

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Grace and Peace

by Dan Trygg

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Romans 1:7

Often, when we study the Bible, we come across terms concerning which we have some vague sense, but not necessarily an accurate understanding. **Because we do not often take the time to see what the term meant to the original author and his readers, we do not establish a clear perception of what is being said.** This is especially easy to do with words that are commonly used in religious circles today. **Paul’s use of the terms “grace” and “peace” are clear examples of this problem.**

The word, “**grace**” (Gk. – *charis*) meant “**unmerited or unearned favor, kindness, mercy and goodwill.**” To attempt to clarify this, **it may be helpful to differentiate it from some other terms.**

We get **justice** when we receive what we deserve for our actions, whether good or bad. The just recompense for sin is death and judgment from a holy God (Isa. 59:18; Psa. 28:3-5). This is not God’s *desire* for us, it is the just payment which follows from serving sin as our master. Paul put it this way, “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). What that means is that if you serve sin, this is the pay you receive.

By contrast, **mercy** is when we **don’t receive what we deserve for our actions.** In other words, the just recompense for our sin is withheld, the punishment is stayed or removed. God withholds His wrath.

Grace is distinct from both of these concepts, however, in that **we freely get what we don’t deserve, and have not earned.** Not only do we *not* get what we deserve, ...nor is the punishment merely *lifted* or *stayed*..., instead, God actually treats us with acceptance, kindness, favor and good will. **He gives us blessings, when we actually deserve curses.** He treats us *as friends*, even though we were His enemies. He makes us His *sons* and *daughters*, when we deserve to be rejected. **He treats us with compassion and good will, when we deserve to be treated with anger and judgment.** He sent Jesus *to be our suffering Savior*, when we deserved Jesus to come as a wrathful judge. **At the time when we were helpless to save ourselves, ...when our lives were lived in opposition to Him..., and we even were hostile toward Him, God graciously demonstrated His love for us by sending Jesus to pay our debt** (Rom. 5:6-8), **reconcile us to Himself** (II Cor. 5:17-19), **and adopt us as His own children** (Gal. 4:4-7; Eph. 1:5).

GRACE is God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense. We did *nothing* to deserve or earn this investment in us by God. He did it out of His great compassion, and the fullness of His loving heart. This definition emphasizes what was required for us to come into reconciliation with God. In Ephesians 2, Paul emphasized that **we were spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins. You can’t get more helpless, ...more powerless to save yourself..., than being dead!** Nevertheless, “God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ...made us alive together with Christ” (vss. 4,5). At this point in his description of what God did for us, Paul inserts the parenthetical phrase “(by grace you have been saved)”. **We didn’t, ...couldn’t..., do anything to save ourselves. God took the initiative to save us.** Then, three verses later Paul states, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that (salvation) not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast” (vss.8,9). **No self-effort, no amount of good deeds, could save us. God had to deliver us from our disastrous situation by (1.) paying for our sin,** by taking our place and bearing the penalty that was due us (Isa. 53:4-7); **and (2.) giving us new life,** through the re-creative working of His Holy Spirit (Jn. 3:1-8; Jas. 1:18; Tit. 3:3-7). We couldn’t do *that*, either. No amount of self-discipline or self-striving could make us come alive. **If we were going to come alive, spiritually, we needed God to give us an influx of His life. That is exactly what the Bible says He did!**

The Bible repeatedly emphasizes that our salvation is by grace, not by works or deeds which we have done, because in our selfish, prideful old nature we want to somehow take credit for being a “pretty-good person”. No, apart from Jesus’ provision for us, we are *not* “pretty-good people”; we are “condemned-to-hell sinners”! **Anyone who thinks they are “pretty-good” does not understand the gravity and hopelessness of their situation.** There is no room for pride or boasting in self-righteousness or self-achievement. It is God’s saving grace, or it is disaster. **We could never be good enough to earn acceptance with God, because His standard is absolute righteousness and perfect holiness. If you are old enough to read this, you have missed that standard already.** Someone likened the hopelessness of salvation by works to trying to swim to Hawaii from the coast of California, just you and your swimsuit. Some of us might make it farther than others before we would succumb to exhaustion and hypothermia, but it is a sure bet that every single one of us would die in the attempt. **There is no room to boast. We all have to rely on God’s free gift.**

