

**John 1:13** –children not born by human parents [ heredity through procreation ] or by human desire [ human works are not involved ] or a husband's decision [ the determination to procreate ], but by God [ efficacious grace ]. (NET)

5. Once in the family of God, all human works are considered the pollution of grace, graphically expressed by Isaiah in:

**Isaiah 64:6** We are all like one who is unclean, all our so-called righteous acts [ human good and evil ] are like a menstrual rag in Your sight. We all wither like a leaf; our sins carry us away like the wind. (NET)

6. The virtue required of the believer is infinitely greater than morality. The inner life of virtue is not something we do ourselves. God provides this in grace.
7. Morality is a human conception of what is considered right and proper, but its virtue is dependent upon the culture in which morality is defined.
8. What one culture considers virtuous another regards as iniquitous. Solomon addressed this dichotomy in some of his Proverbs which we have interpreted as wheel-tracks of righteousness versus wheel-tracks of wickedness.
9. Human good and evil are in opposition to grace. Any human work, regardless of how widely accepted it may be by society or the church, is not grace oriented and is an insult to the integrity of God.
10. Further, anything the unbeliever can do is not the Christian way of life.
11. A culture built on establishment standards maintains order in the society. If that culture also possesses a significant number of citizens who submit to the principles of biblical virtue and integrity, it also functions as a Client Nation to God.
12. God's policy related to the love of God is grace. It is sustained and protected by His righteousness and justice and also includes His omniscience, virtue, mercy, and unmerited favor.
13. The Church Age is the dispensation of the grace of God:

**Ephesians 3:2** If indeed you have heard of the stewardship [ οἰκονομία (oikonomía)<sup>3</sup> ] of God's grace that was given to me for you.

14. The Church Age is the dispensation that characterizes the divine administration of the royal family of God. It is based on the principle of antecedent grace or prevenient grace which is the preemptive work of God in eternity past.

### Antecedent Grace:

1. The word “antecedent” refers to a preceding event, condition, or cause. A synonym of antecedent is the adjective, “prevenient.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides important details:
2. First we note the verb form, “prēvēne”: “to come before, precede, anticipate. To take action before or in anticipation of.”
3. Prevenient is derived from the Latin and defined as “coming before, preceding, previous, antecedent”:

**Prevenient grace in Theology, the grace of God which precedes repentance and conversion, predisposing the heart to seek God.<sup>4</sup>**

4. This word is a compound from the Latin *prae* “before” plus *venio* “come”: “to come before.”
5. This doctrine is discussed in detail from this excerpt:

**Prevenient grace is grace which comes first. It precedes all human decision and endeavor. Grace always means that it is God who takes the initiative and implies the priority of God's action on behalf of needy sinners. That is the whole point of grace; it does not start with us, it starts with God; it is not earned or merited by us. It is freely and lovingly given to us who have no resources or deservings of our own. “In this is love,” John declares, “not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins”; consequently, “we love, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:10, 19). God took action, moreover, when we were helpless (Romans 5:6), without any ability to help ourselves or to make any contribution toward our salvation. The sinner's state is one of spiritual death, that is to say, of total inability, and his only hope is the miracle of new birth from above (John 3:3).**

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<sup>3</sup> “A manager of a household. The responsibility of an administration, as of a house or of property; a spiritual dispensation, management, or economy. The ‘dispensation of God’ means the administration of divine grace” (Spiros Zodhiates, ed., “οἰκονομία,” in *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, rev. ed. [Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993], 1031–32). See Ephesians 3:2, “If you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God” (KJV).

<sup>4</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “prevenient.”

That is why the apostle reminds the Ephesian believers that salvation came to them when they were “dead” in sins, from which there follows only one conclusion, namely, that it is by grace that they were saved. Both now and for all eternity the Christian will be indebted to “the immeasurable riches” of God’s grace displayed in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. But for the prevenience, or priority, of divine grace, all would be lost.<sup>5</sup>

6. Antecedent or prevenient grace refers to that which precedes human history and continues throughout time. This grace applies to post-salvation grace as much as to pre-salvation grace.
7. Antecedent or prevenient grace is the divine initiative in the exercise of God’s grace policy to establish a relationship with mankind totally apart from human merit, human works, or human resources.
8. Antecedent or prevenient grace is also the divine initiative in providing grace blessings from God to mankind, dating back to eternity past as illustrated by the believer’s escrow blessings for time and eternity.
9. Divine omniscience was able to perceive each individual’s moment of salvation by grace through faith. Knowing this, God provided an escrow account for each person in eternity past.

**Ephesians 1:3** Worthy of praise and glorification is God [ Grantor ] even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the One Who has blessed us [ aorist active participle of the verb εὐλογέω (*eulogéō*): precedes the action of the main verb, ἐκλέγω (*eklégō*), in v. 4 ] with every spiritual blessing [ escrow account ] in heavenly places [ escrow deposit is in the third heaven ] in Christ [ escrow Officer ].

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<sup>5</sup> Philip E. Hughes, “Prevenient Grace,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 480–81.