

“Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

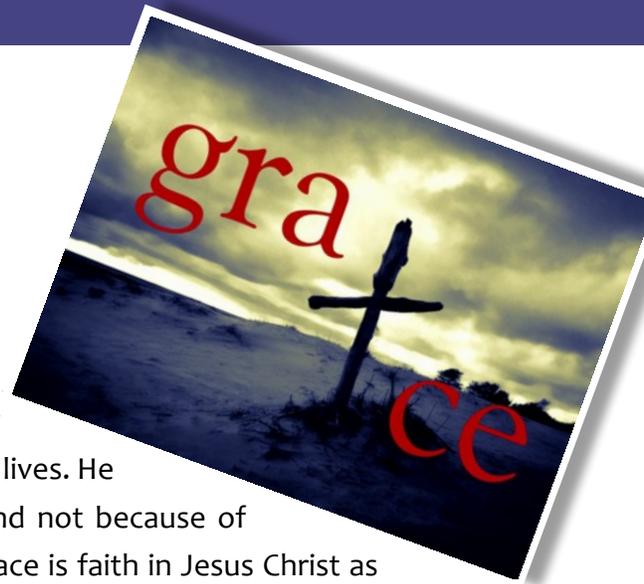
Romans 3:24

Understanding God's Grace— Giving & Living (part 2)

Theme: God's grace provides Salvation and freedom.

Review of Lesson 22

Grace is God's free favor and kindness to us; it is not merited or repayable. His grace has a God-directed influence on our hearts and lives. He gives out His grace based on His love and kindness toward us and not because of something we do to earn it. All God asks in order to receive His grace is faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. God's grace is what saves us when we believe in Christ. The good news is no one is so bad that He will deny him/her Salvation, because His desire is to save everyone (1 Tim. 2:4).



Bible Truth

Introduction

On what basis does God give us His grace? Does He give it to everyone, to the ones He chooses, to those who do some special religious ceremony, or what? There is considerable tension between various Christian faiths on this topic. The goal of this lesson is to teach the truth of grace and let the reader make their own decisions on specific related matters. This lesson will provide basic truths and let you decide if your church or group teaches them accordingly.

The goal of this lesson is to make sure we understand that God's grace is given to mankind on the basis of faith in Christ—no more, no less. God's grace saves sinners (Eph. 2:8-9) and is given to anyone that believes. It is so simple that people just can't believe it and want to "improve" on it by adding something. Some people reason that because grace is so simple it will be misunderstood and lead to more sin. So they

reason, “If only faith is needed to be saved, there is no need to refrain from sinning.” The Bible addresses this misperception, **"But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, ... What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?"** (Rom. 5:20b-6:1) The Bible quickly answers **"Certainly not!"** (Rom. 6:2a) It is not rules, laws, or human additions to the Word that keep us from sinning, but God's grace working in us to accomplish His will. God's grace, as simple as it is, is the only way in which sin can be averted.

Adding to Grace

We often have this crazy notion that we have to know if someone is really saved. Since we can't see or sense someone's faith, how can we know if someone is really saved? Because of this desire to know, humans add requirements (beyond simple faith) to God's saving grace. It is thought that if a person were

required to say a certain prayer, partake in some religious ceremony, confess their faith before others, etc., then we could determine if that person's faith were real. However, additions or alterations of God's perfect Word only mess things up and are clearly wrong (Rev. 22:18). Doing so only satisfies sinful self-interests. It implies what God has said is not good enough.

Discussion: We can never see a person's heart and we certainly cannot determine if a person's faith is real. That is God's domain and His alone. He does not want us to try to determine if a person has true faith. However, if a person wants to share their faith, that is wonderful. Discuss how a person's faith is the most important and private matter in life. No one has a right to try to inspect it, determine if it is real by questioning you, or require you to meet some human requirement.

Oftentimes the additional requirements for receiving God's grace are from the Bible, but they are for a different age. Because people do not recognize the Age of Grace as a distinct age, separate from other ages, they roll all Scripture together and get a confusing message for Salvation. In past ages, people had to have faith and show obedience to what the Lord asked. Noah had faith in God, but in addition he had to obey and build the Ark. If not, he would have drowned. Abraham believed God and was willing to sacrifice his son (faith plus works), but God in His mercy stopped Abraham before he sacrificed his son. Under the Mosaic Law (most of the Old Testament and up to the Apostle Paul's writings) faith plus a step of obedience (faith plus works) were required for receiving God's grace. In all previous ages, a person had to have faith plus show obedience to the revealed will of God. Today, God's revealed will is that we have faith alone without works—our Age is very special.

In all ages people have been saved by God's grace—no one ever deserved it. The difference in the Age of Grace is that we are saved by God's grace without works while in other ages they were saved by God's grace plus works (an act of obedience). Because grace is the outstanding characteristic of our Age, it is called the Age of Grace.

