



About Grace

By

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The Apostle Paul makes it clear that spiritual salvation is by grace through faith and is the gift of God—not by works. (Ephesians 2:8-9) So, what possible connection could God’s “grace” have with our “works”?

The answer is found in the next verse, Ephesians 2:10: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

God saved us by His Grace, so we are “His” workmanship. The Lord took us as lost sinners and made something special of us through His Love and Mercy: “But God who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).” (Ephesians 2:4-5) God “made” us alive together with Christ. We were “dead in trespasses,” but He made us alive “together” with Christ. Our life is forever connected to the Life of Jesus Christ. His Death is our death. His Resurrection is our resurrection. His Life is our life. His Joy is our joy.

Another way of saying this is that we are God’s great “poem.” The Greek word for “workmanship” is *poiema* . The English word “poem” comes from it. We are God’s spiritual “poem,” His workmanship, the Divine work of His Mercy and Grace.

God has some poetry that He wants us to write to the world. We are “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” The word for “prepared

beforehand” means “previously prepared, ordained.” How long ago did God do that? Paul told the Ephesians at the beginning of his letter that God “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.” (Ephesians 1:4) God chose us before He created the world for a purpose and that is for “good works.” The words mean tasks that have at their core a value of moral goodness, jobs that are good in character and beneficial in effect.

God wants to write “Love” poems to millions of people all over the world and He does that through us: His great poems of Grace. When we do good works, we are writing spiritual poetry to the glory of God. When we do good works, we are doing what God prepared for us to do before He had even created the world. How amazing is His Grace!

The Lord of Grace

Where do we learn how to live a life filled with God’s Grace? Look to the Lord of Grace: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

The Apostle John began his wonderful account of the Life of Jesus Christ with these words: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1) John gets right to the point of His Gospel Message: Jesus Christ is God, the Lord of Grace. Here are the amazing things we learn about Jesus in the first 14 verses of John’s Gospel:

- Jesus is the Word
- Jesus is with God
- Jesus is God
- Jesus was in the beginning with God
- Jesus created all things
- Nothing was created that Jesus didn't create
- Jesus is Life
- Jesus is the Light of men
- Jesus shined in spiritual darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend Him
- Jesus is the True Light that gives light to every man coming into the world
- Jesus created the world, and the world did not know Him
- Jesus came to His own, and His own did not receive Him
- Jesus gives the right to become children of God to those who receive Him and believe in His Name
- Jesus became flesh, lived on the earth and people beheld His glory
- Jesus' glory was as the only Begotten of God the Father
- Jesus is full of Grace and Truth

These 14 verses are a perfect summary of the Gospel message. They may be the most remarkable statement in all of the Bible. Jesus is the Eternal God, the Creator of the Universe and everything in it. Jesus became flesh and lived on the earth. Thousands of people saw Jesus in the flesh, but did not receive Him. Jesus promised that as many as received Him and believed in His Name would become

children of God. John and other disciples of Christ beheld His glory and saw that He was full of Grace and Truth. Jesus is the Lord of Grace. His every thought, every word, every action were filled with Grace and Truth. Jesus has a total command of what it means to live a life of grace.

What does this mean to me? If I want to live a life of grace and truth, if I want to live the *GraceLife*, I need to emulate the Life of Jesus Christ in every way. Everything I need to know about how to live the Christian life to the max is found in the Life Jesus lived while He dwelt among men. Jesus did not hold back. He lived His Life fully, and it was a Life filled with Grace and Truth.

I invite you to read the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John with a new zeal and a deeper appreciation. Witness how Jesus lived His Life. Watch how Jesus talked to people. Listen to what Jesus said to them. See how He treated people and how He reacted to their treatment of Him. Look at the people He used as examples of both good and bad behavior. Make note of what Jesus said is important and what He said was not. Grab hold of His Truth with your whole being and never let it go. Grasp the Grace that filled His heart and make it the most vital part of who you are and who you want to be. And, most importantly, marvel at how much Jesus loves the Father and how much the Father loves Him. Listen to Jesus praying to His Father, and what His Father said about Him. Jesus is the Lord God Almighty, full of Grace and Truth!

Singing Grace In Our Hearts

One of the great joys of life is music. There's something so special about what music does in our hearts and minds. Music can excite and relax. It can motivate and guide. The Bible is filled with music sung and played by God's people. Hundreds of verses in both the Old and New Testaments testify to its great power to reach the emotions and will of people for the glory of God.

"Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and spoke, saying: 'I will sing to the LORD, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!' Exodus 15:1

"Hear, O kings! Give ear, O princes! I, *even* I, will sing to the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel." Judges 5:3

"Then David and all Israel played *music* before God with all *their* might, with singing, on harps, on stringed instruments, on tambourines, on cymbals, and with trumpets." 1 Chronicles 13:8

"I will praise the LORD according to His righteousness, And will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High." Psalm 7:17

"Sing to Him a new song; Play skillfully with a shout of joy." Psalm 33:3

“Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all *your* heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!” Zephaniah 3:14

“And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth.’” Revelation 5:9-10

Singing is a natural way of expressing joy, even in times of great difficulty. What did the Apostle Paul and Silas do when they were beaten and thrown into prison? They prayed and sang. “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” (Acts 16:25) What does Paul recommend for Christians to do each day? “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.” (Ephesians 5:18-21)

Music is also a great educator. We can use music to teach Truths from God’s Word: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” (Colossians 3:16)

I love that phrase, “singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” Think about what it means to sing “with grace in your hearts.” What kind of music would you write with grace in your heart? Here are a few examples of what other Christians have written through the years with grace in their hearts:

“Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now I’m found, was blind, but now I see.”

“Some day the silver cord will break, and I no more as now shall sing;
But, O the joy when I shall wake within the palace of the King!
And I shall see Him face to face, and tell the story, Saved by grace.”

“More about Jesus I would know, more of His grace to others show;
More of His saving fullness see, more of His love, who died for me.”

“There is grace for each need, Grace full, grace free, Saving grace yes, indeed,
Flowing from the throne above; Grace to hide all my sin, All, yes, grace free,
Pardon all may win, Grace in His perfect love.”

“Wonderful grace of Jesus, Greater than all my sin; How shall my tongue describe it,
Where shall its praise begin? Taking away my burden, Setting my spirit free;
For the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me. Wonderful grace of Jesus, Reaching to all the lost;
By it I have been pardoned, Saved to the uttermost, Chains have been torn asunder,
Giving me liberty; For the wonderful grace of Jesus

reaches me.”

What’s the song of your heart today? Is it God’s Grace? If so, write it down so you’ll remember it in the days to come. Share your song with other Christians. Watch as your song of grace lifts their spirits and eyes upward to glorify God. Tell God today how much you love Him, “singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

Law and Grace

The Apostle John made an astounding statement in his Gospel: “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (John 1:18) John wrote his Gospel account at the end of the 1st Century A.D., years after Matthew, Mark and Luke had written their Gospels, years after the Roman Army had destroyed Jerusalem and relocated most of the survivors by 73 A.D. Israel would cease to be a nation of Jews and become known for centuries as Palestine (first called Syria Palaestina in 135 A.D.). All of the other Apostles of Christ were most likely dead when John wrote his Gospel account sometime between 85 and 90 A.D. He was the last Apostle standing. Israel as a religious entity had been decimated. The religion of Judaism was fast becoming a memory. The history of Israel at the end of the 1st Century makes John’s statement about Law and Grace, Moses and Jesus, even more interesting and important to our lives today.

John wrote that Jesus “came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.” (John 1:11) Jesus Christ, the Word of God, offered Himself to Israel as its Messiah and King, but the leaders and people of Israel rejected His offer and became an evil mob that led to Christ’s death on the Cross. Jesus made a second offer to Israel from Heaven to return to earth and establish the prophesied Kingdom of God on earth (Acts 3:19-21), but the leaders and people of Israel again rejected the offer and killed the King’s messengers (Acts 7 – 8).

Jesus Christ, the Eternal God, met Moses on a desert mountain top and gave the great prophet and leader of the people of Israel the Holy Law of God. That same Jesus came to earth in Person more than a thousand years later to bring the people of the earth Grace and Truth. “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” Why does John write these words at this point in his Gospel account?

God expressed His Love to Israel in a specific way when He gave them His Law. The Law is a revelation of God’s amazing Character and His desire for Israelites to develop their character based on the values of their God. After giving Israel His Law and promising them victory in battles with their enemies, God called Moses back to the mountaintop and told him how to build a tabernacle for God: “And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.” (Exodus 25:8) God also told Moses about the Ark of the Covenant, the Table of Showbread, Golden Lampstand, and all of the other furnishings and elements of the great Tabernacle. God did come into the Tabernacle and lived in the Holy of Holies. However, only the high

priest was allowed to enter the Holy Place once a year on the Day of Atonement: “that he may make atonement for himself, for his household, and for all the assembly of Israel.” (Leviticus 16:17) God dwelled with His people, but access to God was strictly controlled by the Law God gave to Moses. That restriction continued for more than a thousand years. Israel knew their God was with them, but they weren’t allowed to have a personal relationship with Him. The relationship God had with the people of Israel was “national” in nature.

