

Great Words of the Bible

GRACE

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by Nick Kalivoda

Two of the great words in the Bible are "grace" and "faith." They are sisters, and they are critical words. They are at the heart of God's formula for saving every one of us, and not only that, they also tell the believer how to please God after he knows that he has eternal life.

THE GRACE PRINCIPLE

Grace is a beautiful word. It expresses the biblical relationship which God has determined for His dealings with men. Grace is a word usually associated with the gospel. It conveys to us the religion-destroying principle of how God desires to bless men. It overturns long-held concepts about how to be right with the Creator, and it replaces the Old Testament truth that promised blessing for obedience. It shatters every well-meaning attempt to find favor with God by religious activity or by humanitarian deeds. It says "no deal" to everything we thought our Father in heaven would accept from us.

Grace is a word that in this church age absolutely cancels every human asset brought to God as meritorious. It is a word that also stamps out pride. It crushes piety and laughs at man's perseverance in religion. In short, it declares every man spiritually bankrupt, with nothing acceptable in his account to offer to a gracious God. Grace wipes out every human design to win God's favor. It declares from the courts of heaven that God cannot be bought at any price. If that sounds like bad news for religion, it is. But it is also very good news for lost men, for God has a better way. He is giving away what we cannot possibly earn by religious activities.

What does the Bible say about religion? It tells us that God established only one religion in the world. He gave statutes and ordinances to make His people Israel different from the nations, but this law code was terminated at the cross! When Christ died,

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the veil in the temple which isolated the holy of holies was torn in two from top to bottom. God did it; and the old covenant and Judaism became obsolete. (Hebrews 8:13)

The apostles introduced no new religious system; primitive Christianity was not a religion with regulations for its followers. The Christian faith was so unstructured that it became known only as "the way." It involved a lifestyle characterized by love (its only commandment), and Paul wrote in Philippians 3:3 that believers in Christ "...are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit, glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh."

Paul could write this because believers are said to be circumcised spiritually (Colossians 2:11), thus being marked as God's people. In addition, God indwells each of them and they worship in spirit, in contrast to a place, time or method. This accords with Jesus' prediction concerning the end of sacred places of worship (John 4:21). He also announced the new way of worship in John 4:23-24:

"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

This announced that God was about to establish a better way based on the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Those words of Jesus, however, have not deterred the world of religion from promoting obligatory practices to make people deserving of God's favor.

THE GRACE GOSPEL

What is this word "grace"? What does the Bible say about it? The Greek word "grace" is found 155 times in the New Testament. When used in association with salvation it is contrasted with works to convey the gracious desire to give eternal life to the ungodly. Since such divine generosity is difficult to accept, some men who do not comprehend this great word "grace" will hold out a handful of verses, often out of context, and proclaim that good works are necessary for salvation! Although the Bible teaches that rewards can be earned, salvation is not a reward. It is a gracious gift.

The grace of God, when received by faith, transforms the completely-lost sinner into a completely-saved child of God. Because he is completely saved by grace, he can do nothing thereafter to improve his position with God. Nor does he need to do anything to improve his position, because grace secures for him the highest possible glory.

This word "grace," although occurring many times in the New Testament, is found only one time in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke). We should have expected this because the synoptic gospels present us the life of Jesus in the context of law and Judaism. We find that single use of the word "grace" in Luke 2:40. It refers to Jesus and tells us that "...the Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him."

In the book of Acts, however, the word "grace" characterized the preaching of Paul on the first missionary journey. In Acts 13 we find Paul and Barnabas preaching the good news in the synagogue in Antioch. It was a message about the grace of God. When some Jews responded by believing the gospel, Paul and Barnabas told them to "continue in the grace of God." Up to that day their loyalty was to Judaism, which had its roots in the law of Moses. Fifteen centuries earlier at Mt. Sinai, God had added the law to the gracious covenant of promise made earlier with Abraham. The law was a temporary addition to the promise, and it became the basis of God's administration over the house of Israel until Christ paid the law's demands on the cross. Following the cross in history, God began governing His new people, the church, by a grace administration. "Administration" is a translation of the Greek word "oikonomia," referring to how a household is managed. From it comes our word "economy."

