

Essential Truths I: Living With God

10 Grace

The grace of God was very important in the life of the early Christians. [Acts 4:33](#) tells us:

“With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and *much grace* was with them all.”

In [Acts 14:26](#), we discover that Paul and Barnabas “had been committed to the grace of God for the work” of the Lord and in [Acts 15:40](#), when Paul and Silas start out on their missionary journey, they are again “commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.”

Why was the grace of God so important to these early Christians? What does it mean when the church “commended” them to the grace of God. Why does it say that “much grace” was with them.

The word “grace” is a very important word in the Bible. It undergirds the whole meaning of our salvation and is the basis of our daily walk in Christ.

Read Colossians 1:6

The Gospel was “bearing fruit” because the Colossians Christians had “understood God’s grace in all its truth.” So what is the meaning of this word “grace”?

Grace has two meanings. We must understand both aspects of its meaning in order to experience the fullness of grace in our lives.

Grace is undeserved favor

When Paul states that “it is by grace you have been saved” ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)), he is speaking of this aspect of the meaning of grace. We did not deserve God’s favor, yet because of God’s matchless love, he extended his mercy toward us and

The Word

God

Origins

Jesus

The Cross

The Blood

Resurrection

Repentance

Faith

▶ **Grace** ◀

Water Baptism

Holy Spirit

Temptation

Fellowship

Generosity

Kingdom of God

Worship

Prayer

Eternity

Second Coming

The Call

saved us, despite our hopeless condition (see **Romans 5:6-8**).

Grace is God's mercy at work. Even though we were sinners, deserving of judgment, God forgave us and saved us in Christ. As A. W. Tozer phrased it:

“Grace is the good pleasure of God that inclines him to bestow benefits upon the undeserving.”¹

John Stott further clarified the meaning of this aspect of God's grace with these words:

“Grace is love that cares and stoops and rescues.”²

Read Ephesians 1:3-13

Read Ephesians 2:1-7

In **2 Timothy 1:9**, Paul summarizes this first meaning of grace by saying that God saved us “not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.” This is the essence of grace – it is *not because of anything we ourselves do*. It is totally undeserved, totally free and totally extended toward us!

The nature of God's grace could not be better expressed than in the beautiful hymn by Charles Wesley:

He left his Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite his grace!
Emptied himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race.³

Read John 1:14,16-17

Read Hebrews 2:9

Grace is enabling power

But the second part to the meaning of grace is just as important. Not only does grace make us *accepted* into the family of God; grace also *enables* us to live the Christian life!

Read 1 Corinthians 15:10

What an incredible self-description by Paul! Everything that Paul did – the ministry that “turned the world upside down” (**Acts 17:6**, KJV) – was energized by the grace of God – God's enabling power. Benjamin Jowett described it this way:

“Grace is an energy; not a mere sentiment; not a mere thought of the Almighty; not even a word of the Almighty. It is as real an energy as the energy of electricity. It is a divine energy; it is the energy of the divine affection rolling in plenteousness toward the shores of human need.”⁴

And as Evelyn Underhill proclaimed:

“Grace is God himself, his loving energy at work within his church and within our souls.”⁵

In your salvation, the fullness of God's grace is at work. Through God's unmerited favor you received forgiveness and restored relationship with him in spite of the fact that you did not deserve it. But more than that, God's enabling power is also at work. It is only by God's grace that you are transformed, born again and become a new creation.

Do you remember the essential meaning of grace distilled from **2 Timothy 1:9**? It is *not because of anything we ourselves do*. Grace simply means that God does what we cannot do ourselves. We could not save ourselves, so God saved us by his grace. Neither can we live the Christian life in our own strength, so God's grace gives us the ability to do what we cannot do ourselves. Both aspects of God's grace – his undeserved favor and his enabling power – come to us because we are in Christ.

Read Romans 5:1-2

This passage is an incredible description of the nature of grace. Let's take a look at how different versions of the Bible render these two verses:

New International Version: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand..."

Darby's New Translation: "Therefore having been justified on the principle of faith, we have peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom we have also access by faith into this favour in which we stand..."

New Century Version: "Since we have been made right with God by our faith, we have peace with God. This happened through our Lord Jesus Christ, who has brought us into that blessing of God's grace that we now enjoy..."

New Living Translation: "Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of highest privilege where we now stand..."

