

The Demands of Grace

By Al Felder

“¹¹For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, ¹²teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; ¹³looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; ¹⁴Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. ¹⁵These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.” (Titus 2:11-15)

These verses contain a beautiful description of the most important event in human history. That event is the incarnation of Jesus. When Jesus left the glories of heaven and came into this world as a man, He was a visible manifestation of the grace of God. Through Him, the grace of God burst forth into the history of man like the rising sun piercing the darkness of night until it vanishes away. The appearance of Jesus has given man an understanding of the grace of God.

The word grace is defined by many as unmerited favor. The Greek Scholar W. E. Vine provides the following definition:

on the part of the bestower, the friendly disposition from which the kindly act proceeds, graciousness, loving-kindness, goodwill generally; especially with reference to the divine favor; in this respect there is stress on its freeness and universality, its spontaneous character, as in the case of God’s redemptive mercy, and the pleasure or joy He designs for the recipient; thus it is set in contrast with debt.¹

There are some things that we must understand about the grace of God. God is not under any obligation to extend grace toward man. God is not in debt to man, nor does God owe man anything. For this same reason, the grace of God cannot be earned for that would place God in debt to man.

Salvation is a product of God’s grace. *“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”* (Romans 3:24) It is God’s desire and will that all men receive His grace. It is possible for man to reject the grace of God. *“Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.”* (Hebrews 12:15) Bitterness, if left unchecked, will cause one to fail to receive the grace of God. This realization leads us to a deeper understanding of God’s grace.

It is necessary to have the proper understanding of God’s grace, otherwise, man will seek to abuse it. *“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?”*

¹ Vine, W. E. 1996. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN : Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996. p. 277.

(Romans 6:1) You see, man's flippant attitude towards God's grace is nothing new. Even in the first century the apostles dealt with the attitude that a person didn't have to obey the commands of God. Just as they do today, many people believed that they could live their life however they wanted to and God's grace would just take care of it all.

We must understand that God's grace does not nullify the Law of Christ. *"God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"* (Romans 6:2) Grace does not exclude our obedience. *"And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."* (Hebrews 5:9) Grace does not allow the one who has received it to continue in sin. *"As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God."* (1 Peter 2:16) Listen, we can't go around living our life however we want to and expect God to be ok with it, because he isn't. Grace has demands.

Grace demands faith. *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."* (Ephesians 2:8) Faith can be defined as, "a conviction based upon hearing."² It is a trust in God based upon His word. We find example after example in the Bible of grace through faith. *"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."* (Hebrews 11:7) Noah was a recipient of God's grace through faith. Noah was told by God of the judgement He planned to bring upon the world. God gave Noah instructions that would lead to the salvation of him and his family. To put it simply, if Noah had ignored the word of God he and his family would have been lost with everyone else. He would not have become an heir of righteousness.

The Bible also tells us of a harlot by the name of Rahab who received God's grace through faith. *"By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace."* (Hebrews 11:31) This woman was one of the inhabitants of the Promised Land. She had heard about the Israelites and their God. When the spies came to her city, she helped them and asked that they remember her when they came to conquer it. As a result of her faith she was spared. She did not perish with those who did not believe. Yes, grace demands faith!

Grace demands repentance. Repentance means, "To change one's mind or purpose."³ In other words, we no longer live the way we once lived. Our main text says that we are to deny ungodliness. A simple way to understand this term is that it is the opposite of godliness.

² —. 1996. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN : Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996. p. 222.

³ —. 1996. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN : Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996. p. 525.

In fact, ungodliness carries with it the idea of actually despising the word of God. It is when we desire evil things over God. It shows our true attitude toward God.

An ungodly person despises God's word and the instruction that comes from it. *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction."* (Proverbs 1:7) God's word requires us to change, to repent. Some people do not like to change. They become set in their ways, and allow certain things to fain their affection. They seek to hold on to them while they let go of Christ.

Another part of this process is denying worldly lusts. *"¹If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. ²Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth."* (Colossians 3:1, 2) In order to do this we have to desire heavenly things above all that this world holds. My affections must be on God and godly things. I cannot allow anything to be above Him in my life. He must be first and I must seek Him above all. That means denying myself.

Grace demands obedience. The text says that we are to live soberly. *"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end of the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."* (1 Peter 1:13) Living soberly means that we control ourselves. We govern our passions instead of allowing them to govern us. We deny ourselves in order to become more like Christ.

In other words, I no longer live my life to please myself. It's about serving God and serving others. I don't seek to do what makes me happy all the time. More importantly, I don't respond to situations the way that I use to. Now I seek to control myself and respond in a way that doesn't suit me or satisfies my desires, I respond in a way that glorifies God.

We are to also live righteously. That means doing what is right. It doesn't matter what the situation may be, the circumstances, or who's involved. Living righteously means that we are going to do what is right at all times, even if it causes us some inconvenience.

Righteous living is outward. By that, I mean that it affects the way that we treat others. *"Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame."* (1 Corinthians 15:34) It takes knowledge to live righteously. It takes knowledge that comes from God's word.

We are to live godly. This means that we have love and have reverence towards God. *"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."* (Hebrews 12:28) This love and reverence cause us to want to live in a way that is pleasing to God. Our desire is to please Him above ourselves.

God's grace gives us the motivation of hope and love. We have the hope of Jesus' return one day. *"²⁰For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: ²¹Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his*

glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." (Philippians 3:20, 21) On that grand and glorious day all sadness, sorrow, and heartache will be no more. We shall be like Jesus, and we will be with Him forever more.

Jesus loved us, and gave Himself for us. *"And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor."* (Ephesians 5:2) Jesus died that we might live. We are to seek to live with that same love towards others.

Grace demands that we live to serve. We are a special people who belongs to the Lord. We are to serve Him with zeal and enthusiasm. *"¹⁹What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? ²⁰For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."* (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20) We have been bought with a price. We belong to God to do His will.

Grace demands that we submit unto divine authority. *"Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work."* (Titus 3:1) I recognize that there is a higher authority than me. My way, my will, my desires must give way to that authority. It is no longer I, but Christ.

Grace does not nullify our duty to obey God. Grace does not grant us permission to sin. Grace demands faith, repentance, and obedience. God's grace is available to you. Will you receive it through faith?