

BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

GRACE

The word *grace* occurs first in Genesis 6, where it is used of Noah: "But Noah found *grace* in the eyes of the LORD" (v. 8). The *grace*, or 'favour' as the original is sometimes translated, which God showed towards him, was manifested by God saving him and his family from the Flood. In Genesis 39, the Egyptian prisonkeeper is providentially caused to show *grace* towards Joseph, which in turn was a manifestation of the *grace* of God: "But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him *favour* in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (v. 21). Christ had favour shown to him by both God and man: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in *favour* with God and man" (Lk. 2:52). Graciousness is an attribute of God: "I am *gracious*" (Ex. 22:27); "The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and *gracious*, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (34:6); "But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and *gracious*, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth" (Ps. 86:15).

A gift

When *grace* is shown towards a person, it is not because they are owed anything, it is a gift. Hence Paul spoke to the Ephesians of "the gift of the *grace* of God" (3:7).

When speaking of Abraham, Paul contrasted *grace* with a debt: "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of *grace*, but of debt" (Rom. 4:4). *Grace* is more akin to giving a gift than paying a wage. As Paul wrote later in the epistle: "And if by *grace*, then is it no more of works: otherwise *grace* is no more *grace*. But if it be of works, then is it no more *grace*: otherwise work is no more work" (11:6). *Grace* was shown towards Abraham in that his faith was "counted unto him for righteousness" (4:3). It is through the *grace* of God that man can be justified: "being justified freely by His *grace* through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (3:24).

The full outworking of *grace* will be seen when Christ returns: "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the *grace* that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13). Then, *grace* will be seen to reign and eternal life will be the consequence: "that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might *grace* reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:21). Even before eternal life is given, we can even now approach God through the Lord Jesus Christ that we might be helped both through His Word and through the angels working in the circumstances of our lives. This help is provided as an act of *grace* by God: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of *grace*, that we may obtain mercy, and find *grace* to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

Requirements for receiving grace

Although *grace* is not earned like a wage, God only shows *grace* to those who are worthy. Moses spoke of how *grace* comes as a consequence of knowing God: ". . . shew me now Thy way, that I may know Thee, that I may find *grace* in Thy sight" (Ex. 33:13). Solomon wrote of how mercy and truth lead to *grace*: "Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: so shalt thou find *favour* [*grace*] and good understanding in the sight of God and man" (Prov. 3:3,4). To obtain *grace* from God, faith is a key requirement: "by whom [Jesus] also we have access by faith into this *grace* wherein we stand" (Rom. 5:2); "For by *grace* are ye saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8). Humility is another reason why God shows *grace* towards a person: "God resisteth the proud, but giveth *grace* unto the humble" (Jas. 4:6).

Once we have been shown *grace* by God it is possible to lose that *grace*, as Paul wrote of those who sought to return to the Law: "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of

you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from *grace*" (Gal. 5:4). And the Hebrews were exhorted to look "diligently lest any man fail of the *grace* of God" (12:15).

The example of the Macedonians and Corinthians

In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul writes of the Jerusalem poor fund, using *charis*, the Greek word for 'grace', in a variety of ways:

- The *grace* of God manifest in the gift of the Macedonians (v. 1)
- The *gift* (*charis*) of money given by the Macedonians (v. 4)
- The *grace* of God Paul hoped would be manifest in the gift of the Corinthians (vv. 6,7)
- The *grace* shown by Christ in rejecting the riches of the world (v. 9)
- The money ("*this grace*") being taken to Jerusalem by Titus and Paul (v. 19).

Spirit gifts

Sometimes *grace* refers to the Spirit gifts. These were originally given at Pentecost, with each gift having a clearly defined function. These gifts died out by the end of the first century.

Peter wrote: "As every man hath received the gift [literally 'a gift'], even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold *grace* of God" (1 Pet. 4:10). (The Greek word for "gift" here is *charisma*, and is related to the word *charis*.) "Gift" refers here to the gifts of the Spirit. Paul says: "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:4). This diversity included things such as healing and prophecy (see vv. 8-10). This variety of gifts is referred to as "*manifold grace*" in 1 Peter 4:10. 'Manifold' means varied, and the Greek word in this verse is usually rendered 'divers' in the AV. Thus "*the manifold grace*" speaks of a variety of specific gifts which had a specific role in the growth of the early ecclesias.

Paul speaks of these gifts again, in Romans 12: "Having then gifts [*charisma*] differing according to the *grace* [*charis*] that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching" (vv. 6,7). The "*grace* that is given" is not vague and abstract, but relates to particular and identifiable gifts. In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul said: "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the *grace* of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge" (vv. 4,5). Here, the "*grace*" led to "utterance" and "knowledge", examples of the work of the Spirit gifts.

John wrote of Christ: "And of his fulness have all we received, and *grace* for *grace*. For the law was given by Moses, but *grace* and truth came by Jesus Christ" (Jno. 1:16,17). "*Grace* . . . came" as a contrast to the works of the Law, where the reward is "not reckoned of *grace*, but of debt" (Rom. 4:5). But "*grace* for *grace*" relates to "fulness", and this "fulness" refers to the Spirit of God which Christ had. Christ had this "fulness", for God gave "not the Spirit by measure unto him" (Jno. 3:34) and thus he was filled with the Spirit, even as "the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy [Spirit]" (Acts 13:52). Paul too wrote of how the Spirit gifts led to "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-13).

Grace today

As in the first century, the believer today has been given "good hope through *grace*" (2 Thess. 2:16), this hope having been revealed in God's Word. The believer is "justified by His *grace*" (Tit. 3:7) and has "forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His *grace*" (Eph. 1:7). However, he should not "continue in sin, that *grace* may abound" (Rom. 6:1), but should rather "walk in newness of life" (v. 4). In the meantime, God's *grace* is shown on a daily basis through the comfort of the Scriptures and the providential guidance of the angels. The believer should strive to show *grace*, not least in all his words, ensuring his "speech be alway with *grace*" (Col. 4:6).

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