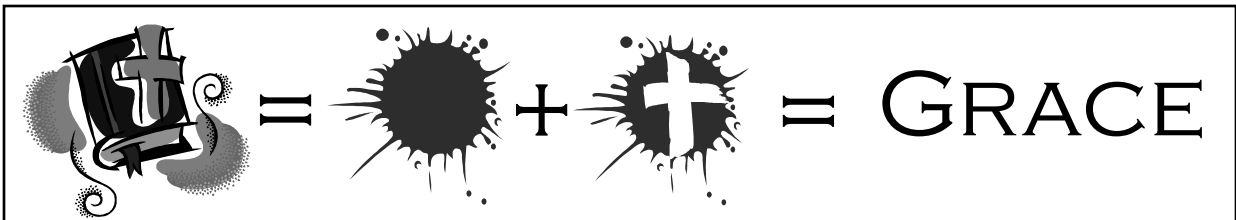


# CHAPTER 2

## THE GLORIOUS TRUTH OF GOD'S ABOUNDING GRACE



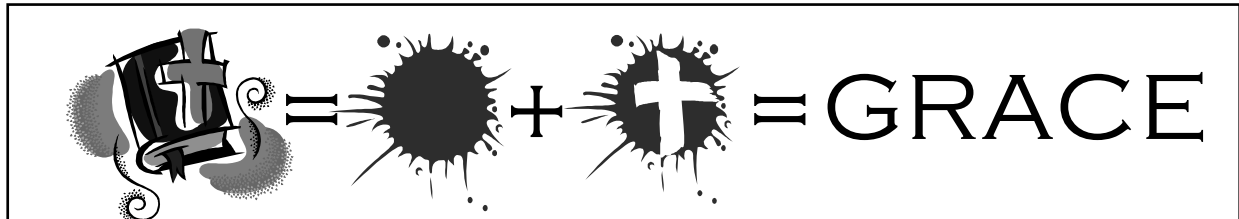
Patrick J. Griffiths @ 2009

Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in **the Storyline of the Bible**. She is determined by design to have a **God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching** focused on personal **discipleship** through intentional and systematic instruction; a **Global-impacting mission** that resolves to be a **church planting church**; and a **Grace-based fellowship** where disciples are invited to live under a **reigning grace** characterized by a **Gospel-driven sanctification** that celebrates a divine **monergism** to the Christian life.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE GLORIOUS TRUTH OF GOD'S ABOUNDING GRACE

“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1).



#### REVIEW

The story God wrote includes a fall into sin and an appropriate but horrific consequence. The sin and its demerit accent humanities inability to erase their shame, fear, and guilt. Only God can do it and only God does. That fact that He did and does is because of grace. This grace is embodied and displayed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the greatest display of grace and the greatest embodiment of grace. It is now only for us to know who He is, what He has done and who we are in Him.



## AN INTRODUCTION

As noted earlier, grace exists because we exist. The intent of this study is to explore the magnitude of grace in and through the person and work of Jesus Christ. I have titled this study “Reigning Grace.” As New Testament believers, God’s grace reigns over His people. This idea is presented in Romans 5:20, 21.

<sup>20</sup> “The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, <sup>21</sup> so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:20, 21).

Where once sin and death reigned, now grace reigns. God’s hero conquered His perennial adversary and by right of conquest He reigns. Reigning suggests supremacy, power, control, and sway. It is the person of Christ reigning in grace that now rules over His people. We are the citizens of His reign. The administration of His reign is marked by grace.<sup>1</sup> Grace reigns because the cross still stands. There are no areas of life that can escape His grace. Charles Ryrie correctly notes its importance with the following opening comments. “Christianity is distinct from all other religions because it is a message of grace. Jesus Christ is the supreme revelation of God’s grace; salvation is by grace; and grace governs and empowers Christian living. Without grace Christianity is nothing.”<sup>2</sup> We will start our study by defining what grace is.



## WHAT IS GRACE?

What is grace? What does it mean to be under grace? Are grace and law antithetical? Several times the word grace (**charis**) is translated with “thank” (Luke 6:32-34), “favor” (Luke 1:30; 2:52; Acts 2:47; 25:3), “liberality” (1 Cor. 16:3), “benefit” (2 Cor. 1:15) and elsewhere with “pleasure” (Acts 24:27; 25:9). Yet apart from a handful of exceptions, our English word “grace” translates the Greek word **charis**.