Paul's message in that synagogue was such good news that it caused many Jews to abandon Moses for Christ, as recorded in Acts 13:32 and 38:

"And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us, their children, by raising Jesus....Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses."

This message was good news to people bound by the law. He announced that God had already provided redemption for His people by sending the promised Savior, and although they crucified Him, God had raised Him on the third day. It was good news of forgiveness and freedom. The gospel freed them from divine judgment for sin and from the law that bound them. It promised freedom from everything to all who believed in the Messiah (Christ) sent by God. Paul, who was himself a Jew, referred to the law of Moses as "bondage." Its purpose was to serve as a control on Israel, but only until the Son of God was sent to set them free.

THE RESPONSE TO GRACE

Significant in Paul's message is that forgiveness and freedom were promised "to everyone who believes." The gospel called for only one response: that they believe in the one God had sent. That excluded trying to earn God's favor, making a promise to God, or for feeling sorry for having depended upon the law. The word "believe" characterized the Apostles' preaching, but not to Jews only. Peter used the same word when he went to Caesarea and spoke for the first time to Gentiles. We read about this in Acts 10:43 where he preached about the resurrected Jesus and said:

"To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Instead of telling those people to do something for God, the Apostles told them what God had done for them by sending Jesus Christ. Forgiveness of sins, they said, would be theirs by believing in Jesus Christ.

It is crucial to note that Peter and Paul did not ask those Jews to keep commandments in order to please God, nor to do good deeds. Unlike gospel preachers today, they did not urge people to pray for forgiveness, nor to "pray to receive Christ." They gave no invitation for a public profession and asked no one to come forward in the synagogue, to raise a hand, or to make a public confession of sins. Instead, they announced that they should believe the good news about the Savior, the Christ, of whom the prophets had written centuries earlier. To believe is to have faith.

The message of the Apostles, because it told men to believe something instead of do something, was called "good news." We call it the gospel of grace. "Gospel" means good news.

To leaders of the synagogues, this message of grace salvation was a threat to Judaism because Jews and God-fearing Gentiles were leaving the synagogues! The result was persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and the Jews forced them to leave the city.

GRACE ATTACKED

Not only was grace salvation opposed by those religious men, so was grace living. This attack came from Jews who had believed, but whose roots in Judaism influenced them to contradict the instructions given to believers at Antioch that they "continue in the grace of God." Paul's instruction there meant that the law, which could not save a man who was dead in his sins, could not govern a man who had been given new life in Christ. Grace was given both to save and to direct these new believers.

Some Jews, who are described as "believers" and who belonged to the party of the Pharisees, wanted to impose the merit system, under which they had been reared, on Gentile Christians. We read about this in Acts 15:1:

"...some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, 'unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.'"

Not content to force the law of circumcision on them, they added this: (vs. 5) "It is necessary to circumcise them and to charge them to keep the law of Moses."

These zealous Jews, who formerly had misunderstood what their scriptures had said about salvation through faith, were now failing to comprehend God's new creation, the church. Under Judaism they had come to believe that the law was the way to be righteous before God. They were convinced that the holy law, given only to Israel, was the only way of salvation. They had ignored what Genesis 15:6 said about how Abraham became righteous in God's sight: "And he believed the Lord, and he reckoned it to him as righteousness." They had also ignored

David, who expressed in Psalm 32 a righteousness apart from works. (See Romans 4:6-8) In addition, the prophet Habakkuk had proclaimed that "The just shall live by faith."

Faced with the turning of Gentiles to God, these Jewish brethren were insisting that Gentile believers in Christ be in compliance with the law of Moses. They wanted to make them "Jewish" Christians!