We can boast in *Him*, but not in our futile efforts (I Cor. 1:30,31). Romans 11:6 says, “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.” If we earned part of our salvation by some good deed(s) we could do, then really we are earning our just due, and salvation is no longer a gift. Titus 3:5 expresses it clearly, “He saved us, *not on the basis of deeds* which we have done in righteousness, *but according to His mercy*, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.” **Salvation is God’s free gift, ...coming from the overflow of His heart of love, ...by the sweat of His brow and the outpouring of His blood, ...through His death on the cross and His resurrection on high. God did all the work! All we can do is acknowledge our need for Him, ...our selfishness, our brokenness, our sinfulness and our guilt, our inability to save or change ourselves to ever meet His standard. Then, if we can accept and trust in the GIFT He offers us in Jesus, He will apply that work to our lives. If we believe that God did, in fact, send Jesus to die to pay for our sins, and to enable us to live a life that honors God, and we take that promise for ourselves, God will count us as innocent and will transform us by the work of the Holy Spirit. Our trust is not some good deed. It simply accepts God’s offer to help. Until we accept the offer, it is of no benefit to us. We must choose to ask Him to save us.**

There is another aspect of grace which is often not talked much about. Just as we needed God’s impartation of life to become spiritually alive in the first place, to cause us to be born again (lit. born-from-above – Jn. 3:3,7), **we also need His ongoing guidance, infilling and empowering to enable us to live life differently.** The Greek word, *charis*, can also refer to a special manifestation of God’s presence, activity or power. The empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives also is the work of God’s grace. **GRACE is God’s Ready And Continual Enabling to live an empowered and holy life in Christ.** For example, Hebrews 4:16 says, “...let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” It is clear that grace here is comprised of more than just mercy. **Grace provides help, comfort, aid or support to enable us to deal with a time of need.** More than simply *favor* in the eyes of God, it is *provision* from God to strengthen us to address whatever it is we are facing.

In I Pet.4:10 Peter wrote, “As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” This adds two new components: First, God’s grace comes in many forms and in many ways. Here, it is an endowment of power to enable a spiritual gift or ministry. So, **it is God’s grace, or His provision of power and ability, which gives us the capability to live beyond our normal human strength.**

A second insight from I Peter 4:10 is that **we will be held responsible as stewards of God’s grace.** We will give an account to God for what we have done with the salvation, spiritual power and abilities He has made available to us (II Cor. 5:10). **Grace may be freely offered, but God expects us to make good use of it.** We are not to accept His grace for nothing. Even though we can’t earn salvation by good works, **God expects us to utilize the transforming and enabling power of grace to serve others** in love and good deeds (II Cor 6:10; Eph. 2:8-10; Tit. 2:11-14; 3:4-8,14; I Jn. 4:7-11). Notice that though He did all the work in order to save us, because we were powerless to help, now **God wants to partner with us in the outworking of His grace** (II Cor. 6:1; I Cor. 3:9). He still provides all of the power and ability, but **we are to be joint-workers with Him in walking out the inworking of His power** (Phil. 2:12,13).

Peace also has similar dimensions. **Peace can refer to the reconciled relationship that we have with God** (cf. Rom. 5:1). Jesus purchased that peace through the blood of His cross (Col. 1:20). 700 years before Jesus’ time, Isaiah wrote that “the chastening for our peace fell upon Him” (53:5). **Peace can also be an endowment from God, a state of mind and heart which God gives to us.** “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you” (Jn. 14:27). Philippians 4:6,7 instructs us as to how to obtain God’s peace, “which surpasses all comprehension”, to “guard” our hearts and minds. **Peace can also be an outworking of the Spirit’s activity in our lives** (Gal. 5:21,22). As we grow in Christ, a peaceful mind and heart should become more and more our experience (cf. Isa. 26:3; Psa. 119:165). We certainly should be able to walk in the loving heart of God enough to learn to live at peace with one another (I Thess. 5:13). Hebrews 12:14 instructs us to “pursue peace with all people”. **Christ is our peace, and He has made us all one family.** Whatever obstacles to peace were there before we knew Christ, in Him they have been removed. We are now brothers and sisters in Him (Eph. 2:14-16; II Cor. 13:11).

The normal greeting in the Roman world at that time was “greetings” (Gk. – *chairein*. E.g., Acts 23:26), and the normal Hebrew greeting was “peace to you” (e.g., Jn. 20:19). Paul’s salutation here is more than just a combination of the custom of both groups. Notice that the Roman greeting is a bit different than the word for “grace” (*charis*). The Roman greeting just meant “be happy” (from *chara*). Paul is wishing for much more than simple happiness. He is blessing them with the grace and peace of God. The Hebrew word for “peace” (*shalōm*) meant “every thing in its proper place of balance, order and blessing. Asking for God’s grace and peace was therefore a very significant greeting, recognizing that God is the source of all blessing, provision and order, and that relationship with Him by grace through Jesus is at the heart of it all.