

What Is Grace? And, Why It Is So Very Important.

(And Equally More Important – What It Isn't)

It is no overstatement that there is nothing more important to and distinctive about Christianity than grace. Our understanding of what Jesus Christ means to us is limited to our understanding (conscious or subconscious) of grace. For this reason, it is certainly better and more beneficial if we can take from the subconscious, making it more conscious and more usable.

Interestingly, the *Bible* provides no definition of grace. And surely this is because grace is so pervasive and important a single one-sentence definition is not possible – the most common definition (*the unmerited favor of God*) is not that enlightening or practical! We do know, from the Bible, that:

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Jn 1:17

. . . 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 2:5-10

Thus, nothing is more important than grace – along with truth, it is what Jesus brought and by it we are saved! Most professing Christians would agree we are eternally saved by grace. The biggest issue, then, is what (if anything) should we expect from grace between the time we are saved until we die? What, in daily life, does grace look like and how can we expect to receive it?

Peter unquestionably considers grace important to the extent we must “grow” in it so we do not “fall” away. Why is it so important, what does growing in grace mean and how is it achieved?

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

But, What About Faith?

“But, but, but . . . (many, maybe most professing Christians would say at this point), what about faith? I have always understood faith was the ‘chicken’ laying the Gospel eggs – you seem to say it is grace that is the catalyst for Christian blessings! I am confused!” Yes, we have, all-too-often, been confused on this issue. In the *Bible's* only statement (above) as to how we are saved we are, at the same time, told saving faith is “by grace . . . the gift of God.”

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” Ro 1:16-17

And, what is this Gospel, and this faith, other than Jesus offering and our accepting His grace?

Faith is certainly necessary to any Christian blessing, but only faith that is from and by grace is sufficient. Everyone has faith to some degree and in some ways. But, no one's faith is saving faith – only God's grace faith, according to the *Bible*, is adequate for this.

God Give Grace To . . . ?

If grace is so important and vital, on both an eternal and daily basis, then we would expect everyone (at least all Christians) could tell us how we get grace. We know where to get food, clothes, gas and the other things necessary for daily life – if we *really* considered grace critical wouldn't we, likewise, know exactly where to find it?

While the Bible does not define grace, it is interesting and revealing that it tells us 3 times! (in *Proverbs*, *1st Peter* and *James*):

God opposes the proud
but gives grace to the humble.

There is no other basis for receiving grace given or intimated in the *Bible* – God gives grace to the humble. But, that still leaves us in the dilemma of only having a theoretical, rather than tangible, idea of what humility is. The next logical question is:

What Is a Practical Definition of Humility?

We are given examples of great, humble, men in the *Bible*, most notably Jesus. But, like grace, we are not given a definition (and neither are dictionaries of much use)! Strange! Until we consider that with a little thought and grace from God it is so obvious!

In one of the great “promise” verses of the *Bible* we are told:

“When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, **if my people**, who are called by my name, **will humble themselves** and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” *2Ch 7:13-14*

In short, they will receive God's grace.

But, even more enlightening are the first, *identical*, public statements of John the Baptist and Jesus that usher in and set the tone for the *New Testament*:

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” *Mt 3:2 & 4:17*

We too often think of humility as a mind-set (which it is). But it is more than a thought or feeling as dictionaries tend to define it. True humility will *always* be evidenced by repentance! We are humble towards those who we think can tell and show us better ways to do what we are now doing poorly. God offers grace to everyone – He gives it only to the humble, because only the humble will take it! When we are self-satisfied and self-righteous the offer of grace stands, but we won't see our need and take it. “I can earn enough money to pay my bills – I don't need grace for this.” OK, then Jesus' clear statement of grace for “all things” is no interest in not taken/given. “I can raise my children, manage my marriage, provide for my retirement, do my job . . . I don't see how

grace applies. When I die I know I will need Jesus, but until then I am one of the lucky ones who can deal with my I need to.” No humility, no grace because we won’t take the grace Jesus brought.

Some Practical Ideas – What Grace Is and Isn’t

Grace is a gift (or best stated, many gifts). We think of gifts as things we receive passively and without expectations on the part of the givers. But, is this a fair representation of even earthly gifts? Certainly not!

A gift from one who cares about us (and this is where most if not all gifts come from) is given with the hope and expectation that the gift will benefit, not harm, us. They would also hope and expect we would care for, not neglect, the gift. Gifts come with expectations and responsibilities.