What does the word mean and how is it used? The Greek word **charis** occurs 156 times throughout the New Testament. It has come to mean “God’s undeserved, unearned, and undesired favor toward condemned sinners.” What this tells us is that **God did not have to do what He did, but He did what He did not have to do.** There was nothing within humanity that moved God to act in a gracious manner toward us. The motive for grace rests solely in God. As we seek to understand what is meant by grace it is always

helpful to note how others have come to understand the idea of grace.



## DEFINITIONS OF GRACE

Grace is God's free and unmerited favor shown to guilty sinners who deserve only judgment. It is the love of God shown to the unlovely. It is God reaching downward to people who are in rebellion against Him.<sup>3</sup>

Grace is the unmerited favor of God in Christ.<sup>4</sup>

Grace is a message of unconditional love from the Father of the universe. It's the free offer of eternal life.<sup>5</sup>

Grace, simply stated, is God's unmerited favor granted to those who deserve His wrath.<sup>6</sup>

Grace is unmerited favor which is given to all who come to God for salvation through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace is, [however], more than unmerited favor. It is reality. [Either your emotional response to your experience or your theology will create your reality. You must interpret your experience by your theology or you will have no objective means of living biblically.] By grace you live, by grace you please God, and by grace you are freed from religion and released into a relationship with your heavenly Father. Grace is always based on who He is and what He has done. Grace is never based on who you are apart from Him or on what you can do.<sup>7</sup>

Grace is the favor of God in giving His Son and the benefit to men of receiving that Son. The lavish gift of God in the person of His Son is the particularly New Testament meaning of grace. This grace is absolutely free. When that grace which was revealed in Christ is received by the believer, it then governs spiritual life by compounding favor upon favor.<sup>8</sup>

To show grace is to extend favor or kindness to one who doesn't deserve it and can never earn it. One more thing should be emphasized about grace: It is absolutely and totally free. You will never be asked to pay it back.<sup>9</sup>

All that we are, all that we have, and all that we ever hope to be, are firmly rooted in the soil of God's Son. It is because of this, "Grace is the peculiar property of the Christian religion, and Christianity

gave grace a meaning it never had before.”<sup>10</sup> Although it is difficult to accept initially, when speaking of God’s grace we need to understand, **The favor of God rests upon those who believe because of position not performance. The blessing of God is because of location not action. The blessing of God upon us is rooted in whom we are, not what we do.**

Because this is true, there is nothing we can do to undo or alter all that God has done and is doing in us, through us, and for us.



## CATEGORIZING ITS OCCURRENCES

To facilitate our understanding of grace it is necessary for us to categorize its various occurrences as it is used throughout the New Testament. There are four primary categorizes.

- I. The embodiment of grace is seen in the incarnation of Jesus Christ

John uses the word grace (**charis**) three times. Jesus is identified in the incarnation as being *full* of grace and truth (John 1:14).

“And **the Word became flesh**, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, **full of grace and truth**” (John 1:14).

His coming marked a shift in the telling of God’s story (Eph. 3:2). In Christ, God’s hero arrives and with Him comes a powerful display of grace and truth. With the coming of Jesus Christ additional revelation will come to the apostle Paul (v.3). Paul will become the chief presenter of Jesus Christ.

<sup>2</sup> “if indeed you have heard of **the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me** for you; <sup>3</sup> that **by revelation there was made known to me the mystery**, as I wrote before in brief” (Eph. 3:2, 3).

When the second member of the Godhead became “flesh,” we had the greatest display of grace and the greatest embodiment of truth. When speaking of this idea theologically, the *incarnation* is the **product** whereas the *kenosis* of Philippians 2 is the **process** whereby God became man.

Grace moved Christ to the *kenosis* and *incarnation* (2 Cor. 8:9).

