

# The True Grace Of God

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"This is the true grace of God in which you stand"

--1 Peter 5:12

Dwight L. Moody was a well-known evangelist of the Nineteenth Century. The story is told that one day while studying the subject of divine grace, he became so excited that he ran out into the street and stopped the first man he met.

"Have you heard of grace?" Moody asked him.

"Grace who?" the startled man asked."

"The grace of God that brings salvation!" Moody replied.

Yes, the grace of God is so great, so marvelous, that when contemplated and grasped in its depth and fullness, the enlightened soul is moved to the heights of wonder and gratitude. It motivates believers to holiness of life and grips them with a sense of urgency to tell somebody--*everybody*--the good news of God's grace to our fallen race.

Every good that comes from God to mankind is motivated by His love and comes to us in His grace and mercy. Grace is getting what we do *not* deserve; mercy is not getting what we *do* deserve.

Jesus said that our Father in heaven "makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust" (Matthew 5:45).

James echoes this: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

Now, before we attempt to explore the vastness of God's grace, it is essential that we understand what grace is. To do that, we must understand first what grace is *not*.

Grace is not metaphysical. That is, grace is not a mystical, invisible "substance" that God mysteriously infuses into the sacraments or pours into people as light pours through a window pane. Grace is not something we swallow in the Eucharist (communion). It is not a spiritual "injection." This false concept of grace came into the Church and Christian theology through the early influence of the Greek philosophical mind-set.

What, then, *is* grace?

Essentially, grace is *unmerited favor*. It is an attitude of God toward us that is motivated by His love for us and that is expressed in His favorable and undeserved actions toward us.

So then, grace is *an act of the will* --God's will. Grace is sovereign in the sense that God does not owe it to us. Yet, it is not arbitrary. God sovereignly grants it to us according to His wisdom, foreknowledge, and all the qualities of His perfect character. It is unconditional in the sense that God's love in itself is unconditional. At the same time it is conditional in the sense that God grants it only on the conditions of repentance and faith on our part. In reality, it is conditioned on faith alone because true faith includes our turning *to* the object of faith (God in Christ) and thus *away* from sin.

Many years ago I was the guest speaker in a county-wide evangelistic effort in Hebron, Nebraska. One night I explained this very point regarding the true nature of faith and grace in salvation. At the close of the service a lady in her seventies, who attended one of the churches in the community, remained seated. With tears coursing down her cheeks she said, "For the first time in my life, I understand it."

How do we learn about God's "amazing grace"? We go to The Scriptures for the full revealed history of God's grace toward mankind, especially as it is revealed in the gospel.

### Grace In The Old Testament.

We look first at how God showed His grace to people, particularly to Israel, under the Old Covenant.

The word "grace" in the Hebrew language of the Old Testament is "*chen*," pronounced "khane." The word *chen* "denotes the stronger coming to the help of the weaker who stands in need of help by reason of his circumstances or natural weakness. He acts by a voluntary decision, though he is moved by the dependence or the request of the weaker party." (H. H. Esser, The Dictionary Of New Testament Theology, Volume 2, page 116 (published in Grand Rapids, Michigan, by Zondervan Publishing House, 1979).

#### *Noah.*

Genesis 6:8 says, "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord."

#### *Moses.*

Consider this intimate conversation that took place between God and Moses, recorded in Exodus 33:12 - 17 and 34:9.

"Then Moses said to the Lord, 'See, You say to me, "Bring up this people." But You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, "I know you by name, and you have also found grace in My sight." Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people.' And He said, 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.'

Then he said to Him, 'If Your presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here. For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth.' Then the Lord said to Moses, 'I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name.'" (33:12 - 17).

"Then he said, 'If now I have found grace in Your sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray, go among us, even though we are a stiffnecked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your inheritance.'" (34:9).

We notice that Moses did not appeal to God on the basis of his own righteousness or the righteousness of the people. He confessed, "we are a stiffnecked people." His appeal was to God for His presence was on the basis of divine grace alone.

#### *David.*

In 2 Samuel 15:25 we read that king David rested the possibility of his return to Jerusalem and his restoration to the throne on whether or not he found grace before God. It did not rest on anything else, including any merit of his own.

"Then the king said to Zadok, 'Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor [*chen*] in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me back and show me both it and His habitation.'"

Psalm 84:11 records this promise: "For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly."

Proverbs 3:34 assures us that God "gives grace to the humble." This promise is repeated twice in the New testament, in James 4:6 and also in I Peter 5:5.

God declared through the prophet Zechariah, "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn" (Zechariah 12:10). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of grace (Hebrews 10:29).

