

CHIEF MINISTRIES

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Often when giving a definition of grace, some teachers will say grace is a person rather than a noun, and the name of that person is Jesus. It's a very catchy saying, but is it true? Grace certainly came through a person, but is grace itself a person?

Jesus was filled with grace and truth. He was the embodiment of God's grace. He was grace in action, dying to pay for our sins, rising from the dead to justify us, sending His Spirit to empower us, and always interceding for us in heaven. But grace is not Jesus. Grace is a noun, brought to us by a person whose name is Jesus. He brings grace to us and demonstrates grace to us. But in the Bible grace is not a person but a noun - a wonderful, glorious noun!

Let's look at some relevant verses that makes this perfectly clear.

- *“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, the glory as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth (James 1:14). So, we see that Jesus is full of grace and truth but is not grace Himself.*
- *“But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we (the Jews) shall be saved, even as they (the Gentiles)” (Acts 15:11). Here Peter speaks of the grace of the Lord Jesus, which would make no sense at all if grace is a person and His name is Jesus. (Substitute Jesus for the word grace above)*

Paul also speaks of *“the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24)*, which makes no sense if grace is a person and not a noun. Of course, the message of God's grace is all about Jesus, but that is very different from saying that grace is Jesus.

Could it be that some people who say, “Grace is a person, and His name is Jesus,” are avoiding giving a clear definition of grace? Really now, when you ask someone to define grace and your given an answer like this, what has the person actually told you? Every true Christian believes in Jesus and loves and follows Him, so when teachers define grace by saying, “It's a person named Jesus,” they haven't told us anything at all. What exactly do they mean?

Let's look at some more verses that speak of God's amazing grace.

Paul wrote, *“But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if through the trespass of one man many died, then how much more has the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many” (Romans 5:15)*. Paul again speaks of the grace of God and then the grace of that one-man Jesus Christ, which is very different than saying grace is a person.

In keeping with that, Paul spoke of “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*” five times in his letters (Romans 16:20; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Galatians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:18). If grace is a person and His name is Jesus, what would these verses mean? Would Paul be speaking about the Jesus of our Lord, Jesus Christ?

In Romans, Paul wrote, “*To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*” (Romans 1:7). Notice that peace and grace come from the Father and the Son, but neither peace nor grace are the Father and Son. See also his greeting to the Corinthians. “*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Corinthians 1:3).

So, I think it should be pretty clear by now that grace is a noun, not a person. But, to repeat, it is a glorious noun, and it is all about Jesus, so let’s focus on the grace that comes to us through Him.

If one does a serious study of the concept of grace in the Bible, you’ll find different keywords for grace in both Hebrew and Greek concordances. If you arrange them in their different categories and prayerfully analyze the usage, you’ll be amazed at what you’ll find, especially in the New Testament!

You see, grace is more than “unmerited favor” (although unmerited favor is nothing to snivel at). It is more than **God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense** (although that acronym sums up everything we will ever have or experience in God). God’s grace is more than just a word or a concept, more than the manner in which God deals with us (as in, “I’m saved by grace, and everything I do is by grace”). It’s more than that. It is His merciful, enabling help. His ongoing empowerment, His continued working on our behalf.

It speaks of the Lord’s past, present, and future action, expressing what Jesus does for us and not just what He did for us. Grace means primarily the free, forgiving love of God in Christ to sinners and the operation of that love in the lives of Christians. Are you ready to do some study?

We’ll begin with verses in which “grace” charis in the Greek, which sounds like car plus iss in English does mean unmerited favor. Here are some clear examples:

- “*But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.*” (Acts 15:11)
- *That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring--not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, (Romans 4:16)*
- *I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. (Galatians 2:21)*

In each of these verses you could substitute “unmerited favor” for “grace”, and the meaning would be the same. So, we can see that we’re on solid footing here.

It was this emphasis on grace that became a foundation of the gospel message. (See John 1:17, “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”). So, the message became known as the gospel of grace, as the following verses attest:

- *So, they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. (Acts 14:3).*
- *But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20:24)*
- *And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (Acts 20:32).*

How glorious is this gospel of grace as filthy as we were, as undeserving as we were, as damnable and ungrateful as we were, Jesus died for us. The Father set His love on us - even though we were rank rebels - and adopted us as His very own sons and daughters, actually making us joint heirs of the universe with His Son. Hallelujah! This is the most wonderful news that a mortal ear could ever hear, and it expresses a goodness beyond human comprehension. We had huge, eternal debts that were damning our souls. Jesus, who owed us nothing, paid them all. That’s why Paul could write that we are “*justified freely by His grace*” (Romans 3:24). God can pronounce us “not guilty” because of what His own Son did.

This is the foundation of our own spiritual lives, and it is the anchor for our souls. God excepted us because of what Jesus did, not because we stopped getting drunk or because we threw away our drugs or because we stopped sleeping around. It’s actually the reverse: we stopped doing those sinful things because of what Jesus did for us, because He died in our place, because He took our shame and our guilt, because He paid the penalty for our sin, because He took what we deserved, canceling our debt, when He hung on the cross.

