

Grace, the Generous Gift of God



by Desmond Ford

Happiness, joy, peace, sweetness, favor, loving kindness, merit, blessings, fruitfulness, innocence, love, mercy, forgiveness—all these words are encompassed in the good news of GRACE

Grace is mentioned about 130 times in the New Testament alone. Paul begins and ends each of his epistles with it. Along with one or two literary relatives, it turned the Western world upside down in the sixteenth century—we call that event the Reformation. In recent years when one of the most well-known Jehovah's Witnesses in the world, Ray Franz, began to study that word in Scripture, it led him to leave his cult and write a book that led many to follow his example.

Grace gives hope to the hopeless, joy to the sorrowing, faith to the faithless, and life to the dying. G R A C E. The Greek word *χαρις* (*charis*), comes from a root meaning "to be joyful," and the noun has a wide variety of meanings, all associated with happiness and joy.

God Is for Us

Theologically it signifies that God is for us even when we are against him. It is but a term for the active love of God streaming continually and prodigally from God as sunshine from the sun. Augustine said it is not grace unless it is *gratis*—that is free. It carries the meaning of generous gifts which, theologically construed, signifies redemption and all that goes with it. It is a word set in contrast to law, works, and human merit. So we read, "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace" (Romans 11:6).

Even Sweeter

But only as we recognize that grace is essentially for the graceless do we gather its essential sweetness. In the Old Testament, its synonyms in the Hebrew signify favor and loving-kindness.

Thus the word binds together both Testaments, signifying that God, because he is Love, is seeking sinners to bless and change them and to fill their lives with fruitfulness, innocence, and joy.

"He so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son," and "not to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:16-17). That's grace. "This man receiveth sinners" (John 15:2). That's grace. "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men" (Matthew 12:31). That's grace. "Him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). That's grace.

Love = GRACE = Mercy = Forgiveness

Love is grace, mercy is grace, forgiveness is grace. All gifts are grace. Joy is grace. Indeed you cannot think of any good thing that is not related to grace in one way or another. There could have been no grace whatsoever for us but for the fact that God the Son in Eden volunteered to take our place and redeem us. "Grace ... came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

If you want rich hours, look up "grace" in your concordance and, particularly in the New Testament, trace through its usage. Take in some of the derivative words and related words also. Where grace is there is also the gospel (see Luke 4:18, 22; Romans 3:21-24; Colossians 1:6; Acts 14:3).

Rejoice as you read that "where sin abounds, grace much more abounds." Plumb the depths of being "under grace and not under law" (Romans 6:14). Marvel at that grace which, as the KJV rightly has it, is something so abundant as to guarantee to us always having all sufficiency in all things. God's sweet and wise will is the only condition in the answer to our prayers.



"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with all the saints"
(Revelation 22:21).





Trying to Be Good Enough Frustrates Grace

Observe that you can frustrate and nullify the grace of God if you seek his favor by trying in yourself to be “good enough” (see Galatians 2:21). You can “accept the grace of God in vain,” if subsequently you fall into the pitfall of legalism or its opposite—antinomianism. We are not to sin in order that grace may abound (Romans 6:1). Divine grace works in us making us more than conquerors and overcomers of the world, the flesh, and the devil (see 1 Corinthians 15:10).

If you have given yourself to the privileged task of ascertaining the significance of this New Testament keyword, you have access to the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. For example, understanding grace you will perceive why in the last days the gospel will suddenly explode in its impact. It will go to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, under the power of pentecostal fires kindled in every city of the globe.

Rapid Transit Message

You know that the news that travels quickly is either very bad or very good, usually the former. But in our instance it will be the latter. If the gospel was something trite like “Be good and God might save you,” it would hardly travel outside its hometown—the town of legalism. But if instead the gospel is grace, and the gospel is joy, forgiveness, power, fruitfulness, mercy, and a thousand other good things, we can understand how one day, when understood, it will take wings and cross all barriers.

In other words, when instead of telling people that if, if, IF, IF they are good, God might love them, tell them instead of the God “who justifieth the ungodly,” the man

who “receiveth sinners,” the One who promised that “all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men.” Tell that out, and it will travel at almost the speed of light.

What to Tell Others

Tell the world that grace is God’s unimaginable generosity. It led him to give Christ, his unspeakable gift. It made him promise to supply, if we need it “exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think.”

Remember Abraham praying for Ishmael? “O that Ishmael might live before Thee.” But our munificent heavenly Father not only gave him Ishmael in lasting existence but also Isaac, and a progeny as numerous as the stars of heaven for we, if Christ’s, are Abraham’s seed. He asked for the life of one, and God gave him millions. That’s grace.

Then think of Jacob. He prays that God might guarantee him his bread and water. But what does God do? By the time Jacob comes that way again, he is rich, living high so to speak, and is a man full of children and all good things.

Then look at the paralytic being lowered into the room where Christ is preaching. He hopes for physical restoration. But what does Christ, the generous Savior do? He not only gives him what he seeks but also something more wonderful. “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.”

Now see the prodigal in his tattered clothes and almost broken spirit. He resolves to go to his father for his father’s servants have bread enough and to spare, and he will ask to be made a servant. What happens to him? He is reinstated, given a ring, special shoes and gown, and a feast. That’s a picture of divine grace in action.