GRACE DEFENDED

In a meeting of church leaders and the Apostles in Jerusalem, Peter stood up and resisted the demands of these men when he said:

"Why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will." (Acts 15:10-11)

Those Jewish "brethren" were not content to let the Gentiles be saved by grace alone because they themselves were still clinging to Judaism after believing in Christ. Their attitude might be summarized by this: "We Jews are the people of God. God has revealed His word to us. He has given us the worship, the covenants, the glory and the sonship, and if anyone wants to get to God he can get there only through us who are under the law." This meant that Gentiles needed to become Jews in order to get to God. These Jewish Christians believed that faith in Christ was only the first step toward salvation for Gentiles. Since the Jew was convinced that only he had access to God, the following diagram represents his logic.

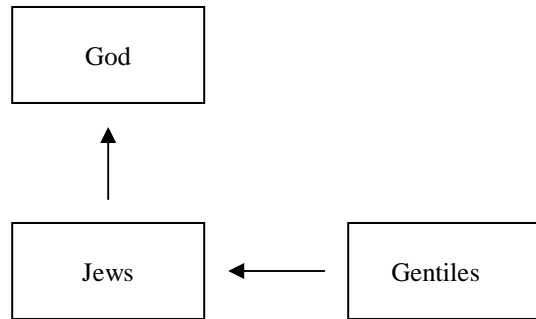


Diagram 1

Peter and Paul, however, insisted that faith in Christ was the one and only requirement for complete salvation. The epistles of Paul especially reveal that he taught believers in Christ that they were no longer under obligation to the law of Moses. His teaching explained that men were acceptable to God through faith in the crucified Christ, not through the law. The result was the new creation, the church, made up of Jews and Gentiles who believed, as illustrated in diagram 2:

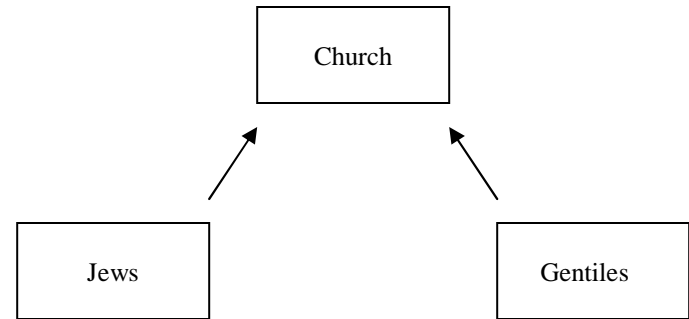


Diagram 2

Therefore, he urged these converts to live by the grace principle of freedom, not by the laws of Moses. This was one of the points of contention in Acts 15 where the apostles, the leaders and the entire church in Jerusalem agreed with Paul's position on grace. The church of the first century had been in danger of division into Jewish and Gentile branches prior to that decision.

Those of the sect of the believing Pharisees lost the battle over the necessity of circumcision and submission to the law for salvation. Nevertheless, they continued to impose both of those requirements on Gentile believers as a means of pleasing God after salvation. Paul, however, taught that Christ had terminated the law "by abolishing in His flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross..." (Ephesians 2:15-16) This meant that the Gentile had equal access to God, but not through the religion of the Jews. Both Jew and Gentile could come into the blessings of grace by faith in Christ alone, and become members

of Christ's church. (See diagram 2)

Paul became the champion of the gospel of grace. He insisted that to enter salvation one must believe, and that salvation was by grace exclusively. In Galatians 1:8 he ruled out any other message.

"But if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed."

The gospel which Paul preached to those Galatians was the gospel of grace--no works, no deeds, no religion. It announced what God had done freely for unworthy men.

GRACE DEFINED

What is this concept of grace? The Greeks had a word for beauty and charm--charis--and it also meant something one could not earn or deserve. It is the word "grace." From that we have arrived at the theological definition of "undeserved generosity." Grace is a gift; it is unmerited favor, and it is free! This is what makes the gospel of grace good news! Grace is presented in Romans 11:6 as something that excludes works:

"But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace."

Made simpler, it means that if it's light, it can't be darkness, otherwise light would not be light, and if it's white it can't be black, otherwise white would not be white.