**“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).**

When God took on humanity, He condescended. In the incarnation the second member of the Godhead stooped, He lowered Himself. This is why Paul tells us in Philippians 2:8 “He humbled Himself.” **He became what He had created.** At this moment, such a thought escapes us. Yet the creator became that which He had created. It was not simply an identification or association, but an actual **“becoming”** (Rom. 1:3; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:7 [each uses ginomai, “To become”]). Such an action on His part is called “grace.” “The lavish gift of God in the person of His Son is the particularly New Testament meaning of grace. This is why it is quite true to say that **charis** is a word that has been raised to a higher level and filled with new meaning by our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>11</sup>

The word “full” in John 1:14 means “to be filled up (as opposed to empty)” or “to be lacking nothing, to be perfect.”

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, **full of grace and truth**” (John 1:14).

There were displays of grace prior to the coming of Christ but in contrast to Him, they appear as shallow pools. In addition, in Christ the displaying of grace is perfect and lacking nothing. With Christ nothing more can be said. Our quest now is to know Him. **He is grace.** There is nothing His people need that they do not already have in Him.

Consider the statement of John 1:16.

“From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another” (John 1:16 NIV).

“We have all benefited from the rich blessings he brought to us - one gracious blessing after another” (John 1:16 NLT).

Can we not hear the echo of Ephesians 1:3 and Romans 8:32 in our ears?

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ**” (Eph. 1:3).

**“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?”** (Rom. 8:32).

Romans 8:32 uses **charizomai** “freely given” which comes from the same root as **charis**. There is no end to God’s grace since the resource is exceedingly rich (Eph. 2:7; 3:8).

“so that in the ages to come He might show **the surpassing riches of His grace** in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:7).

“To me, the very least of all saints, **this grace was given**, to preach to the Gentiles **the unfathomable riches of Christ**” (Eph. 3:8).

We can neither fathom nor exhaust Christ and what He is for us. Jesus is to us “wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30). Often we say “Now you’ve gone and done it” or “Man, did I really blow it this time” as if to suggest that such action on our part is going to test or stretch the grace of God. **Grace exceeds the need because Christ is infinite.** His actions towards the rebel removes any residue of the offense. Nothing is left.

John 1:17 begins with a small preposition meaning “because or for this reason.”

**“For** the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

The opulence or lavishness with which God’s blessings are showered upon us is found in the coming of Christ. With Him or “on account of” Him we have all things. Without Him, we have nothing. Grace and truth are “on account of” Him. To take Him away leaves us with nothing. Jesus Christ is the abundance of the blessing we seek. He is the favor we long for. Yet is not the substance often overlooked for the shadow? When we ask God to bless us we are often asking for the shadow and not the substance. We have embraced the gift of grace and have failed to embrace the giver of grace. How have we missed this? The incarnate Christ is the embodiment of grace.

Not to have Him is to possess all things without having anything. Yet to have nothing with Him is to have all things.
--

Jesus brought grace and truth. It stands in contrast to the Law and Moses (John 1:17).

“For **the Law** was given **through Moses**; **grace and truth** were realized **through Jesus Christ**” (John 1:17).

This does not mean grace was not present with the Law, but it does mean the display of grace and the articulation of truth will now reach an unprecedented height. Knowing the incarnate Christ embodies grace, let us now consider its application in the area of salvation. The second category for grace in the New Testament is as follows:

## II. The expression of grace as seen in the area of salvation

Acts 11:21-23 speaks of Barnabas seeing the grace of God evidenced in the salvation of the lost.

<sup>21</sup> “And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number **who believed turned to the Lord**. <sup>22</sup> The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. <sup>23</sup> Then when he arrived and **witnessed the grace of God**, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord” (Acts 11:21-23).

Salvation displays God’s grace (Acts 11:21-23). This is an expansive and heavily emphasized element throughout the New Testament. In the incarnation, God became man. A primary purpose for the incarnation is redemptive in nature. This is notable in the following three passages.

- Matthew 1:21 tells us very specifically that Jesus “shall save His people from their sin.”
- Likewise Luke 19:10 says that Jesus came “to seek and to save that which was lost.”
- First John 4:14 tells us that, “The Father sent the Son to be Savior of the world.”

In the saving of man, God graced him. He condescended. Without grace, humanity could not be saved. God had to give him something that he did not deserve nor could merit. Salvation is coming to know the grace of God in truth (Col. 1:6).

“which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been

doing in you also since the day you heard of it and **understood** the grace of God in truth” (Col. 1:6).

