

# Grace

## Introduction

Jesus came to “declare” the God of heaven whom no one has seen at any time (John 1:18). He came full of grace and truth and “of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace” (Jn. 1:14, 16). Moses gave the law, but grace and truth were realized in Christ (Jn. 1:17). Jesus was God’s personal expression of grace, the Word of grace made flesh.

Throughout His sojourn on earth, Jesus demonstrated this grace in concrete actions, which gave help to everyone with whom He came in contact. Words like compassion (Mt. 9:36), mercy (Mt. 9:13) and love (Jn. 13: 1, 34-35) are part and parcel with grace, when applied to Christ, who was full of grace.

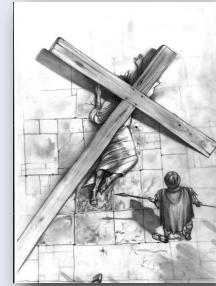
Unfortunately, grace has not always been given its proper emphasis in our teaching, and some have suffered, or even sinned, because of our faulty view of it. Much of our understanding of grace comes from the crucible of debate, instead of through a calm and thorough study of scripture, leading us to an understanding of what grace *isn't*. But do we know what it *is*, why it is so important, and how it can help us each day to live the Christian life?

Grace, especially when understood as nearly synonymous with love, is the central principle of the New Covenant. We cannot understand the New Testament (or even the Old) without a clear understanding of the place of grace in God’s plan. The apostle John is clear enough: Jesus came “full of grace and truth” (1:16) and grace and truth came through Jesus (1:17). The coming of Jesus Christ was result of the grace of God. He is the ultimate gift from God, especially when we see Him on cross. That alone makes it foreground material because Jesus Christ Himself *is* grace.

So, we shall study grace. We want to explore its significance, its abuses, and illustrate how grace helps us in our daily effort to live the Christian life.

I remind you of the words of Paul, who said to the Ephesian elders, “I commend you to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

DAVID POSEY



## Amazing Grace

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.  
T'was Grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And Grace, my fears relieved.  
How precious did that Grace appear  
The hour I first believed.  
Through many dangers, toils and snares  
I have already come;  
'Tis Grace that brought me safe thus far  
and Grace will lead me home.  
The Lord has promised good to me,  
His word my hope secures.  
He will my shield and portion be,  
As long as life endures.  
When we've been here ten thousand years  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we've first begun.

JOHN NEWTON (1725-1807)

## Word Study: Grace

The word group in Greek, from which we get our translation, “grace,” includes the words “gift” and “joy.” Bauer<sup>1</sup> gives a range of meanings which include graciousness, attractiveness, favor, grace, gracious care or help, goodwill, gracious deeds, gift and benefaction. It can be active, when one volunteers to do something which he is not bound to do, especially the gracious intention of God, or passive, when one experiences favor from another.

In the Theological Wordbook of the Bible<sup>2</sup>, N. H. Snaith compares the Greek word *charis*, with Hebrew word *chesed*, (often translated “lovingkindness”) describing them both, essentially, as free and undeserved favor from God, who is under no obligation whatsoever to show His favor to man, but does it anyway. J. I. Packer<sup>3</sup> points out that *charis* corresponds to the Old Testament words for grace (*chen*) and love (*ahabah*) which express God’s favor toward His people, Israel, that He will not let go (see Dt. 7:7; Hos. 11:1-11). The Hebrew verb for love (*‘ahab*) is translated in the LXX<sup>4</sup> with the Greek word *agape* (“love”), a word familiar to most of us.

As you can see, it is important to understand, first of all, that God is not obligated to show favor to anyone. When He does, it is purely out of the goodness of His nature. Secondly, no one can claim favor from God as a right, because no one has legal or moral standing to do so (Rom. 3:10-20, 23). The basic meaning of *chen* is

favor from a superior to a suppliant who cannot claim favorable treatment as a right. Thirdly, grace is a gift – it is always free. If grace is not free (to the recipient), it would not be grace (cf. Rom. 4:4; 11:6).

