the peculiar privilege of true saints (2 Peter 1:4). It is evident that it is the true saints that the apostle is there speaking of. The words in this verse with the foregoing are these: “According as His divine power hath given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue; whereby are given to us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature; having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” The “divine nature” and “lust” are evidently here spoken of as two opposite principles in man. Those who are in the world, and who are the men of the world, have only the latter principle; but to be partakers of the divine nature is spoken of as peculiar to them who are distinguished and separated from the world by the free and sovereign grace of God giving them all things that pertain to life and god-

liness, giving the knowledge of Him, calling them to glory and virtue, and giving them the exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel, and who have escaped the corruption of the world of wicked men. And being partakers of the divine nature is spoken of not only as peculiar to the saints, but as one of the highest privileges of the saints.

That those who do not have a saving interest in Christ have no degree of that relish and sense of spiritual things, or things of the Spirit, of their divine truth and excellency which a true saint has, is evident from 1 Corinthians 2:14: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned." A natural man is here set in opposition to a spiritual one, or one who has the Spirit, as appears by the foregoing and following verses. Such persons we have shown already the Scripture declares all true saints to be, and none other. Therefore, by natural men are meant those who do not have the Spirit of Christ and are none of His, and are the subjects of no other than the natural birth. But here we are plainly taught that a natural man is perfectly destitute of any sense, perception, or discerning of those things of the Spirit. We are taught that by the words "he neither does nor can know them, or discern them." So far from this they are "foolishness unto him." He is a perfect stranger, so that he does not know what the talk of such things means; they are words without meaning to him; he knows nothing of the matter any more than a blind man knows of colors.

Hence it will follow that the sense of things of religion that a natural man has is not only not to the same

degree, but nothing of the same nature with that which a true saint has. And besides, if a natural person has the fruit of the Spirit which is of the same kind with what a spiritual person has, then he experiences within himself the things of the Spirit of God; and how then can he be said to be such a stranger to them and have no perception or discerning of them?

The reason natural men have no knowledge of spiritual things is because they have nothing of the Spirit of God dwelling in them. This is evident by the context; for there we are told that it is by the Spirit that these things are taught (verses 10–12); and godly persons in the next verse are called spiritual because they have the Spirit dwelling in them. Hereby the sense again is confirmed, for natural men are in no degree spiritual; they have only nature and no Spirit. If they had anything of the Spirit, though not in so great a degree as the godly, yet they would be taught spiritual things, or things of the Spirit, in proportion to the measure of the Spirit that they had. The Spirit who searches all things would teach them in some measure. There would not be so great a difference that the one could perceive nothing of them, and that they should be foolishness to them, while to the other they appear divinely and remarkably wise and excellent, as they are spoken of in the context (verses 6–9)—and as such the apostle speaks here of discerning them.

The reason why natural men have no knowledge or perception of spiritual things is because they have none of the anointing spoken of in 1 John 2:27: “The anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and you need not that any man teach you.” This anointing is evidently spoken of here as a thing pecu-

liar to true saints. Ungodly men never had any degree of that holy oil poured upon them, and therefore have no discerning of spiritual things. Therefore none of that sense that natural men have of things of religion is of the same nature with what the godly have; to these they are totally blind. Therefore, in conversion, the eyes of the blind are opened. The world is wholly unacquainted with the Spirit of God, as appears from John 14:17, where we read about “the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive, because it knoweth Him not.”

That those who are not true saints and are not in a state of salvation have no charity is plainly implied in the beginning of 1 Corinthians 13. Therefore they have no degree of that kind of grace, disposition, or affection, that is so called. So Christ elsewhere reproves the Pharisees, those high pretenders to religion among the Jews, that they did not have the love of God in them (John 5:42).

That those who are not true saints have no degree of that grace which the saints have is evident because they have no communion or fellowship with Christ. If those who are not true saints partake of any of that Spirit, those holy inclinations and affections, and gracious acts of soul that the godly have from the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ, then they would have communion with Christ. The communion of saints with Christ certainly very much consists in that receiving of His fullness and partaking of His grace spoken of in John 1:16: “Of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace,” and in partaking of that Spirit which God gives (not by measure) unto Him. Partaking of Christ’s holiness and grace, His nature, inclinations, tendencies, love and desires, comforts and delights, must be to have