There are three points worth noting in this verse:

- **First**, Paul selectively uses the word epiginosko. It means, “To know exactly, completely, through and through” (BAGD, 291).

The NIV translates the word with “understood.” The noun **epiginosis** is used four times in Colossians (1:9, 10; 2:2; 3:10). However, before we get ahead of ourselves please note what had proceeded “to know?” It is the idea of “heard.” Why is this significant? Because Romans 10:17 affirms that, “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” We must preach the grace of God to the lost in order that they might hear and know.

- **Second**, both hearing and knowing are aorist active indicatives. Here I would argue for it being a pure aorist speaking of a “point in time” action.

There was a point in time when we both heard and came to know.

- **Finally**, notice also that the grace of God is “in truth.”

The immediate proximity of verse six to verse five indicates a parallel statement between the two.

<sup>5</sup> “because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which **you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel** <sup>6</sup> which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day **you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth**” (Col. 1:5, 6).

The grace of God is found in the truth of the gospel. God’s grace is seen in the second member of the Godhead becoming man. Consider the magnitude of God’s humiliation and grace. In the gospel of Jesus Christ, the creator would “become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8). The giver of life would have it taken from Him. The Lawgiver would be delivered into the hands of those who are without law (Acts 2:23 [“wicked hands”). At the hands of warmongers the prince of peace would be murdered. The Father of all things would be entombed by the creation of His own hands.

We must make no mistake here. It is “on account of” Jesus Christ we have received grace (Rom. 1:5).

<sup>4</sup> “who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, **Jesus Christ our Lord,** <sup>5</sup> **through whom we have received grace** and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake” (Rom. 1:4, 5).

God graced us for the exaltation of His name. This is the ultimate reason why God manifests His actions from a base of grace. “To receive” speaks of “laying hold of something or someone.” We did not take something that was not being offered. We received something that was being extended to us as a gift (Rom. 6:23).

“For the wages of sin is death, **but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord**” (Rom. 6:23).

The free gift of the grace of God comes to us through Jesus Christ. To have salvation in Christ is to receive an abundance of grace (“an exceeding measure overflowing something above the ordinary”, “a surplus of abundance”<sup>12</sup> [Rom. 5:17]).

“For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those **who receive the abundance of grace** and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:17).

Such grace gifts the recipient with an abundance of righteousness and eternal life. As a saved individual, we are the recipient of an abundant gifting of righteousness. We cannot merit it. We do not deserve it. It is ours solely because of God’s gracious dealings toward us. To remove Him from the equation negates the action. We cannot have grace apart from Christ.

In Acts 15, we have a narrative dealing with the issue of Law observance for Gentile believers. The issue comes to a head in verses 10 and 11.

<sup>10</sup> “Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? <sup>11</sup> **But** we believe that **we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus,** in the same way as they also are” (Acts. 15:10, 11).

The contrast could not be greater. Verse 11 begins with *alla*. The NIV translates this with “No!” It is grace that moved us to believe and it is grace that saves us. Salvation is on account of the grace of Jesus Christ (Acts 15:11) as opposed to the works of the Law. Paul’s

emphatic statement is that both Jew and Gentile are saved by grace through faith alone.

We are freely justified (Rom. 3:24) by his grace on account of redemption. His grace makes it free of charge to us. Yet He still has a tangible and concrete basis for acting in the way He did. The redemption of Christ gives Him the reason or grounds for acting toward us freely in our justification. Consider the ideas contained in Romans 3:24.

“being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24).

- **First**, we are justified. In the doctrine of justification God declares us to be righteous. He places us into His Son and treats us accordingly. Before God, we are right. Because we could not earn it nor did we deserve it, it had to be grace.
- **Second**, the word “justified” is a present passive participle. Notice that it is a passive voice. We are the recipient of the action. We did not do it. We simply received it. Also, notice that it is a present participle. This communicates the idea that right now at this very moment we are right with God. How can this be? Can such a thought be true? “Yes! Yes!” And a thousand times, “Yes!” How can such a thing be true? Because of grace!
- **Third**, Paul uses the word “freely.” It means “without a cause, undeservedly.” The idea strengthens the next statement that it is based on grace.
- **Fourth**, as noted earlier, God can declare us righteous because His Son humbled Himself and became for us what we could not become. He became the payment that was capable of paying off the debt and of setting us free from the penalty of sin.