Free grace does not necessarily mean *unconditional* grace, however. Gifts that are offered must be accepted, and virtually all gifts have conditions attached, even if it is only the reaching out and taking of the gift. Such conditions do not make the gift any less “free,” as we all perfectly understand. God’s grace is gratuitous, but conditional. We must appropriate the gift by our trusting submission and absolute obedience to “the God of all grace.” This is nothing like “work” or “repayment.” As a matter of fact, it is rather arrogant to think we could repay or work off God’s gift in the first place. All we can do is thank Him and walk by our faith.

Much of modern day religion has missed this point and have embraced a concept of grace which has cheapened it and even “turned the grace of God into lasciviousness” (Jude 4).

There are people in churches of Christ, as well, who have embraced the same false concept and have kept one foot in the world, believing that God’s grace will “cover” them. Our aim is to find out what the Bible says about grace and let the Scriptures define it for us.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature, 2d Ed. (1979)

<sup>2</sup> Alan Richardson, ed., 1950

<sup>3</sup> God’s Words, 1981

<sup>4</sup> The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

# Perspectives on Grace

<b>Perspective</b>	<b>Terms</b>	<b>Requires for Justification</b>	<b>Actual Result</b>	<b>Manifestations</b>	<b>Scriptures to Consider</b>
Saved by Law, works (code)	Nomism, Legalism, Galatianism (emphasis on law)	Perfect performance of the code of conduct. Flawless obedience to the Law of God.	Fear, guilt, “straining & striving” or a dragging of the law down to level that can be kept.	“Creedal talk”; rarely speaks of trusting God or of grace. Emphasis on works; God’s part is minimized or reduced. Attitude very common in cults, under guise of “total commitment.” In less obvious forms, there is a marked lack of assurance because one is never “good enough.”	Romans 1-8; Galatians; Hebrews; Col. 2; I Jn. 1.
Grace = License	Presumption, cheap grace, “easy-believism” (emphasis on self)	Rely on God for salvation, regardless of personal holiness	Self-indulgence, sin.	Lifestyle shows he is clearly unconcerned with obedience to God’s word; probably willfully ignorant of most of it. Avoids any discussion of guilt or God’s wrath.	Jude; I & II Peter; Romans 1-3; Galatians 5-6.
Grace (Faith) Only	Unconditional election, irresistible grace, Calvinism (emphasis on God’s sovereignty)	God supplies grace and faith and makes one holy.	Man is totally passive in respect to his salvation. No room for free will. Requires the unconditional condemnation of the non-elect.	May be a righteous individual; many Calvinists are. Others are very weak in regular commitment: e.g., membership in mainline denominations has plummeted in last twenty years. Though they may not act like it, their doctrine makes them glorified puppets.	Matthew and Luke; Acts; Jas. 2; every passage that implies that man has a choice to make relative to Christ.
Saved by Status (i.e., by virtue of membership in the church)	Christ and church are synonymous (emphasis on church).	Attachment to the “right” church.	Thinks exclusively in terms of the unit. Weekly worship put for daily commitment.	Conversations about spiritual things almost always include references to the church (universal?).	Rev. 2-3; Hebrews 9:27; 11; Rom. 4; II Cor. 5:10.
Saved by Grace through Faith	Relationship, Fellowship with God and Christ (emphasis on Christ and love).	Belief, trust, submission, obedience.	Forgiveness, life, justification. Obedience, trust, confidence, assurance.	Has made a clean break with the love of sin. Paul’s attitude is exemplary: Galatians 2:20; 6:9-10, 14.	The New Testament, with examples from the OT. See Hebrews 11, for example.

# Are You Sure?

Many people spend much time worrying about whether they are saved. Some believe that salvation involves some miraculous “better-felt-than-told” work of God in their fleshly heart and they spend much time trying to interpret the past events of their lives to determine if this work has been done.

Others are sure it has not been done and they become almost insane with fear that God has passed them by. These ideas are false and not only rob men and women of the joy of being a Christian, but may actually keep them from being saved.

We can be just as sure that we are saved as that the bible is God’s word and that God keeps His promises. Our certainty is based upon our faith in His word.

If a man goes to a bank to borrow one hundred dollars, the banker will give him a note to sign. He then may say, “If you will sign this note and send it to me, I will deposit the money in your account.” When the man has complied with these conditions and is sure the note has been received by the bank, he will not hesitate to draw on the deposit. Faith tells him the banker has done what he has promised to do.

