

GOD,  
*Grace*  
AND YOU

STEVE CORDLE

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## Forward, Acknowledgments, and Other Salutations

**T**hank you for taking the time to read *God, Grace and You*. This is a book that I wanted to write, but it never seemed to come together at a time when a publisher was interested, so it kept getting pushed to the back burner. The manuscript sat for a long time, largely finished, or so I thought. Since 21st Century Christian published my previous book, *A Closer Walk With Jesus*, I proposed the idea of a book about grace to them and was pleasantly surprised to have it green-lighted. I thought I had the manuscript mostly written, and while rechecking it to complete the bibliography, I decided the entire manuscript needed a rewrite. Rewriting the whole manuscript, of course, took longer to finish than just redoing the bibliography, but I got it done and here it is.

Grace is an oft-addressed topic in churches around the world, regardless of their fellowship affiliation. The problem is there is a lot of misunderstanding about grace. Some go to the extreme that salvation is all grace and belief, to the exclusion of works of obedience that are a necessary part of living the Christian life even AFTER baptism into Christ. The other extreme is a works-based salvation that looks to meritorious works to earn our way to salvation, in the hopes that when one stands before God in judgment, their good deeds will outweigh the bad, and they will get into heaven. As in most cases, the extremes are wrong, and the truth is somewhere in between.

The most important question I keep in mind while writing a book or article is, *“Who is my intended audience?” Do I want to reach the person in the pew who needs Sunday school material? Do I want to reach the student sitting in class at a university or school of preaching? Or do I want to reach the non-Christian who has questions about God?* In this case, the answer is all the above. I wanted to write something that could challenge the ministry student, but be useful for the morning devotional of a Christian or for the church Bible class. That is not easy, but thanks to the people who read the manuscript and offered suggestions for changes, prayerfully, my objective has been accomplished.

In addition to 21st Century Christian for giving me a chance to share these lessons with the reading public, I also need to make acknowledgement and thanks to the two I consider the official proofreaders, Jeff Whitty and Linda Ryland for making editorial suggestions for the manuscript. Acknowledgement and thanks to the folks at Chick Publications for allowing the use of the illustrations in chapters 3 and 8.

Steve Cordle

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## MISCONCEPTIONS CONCERNING GOD'S GRACE

**H**ave you ever noticed just how common misconceptions and misunderstandings are? We've all had misconceptions about people, places, and events. For instance, I grew up in Alaska, and whenever I traveled to the lower 48, I ran into people holding misconceptions about the 49th state many times. When I said I was from Alaska, many thought of sub-zero temperatures, winds blowing, igloos, and people riding dog sleds everywhere they went. That's a misconception. I once showed a 40-something woman a picture of me and some friends taken outside the church building in Fairbanks, Alaska. She looked at the picture and said, "Oh, I didn't know you had buildings up their like the rest of us." Well, we do, and she showed her misconception about Alaska.

Similarly, I used to have misconceptions about Christians and preachers. I generally pictured Christians as holier than thou and much like the character Aunt Esther on the 1970's sitcom *Sanford and Son*. I also had misconceptions about preachers. For instance, if I imagined a country or rural preacher, I pictured preachers as short, fat old men wearing dumpy-looking suits and chewing tobacco. If I pictured a city preacher, I pictured someone about 6 ft. 2 in, rail thin, and wearing a dark suit and tie, something like men wore in the 60s or early 70s and sporting Buddy Holly-style glasses. I pictured Christians in general as a people much like the Pharisees, people who carried their nose in the air and had a definite

“holier than thou” attitude. To me, a Christian was one who would stone you for even thinking about wearing blue jeans, listening to rock music, attending a school dance, or mowing my lawn on Sunday afternoon. In my mind, Christians always wore suits or dresses and in general were not real people. After I became a Christian, I figured out I had a lot to learn and needed to lose some misconceptions and misunderstandings about Christians and preachers.

