

God's Grace and Our Faith

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As I travel across this nation working in various places, I meet a lot of people who claim Jesus Christ as their savior and when you engage them in conversation about their beliefs, they have this notion that grace and faith are the tickets to heaven and in a sense they are right. But their understanding of just what grace and faith is as a comprehensive Biblical term is not always in line with reality. They know that grace and faith is there but they really don't have a clear understanding of just what grace and faith are and how each one of these functions in our justification and subsequent salvation.

For the purpose of this lesson, we are going to examine these two vital and essential elements that play such an important role in our lives as Christians and try to gain a better understanding of them from an overall Biblical perspective.



Man in faith reaches upward to God's extended grace.

First of all, what is Grace?

Most people have no idea what grace really is and how it functions in the life of a Christian. Several people, especially those among our denominational neighbors have this belief that God's grace is some kind of mystical, magical thing that transforms an all powerful, perfectly holy, just and omniscient God into Santa Clause. You know, that red suited jolly character that promises children a bucket of coal or a bundle of switches if they haven't been good but when its all said and done nice presents are received anyway?

I did not deserve the nice things I received. I certainly did not earn them, Santa was under no obligation whatsoever to give them to me. Now while there are some elements to this little illustration that parallel God's grace, we are overlooking one very important fact.

When you strip all the layers away and get down to the facts, Santa lied to me. I had not been a good little boy for the past year and I knew it. Santa promised me something that he did not deliver on. While that was perfectly fine with me at the time, the fact remains that Santa promised me a bundle of switches and I got candy, clothes and hot wheels. Santa gave me grace, but Santa did not keep his word.

God is not Santa. And Santa most certainly is not God. Inspiration teaches us in Titus 1:2 and other places in scripture that God cannot lie. One thing that we can be absolutely sure of is that neither grace or faith rightly applied in our lives will ever make God out to be a liar. God does not say things that He does not mean. God doesn't make promises that He does not keep.

Santa told me that a certain level or standard of good behavior was required in order to receive the good gifts. In other words, I was expected to obey my parents if I wanted the good stuff. God certainly has grace, but unlike Santa, when God promises bad stuff for bad behavior, God is going to deliver bad stuff for bad behavior, no matter how much grace He has. God's grace will not cause God to violate His honest nature or His principles. 2 Timothy 2:11-13 teaches us that God cannot deny His holy nature: 2 Timothy 2:11-13

"11 For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him.

12 If we endure, We shall also reign with Him.

If we deny Him, He also will deny us.

13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful;

He [God] cannot deny Himself. " NKJV

One thing we can be absolutely sure about is that God's grace will never cause God to act in a way that is in conflict with Himself or His standards. God is going to be faithful to His covenant even when we are not faithful to Him. In other words, God is going to keep his promises and do what He said He would do no matter what we do.

So what is this grace that God has towards us? Someone who is gracious has certain qualities which stand out. Those who are gracious are benevolent, meaning they do things for others that they are not necessarily required to do. Those who are gracious are indulgent or beneficent to others, especially inferiors. And those who are gracious are merciful and compassionate. Does this sound like some of the qualities that our God possesses?

The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), which means eternal separation from God. Sin is a violation against God and causes mankind to lose fellowship with God. The only way man can regain that fellowship is if he pays the penalty for that sin. Man sinned, man incurred a debt. The problem is, the payment for all sin is loss of fellowship with God forever. It doesn't matter what that sin is, the penalty is the same. We have lost our fellowship with God and that cannot be restored unless we pay the penalty in full.

Thankfully for us, God is rich in grace and mercy and He doesn't want to see man suffer for all eternity. He wants man to have a chance to regain that fellowship so He came up with a plan where man can have a hope of being reconciled without having to suffer an eternity of punishment. God was under no obligation to do this. Nothing man did compelled God to do this. And this means of reconciliation came at great personal expense for God. Namely the life of His Son as a substitutionary death penalty for us. God could have washed His hands of mankind and walked away to leave mankind to his fate forever and God would have been perfectly within His right to do so. He didn't owe man anything. Mankind got himself into this predicament all by himself without any help from God. God was absolutely blameless in all that man did. But because God loves us so much, He graciously came up with a means whereby man could be reconciled to Him and escape the death penalty of sin. That's grace. Grace as a comprehensive Biblical term represents everything God did in securing a means of redemption for mankind.

For God to give man His law is grace.

For God to let man know he sinned is grace.

For God to provide a means of reconciliation through the sacrifice of His Son is grace.

For God to accept the death of His Son at the hands of man for the sins of man is grace.

For God to make this means of reconciliation known through His word is grace.

For God to allow mankind time to respond is grace.

The availability of salvation, under any circumstances whatsoever, is grace.

All of the things God did in providing a way of redemption for mankind is Grace. Grace is God reaching down from heaven to sinsick, doomed and fallen man with a means and method of reconciliation. Grace is God's role in the redemption of Man.

So, are we saved by grace only? In other words, are we saved simply because God did everything He did with no response from us on our part? Absolutely not. If we were saved by grace only, every human that ever lived would be saved simply by being in existence. Nobody would ever be lost if man were saved by grace only. Mankind has an obligation to respond to God's grace before it will be of any benefit at all. So what is that response? Ephesians 2:8 reads. By "*grace ye have been saved through faith*". Grace operates in our lives through our faith.