The same is true with God’s grace gifts. In the classic “saved by grace” verse we looked at earlier we are told of God’s great gift and His expectation as to our use of this grace:

... 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 2:5-10

We are to be seeking and looking for the good works God prepared in advance for us to do with His gifts given to us. “What fun or pleasure is that,” someone (many) may ask. “I want a gift, but I want it for me! OK, I will give a tithe to the Church – but beyond that I expect it to be mine!” James tells us of the one with this mind-set:

You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Jas 4:2-4

So, grace is not a passive endeavor (“Well, if God gives it to me, He gives it to me, but there isn’t anything I can do to receive it!). It is not for our sole benefit – grace is given so we can be engaged in God’s work and business. And, this is its key point – given so we can be engaged. Sometimes grace is a sheer gift of what we personally need. More often, though, grace works *through* us to our and others’ benefit – it engages us to repent and do right and better.

Some examples? Glad you asked!

Grace For	What the World Tells Us - What We Can Passively Expect from God's Grace	What God's Grace Will Most Typically Look Like
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Happiness	Have <u>everything</u> we need and want - with no responsibilities, just leisure. Aah!	God gives us eyes to see all we have to be thankful for - Happy people are thankful people and thankful people are happy people!
Health	Duh! I am not sick!	God gives us the ability to exercise and be active and the understanding to know how important this is - grace is necessary because exercise is typically about 90% spiritual/mental and only 10% physical.
Finances	Enough money is all it takes - usually just a little more than we have.	Faith to believe and then seek "first his kingdom and his righteousness," knowing that in only this way will "all these things will be given to you as well." ^{Mt 6:33}
Marriage	My spouse will love me!	Grace to love my spouse!
Faith	"I've got it! God gives it to us!" Yes, but still we must →	Fight the good fight of the faith. ^{1Ti 6:12}
Job	Good salary, good benefits, good hours . . .	The grace to put work in its proper perspective and, at the same time, do a great job so that your employer receives more than he could from anyone else because you are benefiting from God's grace.
Time	More!	The grace to keep all aspects of life in harmony and order – entering into the Sabbath (24/7) rest of grace promised in the <i>Bible</i> .
Relationships	Have others see me as important to them.	The grace to, in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you. ^{Mt 7:12}

Peace	No trials and problems. Good luck – this isn't going to happen!	The grace of faith and perseverance in and through trials.
Addictions and other things "I was born with" that I would like to change	Can <i>even</i> God do this? This is a lot to hope for.	Grace to be disciplined in the great disciplines of grace and protecting these graces. Then, even when we do sin we have the promised Advocate who will continue to work in and through us "for those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son" - it is a promise that will happen if we persevere in grace and repentance!

As is obvious, Biblical grace is not passive and without trials, but active in and through life's many trials.

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ^{Ro 1:16}

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ^{1Co 1:18}

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. ^{1Co 4:20}

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ^{2Co 4:7}

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” ^{2Co 12:9}

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength ^{Eph 1:18-19}

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

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 3:14-21}

“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

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Eph 6:10

And on, and on and on . . . power is the only evidence of the grace of God – power from the indwelling Holy Spirit! For, if Jesus is living in us we will have grace power! Contrast this with what the *Bible* warns us of, and is so prevalent today, in churches and individuals that *say* they are Christian.

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them. 2Ti 3:1-5

The surest sign of a false gospel is one without grace power.

It is no overstatement that there is nothing more important to and distinctive about Christianity than grace. Our understanding of what Jesus Christ means to us is limited to our understanding (conscious or subconscious) of grace. For this reason, it is certainly better if we can take from the subconscious, making it more conscious and more usable.

Most professing Christians would agree we are eternally saved by grace while, sadly, many expect little or nothing from grace between the time we are saved until we die. But, grace is our point of contact with Jesus. Without this on-going and growing contact we should fear hearing, at death, what He warned us of:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” Mt 7:21-23

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” Ro 1:16-17

For, what is this Gospel, and this faith, other than God offering and our acceptance of His grace?

We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. 1Th 1:2-5

This is grace – the grace of God! The issue is not the offer of grace, it is our acceptance of it! For, that is why Jesus came – to bring grace and truth:

From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. Jn 1:16