

The Perspective of Grace

Life Changing Sanctification And The Role Of Grace

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me--watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.”

(Matthew 11:28-30) (MSG)

The benefits of grace as explained in the Bible are:

Firstly, that it provides strength (power) especially when weakness is all the person has to offer: *“And He said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.”* (2 Corinthians 12:9) (MKJV)

Secondly, it produces in the person attributes that would be classified as values in ACT: *“love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control.”* (Galatians 5:22,23) (MKJV)

Galatians 6:15 states it in this way: *“It is not what you and I do - submit to circumcision, reject circumcision. It is what God is doing, and he is creating something totally new, a free life!”*(MSG)

This grace is to continue for the life of the believer, and to be continually evident in every aspect of life. Believers are promised *“out of His fullness we all have received . . . grace for (upon) grace.”* (John 1:16) (MKJV). That this was to characterise every aspect of a believer's life is evident in passages such as Hebrews, 10:20 which states *“This is the **new and living way**”*(Hebrews 10:20) (MKJV) (Words in bold emphasised by me)

According to Matthew Henry, part of the ‘rest’ that is offered in our verse at the beginning is a *“well-grounded peace of conscience”* which comes from the knowledge that all sins have been forgiven and paid for; in other words, the individual experiences total redemption.

Of course that does not mean amnesia about the past, minds will remind individuals about past transgressions and what there is to feel guilty about. This is where the continual remembrance of grace becomes a transforming agent. *“Do not conform to*

circumstances will not facilitate the input of grace. There is a need for humility in order to receive grace, according to the promises given in the Bible. If one attempts to base any of God's saving work in life on personal performance rather than relying on Him, then one is setting aside God's grace; with the inference being that Christ's death was unnecessary or inadequate. "*I do **not set aside the grace of God**; for if righteousness is through **law**, then Christ died **without cause**.*" (Galatians 2:21) (MKJV)

So, in order to obtain this grace a Christian is required to develop two relational realities: faith and humility. "*Be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble'.*" (1 Peter 5:5) (NIV). God's grace is given to those who "*walk humbly with [their] God.*" (Micah 6:8) (NIV). *Likewise, faith accesses grace.* "*We have access by faith into this grace in which we stand.*" (Romans 5:2) (NIV)

The development of humility and faith does, of course, rely upon the cooperation of the individual. Pride needs to be actively and deliberately abandoned in order to open yourself up to the working of grace within, thereby abandoning your content; or your story about yourself and why you have succeeded or failed in life; whether you are a good or a bad person; whether others treat you fairly and recognise your good points or not; and so on.

In effect, you become a blank canvas, offering nothing towards the 'growth' process other than the availability of yourself. You begin to see yourself as a space where things happen, and not a place where they are made to happen. To speak in ACT terms, you defuse from all the conclusions and judgements about yourself, willingly accepting things as they are without insisting that they should be as you want them to be, focussing on what God is doing in the present moment, and exercising faith that you are becoming the person that you want to be, and are moving in a valued direction.

This stands in contrast to the other major theme in the Bible and that is of the law as given to Moses.

Understanding the differences between these two covenants is of utmost importance for those who want to live the Christian life with the vitality as described in the Bible.

the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”(Romans 12:2) (NIV)

Grace is a subject that has been considered best left alone in the teaching at many Christian churches as it has two possible interpretations, both of which could become very problematic: licentiousness, or an attitude of ‘anything goes’ - and legalism. Both possibilities are dealt with in the Bible.

Licentiousness: Grace is not God's sanction for excusing personal indulgences.

Paul discusses this at length in Romans chapter 6. He begins the chapter by asking: *“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin so that grace may abound? Let it not be! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it.”(Romans 6:1) (MKJV)*

Legalism: In Galatians, the converse problem is confronted. *“Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, do you now perfect yourself in the flesh?”(Galatians 3: 2,3) (MKJV)* He was writing to a church where some were trying to add law requirements to the acquisition of grace. This attempt to turn grace into a performance standard is described as a perversion, a grievous twisting, of grace.

Grace theology is based on the belief in a personal relationship with a personal God. This relationship is based solely on the ability and faithfulness of God and the believer’s response to this, and does not rely in any measure at all upon any achievement of the individual.

“This is why the fulfilment of God's promise depends entirely on trusting God and his way, and then simply embracing him and what he does. God's promise arrives as pure gift.”(Romans 4:16) (MSG)

Again, in Romans 12:3b: *“Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him.” (MSG)*

This means that one does not have to do anything to earn grace and that the appropriate response is to have faith that God will keep His promise. Faith is, therefore, a prerequisite for active receiving of the grace which is offered.

It also means that self-sufficient striving and attempts to control people and

Historical Examples of Grace and Sanctification

'Augustine's own experience illustrates the problem. He distinguishes between his intellectual conversion to Christianity and his inner conversion. His intellectual conversion, an act of rational deliberation, was sabotaged, according to him, by the very strategies he put to work to attain his goal: complex philosophical reasoning, conceited striving for achievement and fighting a variety of inner challenges. All of these strategies were effortful and ambitious and prevented surrender to God. His inner conversion, which occurred after he had been trying unsuccessfully to live according to Christian Law, did not involve struggle or craving but was rather a simple and peaceful attainment.'

(Augustine 2009 - Luc Van der Berghe)