

# "Grace Upon Grace"

***While we focus primarily on the Grace versus Law issue (and well we should), the more obvious aspect of the Grace of God is given much lesser notice. What are we missing in this All-Important Phenomenon?***

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When considering the subject of God's Grace, our minds invariably gravitate to consider the issue on the basis of "Grace versus Law". That is our typical modern day approach. Where it's the general desire among evangelical types to set aside God's Law, that has become the prism through which most religious people view the matter. While it is true that we can't earn remission of sins by any amount of "lawkeeping", to then go on and consider God's Law irrelevant is another matter entirely.

The purpose of this article is NOT to pursue the Law versus Grace approach. There are numerous publications which do that adequately. In this article, we'll step back and take a more comprehensive look at the full dynamic of what God has done, is doing, and will continue doing in the lives of those He is calling. Without this full awareness, we can't hope to correctly fathom its overall provision. As other articles explain, there is a Grace unto Works factor involved in this subject where we'd be sorely remiss if we let it slip by us.

## **Our Personal Obligation**

What are we obligated to do? This is a question rarely asked, and when it is asked, most christian religions prefer we conclude that we need to DO "nothing". "It is ALL done FOR you", they say. While that may be partly true as it regards the forgiveness of our past sins, Paul saw the obvious and emphatically retorted that under grace we are prohibited from even thinking that we are thereafter free to continue sinning, "that grace may abound".<sup>1</sup> Yet by a convoluted reasoning process modern religion has come full circle to effectively contradict Christ's assurance that He did not come to "do away with" the Law. "Works", as they call it, are interpreted as an attempt only to earn salvation, which is regarded as an offense against the auspices of Grace! An emotional love toward God is set in

place to compensate for any absence of the practical love that Jesus advocated. What's hard to understand about the definition of love that He posed: "If you love me, keep my commandments"<sup>2</sup>; the love of God is the keeping of the commandments"<sup>3</sup>?

## **The Early Church's View**

While WE typically envision the operation of Grace as explained to this point, we should remain aware that the early Church did not see grace as would a modern disciple. Their view of grace considered a much broader application. We can see that when we consider the many unused verses on the subject. They are unused mostly because they don't address the Grace versus Law issue. In fact they can create questions of what was meant by the use of that word in the particular contexts where it was used.

Where we're going with this is to make the case that Grace involves a much greater operation than just forgiveness of sins. We who define Grace as just unmerited pardon (tho' correct) ourselves can miss and have missed the greater point.

The early Church did not understand or believe that the Law is all done away, so they would not have considered the meaning of the term "grace" with that thought subliminally in their mind. That being the case, let's try to understand these many lesser considered verses as they would have understood them, not as we might interpret them.

## **Grace Upon Grace?**

The beloved Apostle John opened his gospel with an enigmatic statement found in John 1:16. "*And of his fullness have all we received, and **grace** for **grace**.*" Though continuing the subject from verse 14's reference to grace and truth, the translation we see does not bring out John's intent, that one grace

<sup>1</sup> Romans 6:2 & 15.

<sup>2</sup> John 14:15

<sup>3</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> John 6; 1<sup>st</sup> John 2:3-7; 1<sup>st</sup> John 5:3

is applied upon another. In other words, Grace is a layered phenomenon, with one superimposed upon another. The Greek word for the translated word 'for' is *ἀντί* (*anti*) which would be better rendered 'upon' <sup>4</sup>, not 'for'.

### How THEY Thought of Grace

Aside from the usual series of verses that typically are brought forward when discussing the subject, there are a number of less used verses that are rarely read, because they don't really support the agenda of a "grace vs. law" argument. Those verses speak of grace as what seems to be a totally different item altogether, thus their mentions don't square with the common take.

With the realization that the early Church did not have the same false idea that early on of grace supplanting the Laws of God, effectively making them irrelevant, we need to lay aside our perceptions and try to see things as they would have seen them.