THE MERIT PRINCIPLE

We have difficulty understanding this concept of grace because we have been reared under a merit system. The merit principle governs our lives from childhood. In other words, we get what we work for. We learned from our parents that rewards are earned, such as, "If you eat your vegetables you will get a dessert." As students we learned that grades were earned by study, and the best job offers come to those with the highest averages. That's

merit, and there is nothing wrong with it. On our first job we discover that hard work, overtime and good performance result in pay raises. Promotions come the same way. This is the merit system at work, and it's a good system. We have all heard of Civil Service. It's a merit system. Those who perform the best are supposed to get the rewards.

THE GRACE SYSTEM

We assume, then, after a lifetime in the merit system, that God also operates by the same system. That's where we are dead wrong because the Bible tells us that God deals with man only on a grace system, and that salvation is a gift. This is in conflict with what we have been taught, and for that reason we hesitate to accept this incredible principle of grace. But what we deserve is not good news as Paul explains in Romans 6:23, "the wages of sin is death." Wages are what we earn, and so death is deserved because we have not performed up to God's perfect standard. A merit system gives men what they deserve--death. Paul also tells us in the same passage that "...the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ, our Lord." This free gift from God is life forever, but it's by Christ, our Lord, not by our own merit. God's grace offers men what they don't deserve--eternal life! This means, of course, that salvation is free! Jesus himself expressed it clearly in John chapter 4 when He said to the woman at the well:

"If you know the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

His use of "living water" was figurative language for the drink that would quench spiritual thirst. It is eternal life. Jesus referred to it as God's gift, meaning that the hoped for heaven is really free. Listen to Ephesians 2:8-9:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not because of works, lest any man should boast."

This means that salvation is not a reward for merit, as we have been brought up to believe. It is something God is giving generously to those who don't deserve it. It is obtained only

through faith in the Savior sent to rescue us.

I like the story of the man who went to a restaurant with his wife and had difficulty getting service. When he did get the waitress' attention, she gave very poor service. When the food came, it was cold. She spilled coffee on his wife's dress. They were disgusted by the end of the meal and vowed they would never return to that restaurant. After he paid the check, he walked back to the table and put a \$5 bill under the plate as a tip! That's grace!

Down here on earth if we drop a pencil it will fall to the ground. That's the law of gravity, and it rules on this earth. In space, however, a person can function as though the law of gravity did not exist. When an astronaut in space releases a pencil it floats. Space exploration has demonstrated that activity in space differs from activity on earth. So it is in regard to the Creator. While we have a merit system down here, which is practical and which is good for relationships with men, there is another law in the heavens. It governs our relationship with God. It is the principle of grace.

For many years, Martin Luther agonized because he thought that self-affliction and many prayers would make him worthy before God. He tried to win the favor of God by his works, but then he came upon this amazing statement in Romans 1:17: "the just shall live by faith." Martin Luther wanted to be just. He wanted God's approval and God's acceptance, but he was never certain that he had achieved it. Now the Bible was telling him that he had been trying to get it the wrong way, and that if he would come to God by faith, or believe God, then God would declare him righteous. He finally understood and rejoiced. The Bible is clear that God saves by the grace principle, not by merit. He offers to save us not because of how good we are, but in spite of how bad we are.

A RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

People of all religions have always tried to earn the favor of their God. Even those reared in a Christian culture try to earn favor in spite of what the Scriptures say about faith and grace. The Bible teaches repeatedly the incredible fact that God has a righteousness to give to man. It's expressed in Romans 3:21-24:

"but now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it. It's the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

This passage tells us that God has a righteousness which is apart from law. That being the case, it must be by grace because law is a merit system, which rewards men for effort. But the preaching of the good news in the first century brought an incredible message to man's ears and it was this: God has provided for man's salvation and is offering it free to everyone who believes Him. It's the good news of God's grace. Salvation, which cannot be earned, deserved, or purchased, is offered as a gift. It is offered to unworthy people and is received through faith. The Bible explains the meaning of faith.

