



Lesson 2

RG in the NEW TESTAMENT

INITIAL TRUTHS TO REMEMBER

1. The *Story* has six acts: (1) God (2) Creation (3) Rejection (4) Redemption (5) Re-Creation (6) Worship
2. This *Story* is the panoramic view for the entire Bible.
3. The *Gospel Story* within the *Story*: God creates each individual, they reject God, and God intervenes and redeems sinners, places within them a new heart, and enables them to worship Him.

OVERVIEW OF THE LESSON

1. The embodiment of grace
2. The expression of grace
3. The endurance of grace
4. The example of grace

AN INTRODUCTION

“A religion is known at its center rather than on its circumference. The religion which underlies the New Testament writings is a religion of grace, or *it is nothing*. The point here is that all depends upon the emphasis. Christianity is primarily a religion which lives upon grace as the royal saving power of God manifested through His Son Jesus Christ.”¹

It will become evident how the gospel permeates and saturates the entire *Story* running from Genesis through Revelation. No part is left untouched. Our desire is to read the Bible as a single *Story* and at the center of this *Story* is JESUS.

BASIC IDEAS:

1. God did not have to do what He did, but He did what He did not have to do.
2. The favor of God rests upon those who believe because of position, not performance.
3. The grace of God exceeds the need of man because Christ is infinite.
4. The entire Christian life is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

The *Story* God wrote includes a fall into sin and an appropriate but horrific consequence. The sin and its demerit accent humanity's inability to erase their shame, fear, and guilt. Only God can do it and only God does. **That fact that He did and does is because of grace.** This grace is embodied and displayed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Hero of God's *Story*. It is now only for us to know who He is, what He has done, and who we are in Him.

Regardless of the act God takes toward His creation, grace colors all of it. All acts of God are acts of condescension when directed toward creation in general and humanity in particular. We live, move, and have our being because God is gracious. "*No grace, no gospel; that is what it comes to, when you study the classical documents of the primitive Church.*"²

The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the promise and His life and death are the completion of the picture. This *Story* is a story of gracious humiliation whereby God would dwell with man in order that man might dwell with God.

This study attempts to help us understand how grace forms the foundation on which the *Story* rests and how Jesus Christ is the fullest expression and embodiment of God's gracious condescension.

I. WHAT IS GRACE?

What is grace? What does it mean to be under grace? Are grace and law antithetical? Initially we must understand how God is intrinsically gracious. He acts graciously in creating, and in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, grace is embodied. To assist us in understanding the magnitude of this idea we will consider the word itself as found in the Bible.

Several times the word grace (**charis**) is translated with "thank" (Luke 6:32-34), "favor" (Luke 1:30; 2:52; Acts 2:47; 25:3), "liberality" (1 Cor. 16:3), "benefit" (2 Cor. 1:15) and elsewhere with "pleasure" (Acts 24:27; 25:9). Yet apart from a handful of exceptions, the Greek word **charis** is translated as "grace" in English.

What does the word mean and how does it occur? The Greek word **charis** occurs 156 times throughout the New Testament. It has come to mean, "God's undeserved, unearned, and undesired favor toward condemned sinners." What this tells us is **God did not have to do what He did, but He did what He did not have to do.** There was nothing within humanity moving God to act in a gracious manner toward us. The motive for grace rests solely in God.

| Grace [Charis] in the NT | |
|--------------------------|--------|
| Rev. | 2 |
| Jude | 1 |
| 2 John | 1 |
| 1 / 2 Pet. | 10 2 |
| James | 1 |
| Heb. | 7 |
| Phm. | 3 |
| Titus | 4 |
| 1 / 2 Tim. | 4 5 |
| 1 / 2 Thess. | 2 4 |
| Col. | 5 |
| Phil. | 3 |
| Eph. | 12 |
| Gal. | 7 |
| 2 Cor. | 18 |
| 1 Cor. | 8 |
| Romans | 21 |
| Acts | 16 |
| John | 3 |
| Luke | 8 |

| Forgive [Charizomai] in the NT | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Phm. | 1 |
| Col. | 2 |
| Phil. | 2 |
| Eph. | 1 |
| Gal. | 1 |
| 2 Cor. | 3 |
| 1 Cor. | 1 |
| Romans | 1 |
| Acts | 4 |
| Luke | 3 |

“In the New Testament, read even casually, it becomes clear that ‘grace’ is almost absent from the gospels and never absent for very long from the pages of the apostle Paul. Paul came into Christianity as the Faith or the Truth or the Way opened up by Jesus the Lord. His powerful statement of it as a religion of grace, or rather as the religion of grace, was due to his dominant conception of God bestowing undeserved favor and fellowship upon men. Jesus never speaks of grace, and none of his disciples ever applied the word to him. Like hope and freedom, grace does not occur in his teaching as preserved by the gospels.”³

What are we to make of this? In the Gospels, Jesus speaks [words] and acts [works of] GRACE. In the Letters, Paul explains GRACE.