Dispensing Grace

There is a fairly good agreement as to what grace means within Christendom. However, there is a great difference in beliefs on the means God uses to give out (dispense) His grace. In fact, how God dispenses His grace is one of the reasons various churches exist. The word “dispense” means to distribute or give out as a drug store or pharmacy dispenses medicine.

The Salvation a sinner receives from God is declared in many, many passages to depend only on faith (also called belief and trust). The only basis the Bible gives for dispensing His grace in our Age is FAITH—nothing more. Yet many churches add to the simplicity and beauty of God's grace. Any additions to faith tarnish and alter the truth of the pure grace of God. While human errors cannot change God's grace (it is unchangeable), they sure can change how we understand grace.

Some churches refer to the basis on which God gives His grace as "the means of grace." The supposed means of grace are additions to the Word if they have any requirements other than faith. Generally, those additions are called sacraments. While the various means of grace do supposedly have biblical verses to back them up, the problem is the verses used are for ages other than ours. So please consider this and know in your heart what God's truth is concerning grace and salvation. If a person thinks these means of grace can save them (without faith in Christ), they are "dead" wrong.

If all human additions for being saved were mentioned here, this lesson would be way too long. Please remember that the response to "What must I do to be saved?" is nothing more than believe **"that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures"** (1 Cor. 15:3b). This offer of Salvation applies to any person that believes Christ took their place on the Cross to pay for their sins.

What Must I do to be Saved

Discussion: An absurd example may help clarify things. Suppose a friend of yours said she was saved when she placed her faith in Christ's death for her sins and stood on her head. Is she really saved?

The person in the **Discussion** above is confused, but that does not disqualify her from Salvation. She is saved based on her faith in Christ as her substitute on the Cross. If she did not believe in Christ, then she would be unsaved. The fact that she stood on her head has absolutely nothing to do with Salvation; it is a total addition to the requirement of faith. In fact, head standing is very misleading and may be harmful to others, but she has the basic requirement of saving faith. The same thing is true for all who do not understand grace and salvation correctly; they are saved by God's grace in spite of wrong beliefs. If total doctrinal correctness were a requirement for Salvation, no one would be saved.

Sometimes a person is unsure how to be saved, so another person tries to help them by showing them the Word and praying with them. This is what the Lord expects. However, you do not have to say a certain prayer or say any certain words to be saved. If you believe in Christ's death for your sins, you will be saved by God before you pray the sinner's prayer (or any prayer asking God to save you). By saying a prayer

you basically acknowledge you are a sinner headed to Hell and you want the Lord to save you. That is great. We just want to make it clear that it is your faith that saves you by God's grace; it is not a prayer. If God required a certain prayer in order to be saved, it would be in the Bible.

If you believe in Christ, God automatically sends His Spirit into your heart. You do not have to ask Jesus into your heart. There is a reference in Revelation to the Lord standing at the door and knocking (heart's door), but that door is opened by faith—not asking Him to come in. Many Christians will say they were saved when they asked Jesus into their heart, and they are truly saved. However, it was their faith that saved them—not the prayer or the asking.

The Bible mentions Salvation in connection with water baptism. Christian churches are sharply divided on the issue. Some say you have to be baptized in order to be saved, others say it is something that is done after you are saved as a testimony, and others think water baptism is not in God's plan for our Age. What are we to believe? Basically, the truth for our Age is written in the Pauline Epistles, but when people mingle in truth from other ages, it creates confusion. That is the case with water baptism. The Pauline Epistles give the teaching for our Age on grace, salvation, and baptism. Paul's emphasis is on spiritual baptism. **"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body"** (1 Cor. 12:13a). This baptism is what God does behind the scenes when He saves us. It is called spiritual baptism because it is done by the Holy Spirit to us (entirely done in the spiritual realm) when we believe. It places us into Christ so we can be one with Him. Once we are in Christ, all His righteousness becomes ours.

Discussion: Do we have to give our life to Him in order to be saved? (Note: It was He who gave His life for us so we could be saved. It seems rather odd that anyone would turn this around. Our commitment (or giving ourselves) to Him is a good thing to do after our Salvation, but it does not lead to Salvation.)

The confusion and misinformation on how to receive God's grace is astounding. Each group thinks they are right and have verses to prove it. The problem is often

the result of using Bible verses not specifically applicable for the Age of Grace. This confusion reminds us why we must remember 2 Tim. 2:15 **"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."** Rightly dividing the word of truth means we have to correctly interpret the Bible, so that we follow God's Word for us **today** (not what He wanted for some other age).

Life Applications

Grace in Daily Life

Salvation is the first thing we receive by God's grace, but that is just a start. The Holy Spirit then continues to work in our lives to bless us with His grace. God's grace has an ongoing divine influence on our hearts changing us from within and guiding us all our lives. Here are several important ways the grace of God works in us after Salvation.