FAITH MEANS NOT WORKING

"But to him who works not, but believes him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." (Romans 4:5)

This passage tells man to stop working in order to be accepted by God. Instead, he must believe. But a man cannot believe in Christ for salvation until he stops working to earn salvation. The above passage says nothing about God justifying good people. Amazingly, it instead says that God "justifies the ungodly." You and I have thought that perhaps we could do enough good so that God would take a liking to us and declare us acceptable. But God's word teaches otherwise. It tells us that because God recognizes Christ's death on our behalf He is able to justify the ungodly. That's grace. Every person who tries to improve himself in order to be justified by God is rejecting grace.

While religion may have taught us to be good to receive eternal life, the Bible tells us that no one can be good enough. This means that each person must abandon reliance on deeds and religious efforts so grace can function to save him. This insures that God will get glory for His grace.

Know this about grace: man can do nothing to help himself. Grace is not a grant-in-aid; it is not a subsidy. It is not an offer that if you do your best God will help you with the rest. It is not you trying the best you can and God making up the balance. It is not 70 percent effort by you with God providing the 30 percent to help you reach his standard of acceptance. Grace, since it is exclusive of merit, means 100 percent effort from God and zero effort from you. If God permitted you to make even the smallest contribution toward salvation, by any act or deed, the character of grace would be contaminated. Do not try to add anything to grace, because in doing so you will nullify it.

Grace not only implies human helplessness and unworthiness in the recipient, it demands it! That is why the Bible emphasizes "there is none righteous; no not one," and that all have missed the mark and are doomed until rescued by grace. Obviously then, since salvation is a gift, and a gracious gift, it cannot be earned.

But religion at times ignores God's way of saving sinners. It tells us to try; God says, "Don't try." Religion says, "You're not too bad." The word of God tells us that "all have sinned." From all that God has revealed about salvation we learn that He does not ask men to promise to be good. God instead makes promises to men.

Not many people understand this concept of grace. I remember an event some years ago in New Orleans. Louis Armstrong, a famed musician, had died. At his memorial service his widow, looking up into heaven said, "He's probably up there now looking down through a little hole in the sky. He was too good a man to be anywhere else." Did she understand grace? She may have, but she failed to uphold it when she spoke, for she implied that he was in heaven because he was good.

Paul referred to grace in Romans 3:28 when he said:

"For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law."

If it's apart from the works of the law, then righteousness must be by another means, and it is! We can be justified only through faith, and since our works do not bring justification, it must be by grace. But because we have been conditioned to think

that God's approval can be gained by merit, we tend to rely on good deeds and try to earn righteousness. This is no different from trying to do works of the law, which the Bible says cannot justify a man. The inspired message from heaven, recorded in Romans 1:16-17, tells us that believing is the way to God.

"I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'"

Can you believe God for His righteousness? Of course you can, but perhaps you won't. You won't until you are convinced that God can accept only those who are as righteous as His Son, Jesus Christ, and nothing less than that! Grace offers you Christ's righteousness. It's perfect and it's complete. You can have it as a gift by believing God's promise. God must have known that we would have difficulty understanding grace so He gave revelation to help us, such as John 1:17. It contrasts grace with law.

"For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

This certainly tells us that grace and truth are not law, they are contrasted. Moses brought God's revelation to Israel and it was law. But Jesus Christ brought us another way to live under God--by grace and truth.

ONLY GRACE GUARANTEES

"That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise might rest on grace and be guaranteed." Romans 4:16

We could have no guarantee of eternal life if it depended on our efforts, but since salvation rests on grace, which means an unearned gift, it can be guaranteed. It is not practically free; it is absolutely free. It rests on God's grace and it depends on nothing more than divine integrity. While you may have been told that salvation depends upon strong faith, it does not! It depends on the strength of the object of our faith, who is God, the giver of the gift.

But how can God give salvation? Doesn't this compromise His own righteousness by letting men get away with sin? Can He overlook the evil things we have done? Wouldn't God be unjust by forgiving even one person? Indeed, He would. Because God is just and righteous, He cannot compromise His justice by any degree of leniency. He must uphold His own holy and perfect law. He must punish the sinner as the prophet Ezekiel declared in ch.18:4: "The soul that sins must die." God cannot change His own holy standard without forfeiting His divine character of truth, justice and righteousness. Because God does not change, we can depend upon Him. What He promises, He will perform!