The moment we put our trust in Him as Lord and Savior, our spiritual account was adjusted, and the Father looked at us and said, “Not Guilty!” What’s more, He said, “You are now righteous.” And what’s more than that, He said, “You are now my beloved child.” That is the grace of God - from the prison of sin to the palace of the Savior, from a child of the devil to a child of the King, all because of the blood of Jesus.

That’s why we can declare that we stand clean before our Lord, and not one blemish does He see. And that’s why the hymn “Amazing Grace” has been one of the enduring classics of the church. Even the word amazing falls short of describing how incredible God’s grace is. When we were utterly helpless, He helped us, and He continues to help us every day of our lives. That is the meaning of grace.

But here is the surprising news: The New Testament word grace does not fundamentally mean “unmerited favor.” Its basic meaning does include favor (of any kind) along with kindness, but it also includes enablement and gifting, important concepts we often miss.

You see, God’s grace not only did something amazing for us - forgiving us for all our sins - but His grace continues to do something amazing for us - empowering us to live for Him. In fact, there was nothing revolutionary in the New Testament concept of grace meaning “favor” or

“gift”. What was revolutionary was the degree of favor shown to us through the Cross and the ongoing effectiveness of that favor in our lives. Grace finishes what it starts.

Why is this so important to understand? It is because many believers know that God saved them by His grace and that He continues to deal with them based on His grace, but they don't know that His grace is presently at work in them. In other words, it's one thing to say, “All that I do, I do by the grace of God,” meaning I don't deserve any credit or honor (which is true). It's another thing to say, “The grace of God worked mightily in me,” meaning I was supernaturally helped by God to do His work.

Do you see the difference? It's one thing to say, “I came to God through His grace,” meaning I have access to God through the blood of His Son (Amen to that!). It's another thing to say, “I serve God daily through His grace,” meaning I am enabled to do His will because He Himself is at work in me. There is a distinction here.

One believer says, “I'm not under the law; I'm under grace” (see Romans 6:14), taking it (wrongly) to mean “God understands my sins and doesn't condemn me for them. He receives me just the same regardless of how I live.” Another believer says, “I'm not under the law; I'm under grace; taking it (correctly) to mean, “Through grace I'm not only forgiven for my sins, but also, I can now live above sin. Whereas the law could only point out my shortcomings, God's grace can transform my nature.” That is the power of grace!

God's grace is comprehensive and complete. It saves and sanctifies, rescues and restores, transforming us from hell-bound sinners to holy-living saints. That's the grace of God! And just as it was the Lord's supernatural, infinite grace that saved us, it is His supernatural, infinite grace that keeps us. It is truly an ocean of grace that we experience in Jesus.

Look back and see how the Lord began to deal with you. It was all grace! You were a hopeless slave to sin, a rejected wretch, a captive to the will of the flesh. *“But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace [charis] you have been saved” (Ephesians 2:4-5).* Who can fathom God's grace?

But that is only the beginning. His grace is with us this very hour, helping us, keeping us, empowering us. That's why we can come with confidence to the throne of grace [charis], that we may obtain mercy and find grace [charis] to help in time of need (Hebrew 4:16). What encouraging words! For His children, God's throne is a place of mercy, and favor, and at that throne we find everything we need. Praise God for the stream of grace that flows from the throne of grace.

And yet there is more! We can also look ahead to future grace; *“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages He might show us the incomparable riches of His grace [charis], expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 2:6-7).* In light of this - who can imagine what it will be like? - Peter urges us, *“Set your hope fully on the grace [charis] that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:13).* What a day that will be! Grace, more grace, and

endless grace - that sums up our past, present and future in Jesus. Do you realize what this means?

It means we can rest confidently in the goodness of our God, knowing that the same blood that washed us in the beginning continues to wash us in this hour, and that the same grace that helped us in the past continues to help us in the present. God favored us by setting His love on us, and He favors us by keeping His love on us.

How were we saved? By grace through faith. How are we kept? By grace through faith. What is our eternal hope? Grace through faith. Revel in it! Rejoice in it! Delight in it! Dive into it! The Lord is our strength; the Lord is our support; the Lord is our sustainer; the Lord is our Savior. Yes, salvation is of the Lord, through the Lord, by the Lord and from the Lord. From beginning to end it's all grace.

It's only understandable then, that a glorious concept like this could be abused. Even the New Testament writers dealt with this abuse several times, with Paul giving an emphatic no to two theoretical questions about grace from the Romans. (See Romans 6, where Paul responds to the questions; "Should we sin more, so that there will be more grace?" And "Are we now free to sin, since we are not under the law but under grace?")

Jude also dealt with the abuse of grace, writing, "*I say this because some ungodly people have wormed their way into your churches, saying that God's marvelous grace allows us to live immoral lives. - And in your church maybe there not just saying it, but by their actions you see it!! The condemnation of such people was recorded long ago for they have denied our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ*" (Jude 1:4).

So, it's clear that grace can be abused and the best way to avoid the abuse of grace is to get to know biblical grace - God's grace - intimately for ourselves. The more we know the authentic, the better equipped we will be to avoid the exaggerated and counterfeit.

I challenge you to come under the gracious hand of God and be real and be changed.

Chief

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