1. By grace we are taught how to live.

The indwelling Spirit guides us from within so that we can live according to His will. This requires an adjustment of our heart to the presence of the Holy Spirit Who enables us to walk/live in accordance to His will. **"If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit"** (Gal. 5:25). We do not need to worry about keeping the law (10 commandments) in order to be "right" with God. **"For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit"** (Rom. 8:3-4). These verses may be hard to understand, but the main point is that the requirements of the law are fulfilled in us by the

Spirit; they are not fulfilled by us. So the ability to please God does not come from following rules, but from the Holy Spirit working within us to change our hearts and minds.

By grace we are transformed from within (by the Holy Spirit) to live, think, and follow His desires. God uses the Holy Spirit to first create heavenly motives and desires within us, then to give us the power and ability to do it. **"For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure"** (Phil. 2:13). The Holy Spirit does not disclose His presence in a way that can be sensed (seen, felt, etc.); you will be conscious of your own faculties changing because of His quiet and powerful work within you. As our character and values are molded to conform to Christ, we live and act accordingly.

2. By grace we are given spiritual blessings and a position in Heaven.

The moment we are saved, we are blessed with all spiritual blessing in Heaven. **"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ"** (Eph. 1:3). Chapters 1-2 of Ephesians then list those spiritual blessings. They are things like: God

selecting believers based upon faith in Christ, making us accepted in the Beloved, redeeming us through His blood, forgiving our sins, sealing our salvation. These are all the spiritual blessings anyone could imagine and more. They assure us that God has taken care of every detail related to our well-being and blessings.

In addition, we are given a heavenly position. As far as God is concerned, we are already seated in Heaven next to Christ. That will actually occur in the future, but it is now guaranteed by God to be a future reality. **"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus"** (Eph. 2:4-6). The position we have, right next to Jesus Christ, will never change.

3. By grace we are kept secure and will not lose our salvation.

It is very important to understand three things: **1) Salvation is an act of God, 2) Salvation is instantaneous, and 3) Salvation is complete.** We do not save ourselves; Salvation is an act of God. This act is a one-time event; it is not an ongoing process. The believer is saved instantaneously—not slowly over a period of time. God does not give us a little Salvation today, some next week, then more later. God's

salvation is given completely all at once. We cannot get more saved or less saved. Salvation is a free gift which is given completely, in the blink of an eye, upon belief. Because God is all knowing, He knew every sin you would commit in the future and those sins are already forgiven.

Discussion: Can you lose your Salvation if you commit a terrible sin(s)? (Note: God already knew about that sin(s) when He saved you. You never did merit salvation, and your lack of merit cannot "lose" your Salvation [your merit has nothing to do with Salvation]. It depends totally and only on His faithfulness and Christ's merit—not anything you do.)

When God saves us, He gives us an eternal inheritance that cannot be taken away. Not only can it not be taken but it is guaranteed to be securely held until He comes to get us. **"The gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of his glory"** (Eph. 1:13b-14). Even our own actions cannot cancel our Salvation. He will not change His mind if you commit a terrible sin(s); He knew all about that sin before He first saved you.

Take 2 Heart

Summary

God dispenses His grace in our Age based on one thing—faith in Jesus Christ. When God dispensed His grace, it first saves us and then works in our lives to change us from within. After saving us, grace has a divine influence on us changing our lives by molding our minds and hearts according to His will. Some churches add to God's simple truth by adding requirements to faith for receiving God's grace. The additional requirements are wrong and are generally requirements that apply to former ages. No special prayer, church ceremony, confession, etc., are needed to be saved—just faith. Your faith is a very private matter and no one has the right to question it. However, if you wish to share your faith in Christ, that is great (so others can learn of Him). By His grace we are: 1) taught how to live for Him, 2) given spiritual blessings and a position in Heaven, and 3) are kept secure so we cannot lose our salvation.

Gospel

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:23-24).

This is the gospel in pure form right from the mouth of God. We are justified (declared righteous; saved) by His grace free of charge. We are bought back (redeemed) from the penalty of sin by Jesus Christ. This all costs us nothing, but it was at great price to God—the death of His Son.

Encouragement

God had a plan for each of us that existed before creation. That plan included Christ's death so that we could be saved by His grace through faith. Then He designed it so the Holy Spirit would dwell within us in order to help us live according to His will. Finally, He chose to bless us super abundantly with all spiritual blessings, making sure we are totally and completely cared for throughout eternity. May the Lord enable you to speak freely of His grace. The truth of His grace is a precious thing to share. Please take joy in what the Lord has done for you from beginning to end, perfect in every detail. You are His child accepted and blessed by the Almighty God. In God's mind, you are already seated in Heaven with Christ (and He will assure this happens in the future). Welcome to His family. What a joy you bring!