

Grace - a life offering gift

About the CS theme 2001

by

Leen La Rivière

1. Before we go into the biblical explanations, let's look at what Webster is saying about grace first:

“grace (grās) n. 1 Beauty or harmony of form, attitude, etc.; ease and elegance of speech. 2 Any excellence or attractive characteristic, quality, or endowment. 3 Unmerited favor or good will; clemency; hence, any kindness, favor, or service freely rendered. 4 Theol. The unmerited love and favor of God in Christ; hence, free gift; the divine influence acting within the heart, to regenerate, sanctify, and keep it; a state of reconciliation to God through Christ; the power or disposition to exercise saving faith and to live the Christian life; any spiritual gift or attainment. See CHARISMA. 5 A short prayer before or after a meal. 6 Something granted in the exercise of favor or discretion and not as of right. 7 A courteous or gracious demeanor; graciousness; demeanor in general. 8 Music An ornament or embellishment, as a trill, turn, or the like. 9 Obs. Physical virtue or efficiency. See synonyms under FAVOR, MERCY.”

All other major believing principles include an action by ourselves, like:

- hope
- faith
- love

Except grace, grace totally comes from God and does not depend on anything in return.

In the same way, if we act out grace to others, it does not require (or depend on) anything in return.

You all know one of the key-verses putting grace into the right perspective:

Eph. 2:8-9 “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.”

In Hebrew we find two words, *chèn* and *chèsèd*, both mostly translated as grace.

- *chèn* has a stronger connection with favour.
- *chèsèd* is a helpful deed (showing grace) as result of mutual connection.
- There is another word, '*rachamim*' (sometimes translated as grace), which means compassion.
- The Greek word for grace is *charis*. This has a foundation in *charein*, something that finally gives joy or fulfillment or is pleasing.

It will be clear, that God shows His 'love without conditions' out of His grace.

What should be the counteraction of men in return for God's grace?

- To be loyal and faithful towards God and His ordinations (Micha 6:8).

2. Examples of Grace

When we interact with God's grace, the purpose is, that we become like He is: mirrors of God's grace.

The Bible gives us great examples:

- Abraham, how he bargained with God to save Sodom.
- Daniel, how he kept praying for his people, how he kept praising God and as a result ended up in a lion's den.
- The Apostles, they kept preaching and giving examples of grace. Most of them were killed for their conviction.

Or in the history of the Church:

- Luther, the great reformer, who finally discovered, that salvation is only by grace.
- Mother Theresa, how she cared for the poor and marginalised, is a true example of grace.
- Martin Luther King; he said: to fulfill the dream, is by grace and love, not by hatred and violence.

- Nelson Mandela: when he came out of prison, he decided to show grace against his oppressors, and not to answer by hatred and violence.
- Or remember the great story about *John Newton*, who composed the famous song 'Amazing Grace'. In the midst of a terrible storm he finally saw his sins and terrible injustice. He stopped the slave-transport and realized, that nothing could cleanse him of his terrible sins, except God's grace.

3. Interesting bible-verses about grace

John 1:14-18 "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known."

Important: if you really want to know what God's grace is, how it works, what it means, what it does in us, what we should do and be (as part of this grace): **study the life of Jesus!** Read and understand what and why He did things.

Acts 20:24 "However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me - the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace."

The gospel of God's grace is good news, the best news there is.

Romans 5:17 "For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ."

There is an abundance of grace.

Romans 5:20 "The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Romans 6:14 "For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace."

Finally free. Freedom at last. Salvation is true and possible, because of God's grace.

Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift (grace) of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Here we find the two opposites:

- Our own acts create sin, penalty: death.
- Trusting God's grace (rendering yourself to Jesus), will bless you with eternal life.

Gal. 2:21 "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

An interesting bible verse, let's analyse it thoroughly!

It is possible to make powerless the grace of God, so that it will not function. How is this possible? To think that salvation is possible by keeping the rules (in this case the law of Moses). The moment you move towards 'the rules' Jesus died in vain. As Christians we believe this, BUT so many times our acts condemn us, because in too many Christian families and in too many churches we install NEW rules:

- 'a true Christian does not wear jeans'
- 'a true Christian does not watch TV'
- 'a true Christian does not have jewelry'
- 'a true Christian man wears a tie on sunday'
- 'a true Christian girl has long hair'
- 'a true Christian boy has short hair'
- etc.