Although it is difficult to accept initially, when speaking of God’s grace, we need to understand how **the favor of God rests upon those who believe simply because of position and not performance. The blessing of God is because of location and not action. The blessing of God upon us is rooted in whom we are, not what we do.**

Because this is true, we cannot reverse God’s gracious actions toward us. We cannot alter all God has done and is doing in us, for us, and through us.

- Q1 - How would you define or explain grace to someone who is new to the idea?
- Q2 - Why is God gracious toward us?

II. CATALOGING ITS OCCURRENCES

To facilitate our understanding of grace it is necessary for us to catalogue its various occurrences as it occurs throughout the New Testament into four primary groupings.

A. The Embodiment of Grace Occurs in The Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

John uses the word grace (**charis**) three times. Jesus is identified in the incarnation as being *full* of grace and truth (John 1:14).

“And **the Word became flesh**, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, **full of grace and truth**” (John 1:14).

There were displays of grace prior to the coming of Christ but in contrast to Him, they appear as shadow. “The Old Testament Law (a token of grace) is replaced by the revelation through Christ (an embodiment of grace).”⁴ In addition, in Christ the displaying of grace is perfect and lacking nothing. With Christ nothing more can be said. Our quest now is to know Him. **He is grace. There is nothing His people need that they do not already have in Him.** Consider the statement of John 1:16.

“From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another” (John 1:16 NIV).

“We have all benefited from the rich blessings he brought to us – one gracious blessing after another” (John 1:16 NLT).

The arrival of Jesus stands as fulfillment to all preceding promises. He is the next chapter in the ONE *Story*.

¹⁷ For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.

“The former is the law, viewed by Paul as the antithesis of grace (Romans 6:14; Romans 7:3; Galatians 4:4, and many other passages), in so far as it only lays us under obligation, condemns us, and in fact arouses and intensifies the need of grace, but does not bestow peace, which latter gift has been realized for us through Christ.”⁵

His coming marked a shift in the telling of God’s *Story* (Eph. 3:2, 3).

² “if indeed you have heard of **the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me** for you; ³ that **by revelation there was made known to me the mystery**, as I wrote before in brief.”

In Christ, God’s hero arrives and with Him comes a powerful display of grace and truth. With the coming of Jesus Christ, additional revelation will come to the apostle Paul. Paul will become a primary presenter of Jesus Christ.

When the second member of the Godhead became “flesh,” we had the greatest display of grace and the greatest embodiment of truth. When speaking of this idea theologically, the *incarnation* is the **product** whereas the *kenosis* of Philippians 2 [**emptied**] is the **process** whereby God became man.

When God took on a human nature, He condescended. In the incarnation the second member of the Godhead stooped, He lowered Himself. This is why Paul tells us in Philippians 2:8 “He humbled Himself.” **He became what He had created.** The Creator became that which He had created. It was not simply an identification or association, but an actual “**becoming**” (Rom. 1:3; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:7 [each uses **ginomai**, “To become”]).

Q3 – How might we go about describing what the arrival of Jesus means to the *Story* of God?

Q4 – Why would we say His arrival is the greatest embodiment of grace?

B. The Demonstration of Grace as Seen in The Area of Salvation.

By **grace alone** is from the Latin **Sola gratia**, one of the five Solas of the Reformation emphasizing that our justification before God and our resulting salvation are both solely by the sovereign distinguishing grace of God and not dependent on any action or condition provided by man.⁶

Acts 11:21-23 speaks of Barnabas seeing the grace of God evidenced in the salvation of the lost.

²¹ “And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number **who believed turned to the Lord**. ²² The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. ²³ Then when he arrived and **witnessed the grace of God**, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord” (Acts 11:21-23).

Those who believed were recipients of grace. Salvation displays God’s grace (Acts 11:21-23). This is an expansive and heavily emphasized element throughout the New Testament. In the incarnation, God became man. A primary purpose for the incarnation is redemptive. This is notable in the following three passages.

- Matthew 1:21 tells us very specifically Jesus “**shall save His people from their sin.**”
- Likewise, Luke 19:10 says Jesus came “**to seek and to save that which was lost.**”
- First John 4:14 tells us, “**The Father sent the Son to be Savior of the world.**”

In the saving of man, God graced him. He condescended. **Without grace**, humanity could not be saved. God had to give him something he did not deserve nor could merit. Salvation is coming to know the grace of God in truth (Col. 1:6).