There is a similar problem in Christianity regarding people's view of God. Many Christians, even long-time Christians, have a misconception about who God is and what God is about. Some picture God as a cruel judge who is just waiting for an excuse to cast us into hell. They think if we step so much as one inch out of line, we'll burn forever! On the other hand, some picture God as one who will accept anyone and anything, regardless of what the Bible plainly teaches. Some of those insist that God will save everyone. I've heard people living in any kind of sin proclaim that God will accept them in it. Several years ago, I saw a television interview with a former Christian minister and ghostwriter to Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and some other recognizable evangelical names, who is now a homosexual activist. The interview featured a soundbite wherein he claimed that God loves him and accepts him with his homosexuality. In the clip, he was speaking in front of an assembled audience when he made the claim. It is known that during that talk, he proclaimed: *“I am gay. I am proud. And God loves me without reservation.”*<sup>1</sup> I agree that God loves him and even accepts him where he is, however God does not want him or anyone else to remain in a lifestyle that Scripture clearly declares is a sin. Again, misconceptions and misunderstandings abound in all areas of life.

All Christians know that grace has a role in the salvation of man, however, grace is a concept that many do not fully or properly understand. No one will have a correct view of the gospel or of what it means to be saved and reconciled with God until they

understand grace. Where does grace fit into your theology? Do you think of grace coming from a super permissive God who allows and excuses everything we do? Or do you picture a God with no grace, who is all law? Do you think of one who is waiting for any little excuse to cast us into hell? While gathering material for this book, I came across a lesson outline about some of the misconceptions people have about God's grace. The outline came up in a class discussion on Ephesians 2 during my time at The Bear Valley Bible Institute. For this chapter, let's look at those misconceptions and find the middle ground and the truth concerning God and His grace.

There is one fact we must remember: *If it weren't for God's grace, there would be no salvation.* As Andy Stanley said in the introduction to his book *The Grace of God*, "Grace is what I crave when my guilt is exposed."<sup>2</sup> Grace offers what is not deserved,<sup>3</sup> which in our relationship with God is salvation by sending His only Son to die on the cross for us. Misunderstandings concerning the grace of God are not new; they have always been with us and always will be. In fact, it was a misunderstanding of grace that Paul dealt with in Romans 6 where it becomes clear that there were Christians among the Church in Rome who had a misconception concerning grace. They thought that since God gave grace to the sinner, then the more they sinned, the more grace God would give. The more grace God gave, the better God looked to anyone needing forgiveness! As we finish Romans 5 and move into chapter 6, the problem becomes apparent as Orbison and Petrillo point out that "Paul concluded chapter 5 by noting that grace was God's response to increased sin. That might prompt some to live disobediently."<sup>4</sup> To think that grace gives us license to sin is a big misconception! As we move into Romans 6, Paul wants his readers to understand that since Christians are saved by God's grace, that fact should make us want to live sin-free lives. In Romans 6:1-6 Paul says,

*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin (NKJV).*

Some of Paul's hearers and readers had concluded that as long as a Christian had faith it made no difference at all what kind of life he lived, such a position arising from a misunderstanding of justification by faith, which they had understood to be "faith only," just as some still misunderstand it.<sup>5</sup>

### **What About My Good Works?**

One of the major misconceptions about God's grace is that it substitutes for works. The fact is that Good works do play a part in our salvation, but remember, we do not perform good works to make us Christians or to earn a spot in heaven, because no amount of good works will make anybody a Christian. Rather, we do good works because we are Christians. It is the good works we do, for the glory of God, that shows unbelievers that we are, in fact, God's people. The point is that the Bible makes it clear that good works are an important part of Christianity. You cannot be a Christian and neglect them. When a lost sinner obeys the gospel and is added to the New Testament church, there is much to do. For many people, especially in certain denominations, when the subject of Christians and works is discussed the go-to Scripture is Ephesians 2:8-9 for the purpose of "proving" that works are irrelevant to salvation.



Ephesians 2:8-9 states, “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.” Looking at those two verses shows that we indeed are saved by grace, but look at the broader context of the passage which includes verse 10 where Paul wants the Ephesians to know in verses 1-9 that they have been taken out of the pagan paths and put into Christ’s path because of their response to God’s grace.

