

Your Questions Bible Answers

What Is Grace? (Part 1)

Common mistakes in grace discussions:

1. Treating grace as a strictly NT concept. Yes, we read in John 1.18 that “the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.” Yes, it is definitely true that the fullness of God’s grace is found only in Christ, but that doesn’t mean that grace only existed when Jesus came to this earth. God’s promises to Abraham were a manifestation of His grace (Genesis 12.1-3) as was His care for Israel (Exodus 19.4-6). Any promise that God has ever made to man is a part of His grace.
2. Assuming that human involvement or acceptance are not needed. Yes, the grace of Jesus’ death on the cross is a free gift (Romans 5.16-17), but as with any gift, even God’s grace can be rejected (Acts 13.46).
3. Equating obedience to God’s commands with grace. Our complaint against denominational concepts of grace is that they neglect man’s role in accepting many of God’s gracious promises. Their complaint against us is that we make God’s grace something that is earned by obedience. First, both are often misrepresentations of what denominations teach and what we teach. Second, while I believe we rightly emphasize the necessity of obedience in receiving God’s grace, there must be no confusion that God’s grace is offered because of Who He is, not as a result of what we do. Future lessons will clarify this point.
4. Defining God’s character as being only that of grace. Consider God’s self-description in Exodus 34.6-7. Significant that this occurred after Israel’s sin with the golden calf. God’s grace was manifest in His refraining from destroying the people and willingness to take the people into the Promised Land. However, God also defined His nature as one of justice. He would be gracious to His people, but if they rejected His grace they would receive their deserved punishment.
5. Thinking that God’s grace can be encapsulated in a short definition or pithy phrase. “God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense” sounds great, but it doesn’t define the riches, or the expense. Furthermore, it says nothing as to how we can receive it. “Unmerited favor” is certainly accurate, but again cannot fully explain the fullness of God’s grace. So, as we begin a discussion of God’s grace, let’s allow God to describe it for us.

God’s description of grace (John 3.16)

1. Without a doubt the best known verse in all the Scriptures. Some of you are reciting it in your head and saying, “wait a minute, grace isn’t even mentioned in that verse.” You would be correct, but grace is wonderfully described.
2. Here we see the origin of grace: God.
 - a. He is the One who created and deserves to be glad in His creation (Psalm 104.31).
 - b. But, He is the One we rejected (Romans 1.20-23; cf. Hosea 8.3; Isaiah 59.1-2).
 - c. He is the One who could be righteous in punishing us all (Romans 1.18).

- d. Only God has what we need, and only He has the power to give it... the forgiveness of our sins!
 - e. Do we recognize just how much we need HIS grace? "A lack of the sense of sin is still the most perilous omen of today." (Thomas Spurgeon)
3. Here we see the motive of His grace: love.
 - a. For God is love (1John 4.8).
 - b. And He loved us even when we were His enemies! (Romans 5.8)
 - c. This should deflate any sense of self-righteousness on our part. We can be saved because God loves, not because of any merit on our own part. "Calvary says, more plainly than anything else, 'Salvation is of the Lord.'... It is impossible for self-righteousness to thrive on the slopes of the hill called Calvary." (Thomas Spurgeon)
 4. Here we see the intended recipient of His grace: the world.
 - a. A world that had lived in rejection and would continue to reject Him (John 1.9-11).
 - b. Note: contrast with Calvin's concept of limited atonement.
 - i. They would argue that Christ died only those who would be saved, using passages such as John 10.15 to justify their position. They would explain away the use of "world" here by saying it refers to "people from every tribe and nation—not only the Jews."
 - ii. Always better to let the Scriptures define what is meant. See John 1.9-10; 3.17-19.
 - c. God loves the entire world.
 - d. Jesus died for the entire world.
 - e. But not all of the world would come to the light, not all the world would believe.
 5. Here we see what He gave: His Son! As mentioned earlier, any promise of God is a manifestation of His grace. However, there is no greater gift than "the only begotten who was in the bosom of the Father," (John 1.18). More will be said about this later.
 6. Here we see the purpose of God's grace: to give eternal life. So much of John's gospel is tied to this idea...
 - a. Eternal life is in Jesus because in Him is true sustenance (4.10,13-14; 6.35,48-51).
 - b. Eternal life is in Jesus because in Him we have a Shepherd (10.7-11).
 - c. Eternal life is in Jesus because in Him there is life after death (11.25-26; 5.25-29).
 - d. Eternal life is in Jesus because in Him we have access to the Father (14.1-6).
 7. Here we also see that grace must be received! It is only for those who will believe!