



When? Then! How?
Now!



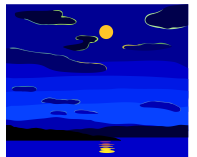
The Clock or the Cow?

People follow patterns – lives have themes. The simple pattern we follow, in selecting one of the above question themes, may have greater impact on and be more defining of our life than anything else we do or think.

The defining question, for Christian and non-Christian, is: Which world is more significant – the spiritual or the material? Unquestionably, the material world is the “bird in the hand;” the issue then is if the spiritual world is the 2, 3 . . . or 100 “in the bush,” and if it is, how can we tap into its benefits?

The essence of faith is testing. Life is a series of exercising faith – from the small (expecting lights when we flip a switch, the car to start when we turn the key . . .) to major (looking for the answer to cancer when it strikes us personally, deciding how to proceed when we face a financial crisis . . .). When we are acting on and by faith (whether in ourselves, others, things or God) we are testing to see if we/they/it/He can and will do what we expected and what they “promise.” We really don’t know for sure until we take the “leap of faith.” Like couples, before they have a child, knowing exactly what they will do, how the child will react . . ., the working in and through the process of faith often results in some strange and unexpected turns!

The key test of faith, in the Christian religion, **is** the expectations (or overlooked and ignored) and handling (or mishandling) **of grace** – the promised 2, 3 . . . 100 birds in the bush. Most professing Christians have no more idea of what grace is than the man in the moon – it might be a comfortable word, but beyond that they have no working definition of grace – it is just like the love of God that they somewhat fuzzily occasionally consider, but any idea that it has a real impact or benefit in their life, today, of course not! “Doesn’t it largely depend on me? Doesn’t God help those who can’t help themselves? This is not me!” **Everything in the Christian life is dependent upon grace** – from beginning to end; **without past, present and future grace there is no hope for the Christian.**



Almost everyone believes there is a god – there is no great merit in believing this. There, likewise, is no great value in believing Jesus lived and died – he is the god of choice of the Western world. The basic definition of a god is one/that which is sovereign – the key to doing and accomplishing whatever needs to be done. Our god can change, from day-to-day, depending on what we need – it is the “If only . . . then my problem(s) would be solved.” And how does grace fit into this equation? **How can a word, a theory, help resolve anything real and tangible? This is the great question and test!**

The essence of faith is testing, and in the case of the Christian faith, the great test is with us, not God! We are the ones that must be tried and tested to develop and mature – thus, the “joy” of trials that show us our weaknesses and need of grace. There is real security living more and more by faith – meaning living less and less in the mirage of worldly security. Will money solve my problems? Health? Youth? Education? A Good job? The answer to a professing Christian should be apparent, but it obviously isn’t since we run back to these foundations of sand again and again.



When?

Then

How?
Now!





Which are you? Which do you want to be?

My bias is to the latter, because (while many conservative, moderate and liberal professing Christians feel otherwise) this is the pattern I see in the *Bible* and “orthodox” Christianity; and the one I see as clearly more promising for and fulfilling in life.




When? Then

people generally fail, in finding grace, for three primary reasons:

-  Compartmentalizing can be a cop-out: “OK, I know I am not perfect in A, but in B, C, D and E I am pretty darn good – nobody is perfect . . .” So they use averaging (bad plus good) to effectively excuse their shortcomings and sins. They don’t need grace because overall they are pretty good and certainly acceptable to God!
-  They typically define the grace they will accept; “If/when God gives me the money I will . . . if I am in God’s will He will make me well . . .” But they seriously misunderstand grace; grace does sometimes make us well and give us money and things – but more often God says: “My grace is sufficient . . . I am offering you grace in weakness, pain, loss, illness . . . take it or leave it.” The when/then person will leave it.

Children do the same with their parents. At 7 or 8 a child thinks he knows exactly what he needs (at 16 he knows he is far smarter than his parent!) – if only his parents would cooperate with him everything would be OK. And so, in his misery, he pouts until he gets what he wants or until his parents make it clear they won’t do what he wants (or he falls asleep and forgets about it during the night). **God**, like a good parent, does not cave to our tantrums and sulking – He **knows where He is going and where we are going if we are to be with Him! This is where, and only where, we will find grace!**

-  Or, they (we?) fail to find grace, when we really do not consider God relevant in a trial. We work ourselves through a trial the best we can . . . and then we don’t need Him or grace!

It is right to use material tools (doctors and medicine, counselors, money, time, education . . .) if those are the means God, through His grace, has provided. But they must not be placed ahead or in place of God and His grace! Our obsessive seeking of security (in a world where security is impossible), places our efforts in opposition to grace – **grace is the only security we can reasonably hope for!**



How?
Now!

People, on the other hand, start with the assumption "Grace is available to me - what is the grace God is offering for this trial? How can I find and apply grace to this situation? How now (where) can I find God’s grace?"



When?

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I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. what it is to have plenty. **I have learned the secret situation**, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in him who gives me strength. Phil 4:11 - 13



I know what it is to be in need, and I know **of being content in any and every** plenty or in want. I can do everything through

When? Then! This is discontent and, in essence, depending on ourselves to get to a better point/place (it is a lack of faith for the immediate prospect of grace – where we find ourselves now) “When I get through this, when things get better, I will . . .” The problem is there is no assurance things will get better – they may, in fact, get worse – requiring more faith, not less. The initial tendency, for anyone facing a trial, is to make every effort to avoid it – by “hook or crook.” The difference is that a How? Now! Person will come to their senses, again!, and seek, by faith, God, His will, direction and grace. Time will not get us to faith – disciplines through trials will! How? Now! – is facing the immediate situation and trial (or even the simply mundane day-to-day of life) by asking in faith: “What is God doing? How will He get me through this? What do I need to do to cooperate with Him in this process?”

While Job was an extreme case (thankfully given as an example), he showed true Christianity - one that seeks grace in the midst of trials - not looking for and only accepting the "best" answer, but looking for God's will (which is where we will find His grace). Grace is free, but it still has specific conditions. Are we learning to be content? Can we, like Paul, say “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances? I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. **I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation**”? If not, we are not growing in grace nor are we How? Now! people . . .



**How?
Now!**

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