And just watch the fights about these unimportant issues! Those are non-debates and a waste of time and energy.

To understand why grace works based on faith in Jesus, and not because of our acts, read the whole passage: Gal. 2:15-21, and read Gal. 5:4-6.

In Eph. 1:5-8 you find how grace gives us purpose and direction: *"In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will - to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding."*

This bible verse shows the purpose of grace as well. It is not to do nothing (we lock ourselves up in a location full of fear, to sin again or to be hindered by the evil ones of this world), NO, we are called to live out God's grace, to be mirrors of God's grace. Grace should make our lives effective lives (see Eph. 4:29 and Thess. 1:11-12 as well).

To be active because of grace, can have a special function: comfort, encouragement:

2 Thess. 2:16-17 *"May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word."*

One of the functions of the believers (you and me) is to comfort, encourage others.

Paul talks about an abundance of grace (1 Tim. 1:12-16). Paul was a persecuter, a violent man. Through God's abundant grace he received mercy to become a living example of grace (= Jesus Christ).

We are called *"to be strong in grace"* (see 2 Tim. 2:1).

Titus 2: 11-14 *"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "no" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good."*
In this section you find grace and lifestyle connected. A call for godly living IN this world.

Hebr. 4:16 *"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."*

What a beautiful encouragement is this bibleverse.

Hebr. 13:8-9 *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them."*

Do not be impressed by so called wisdom, or particular teachings! Our only foundation is grace!

James 4:6 *"But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'"*

It explains how to approach God: in all humbleness.

1 Peter 1:13 *"Therefore, prepare your minds for actions: be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed."*

Focus on grace.

2 Peter 3:18 *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen."*

Growing in grace is growing in knowing Jesus.

4. GRACE IS NOT CHEAP

There are philosophers/sociologists/humanists/anthropologists/people who study comparative religions, who say that christianity (grace) is a fool's wisdom. They have the following arguments:

- a. A true religion asks for a lot of human investment to get saved; christianity does not!
- b. Christianity is not a person's responsibility. "It does not matter what you do, God wipes it all clean, so you never grow up."
- c. Christianity teaches the people to stay poor and dumb; christianity is opium (drugs) for people.

Well, you may be shocked by these phrases, but there are a lot of people who believe those arguments a, b or c. **So, do you know the answers?**

- a.
- b.
- c.

Unfortunately there are quite a number of Christians, who give fuel to these wrong arguments: **because those Christians say (or show by example) that grace even replaces the consequences of wrong behaviour. So they say "God forgave me" and just move on, not bothered by their acts.**

The biblical development is:

- If people sin,
- do understand their situation
- have remorse
- show repentance
- admit openly their sins
- God will give grace, forgiveness
- as long as we deal with the consequences of our sins
- *that includes retribution* to every person, for everything we hurt them with or damaged their property. That may include standing in trials, going to jail.

So grace is NOT CHEAP, it only works based on our attitude and acts.

Isn't this terrible:

There are even Christians who keep sinning, because they say: "God's grace will forgive me". It will be clear that those people fool themselves with a terrible lie! God will hold them accountable!

(Because Christians are not Christians because of what they confess, but according to how they live; "*who does the will of the Father*", *Matth. 7:21; Matth. 12:50.*)

5. The enemy of Grace

You may think that the enemy of grace may be hate, violence or revenge, or disgrace. Some of that may be true, but it is worse. The true enemy of grace is 'ungrace', a state of mentality without any emotion or any connection. Situations like hate, violence, revenge, disgrace, still have emotions, human connections. But the state of mind: **unmoved, apathy, insensibility** makes people like machines, we are dehumanised. How to have the right mentality of connection or concern is expressed in the word **compassion/mercy**. Read:

*Matth. 9:13 "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire **mercy**, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

*Matth. 23:23-24a "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices - mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law - justice, **mercy** and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides!"*

*Luke 6:36 "Be **merciful**, just as your Father is merciful."*

Luke 10:36-37 (the story of the Good Samaritan; this man did good, in spite of the fact that he was an enemy) "*Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?*" The expert in the law replied, "*The one who had mercy on him.*" Jesus told him, "*Go and do likewise.*"

James 2:13 "because judgement without **mercy** will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. **Mercy triumphs over judgement!**"

6. Grace as prayer

Webster's definition tells us that 'grace' is a prayer before a meal as well. But it is so much more than that.