Christian conduct is always important. In the early days, righteous conduct distinguished Christianity from much of the pagan religions of the first century. Today, our conduct is just as important so that we’ll show Christianity superior to other ways of life. The point the New Testament makes is that *good works* are the goal of our salvation, not the condition of our salvation. God’s power, through Christ, expresses itself by transforming the lives of Christians, which then communicates God’s purpose for mankind to those outside of Christ. Later, Paul would tell Titus that:

*...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 the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works (Titus 2:11-14).*

When Paul wrote to Titus, the apostle told the young evangelist that the works of God are good because they conform us to the likeness of God, which, in turn, makes us good to man. In New Testament passages such as Ephesians 2 and Titus 2, the mention of God’s grace would no doubt bring encouragement to those struggling with the difficult things the apostle just told them. Knowing that our sins are forgiven and that Christ graciously accepts us

even though we don't deserve it should help us make significant progress in our Christian growth. The grace of God not only makes possible our salvation, but that same grace makes all of our Christian growth possible. God offers salvation through Christ to everyone, without discrimination, which is what the word *all* in Titus 2:11 means. In that context, "all" refers to the universal offer of salvation. Since all people have free will, the reader of Titus should not take Paul's statement as implying that everyone will be saved.<sup>6</sup>

Another confirmation of works playing a role in salvation is in James 2:14-26 where the apostle tells us that faith is proven by our works. Notice verse 16, where James warns us to not simply tell a person needing help to go their way and to fend for themselves. If someone needs help and you are not able to help meet the need, you can help find someone who can meet the need. The point here is that empty words and phrases will do nothing to alleviate the problems and suffering of ourselves or others. This was called "mouth mercy" to tell someone to "go, be warmed and be filled." Saying to someone in need "good luck to you," while giving them nothing to help them out of their problem will just profit them as much as your professed faith, without those works which are the genuine fruits of true faith, will profit you in the day when God comes to sit in judgment upon your soul (from Adam Clarke's Commentary).<sup>7</sup>

Beginning in James 2:18-20 the apostle tackles potential objections to what he has said when he wants us to realize that faith alone cannot be seen. The existence of faith is seen only by our works, thus James wants the scoffer to show his faith if he thinks he can, apart from works. For the Christian, works can be seen and offered in support of the claim to faith. Think about the air we breathe. Like our faith, the air we breathe cannot be seen, but we know it is there by the works it accomplishes, namely we are alive.

## **Grace Is Not A Substitute For Justice**

Many people think because God is gracious, He will not dispense justice toward sin; however, the Bible makes it clear that God will at some point dispense justice for sin. Bear in mind, it's *justice* as defined by God, not men. John 5:28-29 records Jesus as saying there will be a time when all who are in the graves will hear the voice of God and come forward to the judgment. We see that both the good and the bad will simultaneously be called forward to the judgment. In John 5:28-29 Jesus also states the purpose of the resurrection: to reward those who have done good and punish those who have done evil. The same passage also teaches that what we do in this life will have an effect on where we spend eternity, as well as refuting the notion that there will be separate resurrections for the righteous and the unrighteous. There is a phrase that says "*where you go in the hereafter, depends on what you go after here.*" And although a cliché, it teaches a truth that is applicable here. If you have lived a righteous life, you will reap that as a reward, or else you will suffer the consequences for it.

When speaking to Christians in 2 Corinthians 5:9-10, Paul states that we will one day appear before the judgment seat of Christ. The apostle told the brethren: "Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." We all cherish secret thoughts and cover up acts of which we are ashamed, but when it comes to the judgment, we will all have our acts laid open before God.

Peter also addressed the issue of judgment in 1 Peter 1:17 where he states that God judges the works of all, and He does it without any partiality. Peter's statement shows the righteousness of God, which is a quality demanded by His character. Note the three things in this passage that Peter wants his readers to under-

stand. First, God is our judge and because He is the supreme judge, there is no appealing His judgment. Second, the judgment will be according to “every man’s work,” and those who have done good works will receive an appropriate reward. Third, God’s judgment will be without respect to our personage, that is the judgment will be conducted with complete impartiality. God does not judge based on outward characteristics such as wealth and race, but with reference to work. A similar point is made in the Old Testament in 1 Samuel 16:7 where we are told, “The LORD does not see as a man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” God knows that outward appearances can be deceiving. When looking at a house, you don’t just look at the front on the outside. You go inside and look at the interior and look at the back side of the building. The outside can be immaculate, but if the inside has peeling paint, broken doors, or broken floor joists, you might think twice before buying the house.

God is the same way. God looks at our inside, whereas people look at only the outside. If they don’t like that, that’s as far as they usually go. People don’t usually look to see what the inside contains. God’s grace looks beyond the outward appearance, to what the inside is. The judgment and justice of God are fair, but grace will not negate them or substitute for them.