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1 - 4) was prophesied first by the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28 - 32, quoted by Peter at Pentecost, in Acts 2:16 - 21). It was prophesied also in Proverbs 1:23; also by the prophet Isaiah, in Isaiah 32:15 and Isaiah 44:3; and by the prophet Ezekiel, in Ezekiel 29:39, looking forward to it and speaking of it as an accomplished fact at the time it is fulfilled.

#### Grace In The New Testament.

Under the Old Covenant grace was limited and specific. The full revelation of the depth and breadth of God's grace came with the New Covenant and is embodied in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Greek word for "grace" in the New Testament is *charis*. It is found 155 times--100 times by Paul, including 33 times in salutations. In some places *charis* is translated variously as "favor," "graciousness," and "thanks" (as in "saying grace" at mealtimes). The word is used also to convey the ideas of liberality, benefit, and even joy.

#### The Grace of God was upon Jesus Christ.

Jesus "grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him" (Luke 2:40). He "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (verse 52).

Referring to Jesus, John 1:14 states, "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." Verse 16 goes on to say, "And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace."

"Grace for grace" ("blessing" -- NIV) is grace upon grace, grace one after another, overflowing grace. Verse 17 says, "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." It *all* came through Jesus Christ!

Hebrews 2:9 informs us that Jesus "by the grace of God" tasted death for everyone. All the while that Jesus was here upon earth, He was sustained by the grace of God, even through the agonies of the cross.

### Salvation Is By Grace.

Salvation is by grace alone, and alone in Jesus Christ. It is not by any meritorious works on our part. By our sin we had already forfeited that possibility. Therefore salvation must come exclusively by God's grace. By the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, God provided salvation by grace without violating His justice. Believers are "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:24 - 26).

"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), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:4 - 10).

"That not of yourselves" refers to "saved," not "faith." In this passage the gift of God is salvation, not faith. Salvation is not of ourselves; it is the gift of God received by grace through faith. "Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you" (1 Peter 1:10).

God has "predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise and glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence" (Ephesians 1:5 - 8).

Concerning the new Gentile converts, Peter said to the elders of the church at Jerusalem, "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they" (Acts 15:11). He did not say, "*they* shall be saved in the same manner as we," but "*we* shall be saved in the same manner as they." That deflated any notion of spiritual privilege that might have lingered in the minds of the Jewish believers and put them all on the same "grace level" in Christ.

Paul the apostle was saved only by grace through faith. Before his conversion to Jesus Christ, Paul was "a Hebrew of the Hebrews" (Philippians 3:5). At the same time he was also the "wretched man" of Romans, Chapter 7. Legally blameless, but spiritually bankrupt. So he testified, "by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Paul warned the believers of Galatia, "I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain" (Galatians 2:21).

To the believers at Rome Paul wrote, "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt" (Romans 4:4). "Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace" (verse 16).

### Divine Election Is By Grace.

In his second epistle to Timothy, Paul affirms that God "has saved us and called us with a holy calling, nor according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began" (2 Timothy 1:9).

In Romans 11:5 and 6 we read, ". . . at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace . . ." By "remnant" he is referring to the Hebrew believers in Jesus Christ.

#### The Ground and Conditions of God's grace.

We remember that Ephesians 1:4 - 8 says that God "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence."

God's grace is not random and unconditioned. It is directed purposefully, wisely and prudently.

God's unconditional love for us is the *ground* (basis, foundation) of His grace toward us. God loves the whole world and everyone in it. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Here we see both the *ground* ("God so loved the world that He gave") and the *condition* ("that whoever believes").

God loves everybody; yet, He grants His grace only to those who meet the necessary conditions. Believers stand in grace by faith. The title of this essay is taken from the inspired words of the apostle Peter: "this is the true grace of God in which you stand" (1 Peter 5:12). Earlier Paul wrote, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1, 2).

First, we notice that we enter into God's grace *by faith*. This saving faith is an act of the will that turns fully *to* and fixes exclusively *on* its object--Jesus Christ. In so doing it turns away completely from every alternative, particularly from ourselves and our supposed merits. It is Christ alone, not Christ plus our non-existent "merits." Apart from Christ we stand totally sinful and guilty before the holiness of God, and the guilty have no merits to plead. We have no appeal other than God's unmerited grace in Jesus Christ.

And what a sure ground of appeal this is! It is nothing less than the completed work of God in Jesus Christ on behalf of all who truly repent and believe. It is by grace alone received by faith alone--a faith that turns completely to Jesus Christ and rests fully in Him.

