

Stealth-Grace

Practical Reflections on Grace

“I haven’t ever seen or experienced Grace,” many people (some attending church regularly) would say if questioned about what Grace “looks like” in real life. And there are logical reasons for this:

- Grace is not defined in the *Bible* and the generally recognized definition (“the unmerited favor of God”) is nebulous at best.
- As another sign of a decaying church, Grace is taught less and less in churches so even church-goers are often in a haze about it. And normally, when Grace is discussed, it is more theoretical and less practical so that, rather than clarifying, these discussions further mask and confuse its meaning.
- Grace frequently works in stealth-mode so that, while it is generally in plain sight, it can be easily overlooked. How and why is this?

- By God’s design and purpose much of what He does is intentionally in stealth-mode. God gives Grace most often to the initially foolish, weak, and poor so that other people are seldom impressed or envious of those receiving Grace, having no desire to emulate them.

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. ^{1Co 1:26}

- Even after receiving their Grace, there are typically still non-Christian people (those with natural gifts and talents) who are, in worldly ways, smarter, richer, stronger . . . than the seemingly pitiful folks receiving God’s Grace. This, likewise, does not inspire a stampede to God for His Grace.
- Again, by the plan of God, Grace majors on the intangibles of life (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control ^{Gal 5:22-23}) while minoring on the physical and tangible. And since the world radically distorts, devalues or outright rejects these signs and aspects of a Grace-life, those receiving great Grace seldom interest or attract the non-Graced.
- In most (if not all) cases, in much the same way as worldly gifts, Grace is not unconditional (meaning being given free of any conditions). The *Bible* promises many Graces, but in taking them we must, at the same time, seek corresponding Grace to give-up that which is incompatible with a specific Grace (for example, the Grace for a great marriage is not harmonious with those valuing and clinging to adulterous relationships – Grace is not given to the prideful because they cannot accept the fact they are in need . . .). All Graces are multiple times Better and more for our good than the relative trifles we must “sacrifice” for them, nonetheless we must at least desire and pursue this taking/forsaking.
- In the same vein, Grace can easily be overlooked as such, because it generally works through us, in apparent “natural” ways, so those looking on may feel “Of course, I see how they did this – it isn’t the ‘magic’ I would think of as Grace.” Even for gifts

people would like, seeing how the “hot dog” is made can take the mystery away and make the Grace appear to be of human making or will.

As an example, the *Bible* indicates/God says: “physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.” ^{1Ti 4:8} So that, we can expect (as in the case of all things that the *Bible* indicates has value) that God offers Grace for physical training (which is necessary for health as we age).

Many people say and diligently pray: “I would sure like God’s Grace of health!” That is, until they find out the Grace God offers is to show us what to do, how to do it and gives us the self-control and power to then exercise, part with damaging habits . . . Once finding out this is what Grace will do/how it works, the great majority of people reject this Grace on the basis of “I didn’t realize I was going to have to exercise, give up smoking, stop being a slug, etc.! It isn’t worth it.” In other words, they would like an unconditional gift of health *if* they can continue their unhealthy habits and, since they can’t, they reject the great gift of health offered with minimal effort (after Grace is given us to both do and enjoy it) for very much greater health benefits. God’s Grace is not unconditional – where we find His Grace offers (only found in the *Bible*) we likewise find the associated conditions for them.

As indicated, the greatest Graces are God’s offers of intangible Betters – peace, contentment, patience, kindness, goodness . . . , but there are still many promised and offered tangible and physical Graces (including “all things” ^{Mt 6:33} – food, clothes, etc.) needed for life. God also routinely gives people jobs, homes, cars and other “things.” Like all Graces, these come with associated responsibilities – that we care for and use them to our good, not our detriment. We must value and care for them (by seeking further Grace). We cannot expect God to give us what we do not prize enough to take care of, especially since He will give us further Grace for this. No good parent continues to Grace their children with “things” that the children “trash” and expect to be automatically replaced – neither does God. And when we do value and take care of what God gives us, this is yet another reason people overlook the Grace – they just assume we are doing this on our own instead of understanding this is another Grace in stealth-mode.