“which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you **heard** of it and **understood** the grace of God in truth” (Col. 1:6).

There is nothing we can do to deserve it and there is nothing we can do to undo it.

In the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Creator would “become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8). The giver of life would offer up His life in behalf of the dead. The Lawgiver would be delivered into the hands of those who are without law (Acts 2:23 [“wicked hands”). At the hands of warmongers, the prince of peace dies. The creation of His own hands would entomb the Father of all things.

We are freely justified (Rom. 3:24) by his grace because of redemption. His grace makes it free of charge to us. Yet the Father still has a tangible and concrete basis for acting in the way He did. He is therefore just and able to justify sinners who believe in Jesus. **The redemption of**

Christ gives Him the reason or grounds for acting toward us freely in our justification.

Consider the ideas contained in Romans 3:24.

²⁴ being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; ²⁵ whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶ for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

- **First**, we are justified. In the doctrine of justification, God declares us righteous. He places us into His Son and treats us accordingly. Before God, we are right. Because we could not earn it nor did we deserve it, it had to be by grace.
- **Second**, the word “justified” is a **present passive participle**. Notice that it is a passive voice. **We are the recipient of the action.** We did not do it. We simply received it. Also, notice it is a present participle. This communicates the idea that right now at this very moment we are right with God. In addition, at any time whoever asks can be justified. How can this be? Can such a thought be true? “Yes! Yes!” Moreover, a thousand times, “Yes!” How can such a thing be true? Because of grace!
- **Third**, Paul uses the word “freely.” It means “without a cause, undeservedly.” Rogers and Rogers, notes it to mean, “**As a gift without payment, gratis, for nothing.**”⁷ The idea strengthens the next statement concerning grace.
- **Fourth**, as noted earlier, God can declare us righteous because His Son humbled Himself and became for us what we could not become. He became the payment that was capable of paying off the debt (redemption), setting us free from the penalty of sin and adopting us into His family.

Q5 - What does our salvation by grace exclude?

Q6 - What is the primary purpose of the incarnation?

C. The Durability of Grace as Seen in The Perseverance of The Saints and Progressive Sanctification.

In Galatians 5:1, Paul uses the word “**stand firm**” as a present active imperative. He appeals to our will. He wants us to choose grace.

“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore, **keep standing firm** and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1).

As a command, it speaks of an appeal to our will/volition to continue to stand fast in grace. “[The present tense] indicates a continual and habitual action.”⁸ **The idea of standing fast is that of persevering.** We must be determined to live and thus rest in grace.⁹ Paul suggests that both liberty and freedom are synonymous with grace. The word “liberty” and “freedom” come from the same root word. It occurs in Galatians 2:4 of those who would seek “to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order that they might bring us into bondage.” We are also exhorted not to use the idea of grace for “an occasion to the flesh” (Gal. 5:13).

“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13).

Notice the contrasting idea of grace. It is that of bondage. **The opposite of grace is bondage.** To remove oneself from grace is to “be entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” **Any biblical exposition leading to bondage is the preaching of a false grace.**

Paul’s exhortation to Timothy is “to be strong in grace” (2 Tim. 2:1).

“You therefore, my son, **be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus**” (2 Tim. 2:1).

He uses “be strong” and, like the word for “standing” in Galatians 5:1, it is a **present active imperative**, whereby he appeals to our will to stand firm. This pattern is consistent throughout the New Testament. We as believers are to persevere in grace. We are not to go back to a work mentality nor are we to leave the umbrella of God’s grace. In our desire to obey, please, and serve the Father, there is a natural tendency to see such actions on our part as being meritorious, as if to say, “Look what we have done.” Yet our “working” is the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22) and generated solely by our identification in Christ (Gal. 2:20) and thus our abiding in the vine (John 15:5).

Such grace occurs only in Christ and in Christ alone. Peter uses the same construction of the apostle Paul in 1 Peter 5:12 as Paul did in Romans 5:2.

“Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, **exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!**” (1 Pet. 5:12).

By implication, Peter suggests there could be a false grace. **What is a false grace?** It is a grace coupled together with works. It is a grace that “has begun in the Spirit, but believes you are now made perfect by the flesh” (Gal. 3:3). A grace that depends on God (i.e. **monergistic**) in justification, but looks to man (i.e. **synergistic**) in sanctification is a false grace.

