

What Is Grace

(Your questions and comments are welcome)

(**Bold type** and underling in scripture text have been added for emphasis)

The word grace is the English translation of the Greek word “charis”.

Charis is defined in Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance Of The Bible as “graciousness” (as gratifying) of manner or act (abstr., or concr.; lit., fig. or spiritual; espec. the divine influence on the heart, and its reflection in the life;...”).

In scripture there are several applications of the word “charis” having varied English translations. These applications and translations provide insight into the essential meaning of the word.

The word “charis” is translated “liberality” at 1 Corinthians 16

1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye.

2 Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

3 And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your **liberality** unto Jerusalem.

Here, grace is applied to the material collection given by the brethren at Corinth to those brethren in Jerusalem. It is noteworthy that the giving from one person to another is grace.

The application of grace as passing from one person to another is also seen in Paul’s epistle to the church at Corinth where Paul refers to grace as a “benefit”: 2 Corinthians 1
15 And in this confidence I was minded to come unto you before, that ye might have a second **benefit**;

This translation of the word grace is referring to spiritual benefit that the Corinthian brethren might derive from Paul’s being with them.

Again, for reference to grace in the most common application, as giving between persons, we will look at two passages in the book of Acts. The context of the passages relate to the imprisonment of Paul at Caesarea. Here the Greek word “charis” is translated “pleasure”: Acts 24

27 But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a **pleasure**, left Paul bound.

Acts 25

1 Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

2 Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him,

3 And desired favour against him, **that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.**

4 But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither.

5 Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.

6 And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought.

7 And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.

8 While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all.

9 But Festus, willing to do the Jews **a pleasure**, answered Paul, and said, **Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem**, and there be judged of these things before me?

We see that when Felix left Paul bound, and when Festus asked Paul to go up to Jerusalem to be judged, simply to please the Jews, both actions were a matter of **grace** toward the Jews.

In its most elemental form, grace is the providing of a gratuity, real or perceived, from a person or persons to another person or persons. Further, the benefit may be tangible or intangible and provide for actual need or selfish desire.

Now we will move our discussion from grace in its most basic form, which is a gratuity bestowed by a benefactor on a beneficiary, to a discussion of grace wherein God is the source. While the basic form is the same, the content is according to divine prerogative. God Himself has determined the purposes for which grace will be granted.

God's grace for man is expressed in the following scriptures:

Hebrews 2

9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

Ephesians 2

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by **grace** ye are saved;)

2 Corinthians 1

12 For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the **grace** of God, we have had **our conversation** in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward

These scriptures inform us that: by God's grace Christ died for us; by God's grace we are made alive (saved); and by God's grace we live our life in this world. Accordingly, a clear and accurate *understanding of the meaning* of the word grace as used in the scriptures, and more particularly, of God's grace, and on what basis God will bestow his grace, *is essential to one's relationship to God*.

Other English translations of the word "charis" are "thank" and "thankworthy". In the Gospel of Luke "charis" is translated "thank". We read at **Luke 6**

32 For if ye love them which love you, what **thank** have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.

33 And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what **thank** have ye? for sinners also do even the same.

34 And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what **thank** have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

35 But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your *reward* shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

When we receive back commensurate with what we give, the net result is that it costs us nothing. However, it is a matter of grace to bestow benefit when it is a sacrifice by us, and God regards such giving. (See Luke 21:1-4 for an example)

In 1 Peter where "charis" is translated, both, "thankworthy" and "acceptable", we read: 1 Peter 2

19 For this is **thankworthy**, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

20 For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is **acceptable** with God.

This scripture tells us that God does not find gratification in behavior that is common to most men, but He is pleased by behavior wherein **the motive is to do His will**. What we do *because of conscience toward God is a matter of faithfulness, which issues from faith. And, faith begets grace.* (See Romans 5:2)

As discussed in the consideration entitled, “What Is Faith”, careful observance of our duty to do God’s will is **an expression** of faith. This is in accord with the principle declared by scripture that God’s grace, bestowed on an individual is God’s response to faith. This is so clearly expressed by the apostle Paul in his epistle to the Romans.