Friend, we are the greater debtor before God. How tragic that we have chosen to live such petty lives. How well do we forgive others? Do we forgive based on God’s forgiveness of us? Consider also the statement of Luke 7:36-50. Twice in our passage Jesus uses the word “forgive” both in verse 42 and in verse 43.

<sup>42</sup> “When they were unable to repay, he **graciously forgave** them both. So which of them will love him more?” <sup>43</sup> Simon answered and said, ‘I suppose the one whom he **forgave** more.’ And He said to him, ‘You have judged correctly’” (Luke 7:42, 43).

It is the word, “grace” (**charizomai**). The only way we will begin to see the power of grace is when we see ourselves for what we are. Look at Ephesians 4:32.

“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, **forgiving** each other, just as God in Christ also has **forgiven** you” (Eph. 4:32).

The operative word is “forgiving.” Without surprise the word is **charizomai**. It is the same word in Romans 8:32 (“freely given”). We are debtors before God and the only way out is for someone else to pay it for us. God dismissed the debt, but not without just cause. The theology contained in our passage is too great to note at this time. Yet we would be in error if we did not at least note the words: justification (v.24), redemption (v.24), propitiation (v.25), imputation, forgiveness, and atonement (4:6, 8). All this is because of grace. Before we leave this area I would like to note one more thing.

Election is based on grace (Rom. 11:5). Election is not based on works (e.g., human merit, initiative, or action). Grace and works as meriting agents before God are mutually exclusive. According to Ephesians 1 our election by God (v.1) and adoption into His family is to the praise of the glory of His grace. His grace makes us accepted in the beloved (v.6). The glory of His grace and the riches of it (v.7) produced for us acceptance (v.6), redemption, and forgiveness (v.7). Just how glorious is His grace? Who can begin to sound out the depth of its abundant resource? The quickening of the dead is an act of grace (Eph. 2:5). In the salvation of the unworthy the exceeding riches of His grace is seen (Eph. 2:7).

“so that in the ages to come He might show the **surpassing** riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:7).

He uses the word “**huperballo**.” It means “to surpass in throwing, to throw beyond.” He uses the same word in 1:19 as well as in 3:19. God’s grace is way beyond the need.

Please listen to the following thoughts an individual shared with me concerning the lavishness of God’s actions toward us.

I have been meditating on how excessive, lavish, and extravagant His grace and love is -- wasteful, in a sense, because it goes way beyond the need. God is not just “sufficient” -- He is way more than enough, every time. I was thinking about how even general revelation in creation is “wasted” on those who refuse to recognize that God is the

author of it all. Why "waste" the glories of the heavens on those who will stay in atheism, pantheism, or paganism? Why "waste" the beauty of the world on those who will not see Him for who He is? And yet, that is exactly what He does. He "wastes" general revelation on those who will never believe.

In addition, He "wastes" grace on me all the time. Every day, there is more love, more acceptance, more forgiveness, and more grace that I am ever knowing, appreciating, or recognizing. Each day, He is forgiving me for things I do not even know of. He is protecting me from attacks I never even sense. He is working in ways I do not recognize. He is, in a sense, extremely "wasteful" toward me. Praise Him! He wants me to enjoy knowing and seeing it increasingly. Nevertheless, His supply will always exceed my knowledge. (Eph. 3:20-21) He will always be doing exceeding abundantly above all that I would ever ask or think (or know, or recognize).<sup>13</sup>

This same idea is captured by Paul in Romans 5. He uses the word **perissea** in Romans 5:17 and **huperperisseia** in Romans 5:20. The interesting contrast in verse 20 is between the super abounding (**pleonazo**) of sin and "to abound beyond measure, to abound exceedingly, to overflow" of grace.

<sup>17</sup> "For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the **abundance** of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. . . <sup>20</sup> The Law came in so that the transgression would **increase**; but where sin **increased**, grace **abounded all the more**" (Rom. 5:17, 20).

The grace extended in salvation is a gift from God (Eph 2:8) and is the direct opposite of works. Faith and grace appear to be symmetric (Rom. 4:16). We are simply to believe that what God has said is true. Faith is not a work. Faith is the action of saying yes to all that God has proclaimed.