### **Grace Is Not A Substitute For Law**

Many people ask how grace and the law work together. *Do they work together?* Many insist that because we have God’s grace, there is no longer any law under which we are to live. That is a great problem in the religious world today and in the church. In Galatians 6:1-2, Paul encourages us to help one another with burdens and problems we may have.

*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself*

*lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

Notice the reason for this admonition is that by bearing one another's burdens, we fulfill the law of Christ. Observe also that Paul says we have law. When we see a brother overtaken in sin who is weak or struggling to rise above sin, we should render assistance, with sympathy for the problem. To fulfill the law of Christ is to love your neighbor as yourself. We must help the neighbor as we would ourselves. Jesus came to bear our burdens and sins, thus we must help others. What is this law of Christ of which the apostle speaks? The law of Christ is that we love one another. There is no way to get around this law. God requires us to fulfill this law. This is the distinguishing law of Christ. We love one another as well as others outside the faith. The law of Christ does not allow us to taunt one who is down or rejoice when one falls. A Christian must not be sent on down the road and left on his own by brethren. The law of Christ is what we are now under as Christians. Because of that, we are free from the law of sin and death that dominated us prior to our conversion to Christ. Now we come to the final misconception about God's grace and that is...

### **Everyone Will Receive Grace**

One of the biggest misconceptions about God's grace is that everyone will receive it. There are two basic ideas that can contribute to the idea that everyone will receive God's grace in the end. First, there is the Calvinist doctrine of irresistible grace, which states that no one whom God has selected to receive grace can resist it. They have no choice in the matter, but to accept what God has ordained them to be, namely saved. Dr. John R. Rice pointed out that although grace is offered to sinners, none is compelled to take it (an interesting position for someone whose denomination descends from Calvinism).<sup>8</sup> Second, there is the *Universalist* idea

that God will somehow save everybody, and nobody will be eternally lost or perish. There are problems with both of these ideas:

1. The Calvinist position leaves no room for personal choice or free will in the matter. Free will is something God has given us all and will not override it
2. The Universalist concept also ignores personal choice, plus it disregards the need for God to punish sin, since it teaches that God will save everyone, no matter how faithful or unfaithful to God they live their lives. <sup>9</sup>

Paul told the Ephesian Christians (Ephesians 2:1-2) that grace is given to those who have turned to the Lord, while making it clear to the Ephesians that God's grace will be given to people who do not live according to two things. First, grace is given to those who do not live according *the course of this world*. Simply put, Christians should not be conformed to ideas and lifestyles that are opposed to Christ. The people addressed in Ephesians followed such a course in their pre-conversion lives as did modern Christians prior to converting to Christ. Second, grace is extended to those who do not live or walk according to the prince of the power of the air, meaning they formally yielded to the powers of Satan. Even today, we, like the first-century Christians, will still wrestle with spiritual powers trying to lead us from Christ. <sup>10</sup>

The Apostle John told his readers that "if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Notice the conjunction *if*. This is setting a condition whereby we must continually walk in the light for the blood of Christ to cleanse us. God's grace is a free gift given to all who accept it on God's terms, which leads to man's three-pronged response to God is:

1. Accept salvation as God's gift.
2. Accept it through faith.
3. Become God's workmanship for good works. <sup>11</sup>

Grace and how it is dispensed are not some afterthought. God always intended for us to live this way and for man to accept His gift on His terms. You cannot make it to heaven by your own good works or by just coming to church. A person seeking to become a Christian must do so on God's terms, not one's own. God's grace does not mean that He will save everyone who neglects to make proper preparations. If you are not prepared, you will not be saved.

### **Discussion Questions**

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1. What misconceptions do people have about Christians?
2. Why are misconceptions dangerous?
3. If it wasn't for God's grace, there would be no salvation. Why is that true?
4. In Romans 5 and 6, what was the problem with the Roman Christians' belief about God's grace?
5. Why is God's grace not a substitute for works?
6. Regarding good works, what point does the New Testament make?
7. Why is Christian conduct so important?
8. What is man's three-pronged response to God's grace?
9. What does James 2:14-26 teach salvation by works?
10. Why is grace not a substitute for justice?
11. Since we have grace, do we still have law?
12. Why will there be some who do not receive God's grace?

### **Endnotes**

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