

Grace Defined



Grace (Part 1)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again at the beginning of a new week sharing with you Keys to Successful Living which God has placed in my hand through many years of personal experience and Christian ministry.

The theme I've chosen for this Christmas season is a particularly beautiful and appropriate one: Grace.

But first, let me say thank you to those of you who've been writing to me. Before I finish this talk we'll be giving you a mailing address to which you may write. It means a great deal to me to hear how this radio ministry of mine has been helping you and blessing you. So, please take time to write, even if it's only a brief note.

Now back to our Christmas theme: Grace. I don't know of any word that more accurately sums up the true message of Christmas.

It's my sincere desire for each one of you, my radio listeners, that this Christmas season will be truly blessed and meaningful for you. But this will depend on the attitude with which you personally approach the celebration of Christmas. If your attitude is one of true appreciation and understanding, you can receive blessings that will be of eternal value. On the other hand, if your approach is that of the majority of people today, a pursuit of carnal self indulgence, then you well may be spiritually poorer and more frustrated by the time Christmas is over than you were before.

For me personally, the key to the proper appreciation of Christmas is contained in one beautiful word of measureless meaning: Grace. As I contemplate the events that we commemorate at Christmas I see two things set in stark contrast to one another. On the one hand, the infinite grace and mercy of God. On the other hand, the abysmal need and helplessness of humanity. In my talks this week I'll be dealing with both sides of this theme.

First of all, I want to begin by offering you a definition of grace. This is a kind of official definition which is accepted by many Bible teachers. It certainly doesn't exhaust the full meaning of Grace but it's a good starting point. The definition is this: Grace is the free unmerited favor of God toward the undeserving and the ill deserving.

Notice first of all, that grace is free. It cannot be earned, it cannot be worked for. And then notice it's not only toward those who are undeserving but even to those who are ill deserving. In other words, when we deserve ill, out of his grace God offers us good.

Notice also that the word favor is an alternative word for grace. Especially in the Old Testament both words are used almost interchangeably. Grace is one of the key concepts of the whole Scripture. It's unfolding the ends in the Old Testament and it's brought to completeness in the New.

In the New Testament the Greek word for grace occurs 150 times. The normal New Testament salutation of Christians among themselves was "Grace and peace…" Sometimes they added also "mercy" and said, "Grace, mercy and peace…" One thing is implied by this salutation that if you want peace you have to have grace first. The only way we can have true peace is out of the grace of God.

Most of the New Testament epistles also end with the word grace with some phrase like "the grace of the Lord be with you. Grace be with your spirit." Now the New Testament epistles are the primary thought of our understanding of Christian living, how we apply the truths of the gospel. And so the lesson really is this, that Christian living begins and ends with grace. And if we ever get out from that relationship to grace where grace isn't the beginning and the end, we probably will not be successful in our Christian living.

Let me say a few words about the original words for grace used in the Greek of the New Testament and in the Hebrew of the Old. The Greek word for grace is charis. It begins with that "ch" sound which we also have the word Christos or "Christ." I think we need to bear in mind that grace is always beautiful, it's always attractive.

The Hebrew word, there are two that are used. chen and ratson. I'll not try to speak more about them, just to say that they are used more or less interchangeably. Not quite. Khen means beauty. Specifically, ratson means pleasure. So, take them together, that's beauty and attractiveness.

One common phrase that's used many times in the Old Testament incorporating this word is to find grace or favor in the eyes of somebody. For instance, it says of Noah that Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. That distinguished Noah from all the other men of his generation. In his generation Noah, and because of Noah, his family found grace in the eyes of the Lord. In other words, grace has got something to do with the way that we look at people. And in particular, the grace of God has got something to do with the way that God looks at people There is a saying which says, "Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder." And this is really true of grace. It begins not with us but with God. It originates out of the way that God chooses to look upon us. When he looks upon us with favor then grace begins to operate in our lives. The concept that grace depends primarily on the way that God looks at us or sees us is very beautifully illustrated by the Levitical blessings which are found in Numbers 6:22-26, a blessing that's probably familiar to most of us who've ever attended church or any kind of religious service. A blessing that's shared between Christians and Jews, both use it alike. This is the blessing, Numbers 6:22-26:

> "The Lord said to Moses, Tell Aaron and his sons, [that's the priests] This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them [and now here comes the blessing], The Lord bless you and keep you: the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you: the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace."