And in this grace we *stand*. We stand completely justified *from* our sins, not *in* our sins. When God's grace lifts us up into a justified *standing*, it does not leave us in the spiritual and moral *state* (condition) where we had fallen. In Jesus Christ we stand free from sin's guilt *and* sin's power. God does not save us by grace and leave us in disgrace.

Also, we must continue to stand in grace. "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" (Romans 6:1, 2).

The inspired author of the Epistle To The Hebrews asked the immature Hebrew believers who were under pressure to return to the now-abolished old covenant, "Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose,

will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?" (Hebrews 10:29).

He follows up later with this strong appeal: "Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord, looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God" (Hebrews 12:14, 15). We are to be diligent, to keep looking steadfastly to Christ, keeping clearly in mind what God's grace in Christ has done for us and accomplished in us. We must not fall short of (fall back or away from) the grace of God.

### The Apostle Paul Preached The Gospel Of The Grace Of God.

Paul was both the personal recipient of grace and apostle of grace. He spoke often of the grace that God had bestowed on him personally. Even though he had lived legally blameless in his observance of the letter of the Law of Moses, he knew that he was the chiefest of sinners so far as the complete record of his life was concerned. He knew the abundance of God's grace and mercy upon him in view of his former pride and persecution of believers. Before his conversion he had "persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it" (Galatians 1:13). Now his love and tender care of the church was at least as great as his former hatred had been. He grieved deeply and was keenly aware that he had no personal merit to plead before God, not even his subsequent labors and sacrifices for the church. Everything he had and had become was only by the sovereign grace of God.

Here is what Paul wrote about the depth and fullness of God's grace toward him and in him.

"...it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles..." (Galatians 1:15, 16),

"...I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power, to me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:7, 8).

Paul and his co-workers were commended to the grace of God for their work by the church at Antioch (Acts 14:26; 15:40).

At Jerusalem, "when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised" (Galatians 2:9).

Paul spoke often of the grace of God given to him.

"We have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name" (Romans 1:5).

"For I say through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you. . ." (Romans 12:3).

"I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God" (Romans 15:15).

"By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

"Therefore they stayed there [at Iconium] a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands" (Acts 14:3).

To the Corinthians Paul wrote, "we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, . . ." (2 Corinthians 1:12).

(Speaking of his ministry), "For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God" (2 Corinthians 4:15).

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel of the grace of God. It is the only true gospel; there is not another. The early churches of Galatia were being influenced to return to the Old Testament order embodied in the practice of ritual circumcision. Paul wrote to them out of a sense of urgency: "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:6 - 8). "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:4). They were alienated, severed from Christ. They had been *in* grace through faith in Christ; otherwise they could not have "fallen *from* [out of] grace." They stepped from grace into their own "righteousness" and fell from liberty back into bondage.

The gospel of the grace of God was Paul's gospel, not that he originated it but because it had been entrusted to him by Jesus Christ Himself. Paul had a stewardship of the gospel of the grace of God, given to him for the Gentiles. He wrote, "I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles--if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, . . ." (Ephesians 3:1, 2).

As Paul was on his way to Jerusalem, he said to the elders of the church at Ephesus that he considered more important than life itself "that I might finish my race with joy, and the ministry that I have received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).

### Prevenient Grace.

Believers in Jesus Christ know that they did not come to Christ on their own initiative. Left to themselves, they would have continued on in their unbelief and self-oriented will and ways. In fact, to arrest their minds and turn their hearts, God had to overcome their indifference, reluctance, and even downright stubbornness. Once they gave up their miserable resistance to God and to their own reason, they wondered why it took them so long to come to their senses and enjoy eternal life in Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit, the word of God, the church--these influences of God that bring a person to Christ are called *prevenient grace*. "Prevenient" means preceding, anticipatory.

God's grace does not give the unregenerated person a free moral agency that he or she does not otherwise possess. The sinner has a well-functioning will already. The problem is that it is voluntarily set in the wrong direction under the persuasive influence of the world, the flesh, and the devil. A will that can choose in only one direction would be no will at all. Such a person would not even be a moral agent and therefore would be incapable of making responsible, moral choices of any kind. Once the will sets itself in a direction, it will make only choices that further that direction until it sets itself in the opposite direction.

The influences of prevenient grace are aimed at drawing the sinner to Christ voluntarily and wholeheartedly. Without those gracious influences the soul cannot come to Christ because its spiritual

and moral direction and momentum are voluntarily enslaved by the powerful combination of the world, the flesh, and the devil. It *cannot* because it *will* not, and as long as it will not.

