

To the Finish Line



Very frankly, we have no need of God, or His

- ✓ Have all the money we need and want
- ✓ Do not have any health
- ✓ Possess unlimited time
- ✓ Maintain perfect
- ✓ Are without any physical limitations or “flaws” . . .
- ✓ Are free from any drives, urges or passions that control us . . .
- ✓ Feel we have everything we own in order, clean, in good condition, . . .
- ✓ Expect to live forever and not be required (like everyone else) to leave everything behind . . .



grace, if we:

so we can buy everything to make and keep us happy . . .
issues – now or in the future . . .
to do what we want, when we want to . . .
relationships with everyone . . .

Otherwise, it would be wise to understand we do need God and His grace; and know how to get, keep and increase it to the finish line!

The defining evidence of true Christianity is the reality and presence of God’s grace – not what we do for God, but what He has and is doing for us NOW! Yes, with true grace **we will be changed and will live differently**; but only because of God’s grace. Always, where there is real Christianity, there is a growing grace. A person may have great faith in a religion other than Christianity, but even they would have to admit **Christianity is the only grace-based religion** (in spite of many, if not most, professing Christians understanding nothing of grace – clinging to a dead, works-based, religion less like the teachings of the *Bible* than that of the *Koran*).

In its essence, grace is God’s power given to man to do what is otherwise impossible in and of themselves. We see, in the *Bible*, a clear example of this:

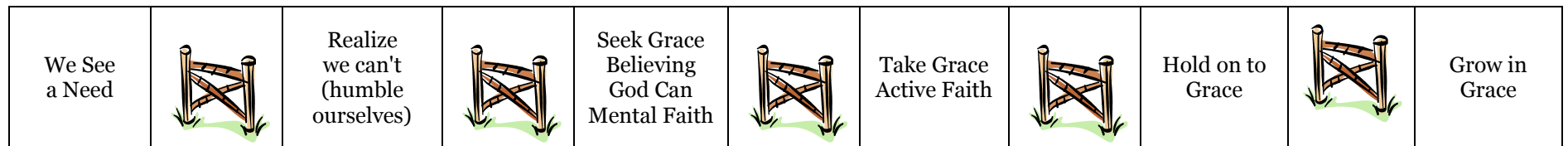
The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. Ac 11:21 - 23

It wasn’t that they went to church every week, gave money to the church, were nice to other people – something extraordinary, beyond man’s abilities, was occurring such that Church leaders, in Jerusalem, had to send a representative to verify it!

And while **grace is totally and fully a gift**, there are ways we can cooperate with or hinder, impede or even destroy it in our lives – we need to know these warnings and principles. “When Barnabas arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and **encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.**” **Yes, grace is a gift, but the world and devil will do everything they can to keep us from it.** The devil will use religion? Of course! **False religion is the best poison to grace** – becoming self-righteous and thinking I can, by doing **anything**, please God so He gives me grace. But, of course, this is foolishness –

either grace is a gift or it is not – in true Christianity it is fully a gift – in a false religion (including many who **say** they are Christians) grace is not a consideration or issue at all or it is not fully a gift – it is based on something we do for God. The defining evidence of true Christianity is the reality and presence of God’s grace – not what we do for God, but what He has and is doing for us NOW and promises to do in the future!

A Picture of the Hurdles to Grace



Faith is the common factor at each hurdle – that is why our prayers should less often be for more grace (there is much grace available if we will just take it!) – our cry and seeking should be for more faith (a type of grace) – the taking of this available grace!

One, and Only, Way to Get Grace

There are two type people in the world – those who know they are helpless and hopeless and those who don’t know this (but nevertheless are as well since all people are hopeless and helpless).

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” ^{1Co 1:26 - 31}

“God opposes the proud
but gives grace to the humble.” ^{Psalms, 1 Peter and James}

The paradox we see most clearly in David’s life is that his (like Paul’s) great strength was his knowledge of his weakness; both made big mistakes, but the mistakes and sins were mitigated by this knowledge of their weakness and the humility flowing from it; only in grace are we strong.

But God said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” ^{2Co 12:9}

Faith, Faith, Faith

Grace is all around, available and ever-present; **the limitation is not with God, it is in our failing to seek and take the available grace by faith.** Faith, a type grace itself, is the “conduit” and only channel for grace – knowing we can’t and God can and will.

“I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” ^{Mt 17:20}

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” ^{Mt 19:25 - 26}

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. ^{Heb 11:6}

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. ^{Heb 4:16}

The Great Fear - Losing Grace

You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. ^{Gal 5:4}

Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. ^{2Pe 3:17}

Much of the *Bible* is focused on the warnings of forgetting our need of God and His grace and trying to get by on our own strength; seeking God from crisis to crisis rather than day-by-day, day-in day-out, in the daily mundane issues of life.

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. ^{Jude 1:3}

Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. Then the LORD'S anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving you. Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the LORD swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth. ^{Dt 11:16 - 21}

It is vital we understand we are saved by grace, not by observing the Law. That being said, our need of “being careful,” “not forgetting” . . . is as important now as it was to the Jews. If we forget our need of grace, and fail to develop Christian disciplines, we will walk away from God and His grace.

Growing in Grace

It is inevitable, we are either cultivating and growing grace or we are losing it, even if gradually. Yes, while grace is **totally** and **fully** a gift, there are ways we can cooperate with or hinder, impede or even destroy it – we need to know these negative warnings and positive principles.

Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen. ^{2Pe 3:17 - 18}

Every day brings a need for new and “fresh” grace.

Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. ^{1Ti 4:15 - 16}

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}

A Perfect Picture and Message of Grace

Psalm 23

A psalm of David.

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.

Seek, Depend On, Grow, Value, Remember . . . God's Grace!