All that we have is because Jesus Christ became man. In this act we see the greatest display of grace ever seen in human history. Friend, if the grace of God is much more than the need, then how have we chosen to think? Have we chosen to think like a spiritual pauper or have we set our mind on the higher ground of God's overflowing grace? May God continue to knit our hearts together in our common pursuit of our uncommon God. This leads us to our third category for grace in the New Testament.

III. The endurance of grace as seen in the perseverance of the saints and progressive sanctification.

The provision of grace is so much more than the debt of sin (Rom. 5:20).

“The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Rom. 5:20).

Grace swallows up the debt of sin. Grace is so powerful that it removes all traces of sin’s presence in the life of God’s people. As believers we are to practice our position. Where once sin reigned, now grace reigns (Rom. 5:21).

“so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:21).

Grace reigns on account of Jesus Christ our Lord. Grace reigns because Jesus reigns. The reign of Christ is a grace reign. We are under His reign of grace.

Sin and grace are mutually exclusive. Grace repels sin (Rom. 6:1, 15). Grace is not a license to sin. **Freedom from sin is not a freedom to sin.** One does not abuse grace when they sin. Grace does not encourage or incite sinful desires and activities. An abused grace is an unknown grace. To know grace is to resist sin. As one who is under grace we are no longer under the dominion of sin.

Preaching grace is not only risky, but the fact that some take it to an unwise extreme is proof that a minister is indeed preaching the true grace of God. <sup>14</sup>

Do you think the sinner abuses grace? Nay, they do not know the riches of His grace! The sinner sees grace and sovereignty as an opportunity to sin. The believer sees both as a comfort and strength in weakness. Oh, to be consumed with the passion to sound out the unsearchable riches of His exceedingly glorious grace. This is God’s story. This is the legacy to which we have been called. Oh God, show us the glory of your grace. One glimpse of His grace would melt us into a molten pool of passionate love for Him. Grace purifies; grace obeys; grace moves; grace loves. Where is the grace of God in our thinking? How has it manifested itself in our lives?

God the Father gives grace to us in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:4; cf. Acts 14:26ff).

**“I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus”** (1 Cor. 1:4).

This is both salvific and sanctifying grace. The saved are exhorted to continue in the grace of God (Acts 13:42-48).

**“Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God”** (Acts 13:43).

Why the word “urging?” “Urging” means “to persuade or influence.” The idea is that of getting someone to believe what you are saying. Paul strongly urged his audience to remain or persevere in grace. When one has begun in grace, they are to continue (“to remain, persevere”) in grace. Why the exhortation to continue in grace? We need reminding because the natural tendency is to fall back into the concept of works.

The enemy will continue to tempt us to work to become what we already are.<sup>15</sup>

We must never forget that works and grace are mutually exclusive. Works can neither merit nor maintain what is granted by grace. Much of Christian living and preaching is grace free. It is devoid of its message. Let us note carefully the observation by Jerry Bridges:

My observation of Christendom is that most of us tend to base our personal relationship with God on our performance instead of on His grace. If we’ve performed well - whatever ‘well’ is in our opinion - then we expect God to bless us.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, we are always challenging ourselves and one another to ‘try harder.’ We seem to believe success in the Christian life (however we define success) is basically up to us: our commitment, our discipline, and our zeal, with some help from God along the way.<sup>17</sup>

However, I think most of us actually declared temporary bankruptcy. Having trusted in Christ alone for our salvation, we have subtly and unconsciously reverted to a works relationship with God in our Christian lives. We do

think they earn God's blessings in our daily lives (p. 17). We are all legalistic by nature; that is, we innately think so much performance by us earns so much blessing from God.<sup>18</sup>

How tragic to think that God's enablement means we now work in conjunction with Him. His enablement is an efficacious enablement.

Works and grace appear to be opposites in this way (Rom. 4:4).

<sup>4</sup> "Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. <sup>5</sup> But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness" (Rom. 4:4, 5).

Works create debt and receives a wage but grace creates no debt. If grace creates debt, then there is obligation with the recipient to repay. He now owes. Yet grace does not work in the area of obligation, deficiency, or debt.

The believer is to "stand in grace" (Rom. 5:2).

<sup>1</sup> "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup> through whom also we have obtained **our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand**; and we exult in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1, 2).