There are actually six parts to that blessing. First, "the Lord bless you." Second, "the Lord keep you." Third, "the Lord make his face shine upon you. Fourth, "be gracious to you. Fifth, "turn his face toward you." And sixth, "give you peace." Peace is the end.

Now notice that where it says "the Lord be gracious to you", and that's the key word, that's the concept of God's showing us his grace toward his people both before and after that phrase in the blessing, it speaks about the Lord's face. Let me single out that particular passage. "The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord turn his face toward you," so that grace is put between the way the Lord looks at His people.

First of all, the Lord makes his face shine upon his people and then the Lord turns his face toward His people. That's the operation of the Lord's grace. It depends on the way that the Lord looks at us. And the outcome of it again is peace. Notice then, "he gives you peace." But once again, the lesson is peace only comes out of the grace of God.

Now there's a rather beautiful example of the Lord's grace manifested in his looking on his people at the end of chapter 2 of Exodus describing Israel's misery in Egypt and how the Lord began to show grace or favor toward them. It says in Exodus 2:22-25:

> "During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his

> covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them."

You see, here are the Israelites in desperate need and misery, unable to help themselves. All that they can hope for is the grace of God. God hears their groaning and their crying and God's response is this: He looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them. That's God's favor. His grace was turned toward the Israelites. He became concerned about them. Practically he began to move on their behalf to intervene and deliver them. But at the point where it says "God looked on the Israelites," that was the point which his grace began to operate on their behalf.

Finally, let me close today with one beautiful scripture from the New Testament. 1 Peter 5:10 says this:

> "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."

Aren't those beautiful words? And notice first of all, that he's the God of grace. In other words, grace comes solely and entirely from God. There is no other source of grace. If you want grace then you must go to God because God is the only source of grace in the universe.

And then notice what grace does. Grace restores us. Grace makes us strong, firm, and steadfast. That's how grace operates. Grace looks upon us. It's the favor of God, his face turned toward us. And as God looks toward us and intervenes, it does what we need.

Well, our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll be dealing with the difference between grace and works.

Radio Program

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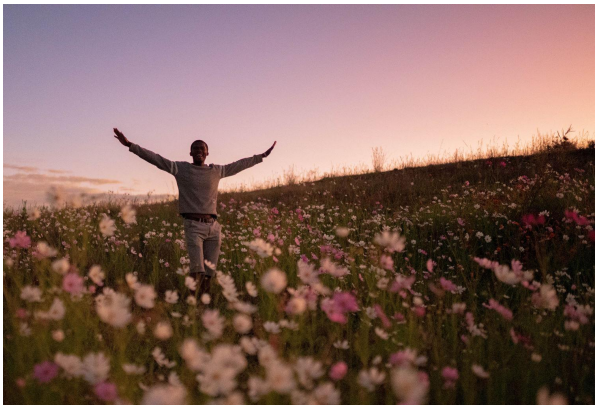

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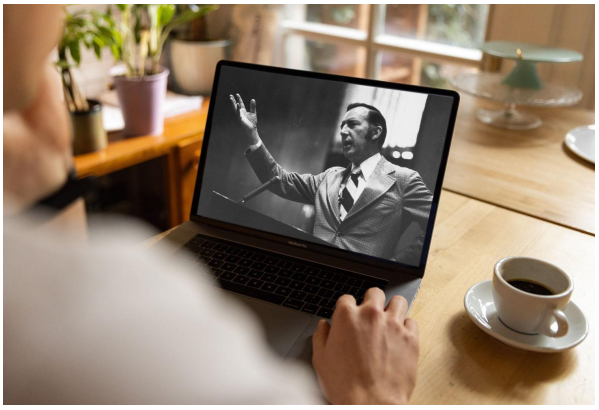

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