Recorded in Mark 16:16 are these words of Jesus, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth no shall be damned.” When we have done these things, we can be sure of it because we have

done what was commanded of us and we have enough confidence in Him to be sure that he will do what he has promised.

After we become God’s child, we have another promise: “if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin”(I Jn. 1:7). If I diligently study to see the light and then diligently walk in it, I shall be sure he forgives me of any further sins I commit through weakness or ignorance.

Faith in God’s promises is a firm foundation for our certainty of salvation. No other foundation can be trusted; others only deceive. For this reason, we must not depend on what others say but we must personally study the scriptures with great diligence to determine the conditions which God has attached to His promises and to be certain that we comply to the best of our ability with ever one. Then we can be sure we are saved.

SEWELL HALL

# Q&A

## Passages and Analysis

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1. Define “grace.”
2. Describe the relationship between grace and faith.
3. What is the difference between these terms: “grace”; “graceful”; “gracious.”
4. Read John 1:14-17 and explain the use of the term “grace” in relation to Christ.
5. Read Acts 4:32-34. How is the term “grace” used in this text?
6. Read Acts 6:7-9. In what sense was Stephen “full of grace”?
7. Read Acts 11:22-24. When Barnabas “saw the grace of God,” what did he see?
8. Read Acts 13:42-44. What were Paul and Barnabas urging the people to “continue in”?
9. Read Acts 14:2-4. How does one bear “witness to the word of His grace”?
10. Read Acts 14:25-27 & 15:39-41. How is one “commended” to the grace of God?

11. Read Acts 15:10-12. Explain, in context.
12. Read Acts 18:26-28. How do we believe “through grace”?
13. Read Acts 20:23-25. What is the “gospel of the grace of God”?
14. Read Rom. 1:6-8. How did Paul receive “grace and apostleship”?
15. Read Rom. 3:23-25. Describe “justification by grace.”
16. Read Rom. 4:15-17. In what sense does the “promise rest on grace”?
17. Read Rom. 5:1-3. Explain how we gain access to grace.
18. Read Rom. 5:14-21. Explain the term “much more” in this text and how grace abounds “all the more.”
19. Read Rom. 6:1, 14-15. Explain the relationship between grace and sin.
20. Read Rom. 11:5-6. How was the remnant “chosen by grace”? What is the relationship of grace and works?
21. Read Rom. 12:5-7 & Eph. 4:6-8. Explain the place of grace in the giving of our abilities.
22. Read Rom. 16:19-21. How is the “grace of Jesus Christ with” us?

23. Read I Cor. 3:9-11. What is the nature of this “grace” given to Paul?
24. Read I Cor. 15:9-11. Describe each use of the word “grace” in this passage (there are three in the ESV)?
25. Read II Cor. 4:15. How does “extend to more and more people”?
26. Read II Cor. 6:1-3. How might one “receive the grace of God in vain”?
27. Read II Cor. 8:1-10. There are several uses of the word “grace” in this reading. Describe each one.
28. II Cor. 9:7-9. What, specifically, is being given to the Corinthians? (I.e., define “grace.”)
29. Read II Cor. 12:1-10. Describe how Paul uses the term grace in this chapter. Does grace always produce physical benefits?
30. Read Gal. 1:5-7. How does the “other gospel” that Paul mentions here affect one’s calling in the “grace of Christ”?
31. Read Gal. 1:15 and 2:9. What specific act of grace is Paul referring to?
32. Read Gal. 2:20-21. How might the grace of God be “nullified”?
33. Read Gal. 5:3-5. How can we fall away from grace?
34. Read Eph. 1:1 to 2:8 and summarize Paul’s meaning of grace (note, also, possible synonyms for grace used in this reading).
35. Read Eph. 3:1-3. In what sense was Paul a “steward” of God’s grace? Cf. 3:7-8