J. B. Phillips' The New Testament in Modern English: "Since then it is by faith that we are justified, let us grasp the fact that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have confidently entered into this new relationship of grace, and here we take our stand..."

The Message: "By entering through faith into what God has always wanted to do for us – set us right with him, make us fit for him – we have it all together with God because of our Master Jesus... We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand – out in the wide open spaces of God's grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise."

The Amplified Bible: "Therefore, since we are justified – acquitted, declared righteous, and given a right standing with God – through faith, let us [grasp the fact that we] have [the peace of reconciliation] to hold and to

enjoy...Through Him also we have [our] access (entrance, introduction) by faith into this grace – state of God’s favor – in which we [firmly and safely] stand...”

Just as we discovered in our last lesson that faith has two aspects – a saving aspect and a daily aspect – so also does grace. **Romans 5:1** describes the saving aspect of God’s grace and **Romans 5:2** describes the continuing, daily aspect of God’s grace.

Daily Grace

Read 2 Timothy 2:1

As believers in Christ, grace is a state in which we now live and breathe. We are encouraged to “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” and to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (**2 Peter 3:18**).

Grace is the power that energizes your walk in the Spirit. And just as we have seen that there are two meanings to grace, so these two parts to grace are available to you on a daily basis:

- God’s undeserved favor – the forgiveness of sins (**Romans 3:23-24**)
- God’s enabling power – the power to overcome sin (**Romans 6:14; Titus 2:11-12**)

If we only understand one of these aspects of grace without the other, we can seriously misunderstand the nature of God’s grace.

Read Romans 6:1-2

The first misunderstanding of God’s grace is to think that it *doesn’t matter* if a Christian sins, because God’s grace is always available to bring forgiveness (read **Jude 4**). But no, God’s forgiveness is only one half of the work of grace. God’s plan is for us to overcome sin through the power of His grace.

Read Romans 6:14

The second misunderstanding of God’s grace is to think that a Christian *cannot* sin. John wrote about this clearly in **1 John 1:8,10**:

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us...If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”

God’s grace works only when we realize our need of God’s help. It is in the midst of our weakness that grace comes to do what we cannot do ourselves (**Romans 8:3-4**). Like Paul, we too can discover the daily outworking of God’s grace in the midst of our weakness and inability.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

This grace is a *daily* grace. It is not stored ahead of time, but is only made avail-

able at the point of need (note **Hebrews 4:16**). As Louis Cassels phrased it:

“If God wants you to do something, he’ll make it possible for you to do it, but the grace he provides comes only with the task and cannot be stockpiled beforehand. We are dependent on him from hour to hour, and the greater our awareness of this fact, the less likely we are to faint or fail in a crisis.”⁶

You cannot survive on yesterday’s grace. Like the manna in the wilderness (**Exodus 16:14-21**), God’s grace is fresh and new each morning. We need to take time to draw on his grace each and every day.

Read Lamentations 3:22-23

Missing the Grace of God

Read Hebrews 12:15

As Christians, we have been called to continue in God’s grace (**Acts 13:43**). But, sadly, it is possible to miss the grace of God. We can miss the God’s grace through:

Self-effort

Read Galatians 5:4

We sometimes use the term “fallen from grace” to refer to a backslidden Christian. But this is not, in fact, what Paul is talking about. Note his words:

“You who are *trying to be justified by law* have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.”

It is the legalistic Christian who has fallen away from grace* (note **Galatians 1:6**). When a Christian becomes “burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (**Galatians 5:1**), they miss out on the grace that God has set apart for them for this day.

Read Romans 11:6

Self-gratification

Read Galatians 5:13

The other way we can miss out on the grace of God is through a self-focus expressed in the gratification of the flesh. This is not just “giving in” to temptation. Indulging an unforgiving spirit is just as much a gratification of the flesh as indulging in anger or in lust, and that is what the Lord specifically targets in **Hebrews 12:15**.

Read Romans 13:14

Grace is so important in God’s plan for our lives because only grace changes the focus of our lives from self to God. If we could save ourselves, the result would be pride and boasting. If we could live the Christian life in our own strength, the

* There is no indication that someone who falls into legalism loses their salvation. What they do lose is the energizing power of God’s grace in their lives.

result would be the same.

Read James 4:6

We experience God's grace in our lives through humility – a simple but life-changing revelation that we cannot *save* ourselves or *change* ourselves. We can only rely on the wonderful grace of God.

