

The True Meaning of Grace

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

The concept of God's "grace" is thrilling beyond words. It shines its brightest, however, against the seemingly dark backdrop of another aspect of our Creator's nature — that of **sacred wrath**.

The Wrath of God

The most common Greek word for "wrath" is **orge**. The term occurs 36 times in the New Testament (cf. Rom. 1:18; 2:5). Another expression denoting "wrath" is **thymos** (18 times; cf. Rev. 16:19; 19:15).

Most scholars make some distinction between the terms. Some suggest that **thymos** is "boiling" anger, whereas **orge** reflects an "abiding and settled" state of mind. Perhaps the two terms in concert denote the **intense and sustained** disposition of God towards evil and those who abandon themselves to it.

But wrath, as used of God, does not suggest an impulsive, emotional reaction, as the term frequently does with humans.

Rather, divine wrath is the reflection of a **deliberate and measured** reaction of a perfectly holy Being toward sin — a response that is entirely consistent with the righteous nature of a loving God.

Standing over against the starkness of sacred wrath, is the dazzling concept of grace.

Grace Defined

"Grace" derives from the Greek, **charis**. In secular Greek, **charis** was related to **chairō**, "to rejoice." As far back as Homer it denoted "sweetness" or "attractiveness."

Charis came to signify "favor," "goodwill," and "lovingkindness" — especially as granted by a superior to an inferior.

In the New Testament, "grace" (156 times) takes on a special **redemptive sense** in which God makes available his **favor** on behalf of sinners, who actually do not deserve it.

There is tremendous emphasis in the New Testament upon the fact that human salvation is the result of Heaven's grace. This beautiful truth should never be minimized. At the same time, it must not be perverted.

Unfortunately, much too often those with only a superficial concept of grace have hijacked the term and foisted upon it a sense alien to scriptural teaching.

Let us consider some of the precious Bible truths associated with the concept of salvation by grace.

Grace Is for Everyone

God's grace has been offered to the entire human family.

"For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men" (Tit. 2:11).

This cannot mean that every soul will be saved. Such a conclusion would contradict numerous other passages.

What this does suggest is that Heaven's grace is **potentially** available to all who care to access it by means of the divine plan of redemption (cf. Rom. 5:1; 6:3-4, 17).

This reality is in direct conflict with the Calvinistic notion that God, before the foundation of the world, chose only specific persons to be recipients of his grace.

The Grace and Knowledge Connection

The access to God's grace is by means of an objective body of revelation. Paul noted:

“For the grace of God hath appeared . . . instructing us” (Tit. 2:11-12).

Christianity is a **taught religion**. Isaiah, speaking of the messianic age, exclaimed: “he will teach us of his ways” (Is. 2:3). Jesus himself declared:

“It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every one that hath heard from the Father, and has learned, comes unto me” (Jn. 6:45).

God's grace is not dispensed **apart** from an instruction that requires both understanding and obedience.

In these days when there is a tendency to stampede folks into the church, with minimal comprehension of what they are doing, this is a crucial matter to emphasize.

Is Grace Conditional?

Yes, the reception of God's grace is **conditional**.

Calvinism erroneously asserts that grace is bestowed unconditionally by the sovereign will of God. The Bible negates this concept.

The principle is illustrated by the example of Noah, who “found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Genesis 6:8); and yet, as the writer of Hebrews shows, the patriarch and his family were saved by preparing an ark in obedience to God's instruction (Heb. 11:7; cf. Gen. 6:22).

Jehovah offered the grace. Noah, by faith, obeyed the Lord, and so was blessed. While God extends grace, human beings must be willing to receive the favor (2 Cor. 6:1).

Grace Is Not Earned

Grace **excludes** merit.

We must constantly remind ourselves that humanity is not deserving of salvation. No one can “earn” pardon by works of human merit. If such were the case, we could boast regarding our redemption; however, that is impossible (Eph. 2:8-9).

Even if one were able to perform everything God commands, he still must regard himself as an “unprofitable servant” (Lk. 17:10). Jesus taught that our sins have put us head-over-heels in debt, and no person has the innate ability to liquidate that obligation (cf. Mt. 18:24-27).

When this concept is truly grasped, service to Almighty God will flow with a freshness and zeal that invigorates the soul. Doubtless a failure to fathom the true significance of grace is the reason many church members are spiritually lethargic.

How Can I Access God's Grace?

Grace is accessed initially at the point of **gospel obedience**.

It is shocking that so many sincere people are unaware of the fact that “grace” and “obedience” are not enemies. Paul affirmed that grace is accessed by faith (Rom. 5:1-2; Eph. 2:8-9).

It is not, however, a faith void of loving response to God. It is an active faith (James 2:21-26).

Consider this fact. In Ephesians 2:8, the apostle states that one is “saved by grace through faith.” Later, in the same document, he says that sinners are “cleansed by the washing of water with the word” (5:26).

“Saved” and “cleansed” represent the same idea. Further, scholars almost universally acknowledge that the “washing” is an allusion to baptism. It is clear, therefore, that the reception of grace, by means of the “faith” system, includes immersion in water.

Again, note that eternal life is the result of grace (cf. “grace of life,” 1 Pet. 3:7, i.e., life resulting from grace). But one experiences that “life” when he is raised from the water of immersion (Rom. 6:4). Heaven’s grace plan system includes obedience.

To express the matter another way, Christ “saves us, through the washing of regeneration [acknowledged to be a reference to baptism], and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.” Yet this is equivalent to being “justified by his grace” (Tit. 3:5, 7).

Obedience and grace do not stand in opposition to one another.

Continuing in Grace

The state of grace must be embraced **continuously**; otherwise one will fall from divine favor, and his initial reception of Heaven’s grace will have been “in vain” (2 Cor. 6:1; cf. 1 Cor. 15:10).

It is incredible that many, who identify themselves with Christianity, should contend that it is impossible for the Christian to fall from God’s grace.

If one cannot fall out of grace, why did Paul urge his fellow-believers to “continue [present tense — sustained perseverance] in the grace of God” (Acts 13:43)?

The Scriptures warn of certain Christians who attempted to revert to the Mosaic regime for salvation. As a result, they were “severed from Christ” and “fallen away from grace” (Gal. 3:26-27; 5:4).

Conclusion

Grace is a soul-thrilling concept; it must be deeply appreciated, but never manipulated or distorted.

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Scripture References

Romans 1:18, 2:5; Revelation 16:19, 19:15; Titus 2:11; Romans 5:1, 6:3-4, 17; Titus 2:11-12; Isaiah 2:3; John 6:45; Genesis 6:8; Hebrews 11:7; Genesis 6:22; 2 Corinthians 6:1; Ephesians 2:8-9; Luke 17:10; Matthew 18:24-27; Romans 5:1-2; James 2:21-26; Ephesians 2:8; 1 Peter 3:7; Romans 6:4; Titus 3:5, 7; Acts 13:43; Galatians 3:26-27, 5:4

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