So then, the believer did *nothing* to save himself or herself. It was all of God. The person responded by the full surrender of the will in faith. In believing on Christ, the heart (soul, will) forsook the rebellion that had shut God out of the soul. In doing this the person did not merit something or in some way help save himself or herself any more than a robber would merit something by deciding to give up robbery. Salvation is a free gift of God's grace received by faith in Jesus Christ, not a reward for repentance. Repentance is mandatory, but not meritorious. God did not owe the new convert anything.

When Apollos went to Ephesus, "he greatly helped those who had believed through grace" (Acts 18:27). Without God's prevenient grace they never would have believed.

God's grace is not irresistible in the sense that it forces people to repent, believe, and obey. Nevertheless, God's grace is fully effective. Fill a room with angry hornets. Though no one is forced to leave the room involuntarily, everyone is very eager to do so immediately. In the words of the old "Hornet" song, God "never compels us to go 'gainst our will, but He makes us right willing to go."

### God's Grace Overcomes Sin.

God's grace does not *overlook* sin; it *overcomes* sin. In Romans 5:15 - 21 Paul describes the contrast between the failure of Adam and the victory of Christ.

"But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. For if by one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

In this passage we notice that: (1) grace is greater than sin; (2) where sin abounded, grace *superabounded*; (3) grace is completely effective against sin.

Even in Paul's day, some had distorted what he wrote concerning grace. Peter reported, "Account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation--as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, since you know these things beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked" (2 Peter 3:15 - 17).

How does a person twist [*streblousin*, torture] Paul's words and the rest of the Scriptures in a way that brings about their own destruction? Jude tells us: they "turn the grace of our God into licentiousness...."

People torture the Scriptures to their own personal destruction when they erroneously make God's grace a license to sin. This includes believing and teaching that grace exempts the sin of believers from the penalty of sin. Only God knows how many people have died in this delusion, and how many even now dream of eternal life while they continue to live in known and deliberate sin.

Paul asks the rhetorical question: "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" Then he answers it with an authoritative and resounding "no!" "Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" (Romans 6:1, 2). Let it not be! Never! A moral impossibility! Out of the question! Kill sin or it will kill you!

Believers died to sin. We have been set free from it. It has no power over us. "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace" (Romans 6:14).

How do we know that we are under grace and not under the Law? Because sin does not have dominion over us ["lord it over us"]. Anyone who is living under the control of sin cannot at the same time be living under grace. That person is deceived if he or she thinks otherwise.

God's grace teaches believers to live in honest integrity before God and produces in us holiness of heart and life. Titus 2:11 states, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age."

God "has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began" (2 Timothy 1:9).

#### God's Grace On The Believers.

On the one hand, God's grace is extended to everyone in many ways. Jesus said that "He [God] makes His sun to shine on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). Also, the offer of salvation and the call to repent, believe and be saved is extended to all. On the other hand, efficient and effective grace is received only by believers.

Acts 4:33 records of the church at Jerusalem, "great grace was upon them all."

Barnabas went north to visit the church at Antioch in Syria. "When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord" (Acts 11:23). Believers are to bond to the Lord and remain true to Him. This is our obligatory response to God's grace.

On their first missionary journey Paul and Barnabas arrived at Antioch in Pisidia. On the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and proclaimed the good news that Jesus Christ is the long awaited Messiah and Savior. "When the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God" (Acts 13:43).

We notice their urgent appeal to the new believers to *continue* in the grace of God. This is very important. It is possible to be in the grace of God fail to continue in His grace.

To the church at Corinth Paul writes, "I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus" (1 Corinthians 1:4). The Corinthian church certainly needed God's

grace. Their problems were in urgent need of correction. Still, God's grace was upon the church as a whole, and it was by God's persistent grace that the problems were eventually overcome and corrected.

In his second epistle to the Thessalonian church Paul tells them what he is praying for them. "Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 1:11, 12).

This prayer begins by asking God to qualify the believers for their calling, and ends by stating that the result will be "according to the grace of God and our Lord Jesus Christ." So then, our hope rests not in our ability to *persevere* but in the sufficiency of God's grace to *preserve*.

#### Common Grace Among Believers.

In Philippians 1:7 Paul said, "you all are partakers with me of grace." Most of God's grace to believers is shared in common by all believers. Everything that God provided for us and brought to us through the life, death, resurrection and glorification of Jesus Christ belongs to all believers and is fully available to all believers. "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). This includes "all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue" (2 Peter 1:3).

God does give enabling grace that is specific to our individual ministries. Romans 12:6 says that we have different gifts "according to the grace that is given us." Also, "to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift." We do not all have the same function in the body of Christ (the church). For that reason God gifts, enables, and anoints each one for different purposes. As we all function together in love and unity, the fullness of Christ is revealed in us, because "as He is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17).