God, however, satisfied His desire to show mercy and love to lost men by providing another person to pay the debt that they owe for sin. The gospel tells us that Jesus took the sinner's place in death. Instead of us getting what we deserve, Jesus took what we deserve. As a result, a gift is offered. Paul expressed this wonderful offer from God again in Ephesians 1:7:

"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us."

In spite of that declaration, people keep asking, "Won't our prayers help? Won't all those years of tithing and all those church meetings we've attended help us?" No! Salvation is by grace and it is received through faith, not through religious efforts, and not along with them. Remember, "but to him who works not, but believes Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." (Romans 4:5)

But aren't those things good that we have done? Yes, praying, giving, and worship are good. But they cannot buy something which is not being sold, nor can they obtain that which is offered as a gift. God is not selling or trading what He decided is a gift, and only salvation which is by grace alone insures that God will get the glory He deserves.

Therefore, we must withdraw all our offerings, our deeds, and our righteousness and take gladly what is generously offered from heaven through faith. That's the gospel message of grace. We must believe that God will do what He has promised to do for us. To do otherwise is to make God a liar! Grace is never a reward for our efforts. When we insist on the value of human effort to get

God's endorsement, we are perpetrating the religious crime of robbing God, because this would take away the glory which God alone deserves for saving us.

Grace is a "Glory for God" program. He'll share none of His glory with the unworthy. To do so would be an insult against His own Son's necessary work on the cross. God will not change His plan; it is fixed for eternity! Every attempt to get glory apart from grace through faith is a subtle attempt to rob God of what is rightfully His.

HOW MUCH GRACE?

Many of us have a false interpretation of grace which distorts our understanding of this wonderful concept. We assume that an evil person needs more grace to be saved than a moral person.

Years ago John Gacey lured young men into his home, sexually abused them, murdered them, and then buried them under his house in Chicago. There were some 20 young men who died there. How much grace will it take to save him compared to you, or the Pope, or Billy Graham? We are inclined to say it would take much more grace to save John Gacey, but I am certain that it takes the same amount of grace to save all of us. Since salvation is totally by God's grace, it takes 100 percent of it to save John Gacey, and 100 percent grace to save Billy Graham! They contribute nothing. If they could, then they could boast, and salvation would not be by grace.

From heaven's viewpoint, we must come to God without merit. Grace salvation means that we stand before God empty, with nothing more to offer than a man on death row. God alone is the giver of salvation, and that is humbling. Grace causes pride to flee, for when I realize that the most evil law breaker is no more deficient than I am, I stand ashamed. What can wash away his sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus! What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. For by grace he is saved, and by grace I am saved!

Now, how much does a gift cost? Salvation is said to be the gift of God, and a gift is free! It is free to the recipient, but it

cost the giver. Someone has to pay for a gift, and in this case, God paid what His holy law demanded. He purchased it through His Son's sacrifice and now offers it as a gift to the ungodly. Beware of men who say God's gift "will cost you everything," which suggests indebtedness. Grace incurs no indebtedness on the part of the recipient. If it did, it would cease to be grace.

GRACE: THE BELIEVER'S TEACHER

There is an aspect of grace which has escaped most of us. Many people, after being saved by accepting the gift of God, then assume that they should attempt to live by Moses' laws to please God or to serve Him to prove that they are worthy of His blessings. God has a better way to teach His children. The grace of God teaches us!

As the divine law instructed Israel in the Old Testament, so divine grace teaches believers how to live. Paul explains it in Titus 2:11-14:

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds."

Paul points out that the objective of grace salvation is that God's people live righteously and be zealous for good deeds. He redeemed us so that we would live pure lives and he said that the grace of God has appeared to instruct us in this. Grace does teach us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live sensibly, righteously and godly.

Are you allowing the grace of God to teach you this? Grace can't teach you until you submit to it. Jesus Christ came with grace to replace Moses and the law, which for 1500 years had taught the people of Israel how to live. God terminated that law and established the grace system when Christ fulfilled the law at the cross. (Colossians 2:14)

Moses had written about Him in Deuteronomy 18:18 when he said, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him."

