

Grace is a Funny Thing

Funny has a number of meanings – causing laughter, out of the ordinary, strange; Grace is all of these, and more!

Two well-known Bible passages highlight the blessings of Grace:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Mt 5:3 - 10

Each blessing underlines God’s grace, and its paradox. Without grace there could be no hope in the trials of poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, hunger and thirst for righteousness . . . only by a promise of blessing (a gift in each **for**) could anyone expect to reasonably find hope!

The same is true of *Psalm 23* – the promises of Grace are the bases for the comforts offered; in this short piece we have one Grace after another:

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of righteousness
for his name’s sake.
Even though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

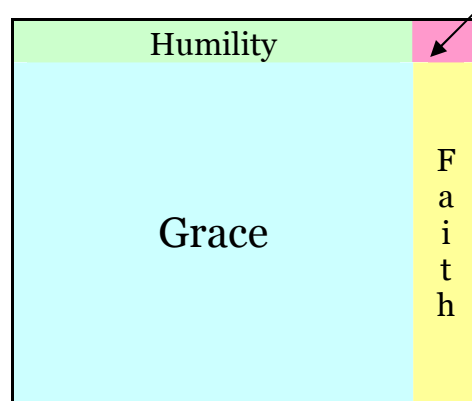
You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the **LORD**
forever.

I Don't Especially See Grace – How Do I Get It?

If Grace is a gift, then why don't more people appear to recognize and have it (even, and most sadly, even "church" people)? The sole reason is that, while Grace is a gift, it is conditional. It is not a gift "on top of" what we already have, rather it is a gift offered in place of what we have and dearly cling to – in Psalm 23 the condition is stated right up front: IF The LORD is my shepherd . . . is the condition on which all the following promises rest. While all the promises of Jesus' *Beatitudes*, while more subtle, likewise rest on the assumption that The LORD is my shepherd. No temporal, much less eternal, Grace is promised without and until the pinnacle Grace of salvation is found and accepted – which requires a giving up of what we now have for the promise of what The **LORD** as our shepherd offers.

A picture may better underscore how and where Grace is found and the "door" through which we enter into it:



EVERY promise of Grace comes with the condition of relinquishing something we now hold onto – humility in understanding Someone knows more than I do accompanied its twin, in action, faith. Faith is not a passive mental acknowledgment (humility is the mental "part"), rather it is the active outworking of this mental and emotional confession –the giving up in order to receive.

Grace Works!

The Lord's hand was with them [another way of saying "Grace"], and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God . . . Ac 11:21 - 23

"But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God [is of and by Grace!]." Jn 3:21

The devil (and many preachers too) would like us to believe that Grace is not a funny thing – it is either earned (the most common message of the conservative) or universal (the false hope of the liberal), both lies! Even before Jesus (and the *New Testament*) we were warned of this foolishness:

You have wearied the **LORD** with your words.

“How have we wearied him?” you ask.

By saying, “All who do evil are good in the eyes of the **LORD**, and he is pleased with them” [this is the liberal – “Don’t worry. God made you like you are, he loves you without condition and will receive you with open arms in heaven!”] or “Where is the God of justice?” [the conservative self-righteousness that is even more sickening – they believe they have worked hard enough and been good enough to please God and, thus, they will be saved.] Mal 2:17

Both the liberal (who does not want to give up the sin and self-dependence to which they cling and identify with) and the conservative (in their pride rather than humility) will be destroyed! Both can be VERY religious, but both are dead wrong!

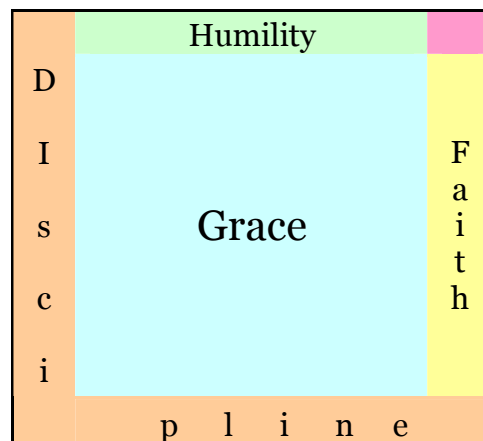
Either Grace is working (and is evident) or it is false hope!

When Grace Comes the “Fun” Really Begins

The beginning of Grace is just that – a beginning (not the end unless it comes at the immediate end of life like it did for the thief on the cross next to Jesus).

The term for one who has received Grace (versus the one offered, but refusing it) is a disciple – accenting the continuing, third component, condition, of Grace – developing the disciplines to continue receiving (accepting) the Grace offered to us that is necessary to get from where we are to where we hope to be when our few short years are over.

Grace is a gift conditioned on humility and faith, “bordered” by discipline:



The disciplines and trials of Grace have as their purpose to keep us at the point of humility and faith rather to succumb to the liberal or conservative error and resulting death. Yes, it (and I!) must get better than this.

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you [by and through Grace!] to will and to act according to his good purpose. ^{Phil 2:12 - 13}

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. ^{Eph 2:1 - 10}

We accomplish more, not by trying harder but, by properly gracing. Grace is a paradox:

Grace is a gift, it is conditional. It is not a gift “on top of” what we already have, rather it is a gift offered in place of what we have and dearly cling to:

“Those who cling to worthless idols
forfeit the grace that could be theirs.” ^{Jonah 2:8}

Yes, Grace is a funny thing –

Easier than what we are now doing – but decidedly different.
A gift/free – yet demanding we give up everything to take it.
Offered to those most likely to take it – the weak, foolish, poor . . .
Requiring us, by discipline, to grow in it or lose it.

Maybe the chief obstacle and primary focus of the Christian has to be in confronting and destroying, by and through Grace itself, the next barrier to Grace – for no matter how far a person has progressed there is another, higher, barrier attempting to impede Grace. Who would deny that the hardest thing, the highest barrier, we have to confront is death? And where, other than through and by Grace, is there any hope?

Grace is a funny, but serious, thing!