In fact, when it comes to Christian life and experience, many of us have understood the gospel as the thing that *gets* us in, while the thing that then *keeps* us in (we assume) is our own effort and performance. We recognize that the gospel ignites the Christian life, but we often fail to see that it’s also the fuel to keep us going and growing as Christians.¹⁰

Dr. Larry Crabb notes,

How foolish can you be? You received life from God by admitting your failure and weakness and trusting in Christ. Do you think you’ll now live that life by doing enough things right to persuade God to give you what you want? You were saved by grace, and you’ll grow by grace. The Law of Linearity is ended.¹¹

Q6 - Is it possible to be saved by grace, but to fall back into a work’s righteousness mindset?

Q7 - How might we guard against this?

D. The Illustrations of Grace as Seen in His Service Rendered Through His Saints.

The work of grace by Jesus Christ and through His people is truly unprecedented. First, note a handful of passages exhibiting what His grace toward the undeserving looks like.

1. The sacrificial and substitutionary death on the cross (Rom. 5:6, 8, 10).
2. The forgiving of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1ff).
3. The forgiven woman who washed His feet with her tears (Luke 7:36-50).
4. The father's reception and warmth toward his two prodigal sons (Luke 15:11-32).
5. The healing of the ten lepers and the ingratitude of the nine (Luke 17:11-19).

All of these passages speak to the abundance of God's grace. A grace that loves without condition, accepts without requirement, forgives without limit, favors without merit, and serves without reward.

Now notice how this grace comes through the believer. Ministry/service/good works are an expression of the grace of God (Acts 14:26; 15:40).

"From there they sailed to Antioch, **from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished**" (Acts 14:26).

"But Paul chose Silas and left, **being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord**" (Acts 15:40).

The words "commend and commit" are the same in both passages and mean "to surrender, to yield up." It most often occurs as the English word "betray." It has the strong idea of "being given over to."¹² **Paul and Barnabas had been "given over to" the grace of God for the work of the ministry.** As servants of God, we are recipients of God's grace, thus stewards and administrators of the same. If God's grace is not operative in ministry, we will fail. Grace keeps us faithful. We are to be ministering grace to others (Eph. 4:29).

"Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, **so that it will give grace to those who hear**" (Eph. 4:29).

All that we are in ministry is a result of God's grace dealings with us. We have what we have because of grace (Rom. 12:3, 6; Eph. 4:7).

³**For through the grace given to me** I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. . . ⁶ **Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us,** each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith" (Rom. 12:3, 6).

"**But to each one of us grace was given** according to the measure of Christ's gift" (Eph. 4:7).

Because it is all of grace, no one can boast; no one can be jealous, contentious, or combative. This is Paul's primary point in the Book of Romans. Paul saw his ministry because of grace (Rom. 15:14-16; 1 Cor. 3:10). The overwhelming body of evidence provided for us by the biblical record forces us to conclude, "**Salvation by grace; sanctification by grace; service by grace** – it seems clear that God's entire program for His people is one of grace from start to finish."¹³

Q8 - If God treats me with grace, how might I treat others?

Q9 - What does grace look like in your life?

Q11 - What does this study cause you to change in your thinking and/or actions?

CONCLUSION

Paul's gospel was of the grace of God (Acts 20:24). Paul recognized that his ministry was given to him by grace and enabled by grace (1 Cor. 15:10; Eph. 3:7, 8; 1 Pet. 4:10). Paul never lost sight of his grace-based ministry (2 Cor. 1:12). We must never forget that all we have and enjoy is a result of grace and empowered by grace. Grace does not exclude our participation. Yet such participation is not viewed as an independent contractor, but rather as a tool used by the Master craftsman.

NEXT LESSON – RG and One's Identity

¹ James Moffatt, *Grace in the New Testament*, 1932, p. xii, xv, 9 [Emphasis added].

² Moffatt, p. xv [Emphasis added].

³ Moffatt, pp. 8, 75.

⁴ Cleon L. Rogers, Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers, III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Zondervan, 1998), 178.

⁵ Meyer's NT Commentary on John 1:17.

⁶ http://www.theopedia.com/Grace_alone

⁷ Ibid, 322.

⁸ Rogers and Rogers, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key*, 430.

⁹ "Our hard word, therefore, means coming to a greater understanding of *his* work." Tchividjian, *Jesus*, 96.

¹⁰ Tchividjian, *Jesus*, 37.

¹¹ Larry Crabb, *The Pressure's Off: There's a New Way to Live* (Waterbrook Press, 2002), p. 36. Crabb explains the Law of Linearity as "There is an *A* that leads to the *B* you want. Figure out what *A* is, do it, and you'll have the life you most desire." He contrasts this with the Law of Liberty. Where the recipient, "Come as they are. They do not bathe before they approach God. They come to God for the bath." P. 12.

¹² BAGD, 614.

¹³ J. Carl Laney, Jr., "God," in *Understanding Christian Theology*, ed. Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 191.

