



BY GRACE ARE YOU SAVED

Reading: Romans 5

Grace

God's grace is His free gift of loving kindness towards mankind. No-one deserves God's grace. It is wonderfully shown by God's gift of the Lord Jesus Christ to bring forgiveness of sins and salvation:

"... God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"
(Romans 5:8).

God's grace is His favour that no one deserves

God showed grace towards the apostle Paul. Even though he had persecuted Christians, God forgave him (Acts 8:3). Paul later wrote:

*"For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But **by the grace of God** I am what I am, and **his grace towards me** was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but **the grace of God that is with me**"* (1 Corinthians 15:9,10).

Wrong thinking!

Many people think that they can earn salvation by the things they do. This is not true. Even though the apostle Paul says that he worked hard for the Lord, he knew that this would not save him in the end. Salvation is God's **gift**, and a gift cannot be earned. But **wages** are earned, and Paul tells us that we **earn** death:

*"For the **wages** of sin is death, but the free **gift** of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 6:23).

As we have already learned, we deserve death because we sin, but God offers us salvation from this through His grace. God does not give us salvation as a reward for doing more good than bad in our lives. Our good behaviour and good deeds do not earn God's blessings, because forgiveness of sins and immortal life are God's **gifts**. They cannot be earned or bought in any way. God has:

*"... saved us and called us to a holy calling, **not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace**, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began"* (2 Timothy 1:9).

The apostle Paul says:

*"**For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast**"*
(Ephesians 2:8,9).

Ephesians 1:7 explains: *"In him (Jesus) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace"*.

The apostle Paul thanks God for the gift of the Lord Jesus who can save us from sin:

"Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

The importance of faith

Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:8 (above) that we are saved by God's grace *"through faith"*. This means that we can only be saved if we have faith in Him. Hebrews 11:6 tells us that:

"... without faith it is impossible to please him (God), for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."





The words 'faith' and 'belief' in the New Testament come from the same Greek word and so have the same meaning, which includes the idea of trust. This helps us to understand what the Bible means by 'faith'. To have faith in God means to believe and trust in Him and His promises, so that we place our lives into His care with complete confidence. Just as a small child depends on his father, so we must learn to rely on God in everything.

Faith is belief and trust in God that eventually results in a complete confidence in Him and His purpose

In Lesson 12 we looked at two examples of the remarkable faith of Abraham. In the first example, Abraham put his trust in God and left his country without knowing where God would lead him. In the second, Abraham was prepared to offer his son, Isaac, as God had instructed, because he believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead.

Abraham showed his faith by obeying – by doing what God had instructed. This is an important lesson for us: true faith shows itself in action to obey God. If we truly have faith in God, we will do what He asks and follow His ways. Faith which does not make us try to overcome sin and follow the Christian way of living is not true faith:

“So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:17).

Faith in God and His promises comes from reading God's Word and seeking to understand its teaching (Romans 10:13-17).

Faith and righteousness

Because we sin, we die. We can do nothing to appear righteous in God's sight and save ourselves. Righteousness can only come from God. By grace God will forgive our sins and so treat us as if we are righteous if we show faith in Him. Genesis 15:6 says, *“And he (Abraham) **believed the LORD**, and he (God) **counted it to him as righteousness**”*.

In the New Testament, Romans 4:2-5 talks about Abraham and gives the same message. The Bible word 'justify' means the same as 'to be counted righteous' (being made right with God). God forgave Abraham's sins and counted him righteous because of his faith. Faith in God is essential for salvation.

Romans 4:2-5 For if Abraham was justified (*considered righteous*) by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness ...

Later in the same chapter, the apostle Paul says this about Abraham's faith:

*“No distrust made him (Abraham) waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, **fully convinced** that God was able to do what he had promised. **That is why his faith was 'counted to him as righteousness'**”* (Romans 4:20-22).

After speaking about Abraham, the apostle Paul then explains that righteousness *“will be counted **to us who believe in him** (God) who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification”* (Romans 4:24,25).

Notice that it is only possible for us to be considered righteous through the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have to believe that Jesus died for us and so accept his sacrifice. If we have faith in God and His offer of salvation through the Lord Jesus, then by His grace we can be justified (made right with God):

“... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23,24).