Paul's statement is in the perfect active indicative. This is a past fact with ongoing results. Grace causes us to "exult in hope of the glory of God." Jesus Christ opens up to us grace (Rom. 5:2). As believers we are standing in grace. It is impossible not to see how **Jesus Christ is synonymous with grace**. Nothing can alter this glorious standing. This is what grace works in the life of its recipients. Such grace is found only in Christ and in Christ alone. Peter uses the same construction of the apostle Paul in 1 Peter 5:12 as Paul did in Romans 5:2.

"Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, **exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!**" (1 Pet. 5:12).

By implication Peter suggests that there could be a false grace. What is a false grace? It is a grace that is coupled together with works. It is a grace that "has begun in the Spirit, but believes you are now made perfect by the flesh" (Gal. 3:3). A grace that depends

on God (i.e. monergistic) in salvation but looks to man (i.e. synergistic) in sanctification is a false grace.

In Galatians 5:1, Paul uses the word “**stand firm**” as a present active imperative.

“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore **keep standing firm** and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1).

Grammatically, it speaks of an appeal to our will to continue in standing fast in grace. The idea of standing fast is that of persevering. We must be determined to live and thus rest in grace. Paul suggests that both liberty and freedom are synonymous with grace. The word “liberty” and “freedom” come from the same root word. It is used in Galatians 2:4 of those who would seek “to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order that they might bring us into bondage.” We are also exhorted not to use the idea of grace for “an occasion to the flesh” (Gal. 5:13).

“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13).

Notice the contrasting idea of grace. It is that of bondage. The opposite of grace is bondage. To remove oneself from grace is to “be entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” I will say without hesitation that much preaching today places the audience under the “yoke of bondage.” We should be outraged that such preaching is passed for biblical preaching and is considered acceptable and normal. It is the preaching of a false grace.

Paul’s exhortation to Timothy is “to be strong in grace” (2 Tim. 2:1).

“You therefore, my son, **be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus**” (2 Tim. 2:1).

He uses “be strong” and like the word for “standing” in Galatians 5:1 it is a present active imperative. This pattern is consistent throughout the New Testament. We as believers are to persevere in grace. We are not to go back to a work mentality nor are we to leave the umbrella of God’s grace. In our desire to obey, please and serve the Father, there is a natural tendency to see such actions on our part as being meritorious. As if to say, “Look what I have done.” Yet our “working” is the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22) and generated solely by our identification in Christ (Gal. 2:20) and thus our abiding in the vine (John 15:5).

Consider the Old Covenant saint. Is he ever exhorted toward the same? There is a dramatic difference between what we currently enjoy under the New Covenant and what they struggled with. It is equally interesting to see how grace and Christ are inseparably linked. Our final category in considering grace is . . .

IV. The example of grace as seen *in His service rendered through His saints*

Ministry is to be identified as an expression of the grace of God (Acts 14:26; 15:40).

“From there they sailed to Antioch, **from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished**” (Acts 14:26).

“But Paul chose Silas and left, **being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord**” (Acts 15:40).

The words “commend and commit” are the same in both passages and mean “to surrender, to yield up.” It is most often translated by the English word “betray.” It has the strong idea of being given over to.<sup>19</sup> Paul and Barnabas had been given over to the grace of God for the work of the ministry. As servants of God we are recipients of God’s grace, thus stewards and administrators of the same. If God’s grace is not operative in ministry we will fail. Grace keeps us faithful. We are to be ministering grace to others (Eph. 4:29).

“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, **so that it will give grace to those who hear**” (Eph. 4:29).

Are we ministers of the true grace of God? How do we become a minister of grace? By speaking to others as we would wish to be spoken to. As we minister to others in grace, God is glorified (2 Cor. 8:19).

“and not only this, but he has also been appointed by the churches **to travel with us in this gracious work, which is being administered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself, and to show our readiness**” (2 Cor. 8:19).

All that we are in ministry is a result of God’s grace dealings with us. We have what we have because of grace (Rom. 12:3, 6; Eph. 4:7).

<sup>3</sup> **“For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. . . .<sup>6</sup> Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us,** each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith” (Rom. 12:3, 6).