But that changed centuries later. God expressed His Love to Israel in a “personal” way when He sent His Son to Israel. Jesus Christ is the direct Revelation of God: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14) Jesus was “born” into the nation of Israel as any other Israelite, except His birth was a miracle being born of a virgin. Though Christ’s mother was a human, Jesus did not have a human father. He was from God the Father and therefore had no sin. He was perfect in every way. Even as Jesus gave the Law to Moses so that Israel would know God and become obedient to His Will, Jesus now gave Israel Himself so they would know God in a personal way and become obedient to His Will. However, as we know, Israel didn’t obey God’s Law and they didn’t obey His Son. Israel rejected God’s Law for centuries and would finally reject Jesus Christ and God’s offer of national grace. As Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome: “but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why?

Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.' (Romans 9:31-33) Israel failed in all its attempts at national righteousness because of the people's rejection of Jesus, the stumbling stone and rock of offense.

Today, Jesus continues to offer His Grace and Truth, but His offer now is primarily to the Gentile world. The Apostle John knew that when he wrote his Gospel account. He knew that God had set Israel aside for a time while Jesus made His offer of personal salvation to the Gentiles. This offer will come to an end, so now is the time of salvation: "Behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation." (2 Corinthians 6:2) If you know the salvation that comes through Jesus Christ, rejoice in His Grace today and every day. If you do not know His salvation, now is the time. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." (Acts 16:31)

Greetings of Grace

Remember when you first learned how to write a letter? Maybe it was your father or mother who taught you, or maybe a teacher in school, but we learned that it's important to communicate properly to people in many different kinds of letters. Here's what I remember first learning about writing a letter:

- Introduction (the writer and who will read the letter)
- Greeting (first sentence(s) following the introduction)
- Opening paragraph (tell them what you're going to write about)
- Body of the letter (write about your subject)
- Closing paragraph (summarize what you told them and what response you want)
- Closing (last sentence(s) following the body of the letter and closing paragraph)

The Bible is God's Love Letter to His children and the world. The Holy Spirit inspired the writing of every Letter in God's Word, so we can learn a lot about what He wants from us by what He inspired.

The Books of James and Galatians may be the oldest Books of the New Testament (James believed to have been written between 45 – 50 A.D. ... Galatians between 49 – 52 A.D.). Let's see what we learn from the way they were written.

Introduction to James: "James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad."

Introduction to Galatians: "Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead), and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia."

Greetings to James: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be

perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

Greetings to Galatians: “Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Opening paragraph to James: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.”

Opening paragraph to Galatians: “(our Lord Jesus Christ) Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen”

The Apostle James wrote to the twelve tribes (Hebrews) scattered abroad and told them to count it all joy when they faced various trials in their lives.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Gentile believers in the region of Galatia and wished them grace and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Different apostles, different audiences, different purposes in writing their letters. We’ll see these and other differences in the bodies and closings of each book. That makes sense since God’s purpose was different for each of the audiences.

James wrote only one letter included in the Bible, so we don't have the opportunity to see how his ministry progressed through the years. But Paul wrote many letters to a lot of different churches over a period of more than 15 years, so we can see what may have changed in his ministry through the years.

What stands out about the ministry of Paul is how consistent he was in his greetings. Each church he wrote to had a different need, but Paul always greeted them in the same way. Whether a church was living up to its potential or not, whether church members were obeying God or not, Paul loved them and wished them the same thing. Watch.

Galatians (approx. 49-52 A.D.) "Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ."

1 Thessalonians (approx. 51 A.D.) "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

2 Thessalonians (approx. 51 A.D.) "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

1 Corinthians (approx. 56 A.D.) "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

2 Corinthians (approx. 57 A.D.) "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Romans (approx. 57-58 A.D.) "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Ephesians (approx. 60 A.D.) "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Philippians (approx. 60 A.D.) "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Colossians (approx. 60 A.D.) "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Philemon (approx. 60 A.D.) "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

1 Timothy (approx. 64 A.D.) "Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord."

Titus (approx. 65 A.D.) "Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior."

2 Timothy (approx. 67 A.D.) "Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord."

Paul addressed the churches in the same way in every one of his letters in the Bible: "Grace to you and peace..."

Paul addressed the pastors of churches in the same way in all of his pastoral letters in the Bible: "Grace, mercy, and peace..."

Grace was at the heart of Paul's greetings even as God's Grace was the theme of Paul's letters. The Apostle Peter also included greetings of grace and peace in his two letters (approx. 65 – 66 A.D). The

Apostle John included greetings of grace and peace in his second letter (approx. 90 – 95 A.D.) and The Revelation of Jesus Christ (approx. 95 A.D.).

These are greetings of grace from our dear brothers in Christ from almost 2,000 years ago. What is our greeting to each other today? Has it changed over time? No. We wish you “grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” These are our *Greetings of Grace* to one another in the 21st Century, even as it was in the 1st Century.

And our closing? As Paul wrote, “Grace be with you all. Amen.”

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