Our sins separate us from God. If we are made right with God, then we are at peace (brought into harmony) with Him. We have access to Him in prayer and enjoy fellowship (a special relationship) with Him. We have entered into His grace:





“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:1,2)

Disciples in Old Testament times

If belief in the saving work of Jesus is essential for our salvation, how can those who lived before Christ be saved?

Some of those who lived in Old Testament times **knew about Christ!** They did not know him by name (Jesus), but they knew him as the promised Son of God – the Messiah and Lamb of God. They understood from God’s Word that everyone needs salvation, and that God would provide this through the death of a perfect man, who would be the ‘Lamb of God’. He would give his life for the salvation of mankind (Genesis 22:8, Isaiah 53).

The apostle Paul confirms this when he says in Acts 26:22,23:

*“I stand here ... saying nothing but **what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass**: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles”.*

So Abraham and many other Old Testament characters believed in the saving work of Christ Jesus, although they did not have the privilege of being able to read the Gospel records about the Lord’s life and work.

Galatians 3:8 tells us that the Gospel was preached to Abraham, and we read of Jesus saying to the Jews,

“Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad” (John 8:56).

When Abraham was about to offer as a sacrifice his son, Isaac, as God instructed, God provided Abraham with a lamb that he could sacrifice instead (Genesis 22:13). This lamb represented Jesus. Through this symbol, Abraham was shown the sacrifice of Jesus.

Does it matter how we behave?

If salvation comes by God’s grace and cannot be earned by what we do, does it matter how we behave? Can we please ourselves and do what we like with our lives? Can we expect God to continue to show His grace towards us if we enjoy sinning and do not try to change our lives to serve Him?

Of course it matters how we behave! We have already seen that to receive God’s grace needs faith, and true faith shows itself in obedience to God. The apostle Paul asked: *“Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?”* (Romans 6:1). In other words, Paul is asking whether people should continue to sin so there is more opportunity for God to show His grace! He answered the question in the next verse: *“By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?”* Believers should ‘die to sin’ when they are baptized – they should try hard to stop sinning. Paul says to baptized believers:

*“So you also must consider yourselves **dead to sin** and **alive to God** in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions” (Romans 6:11,12).*

If we really have faith in God and His offer of salvation through the Lord Jesus, our actions will show it. Because we are thankful for God’s grace we will want to serve God better. We will try our very best to follow the example of Jesus. Then we will truly be his followers. People who do not try to obey God and Jesus are not true disciples. If they really believed, they would obey. They have no real faith, and so do not have access to the grace of God.

We cannot claim to believe and do nothing about it. Following the Christian way of life involves fighting against sin in our own lives. It also involves doing good deeds – things that will please God. This is how we show true faith in our lives. However, as we have already seen, by themselves these deeds will never make us righteous, because salvation cannot be earned.





Discipleship

Baptism is a new start. All our past sins are forgiven when we are baptized. Yet however hard we try, we still do wrong and think wrong thoughts. But baptized believers can come to God through the Lord Jesus. In their prayers they can confess their failings. If they are truly sorry, God will forgive them.

So disciples should never give up. With the love of their Heavenly Father to help them, they will receive a place in God's kingdom in the end. Jesus said to his disciples,

"It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

God's gifts to believers

Here are some of the blessings of God's grace that baptized believers can enjoy in this life as disciples of the Lord Jesus:

- forgiveness of all sins (Ephesians 1:7)
- peace of mind (Philippians 4:7)
- access to God, through Christ, in prayer (Romans 8:34)
- fellowship with God, the Lord Jesus and other believers (1 John 1:3)
- joy (John 15:11)
- contentment (1 Timothy 6:6; Philippians 4:11)
- being God's sons and daughters (1 John 3:1,2)
- hope in this evil world.

There are also the future blessings of immortal life in God's kingdom.

Summary

1. God's grace is His favour towards mankind that no one deserves. It is wonderfully shown in God's gift of the Lord Jesus to bring forgiveness of sins and salvation.
2. No-one can save himself. It is only by God's grace that we can be saved through faith.
3. To have faith in God means to believe and trust in Him and His promises. Faith comes by reading the Bible.
4. If we have true faith, it will show in the way we behave.

Verses to learn: Romans 5:1,2

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Passages to read: Psalm 32; Romans 3:21-28; Romans 4; Titus 2:11,13 and read again Galatians 3.