Just watch the following list. They are all *opening* or *closing* verses of the letters in the New Testament:

Rom. 1:7 "To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: **Grace** and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

Rom. 16:20 "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The **grace** of our Lord Jesus be with you."

1 Cor. 1:3 "**Grace** and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

1 Cor. 16:23 "The **grace** of the Lord Jesus be with you."

2 Cor. 1:2 "**Grace** and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

2 Cor. 13:14 "May the **grace** of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

Gal. 1:3 "**Grace** and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"

Gal. 6:18 "The **grace** of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen."

Eph. 1:2 "**Grace** and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Eph. 6:24 "**Grace** to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love."

Phil. 1:2 "**Grace** and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Phil. 4:23 "The **grace** of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen."

Col. 1:2 "To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: **Grace** and peace to you from God our Father."

Col. 4:18 "I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. **Grace** be with you."

1 Thes. 1:1 "Paul, Silas and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: **Grace** and peace to you."

1 Thes. 5:28 "The **grace** of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

2 Thes. 1:2 "**Grace** and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

2 Thes. 3:18 "The **grace** of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all."

1 Tim. 1:2 "To Timothy my true son in the faith: **Grace**, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord."

1 Tim. 6:21 "...which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. **Grace** be with you."

2 Tim. 1:2 "To Timothy, my dear son: **Grace, mercy and peace** from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." (other translation says 'grace')

2 Tim. 4:22 "The Lord be with your spirit. **Grace** be with you."

Titus 1:4 "To Titus, my true son in our common faith: **Grace and peace** from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior."

Titus 3:15 "Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. **Grace** be with you all."

Philemon vs. 3 "**Grace** to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Philemon vs. 25 "The **grace** of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."

Hebr. 13:25 "**Grace** be with you all."

1 Peter 1:2b "**Grace and peace** be yours in abundance."

2 Peter 1:2 "**Grace and peace** be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord."

2 Peter 3:18 "But grow in the **grace** and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen."

2 John vs. 3 "**Grace, mercy and peace** from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love."

Rev. 1:4 "John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: **Grace and peace** to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne"

Rev. 22:21 "The **grace** of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen."

Powerful verses. Are those just nice wishes? Well, then you have no clue about the **power of prayer** and the **power of blessing**. These prayers that the other will receive peace, justice and *grace*, will start the movement of God toward dealing with that person or situation. These prayers for *grace*, peace, prayers of true blessing, are the beginning of change. It will help to release God's Spirit, God's dimension of grace. *And by blessing others with grace, you in return will be blessed too.*

7. Steps to take

It does not matter how you feel about a situation or persons. It may be the worst scenario. The persons may be your personal enemies...

- A. Make the turn in your mind and start a prayer of blessing for those persons or situation. The first time you do this, it is extremely difficult, "God, Jesus, in your name, I bless, please bless 'Mr. Johnson' / that car-crash, (or whatever it may be)".
- B. Allow God time to be involved with that person or situation. But keep repeating this prayer of grace & blessing daily.
- C. You will find relief after a while, you can loosen up your feelings of bitterness, hate, revenge. But keep repeating this prayer of grace and blessing. (This does not mean we let unlawful situations endure. You may have to report to the police, just like Paul who called to act out the justice of the Roman Empire.)
- D. Forgive in your heart and mind. But keep praying this prayer of grace and blessing. By letting go, in God's hands, you are disconnected, so God can restore you too. In some very

terrible cases, forgiveness may take a long time, even years. You may need God's help and God's Spirit.

But do not cover up the sins or the acts that are wrong. Only in the light is healing. Again if situations are against law or justice, you may need to tell the police (like molestation, fraud, rape, accidents, violence).

E. Reconciliation is possible. Be open to that, even when you are terribly hurt. But reconciliation can only happen when justice is done. Too easily Christians misuse grace to cover up ungodly behaviour. Of course this is wrong. So first there has to be recognition of the problem or sin by the offender, followed by remorse, repentance, admittance of the truth. Then justice should happen. As a result reconciliation is possible.

As you can see now, there is a lot connected with grace. Out of God's grace, we should be graceful or merciful to others.

"There is nothing we can do to make God love us more; and there is nothing we can do to make God love us less" (Page 71 'What's so amazing about grace' by Philip Yancey; this book is worth reading. Published by Zondervan/Harper Collins).

*Hebr. 4:16 "Let us then **approach the throne of grace with confidence**, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."*

Yes, we can; yes, we should now approach God, because He is grace!