But, it's what John reveals in his chapter 1, verse 16 that should make us aware that there is a broader meaning to the term 'Grace' than is generally understood today. That would explain the many verses that don't seem to fit or support the usual argument.

You see, the early Church understood that Grace is a more comprehensive operation than just forgiveness of sins. When we argue from the perspective of it being that alone, we blind ourselves to what otherwise ought to be obvious. By allowing a 'just-the-forgiveness-of-sins' definition alone, we leave off a major area of understanding fully what Grace does mean and should mean to us.

There are two major "layers" of Grace's application. First, the remission of our sins (upon repentance) but more than that, there's the work that God is doing by the Power of His Spirit in us: (The 'heavenly gifts' spoken of in places, or the 'spiritual blessings' spoken of in others.) We are His workmanship,

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<sup>4</sup> The Jamieson Fausset Brown Bible Commentary has this with regard to verse 16. "... **grace for grace** – that is, as we say, grace upon grace, in successive communications and larger measures, as each was able to take it in. ... The word "truth" it will be observed, is dropt here; and "Grace" stands alone, as the chosen New Testament word for "all spiritual blessings" with which believers are enriched out of the fullness of Christ." *JF&B Commentary*, Hendrickson Publishers, Vol. 3, March 1997, page 349. We can see in their admission that the term Grace here is meant to indicate our spiritual blessings, something other than just forgiveness of sins.

after all, as Ephesians 2:10 tells us. That work involves our growth in faith, love, knowledge and righteous character. That is Grace also! Without His involvement and cleansing of our character and conduct, our best efforts are just filthy rags. <sup>5</sup>

### A More Comprehensive Awareness

Let's review a sampling of verses that should leave us wondering if WE understand what Grace is as fully as did the early Christians.

[Acts 4:33] "*And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great **grace** was upon them all.*" Now, these hearers were already converted Christians. Their actions showed a dedication unusual in our time. But that grace spoken of here wasn't 'forgiveness' per se.

[Acts 13:43] "*Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the **grace** of God.*" Here also, grace is something that the hearers could "continue in". These were as yet unconverted proselytes. The following verses show that the grace being spoken of was the opportunity to be enlightened in god's Truth and Way.

[Acts 14:26] "*And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the **grace** of God for the work which they fulfilled.*" This recommendation speaks to their being given power and opportunity to preach and make disciples.

[Acts 18:27] "*And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through **grace**:*" Here again, grace provided opportunity to hear and to understand. It wasn't so much personal repentance or forgiveness at this point.

[Acts 20:32] "*And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his **grace**, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.*" We've now moved beyond the 'forgiveness' aspect and into growth in spiritual maturity through the Word, and toward an ultimate 'sanctification' giving them inclusion into the Family of God.

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<sup>5</sup> See Isaiah 64:6

[Rom.5:2] “By whom also we have access by faith into this **grace** wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Faith provides access into Grace, and Grace provides a sanctuary in which we stand, looking forward to ultimate glorification. It should be abundantly clear that their perspective on Grace was more comprehensive than involving forgiveness of sins only!

[Rom.12:3] “For I say, through the **grace** given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.” Paul here provides us with definition not commonly presented in religious circles. Notice the next verse; [Rom.12:6] “Having then **gifts** differing according to the **grace** that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;” Paul first refers to the grace extended to him (that of being made a minister of the gospel (see Romans 15:5)) he then reminds the brethren of their individual gifts of grace, going on to list no less than 27 attributes (gifts of the Spirit) provided under the auspices of Grace! We are clearly beyond seeing grace as just unmerited pardon of sins.

### What Did Grace Provide Paul?

[Rom.15:15] “Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the **grace** that is given to me of God,” Being called in the extraordinary manner as he was and being put into the ministry, of being Apostle to the Gentiles, is what Paul refers to.

[Gal.2:9] “And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the **grace** that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.”

[1Cor.3:10] “According to the **grace** of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.” Here Paul reaffirms what is alluded to in the above verse. The ability to do what he had been doing is appropriately credited to God’s Grace!