The new prophet came with a new message. Jesus was not another law giver. He came with grace and truth. No longer would God govern His people by the merit system of law introduced through Moses. The people of Israel were blessed if they obeyed the laws, but under the grace principle of living, God's children obey because they have been blessed. We have been told that believers need the law to teach them to live right. But the New Testament gives us a better way, and it's grace. Grace teaches us to trust in and to follow Christ, the source of all blessings.

GRACE BRINGS LIBERTY

There is beauty in a Christian who lives by grace. You will feel comfortable around him. He won't watch what you eat or drink. He won't care where you go or how you dress. He knows liberty, and he gives liberty to others. He understands that there is a freedom which comes with grace salvation. Jesus spoke of it when He said, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

Why are so many people in bondage and under law? Why are they burdened so much with rules and prohibitions? Because they have missed the Bible's teaching about grace. Isn't it significant that never, not once, did the apostles ever make an appeal to any Christian to live righteously because of the law of Moses?

The motivation for right living in the epistles written to the churches is the love of Jesus Christ and the grace of God. They remind believers to look at what God has done and to realize who they are in Christ. The believer is reminded that God made him His child and has given him His Spirit. He has made each believer fit for heaven, and has declared him sanctified in Christ Jesus, set apart for God's own use. This is the believer's position before his Creator as a result of grace!

The law of Moses can't make you what you ought to be,

but the grace of God can, because God gives us His Spirit and "wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." The Christian must live by grace if he desires to please God, because the Spirit within him functions only where there is liberty.

Each must choose who will motivate his behavior, Moses or the Spirit of Christ. Paul confronted the Galatian Christians who had submitted to the grace of God by believing in Jesus Christ, but who were influenced by Jews to live by law and to receive circumcision, by telling them, "You have fallen from grace."

He was not referring to their salvation; he was speaking about the liberty into which God had called them by the Spirit. They had deserted grace living and were trying to live under the law, which is bondage. They were losing their liberty. This is the meaning of "falling from grace."

Take a new look at the Bible to discover God's grace program so you can not only be certain of His gift of eternal life, but also to know and enjoy the liberty in which He wants you to live. Paul wrote this in Colossians 2:6:

"As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk you in him."

How did you receive Christ? By grace, through faith. Then continue in it!

LIVING BY GRACE

As Paul and Barnabas left the synagogue in Antioch, having preached salvation through faith in the resurrected Christ, some people followed them. This action implied that they had believed the gospel of grace.

God's messengers then urged them "to continue in the grace of God." This meant living by grace. That instruction was critical because there is no other way to live pleasingly to God! If we miss this point, we may wander for years trying to win God's approval by our deeds or behavior, which is legalism.

Those Jews and proselytes, having abandoned the merit

system as dictated by the law of Moses and having believed in Christ, must have understood what Paul and Barnabas meant. Since they had not earned forgiveness and had been "freed from everything from which they could not be freed by the law of Moses," (Acts 13:39) they must have concluded that "continuing in the grace of God" meant not trying to earn God's favor thereafter. This called for a lifestyle that would not seek or expect anything from God as a result of personal merit.

Under New Testament grace the basis for blessing is not merit. All blessings come by the grace of God. Therefore, living by grace calls for an attitude in the believer which rejects every religious act, every good deed, and all behavior that is designed to make him deserving of God's blessings.

Furthermore, since the Word of God proclaims that the believer has been "blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 1:3), this inclusive declaration leaves nothing spiritual to be desired. This passage informs the believer in Christ that his inheritance is in heaven, and as an heir, he need perform nothing to insure what has already been willed to him.

Living by grace, therefore, means being content with the non-merit relationship which God established through faith in the worthy Son of God.

How might a Christian not continue in the grace of God? When he expects God to bless him because he does something for God or gives something to God. Such expectations, based on meritorious acts, would place God in a debtor relationship, thereby nullifying the grace relationship which the Father has planned for His children. God will be no man's debtor!