Christ Loved Parties

Christ told umpteen stories about parties but gave only one miniparable about a funeral (see Matthew 11:17). Similarly, the Old Testament ordered many feasts but only one fast (the Day of Atonement).

No wonder we read, “the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). Anyone who understands grace cannot but be joyous and strong.

Look how prominent the word joy is in the Gospel narratives (read Matthew 2:10; 13:44; 28:8; Luke:1:14,44; 2:10; 10:17; 15:7,10; 24:41,52; John 3:29; 15:11; 16:20,22,24; 17:13).

It’s not surprising that after the gospel was preached and received in a certain place, we find the wonderful record that there was “much joy in that city” (Acts 8:8).

When we turn to the last hours of Jesus, instead of speaking in funereal tones about negative matters, we find him constantly assuring his disciples that soon they would have his joy and his peace (see John 14:27; 15:11;16:33).

Christ the Realist

Christ is no thoughtless optimist. He knows full well that there will be strife and pain for believers but see how balanced and comforting his words. “**In the world** ye shall have tribulation,” but “in me you may have peace” (John 16:33).

Similarly in Mark 10:29-30, he not only promises good things a hundredfold, but adds “with persecutions.” He was and is a realist. Thus with his followers he could sing a hymn on his way to death (see Matthew 26:30).

I will leave it to you to study the connections between grace and the divine covenants. But be sure to observe that in the

covenants of grace God never leaves us to ourselves. When the Comforter comes, he writes, he causes us to walk therein (see Hebrews 8:10 and Ezekiel 36:26-27). That’s grace indeed, when he makes us want to do what we ought to do and then enables us to do it.

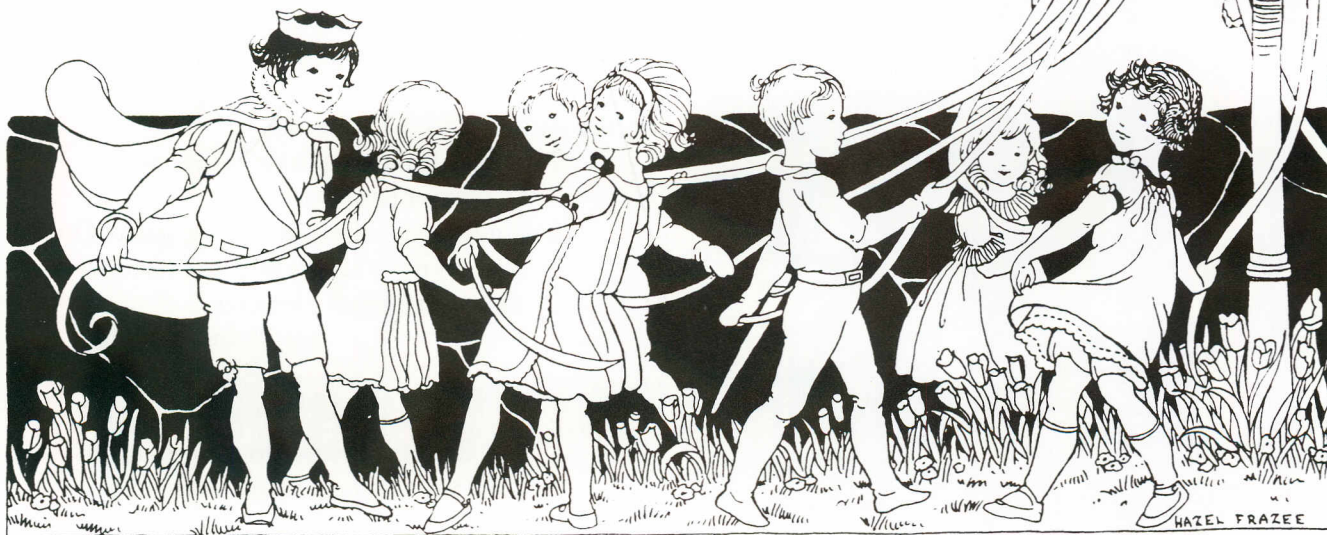
Grace First and Last

In the last verse of Scripture we read, “the grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints” (Revelation 22:21). We are to accept that benediction and feed upon it by investing it with all the comprehensive blessings that grace includes. This book, like Paul’s letters, begins as well as ends with grace (see Revelation 1:4, “Grace to you and peace from him ...”).

Are you seeking peace? It can only be yours when the grace of God is received. With grace and through grace alone comes peace—grace to you and **peace from him**. As you fall in love with this word and all it signifies, you will find it even where the term is absent. For example, in the vicinity of the closing benediction, we read: “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price” (Revelation 22:17). “Without price”—that’s grace.

No wonder the Spirit painted that glorious picture in Matthew 13:44. Here is a man stumbling his way through the field of Holy Scripture who suddenly discovers the treasure—the treasure of grace. “For joy thereof” he counts nothing else of comparative value, and he empties his hands of every earthly thing in order to receive and keep that which can be his for eternity. Is that you?

If not, why not? Come. All is free. All is grace. Today. ♦



HAZEL FRAZEE