So since Grace represent God's role in man's redemption, then what does the term "Faith" mean? Faith is the response that man must give in order to receive God's grace. "*Without faith it is impossible to please Him*" (Hebrews 11:6). We are saved by Grace through faith. Without faith, grace is worthless to us. We must have faith if God's grace is going to benefit us in any way whatsoever.

What is Faith?

So does this term "faith" simply mean belief in God or belief in Jesus Christ? Is faith alone all that is required or is there something else? That's something we can put to the test very easily. When we read James 2:18-24 we see this, "*But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble! 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? 22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? 23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. 24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.*" (NKJV)

Many many people try and claim that Paul taught salvation by faith alone. Well if that is the case, then what about what Paul wrote to in Romans 2:5-11? "*But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6 who "will render to each one according to his deeds":* 7 eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; 8 but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness — indignation and wrath, 9 tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil,*

of the Jew first and also of the Greek; 10 but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 11 For there is no partiality with God.”

What about the Philippian Christians? Philippians 2:12-13, “*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*“ ... So we know very easily that faith means more than faith alone. This is very important because there are vast numbers of people out there who believe that we can be saved by faith alone and when we get the opportunity we need to be able to show them in scripture that biblical faith is more than just belief.

Let's look at a few scriptures which help us to define what faith is as a comprehensive Biblical term.

Faith is our Shield:

Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked (Ephesians 6:16).

Faith is service:

Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all (Philippians 2:17).

Faith is a Sacrifice:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service (Romans 12:1). Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all (Philippians 2:17).

Faith is Perseverance:

If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister (Colossians 1:23). Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith: For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord (1 Thessalonians 3:7-8).

Faith is a Walk:

For we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10). As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him (Colossians 2:6).

Faith is a Work:

Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father (1 Thessalonians 1:3). Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power (2 Thessalonians 1:11).

Faith is a Fight:

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses (1 Timothy 6:12)

Faith is a trial:

That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:7).

Faith is Patient:

That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises (Hebrews 6:12).

It's God's grace and our faith. God's grace represents everything He did to make salvation available for mankind. Our faith is the response we must make in order to receive God's grace. By grace we are saved through faith. The grace that saves us is God's. The faith that saves us is ours.

We all join together in our hope for eternal life. We are here today because we want to worship God and to live with Him in heaven after this life is over. Jesus said in John 5:28-29, *"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice 29 and come forth — those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."* Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:10, *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."*

There is a day coming when every single one of us is going to face God and give an account of the life we have lived. And based upon the life we lived, we will either live in heaven with God forever or we will suffer in Hell for eternity. Those are our options. And in the end it will be the life of faith that we lived that will make the difference.

Jesus said in John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* We absolutely have to believe and have faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. But as we saw earlier, there is more to it than just faith only. Our faith must be an obedient one if it is to be the proper response to God's grace.

Jesus declared in Matthew 7:21, *"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."*

God's grace and our faith will not get us into the kingdom of heaven if we fail to do the will of God.

Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, *"And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power"*

God's grace and our faith will not save us if we fail to obey the Gospel.

So how do we obey the gospel? We obey the gospel by becoming participants in it.

Repentance:

Jesus said in Luke 13:3, *"I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."* If we do not repent, Jesus says we will perish and He's talking about eternal punishment in Hell here. Repentance is a sorrow of heart

that leads one to a change in behavior. We must stop living for the world and start living in accordance with God's will. Those who do not change their behavior did not repent.

God's grace and Our Faith will not save us if we fail to repent. Our faith must include repentance.

Confession:

Jesus said in Matthew 10:32-33, *"Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven".*

God's grace and our faith will not save us from being denied by Jesus if we fail to confess Him before men. We have to become participants in the command to acknowledge our faith to others. Our faith must include confession.

Baptism:

Jesus taught in Mark 16:16, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."* He also said in John 3:5, *"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."*

Baptism is a very important step in the salvation process. When we look in scripture for a clear and concise description of just what the gospel is we find 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, where Paul wrote:

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;

2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures"

Simply put, Paul declared that the gospel is summed up in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So how do we today participate in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Paul tells us how starting in Romans 6:3

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" We obey the gospel when we become participants in the death of Christ at baptism.

Romans 6:4

"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death" We obey the gospel when we become participants in the burial of Christ through baptism when we are buried/immersed in water.

Romans 6:4

"...that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." We become participants in the resurrection of Jesus Christ when we arise from the watery grave of baptism to walk in our new life. Jesus was raised from the dead to a new life. When we arise from the waters of

baptism, we arise to a new life. That new life is the born of Spirit and water that Jesus taught. Through baptism we obey the gospel by becoming participants in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God's grace and our faith will not get us in to the kingdom of God if we fail to be born again in the waters of baptism. Our faith must include baptism.

Faithful living:

Jesus said in Matthew 10:22, *"And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved."* and in Revelation 2:10, *"be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."*

God's grace and our faith will not get us a crown of life if we fail to be faithful till death. Our faith must include being faithful and enduring to the end.

Grace is God reaching down to the lost from heaven with a chance for eternal life. Faith is man reaching upward to God in hope of that salvation. We can't have one without the other. Grace won't save without faith and faith can't save without grace. It's God's grace and our faith.

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