Grace – A Practical Definition

A simple, yet practical, definition of Grace is that it is a gift given, with no need or expectation of repayment on the part of the giver, so that the receiver can do what is otherwise not possible for them to do. And not only can God give Grace, we can also give Grace (or better said, we can be God’s conduits of Grace) to others with even greater blessing to us. We are expected to learn to pass-along Grace to others as God provides and leads us to do so.

It is more blessed to give than to receive. ^{Ac 20:35}

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. ^{2Co 9:8}

After the initial greatest of all Graces, eternal salvation ^{Eph 2:1-10} (speaking specifically here about God’s special Graces, not the “common” Graces of life itself and the many gifts He gives even unsaved people – food, clothing, the means of holding a job . . .), all God’s further special Graces

(offered to all – taken by only those who are saved) are for the purpose of sanctifying us: successfully and purposefully saving us, from the world and all its dangers and traps, until we die and enter heaven (the dangers of life, and need to be saved from them, certainly do not end when we are born again).

No, Grace after being born again is not an optional gift we are free to take or leave, to be eternally saved we must take it! Jesus warned one of the religious leaders of His time:

I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? *Jn 3:12*

Jesus is different from all other supposed religious “saviors” because, unlike them, Jesus does not say He will save us eternally if we do x, y and z for Him now; He saves us now as a sign and promise to save us eternally. Thus, Jesus promises great “now” Graces as a basis for growing in His grace and truth until we die and are made perfect (“glorified” in *Bible* speak) – we are told:

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

The Real Beauty, Value & Meaning of Grace

Just as Grace cannot be separated from associated responsibilities and conditions, it surely cannot be separated from Christ. Churches can talk all they want about a theoretical and historical Jesus, but apart from their teaching His Grace we will have no connection or personal relationship with (or real understanding of) Jesus Christ. For while Jesus is His name, Grace is what He does for us, how we relate to Him. Grace is our best evidence of Jesus, seeing the reality of His gifting us tangibly and intangibly beyond anything we could think or imagine.

By Grace all authentic Christians are rich beyond counting (a few even financially). They value and seek what money cannot buy, understanding all of His Grace’s combined are far distant, in importance, to knowing Christ – as a young child will appreciate the presents of the parents while certainly valuing and loving their parents far far more.

Yes, God’s Grace is inseparable from Christ, the Holy Spirit and God the Father. So seeking Christ first is the key to finding Him and all the associated Graces. And the “map” for this great search? The *Bible* (especially the *New Testament*).

A practical definition of faith is the acceptance of God’s Grace. So that a very real “measure” of our faith may be the degree and level of our seeking and accepting His abundantly surrounding Graces – our personal lack of Grace is not for want of Christ’s many offers, but our lack of valuing and taking these great many offered gifts that are all around us.

And while God (to their ultimate eternal detriment) gives common Graces to non-Christians (in differing measures and types), He likewise, in His Word, makes it clear their failure to acknowledge Him, and seek Him for the far more important special graces He offers, will end in eternal destruction.

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. *Ro 1:18 - 20*

For Grace, although often in stealth-mode, can be clearly seen for those choosing to see it.

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. ^{Jn 3:21}

Grace is real power the receiver certainly (and possibly others as well) will see:

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. ^{Eph 3:20-21}

Let's face it, all of life is stealthy – if we don't find hope, help and purpose in Christ we certainly, as an alternative, are not going to find it in a world that is nonsensical and, as a result, even more stealthy.

And any thought that Grace is rare is certainly foolish for:

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written. ^{Jn 21:25}

If that is an observation from the short 3-plus years Jesus was on earth, do we think He has stopped doing these works? Do we consider this (wrongly) a past tense or (rightly) a present tense verse? There are certainly currently millions upon millions that personally testify to God's personal and frequent Grace – in spite of their still poor "eyesight" ^{1Co 13:12} they see well enough to find and know the source of their many blessings of Grace, having faith to proclaim:

From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ^{Jn 1:16-17}

Yes, God's Grace (to other than the receiver) is typically in stealth-mode with the only way to see it, for ourselves, being by seeking to hear God's Voice to us personally in His Word and related prayer.

We are saved and live by Grace – these are not gifts we can afford to miss!