36. Read Eph. 4:1-8. What does grace refer to here? What passages that we have studied earlier refer to something similar?
37. Read Eph. 4:28-30. How might we give or impart grace to others? What does “corrupting talk” produce, instead of grace?
38. Read Phil. 1:6-8. How were the Philippians “partakers” of grace with Paul?
39. Read Col. 1:5-7. What is involved in “understanding” the grace of God?
40. Read Col. 4:5-7. Describe “gracious” speech.
41. II Thess. 1:11-12. What does it mean to “glorify” God and how do we do it “according to the grace of our God”?
42. II Thess. 2:15-16. Describe, from this reading, how grace promotes mental health.
43. Read I Tim. 1:13-15. Here grace is described as “overflowing” (ESV) or “more than abundant” (NASB). What is Paul describing?
44. II Tim. 1:8-10. How does God’s grace differ from “our works”? When did God establish his plan of salvation? See Eph. 1:4
45. II Tim. 2:1. How are we strengthened by grace?
46. Titus 2:10-12. What, exactly, “appeared” that brought salvation to all people? When?
47. Titus 3:6-8. What does “justified” mean? How are we “justified by grace”? What else, according to other passages, are we “justified” by?
48. Read Heb. 2:8-10. The writer says that Jesus “tasted death” by the grace of God. Explain.



49. Read Heb. 4:15-15. What is the “throne of grace”? How does grace “help” in time of need?
50. Read Heb. 10:28-30. How might we “outrage” (ESV) or “insult” (NASB) the Spirit of grace?
51. Read Heb. 12:14-16. Explain how we may fail to obtain the grace of God.
52. Read Heb. 13:8-10. Describe the means through which the heart is strengthened by grace. What other things may affect the heart?
53. Read James 4:5-7. What is “more” grace? What does God actually give to the humble? (Cf. I Pet. 5:5)
54. Read I Pet. 3:7. Wives and husbands are joint heirs of the “grace of life.” What does that mean?
55. Read I Pet. 4:9-11. In what sense is God’s grace “manifold” or “varied”?
56. Read I Pet. 5:10. Here God is described as “the God of all grace.” What does “all” refer to? What the rest of the verse promise?
57. Read I Pet. 5:11-13. What are we to “stand firm” in, exactly?
58. Read II Pet. 3:18. How do we “grow” in grace?
59. Read Jude 3-5. Who “perverted the grace”? What did they do?
60. What is with us when the “grace of the Lord Jesus” is with us?

# Q&A

## Categorize the Passages

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*In this column, name the category in which the passages on grace fit.*

*In this column, list the passages that fit the category*

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*Grace as the preached word.*

*Passages: Acts 13:42-44 (etc.)*

## The High Cost of the Free Gift

When a sense of sin has been awakened in us, we will mourn, not only for what Christ has suffered, but for what He has suffered *for us*. It was while we were sinners that Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). God prepared a body for His Son so that He could suffer in that body for all of us (Heb. 10:5). As we focus on the cross, our thoughts should never forget the reason for it.

We know that Jesus suffered much on the eve of the execution from the account in Mt. 26. “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death,” He told His disciples, and went off to pray to His Father: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” The words of Dt. 21:23 undoubtedly weighed heavily on His mind: “For He who is hanged on a tree is accursed of God.” And surely He recognized that crucifixion was universally considered the most horrible form of death and was reserved for the most vile.

The punishment began when Jesus was stripped and inflicted with the most terrible form of scourging, the flagellum of the Romans, a whip in which nails or pieces of bone were attached to intensify the pain. Often the sufferer died under it.

It was 9 O’clock when the procession reached Golgotha (Calvary) and the dreary preparations for the crucifixion commenced. The most awful moment was to follow: Jesus was laid down upon the implement of torture. His arms were stretched along the cross-beams and at the center of the open palms, the point of a huge iron spike was placed, and then



driven home into the wood below. Another spike was driven through the feet, tearing its way through the quivering flesh. Then the “accursed tree” was heaved up slowly and the end fixed firmly in a hole in the ground. The feet were just slightly above the ground and Jesus was in easy reach of anyone who might choose to strike Him.

Death by crucifixion includes all that pain and death can have of the horrible and ghastly dizziness, cramp, thirst, starvation, sleeplessness, traumatic fever, tetanus (lockjaw); the publicity of shame, the long continuance of torment, the horror of anticipation, the mortification of unattended wounds, all endured up to, but short of unconsciousness.