Read Galatians 2:20-21

Grace in Action

Read again Hebrews 4:16

God's grace is like a bank from which we can withdraw deposits each and every day. Imagine someone set up an account in your name, but with certain provisions. "Each and every day," your mysterious benefactor says, "I will place one million dollars in your account. You can draw on that account as often as you like during the day, but come midnight, any balance in your account is wiped clean. Then at 6 am each morning, a new million dollars is placed in your account."

What would you do? How many of us would try to use as much of the million dollars as we could each day?

That's how God's grace works. As you walk with God each day, we constantly meet new trials of our faith (**1 Peter 1:6-7**). But Peter describes these trials in a very unusual way. They are called "all kinds of trials" (NIV), "various trials" (DNT) and "manifold trials" (KJV).

The Greek word that Peter uses literally means "various, diversified, manifold, different kinds." The word "manifold" means "multicolored and magnificently variegated." In other words, the trials you face are "various, diversified, multicolored and magnificently variegated"!

But then Peter does something unusual. In **1 Peter 4:10**, he uses exactly the same Greek word, but this time referring to God's grace. As the *New King James Version* translates it:

The Gifts of the Spirit

The word grace is used in the Bible to describe many different facets of God's work in your life. The grace of salvation is the most commonly understood aspect of God's grace, but the word grace (in Greek, *charisma*) also refers to the gifts of the Spirit.

This is understandable, since grace is "God's enabling power." When we operate in the gifts of the Spirit, or in any form of ministry, that is God's grace flowing through us to touch other people lives.

Take a look at the following verses and see how this aspect of the meaning of grace is used throughout the New Testament.

Read Acts 6:8

Read Acts 14:3

Read Romans 12:6

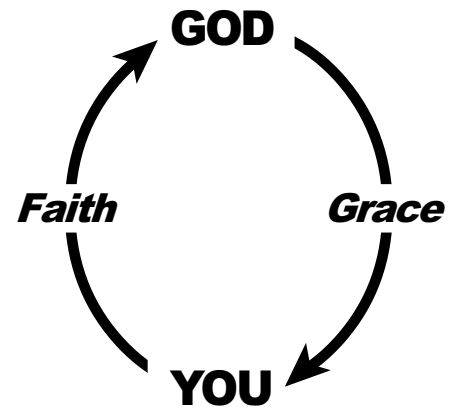
Read 2 Corinthians 8:7

Read Ephesians 3:2,7-8

Read Ephesians 4:7

“As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of *the manifold grace of God.*”

Grace is also described as manifold. God’s grace is not a monochrome, one-size-fits-all grace. It is “multicolored and magnificently variegated.” Just as you face manifold trials, so God has made manifold grace available to you. If you are facing a bright red trial, then there is bright red grace waiting for you to draw on. If you are facing a deep green trial, then God has a deep green variant of his grace ready for your use. God’s grace is designed to match each and every situation you face.



God is called “the God of all grace” (1 Peter 5:10). But that grace is released on the basis of your faith. It works this way.

In the midst of a trial of faith, your response to God is *faith*, which is believing what God’s Word says *despite* what the circumstances might indicate. God’s response to your faith is his *grace*. That was why Paul was able to say in 2 Corinthians 9:8:

“And God is able to make *all* grace *abound* to you, so that in *all* things at *all* times, having *all* that you need, you will *abound* in *every* good work.”

¹ A. W. Tozer (1897-1963), quoted by Edyth Draper, *Draper’s Quotations for the Christian World* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House), extracted from QuickVerse 5.0.

² John R. W. Stott (1921-), quoted by Edyth Draper, *Draper’s Quotations for the Christian World* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House), extracted from QuickVerse 5.0.

³ Charles Wesley (1707-1788), quoted by Edyth Draper, *Draper’s Quotations for the Christian World* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House), extracted from QuickVerse 5.0.

⁴ Benjamin Jowett (1817-1893), quoted by Edyth Draper, *Draper’s Quotations for the Christian World* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House), extracted from QuickVerse 5.0.

⁵ Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941), quoted by Edyth Draper, *Draper’s Quotations for the Christian World* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House), extracted from QuickVerse 5.0.

⁶ Louis Cassels (1922-1974), quoted by Edyth Draper, *Draper’s Quotations for the Christian World* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House), extracted from QuickVerse 5.0.