[1Cor.15:10] “But by the **grace** of God I am what I am: and his **grace** which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the **grace** of God which

was with me.” Not only his calling, but Paul credits his labors to the power given him by Grace. It not only made him what he was, but gave him the ability with which to DO it.

[Eph. 3:8] “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this **grace** given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;” Paul recognized his ministry as being a direct manifestation of Grace.

### A Finishing Process:

We are to grow in grace as 2 Peter 3:18 admonishes us to do. Evident in the next few verses, we see Grace as providing an ongoing perfecting process.

[2Pet.3:18] “But grow in **grace**, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.” We can easily explain growth in knowledge, but if grace is merely unmerited pardon of sins, how does one grow in that?

[2Cor. 8:6] “Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same **grace** also.” Grace was known by them to also include its full progression: the finishing of their godly character and faith.

[2Cor. 8:7] “Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this **grace** also.” There was yet another expression of grace besides those five mentioned: their ‘liberality’ in giving money for the needs of others. Paul describes this as being within the realm of grace (graciousness)). (see v. 2)

[2Cor. 8:19] “And not that only, but who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this **grace**, which is administered by us to the glory of the same Lord, and declaration of your ready mind:” That same liberality (financial charity) mentioned above is again referred to as an evident expression of grace on their part.

### Grace Produces Good Works

As we saw in Romans 12 above the many faceted expressions where grace provides us with varying gifts, our service to others is made possible in ways that would not otherwise be.

[2Cor.9:8] *“And God is able to make **all** **grace** abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:”* Imagine that: Grace produces works!

### **We’re to Extend Grace Toward Others!**

[Eph.4:29] *“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister **grace** unto the hearers.”*

[Phlp. 1:7] *“Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my **grace**.”* Support effected their partaking of it!

[Col. 4:6] *“Let your speech be alway with **grace**, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”* Replies should be gracious.

[1Pet.4:10] *“As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold **grace** of God.”* [manifold = multi-faceted, as seen in Romans 12]. In being ‘good stewards’, we are to extend grace toward others, as we have received it of God.

### **Grace’s Essential Qualities: Faith and Love.**

[1Tim.1:14] *“And the **grace** of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.”* His qualities extend into us!

[2Tim.1:9] *“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and **grace**, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,”*

[2Tim.2:1] *“Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the **grace** that is in Christ Jesus.”*

[Heb.4:16] *“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of **grace**, that we may obtain mercy, and find **grace** to help in time of need.”*

With all of these in mind, we need to consider what they really meant when using the term. While Paul strongly affirmed that remission of sins is the initial extension of Grace toward us, it is by no means merely that. The early Church understood that the initial Grace is overlaid with a higher level Grace, that of perfecting our righteousness and extending what we have received toward others.

### **Ultimate Grace: Receiving Spirit Bodies.**

[1Pet.1:10] *“Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the **grace** that should come unto you:”*

[1Pet.1:13] *“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the **grace** that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;”* There is a grace yet to come!

[1Pet.5:10] *“But the God of all **grace**, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.”*

### **An Ultimate Perversion:**

[Jude 1:4] *“For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the **grace** of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”* It was predicted that Grace would become subverted in meaning. Ungodly ‘theologians’ would make grace out to be an excuse to take license with its provision, alleging that we need not obey God’s laws once ‘under grace’. We have had to counter this misconception ever since!

### **SUMMARY: In all of this it should be evident:**

- **Grace is more than just forgiveness of sins’,**
- **It does not support the idea that it nullifies our obligation toward the moral law,**
- **Grace facilitates our perfection in righteousness: humility, faith and love,**
- **Grace is not just an incoming phenomenon,**
- **Grace obligates us to extend graciousness toward others,**
- **Grace legitimizes and facilitates our service toward the family of God,**
- **The ultimate grace will be our flesh to spirit change at Christ’s Return!**

[1Pet.5:10] *“But the God of all **grace**, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, **make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.**”* This is what Grace IS! This is what it does! 