**“But to each one of us grace was given** according to the measure of Christ's gift” (Eph. 4:7).

Because it is all of grace, no one can boast; no one can be jealous or contentious and combative. Paul saw his ministry on account of grace (Rom. 15:14-16; 1 Cor. 3:10). The overwhelming body of evidence provided for us by the biblical record forces us to conclude, “Salvation by grace; sanctification by grace; service by grace - it seems clear that God’s entire program for His people is one of grace from start to finish.”<sup>20</sup>



#### MAKING THE TRANSFER

Chuck Swindoll gives four practical expectations of embraced grace.

- First, you can expect to gain a greater appreciation for God’s gifts to you and others.
- Second, you can expect to spend less time and energy critical of and concerned about others’ choices.
- Third, you can expect to become more tolerant and less judgmental.
- Finally, you can expect to take a giant step toward maturity.<sup>21</sup>

Paul’s gospel was of the grace of God (Acts 20:24). Paul recognized that his ministry was given to him by grace and enabled by grace (1 Cor. 15:10; Eph. 3:7, 8; 1 Pet. 4:10). Paul never lost sight of his grace based ministry (2 Cor. 1:12). We must never forget that all we have and enjoy is a result of grace and empowered by grace. Grace does not exclude our participation. Yet such participation is not to be viewed as an independent contractor, but rather a tool being used by the Master artisan.

Grace as a synonym for our Lord Jesus Christ is as vast and unsearchable as He is. One can never sound out its depth or exhaust its resource. May we truly be a people who are marked by grace as both recipients, stewards, and administrators?

How do we know when we have made the transfer? Grace manifests itself primarily in the area of relationships. I once had to respond

to someone concerning a situation where an individual had a moral lapse. Here is my concluding thought to this person:

Finally, regardless as to what you and I might believe about this matter, if she is a believer (which only God can ultimately judge), she is covered by grace. Everything I have ever taught concerning grace is as applicable to her as to you or me. Wow, that is how wonderful the grace of God is. My standing and favor before God is based solely on the work of Christ and not on my ability to perform. God's grace is upon her regardless as to her moral failure. Surely, this simply blows our minds. Yet I rejoice that this is true, because though my sins are different from hers, they are no less real. I simply marvel at the grace of God's unconditional favor, blessing, and love.

As we will see, the grace of God far exceeds our ability to sound it out. May God use this study to stimulate within us a heart of worship that is driven by the magnitude of the object pursued?



#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

The story God wrote includes a fall into sin and an appropriate but horrific consequence. The sin and its demerit accent humanities inability to erase their shame, fear, and guilt. Only God can do it and only God does. That fact that He did and does is because of grace. This grace is embodied and displayed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the greatest display of grace and the greatest embodiment of grace. It is now for us to know who He is, what He has done and who we are in Him.

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<sup>1</sup> Ryrie's comments compliment this thought. "Sovereign grace means ruling grace - a picture which the New Testament confirms in such a passage as Hebrews 4:16, where the throne of grace is depicted as the highest court of appeal." Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Grace of God* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963), 86.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Jerry Bridges, *Transforming Grace*, (NavPress: Colorado Springs, 1991), 21, 22.

<sup>4</sup> Alva J. McClain, *Law and Grace*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1954), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Dudley Hall, *Grace Works*, (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Pub., 2000), 11.

<sup>6</sup> J. Carl Laney, Jr., "God," in *Understanding Christian Theology*, ed. Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 191.

<sup>7</sup> Kay Arthur, *Lord, I Need Grace to Make it*, (Waterbrook Pr., 1989), 19, 21.

<sup>8</sup> Ryrie, *The Grace of God*, 25.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Swindoll, *Grace Awakening*, (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1990), 9.

<sup>10</sup> Ryrie, *The Grace of God*, 22.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>12</sup> *BAGD*, 650.

<sup>13</sup> Marcia Detrick, personal email correspondence, December 2003

<sup>14</sup> Swindoll referring to a quote by Martyn Lloyd-Jones in, *The Grace Awakening*, 39, 40.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Wells, *Sidetracked in the Wilderness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 177.

<sup>16</sup> Jerry Bridges, *Transforming Grace*, 11.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>19</sup> *BAGD*, 614.

<sup>20</sup> Laney, Jr., "God," 191.

<sup>21</sup> Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening*, 13.