For example, men wrongly have been urged to give financially to God with the hope of being richly blessed in return. Yes, it was that way under the law of Moses, but not under grace. When a believer in this New Testament age seeks to deserve blessings by various commendable acts, such as praying, Bible reading, attending church, or tithing his income, he forsakes the grace way of living. Unconsciously, he is seeking divine favor by merit. This is an ever present danger and it robs the believer of both rest and joy in Christ.

The grace of God brings men liberty, not to live as they please, but instead to live as Christ lived. He lived to please the Father. Those who believe, and thus live, are promised more joy, peace, and satisfaction in this life as they read His word and conform to His perfect law of liberty.

The death of the righteous Son of God for the unrighteous ruled out forever any bestowal of blessings from heaven on a merit basis! We live by grace when we refuse to modify the meritless way of living established by God. It means that we will rest on the righteous basis of all blessings--Jesus Christ! No one can live by grace without being continually satisfied with the crosswork of Christ on his behalf.

Living by grace is a reality when we accept the fact that since God will never be satisfied with us, we should never strive to make it so. We live by grace when we rest on the fact that God is satisfied with Christ, to whom we are united by faith.

THE AUTHOR

Nick Kalivoda has been a lecturer in Bible and Bible Archaeology in Louisiana State University's Continuing Education program for more than ten years and also teaches the Campus Bible Class for the public each Sunday at 9:15 a.m. in LSU's Faculty Club. In 1986 he began teaching the daily Radio Bible Course in Baton Rouge.

He earned a degree in Bible Archaeology at Wheaton College, a Master of Journalism degree from LSU, and studied at Dallas Theological Seminary from 1948-51. In 1994 Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon, honored him with conferral of the honorary Doctor of Laws degree for "distinguished Christian service" as a layman.

A student of archaeology as well as the Bible, he directs annual tours to the Bible lands, visiting archaeological and biblical sites. These tours, along with visits to foreign museums, have resulted in a popular illustrated course on "Archaeology and the Bible."

He is the author of 28 Bible teaching courses on cassette tapes and has been a regular Bible teacher in Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian and Bible churches.

Kalivoda served as Religion Editor of the Baton Rouge Morning Advocate, 1981-83, and is the former public relations spokesman for LSU. He took early retirement in 1984 following a career as director of the University's Office of Media Services. He served in leadership positions in both local and national public relations organizations and was a member of the Organizing Board of the National Council for Advancement and Support of Education.

He serves on the Steering Committee for the Governor's Prayer Breakfast, and is a member of the Board of Directors of the Medical Centers of West Africa, and in 1987 won the "Layman of the Year" award in the Mid-South district of Kiwanis International.

THE RADIO BIBLE COURSE

The Radio Bible Course is an independent Bible teaching ministry located in Baton Rouge, La. It was founded in 1986 as a result of urging by his class members at the Community Bible Church to begin a radio teaching ministry. They offered to support it, and a 15-minute broadcast of Bible teaching was initiated in October of that year. The Radio Bible Course began its broadcast in Baton Rouge in 1986, reaching central Louisiana. Its New Orleans broadcast extends along the Gulf coast into Florida. Call for stations in your area.

The Radio Bible Course is a work of Christian lay persons. It has no paid employees, nor does it pay benefits to anyone. It is supported by friends and listeners; gifts are tax deductible. It is administered by an eight-member Board of Directors, who also serve without pay.

In addition to its daily radio programs, the RBC ministry has conducted Bible short courses in the community and on the Louisiana State University campus. This ministry evolved from Kalivoda's many campus courses offered through the LSU Division of Continuing Education since 1976.

In Baton Rouge it also conducts the Sunday morning Campus Bible Class at 9:15. It has met in the LSU Faculty Club since February 1986. This is a community class and includes university students and faculty. It promotes both fellowship and education centered on the word of God.

As part of its effort to prepare lay persons for ministry, the Radio Bible Course has offered seminary-level courses in Baton Rouge since 1991. These semester-long courses can be taken for enrichment or for credit in cooperation with Western Conservative Seminary in Portland, OR.

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