Romans 4

16 Therefore **it is of faith, that it might be by grace**; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

Romans 5

1 Therefore being **justified by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

2 By whom also we have **access by faith** into **this grace wherein we stand**, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Faith is man’s only access to God’s grace. There are no rituals, ceremonies, or works of any kind that provide access to God’s grace. While such things are neither good nor evil in themselves, they do not bring forth the grace of the Lord.

In the epistle of James, we read that humility is required to obtain grace from God.

James 4

6 But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God **resisteth the proud**, but **giveth grace unto the humble**.

7 **Submit yourselves** therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.

10 **Humble yourselves** in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

A proud attitude cannot coexist with an attitude of faith. Humility is inherent in an attitude of faith toward God. It should be noted that this scripture equates humility with submitting to God. And those who are **submitted to God**, resist rather than yield to the devil and sin, depending on God for deliverance. Such an inward posture is what is meant by the term faith. ***Gods granting of deliverance (salvation) from, both the devil’s efforts and the lust of sin, is grace.***

The following passages of scripture, that illustrate faith, show us that the referenced persons were humble people:

Luke 18

8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

9 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are,

extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

12 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

14 I tell you, **this man** went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he **that humbleth himself** shall be exalted.

“...when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” Jesus then compares the attitude of the Pharisee with that of the Publican. He is relating faith to humility. The Pharisee was depending on his works for divine acquittal, while the Publican was relying on God’s mercy, a clear evidence of humility.

A further example of humility that Jesus relates to faith is recorded at **Matthew 8**

5 And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,

6 And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.

7 And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.

8 The centurion answered and said, Lord, **I am not worthy** that thou shouldst come under my roof: **but speak the word only**, and my servant shall be healed.

9 For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

10 **When Jesus heard it, he marvelled**, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, **I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.**

11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

12 But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

13 And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and **as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.** And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.

And also at Matthew 15

21 Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

22 And, behold, a woman **of Canaan** came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

23 But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

25 Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.

27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, **O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.** And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

In each of the three preceding passages of scripture, *humility is evidenced in that the persons involved had a low view of themselves and a high view of the Lord.* This is hardly the popular contemporary view of encouraging self-esteem, which suggests that the validity of the “self-esteem” proposition should be reexamined.

In some other applications of grace, we should note that the apostle Paul declares that his entry into and prosecution of the gospel ministry was by the grace of God.

Galatians 1

1 Paul, an apostle, (**not of men**, neither by man, but by **Jesus Christ**, and **God the Father**, who raised him from the dead;)

Ephesians 3

7 Whereof I was made a minister, **according to the gift of the grace of God** given unto me by **the effectual working of his power**.

1 Corinthians 15

9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

10 But **by the grace** of God I am what I am: and his **grace** which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but **the grace** of God which was with me.

Also, redemption, forgiveness of sins, wisdom, and prudence are according to God's grace. Referring to, in Christ, Paul writes to the saints at Ephesians 1

7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of **his grace**;

8 **Wherein** he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

As previously mentioned, we are told that the grace of God teaches us how to live:

Titus 2

11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

12 **Teaching** us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, **we should live** soberly, righteously, and godly, in this **present** world

It should be noted that a widely used definition of grace is “unmerited favor”. I would suggest that, while God’s favor (**that which he does for, in, and through us**) is not because of merit, this definition tends to blur the difference between “grace” and “mercy”. While grace is the bestowal of divine benefits, the fact that such favor is unmerited is a matter of divine **mercy**.

Strong's Concordance defines “mercy” as compassion. Compassion involves feelings of sympathy, pity, or sorrow for someone due to their difficult or unfortunate circumstance. Thus, *mercy is an inward attitude of compassion, but grace is the act of bestowing benefits.*

An example of the lack of this distinction between grace and mercy is observed in the writing of an expositor of scripture who writes: “The scriptural definition of grace will never be improved upon-The kindness and love of God our Savior toward men...not by works of righteousness which we have done...(Titus 3:4,5).” **The writer cites part of the passage in Titus chapter three. However, verse 5 continues by stating: “but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.”**

This scripture is referring to more than grace, which is the act of “regeneration and renewing by the Holy Ghost”. The writer omits this portion of the passage in his definition. References in the passage to “love”, “kindness”, and “mercy” refer, not to grace, but rather, to God's attitude toward men which is his motivation for bestowing his saving grace of regeneration and renewing. **However, God's attitude of love, kindness, and compassion toward man does not negate faith as a person's only access to His grace.**