#### Abounding Grace.

"But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more" (Romans 5:20).

Paul prayed that God would remove his "thorn in the flesh." God did not grant Paul's request; instead He said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

There are times in our lives when we need "survival grace." We need enough grace from God to "get us by" the present moment--perhaps a day or even a major crisis. God has provided what we need for those times, and we need to access it by faith. Yet, many believers live only on survival grace. God's grace for each and every believer is far more abundant than that. God has provided grace not just to *survive* but also to *thrive*! He is "the God of all grace" (1 Peter 5:10).

The first part of James 4:6 says that "He gives more grace." But first we must humble ourselves, give up our pride, admit that we cannot do it all on our own, and ask for God's help. James 4:6 continues by quoting Proverbs 3:34, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

We find God's grace in His word. Paul said to the elders of the church at Ephesus, "I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). God works with, by and through His word to build us up in Christ. His word is a treasure of His grace. Live in God's word and it will build you up spiritually and in all of life.

### Share Grace With Others.

This is a true saying: "Grace is a gift God to be shared with one another. We received it freely and without merit; we are to share it freely and without merit." Believers are agents of God's grace to others. Freely we have received; freely give (Matthew 10:8).

The salutation, "grace and peace," is found in the New Testament in some form thirty three times. These are not meaningless words included in the Scriptures as a mere literary formality. They are a sincere invocation, a statement that calls down God's grace and peace upon those who receive it. Because they are inscripturated in God's word for all believers in all generations, they are for us today.

The grace that we receive and share with one another includes many things. In the Amplified Version, 1 Peter 4:10 reads, "As each of you has received a gift (a particular spiritual talent, a gracious divine endowment), employ it for one another as [befits] good trustees of God's many-sided grace--faithful stewards of the extremely diverse [powers and gifts granted to Christians by] unmerited favor."

What the grace of God has done for us, we do the same for others as we have the ability and opportunity. "Of His [Christ's] fullness we have all received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16).

### Grace Operates In Giving.

We are not to keep it all to and for ourselves. God's grace is not static; it is dynamic. It is not a reservoir; it is a flowing river. It is not a storehouse; it is a distribution center. As we give, we receive; and as we receive, we give. "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you" (Luke 6:38). This is God's economy and it is true spiritually, in interpersonal relationships among believers, and also in business. Free enterprise begins with giving. Investments are deferred benefits to oneself, employed first in producing something that will benefit others. Its motive is the opposite of Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*.

God's grace operates in our giving and receiving. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, "We want you to know about the grace that God has given to the Macedonian churches . . . their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity . . . So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. . . See that you also excel in this grace of giving" (from 2 Corinthians 8:1 - 7 NIV). "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, have an abundance for every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8). "[for your generosity], in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you" (verse 14 NIV).

### Grace In All Things.

We all need continual grace to help us control our tongue and guide our speech. We must allow God's grace to guide what we say and how we say it. "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Colossians 4:6). This means the opposite of "a salty tongue." It means that our speech is to be well flavored with the grace of Christ. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29).

So, give grace generously. Let go of hard feelings and grudges. Husbands and wives, give grace to each other. Parents, give grace to your children. Children, give grace to your parents and siblings. Let us discipline our tongue. No "yelling for yelling," but blessing instead (1 Peter 3:9).

"Husbands, dwell with them [your wives] with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Peter 3:7).

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" (Galatians 6:18).

Smile at someone. Give someone a hand on the shoulder or a pat on the back. Lend a helping hand. Give someone an encouraging word. Also, be willing to receive grace from others. Don't refuse their offer of grace.

"Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). Mature in God's grace in your life. Let grace do its perfect work in you in every way and in all dimensions of the character of Jesus Christ that God is forming in your character.

"Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:1).

Finally, keep coming to the source of divine grace. "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

The fullness of God's grace toward believers is yet to be revealed to us in the ages to come. God's grace has provided for believers a glorious future. This is our hope--our sure destiny. God has "given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace" (2 Thessalonians 2:16). This hope--this destiny--awakens in us a holy resolve and energizes us to holy action.

The revelation of God's grace will continue and increase forever. "[God has] raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace toward us in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6, 7).

If the elect ever come to what seems to be the ultimate revelation of the grace of God, God will open new depths and dimensions of the riches of His grace that until that point we never knew existed or thought possible; and we will marvel anew and revel ever more deeply in the unfathomable, ever increasing and never ending fullness of His grace toward us in Christ Jesus--with fullness of joy in His presence and to the praise of the glory of His grace. Amen and amen!