The unnatural position made every movement painful; the lacerated veins and crushed

tendons throbbed with incessant anguish; the wounds, inflamed by exposure, gradually gangrened; the arteries, especially of the head and stomach, became swollen and oppressed with surcharged blood; and, while each variety of misery went on, gradually increasing, there was added to them the intolerable pang of burning and raging thirst, for which Jesus was offered a sponge laced with vinegar.

Such was the death which Christ suffered for you and me. Such is the stark reality of the cost of grace to God, a gift which He has so freely given us.

## The Last Word on Grace

We have looked at most of the passages on grace that occur in the New Testament with the aim of expanding our understanding of the concept. What have we learned?

### Grace cost God His only Son

If we forget everything else, we should remember that grace is centered in the cross. It is a far cry from a “nice warm feeling” that God has for His creation whether He has that or not is irrelevant—the Bible never suggests that grace is the “warm fuzzies.”

In fact, when we think accurately about grace, our first thought may well be repugnance at the idea that God has to send His Son to the awful cross because of us.

Grace cost God a great deal. His willingness to sacrifice His Son for us, “while we were yet sinners” (Rom. 5:8) is nearly incomprehensible, at least from a human level.

Grace, ultimately, is God’s love put into action through His Son.

### Grace is free

Grace was very costly to God, but it is free to us (see Rom. 5:15-17). There is no way we can earn the gift, otherwise it would not be a gift.

It may come as a surprise that we don’t all embrace this quite as readily as we might expect. Receiving a gift is more difficult than it first appears. There is a strong inclination in most of us perhaps due to upbringing—that causes us to reject the notion of a pure gift. We may feel that if we didn’t earn it, it’s not worth much.

But grace must be accepted as a gift or we will nullify the force of it. Paul made this point in the letter to the Galatians. A failure to grasp this point is the primary reason some “fall away from grace” (Gal. 5:4).

### Grace is free but not cheap

Grace is free, but not cheap. What is “cheap grace”? This is the other extreme from the “earn it” view. This is a willingness to take the gift but without appreciating it.

Those who fail to recognize or appreciate the cost of grace may view it as a covering for sin. They turn the grace of God into a license to practice sensuality (Jude 4). They say, “God will forgive me; that’s his job.” But as Jude says, “their condemnation is just.”

### Grace is not unconditional

Another false view of grace is that because it is free, it is “irresistible”; that is, that there are no conditions to receiving it.

But Paul says that we have “obtained access” to grace “by faith” (Rom. 5:2). Without faith, we will not seek grace nor can we obtain it. Grace is God’s part, centered in the cross. Faith is man’s part, and comes through hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17).

We can illustrate this in several ways. For example, a suitor asks his sweetheart to marry him, and holds out a diamond ring, in all its brilliance. He offers the ring without cost; it is a gift, motivated by grace and love. If she accepts it, their relationship changes—they are “engaged.” But if his sweetheart never takes the ring and places it on her finger, while it is no less a gift, there is no change in their relationship because she has not accepted it.

God’s grace, likewise, but be taken. He will not force it on anyone.

### Grace does not eliminate “law”

Some are under the impression that grace and law are mutually exclusive—that if we are “under grace” instead of “under law” then there is no law.

Grace without law is impossible. Law defines sin (Rom. 4:15) and without sin (and therefore, without law) there would be no reason for grace. If there were no sin, there would be no reason for Christ to die on the cross, which is the primary manifestation of God’s grace.

Grace does not eliminate law; instead, it saves us from the effect of not keeping law perfectly. See Gal. 3:21; I Cor. 9:21; Rom. 3:8; 6:1, 15.

### The Final Word on Grace

Ultimately, it will all come down to what we do with God’s grace. The word of His grace (His gift of Jesus) has been preached—the question is, how will we respond? Or, to put it in terms Pilate’s question, “What shall I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?”

II Cor. 5:10 says we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. What verdict will we hear? The answer depends totally on how we respond, day-in and day-out to the “incredible” gift of God, His grace. Those who cherish it and live in appreciation for it will hear those words, “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord.”