

God's Grace ~ Part 1

"Perhaps there is no word in the Bible more precious than Grace."

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Introduction to Series

We are starting a new series with this post on the topic of God's grace. The grace of God is one of the most important subjects in all of Scripture. At the same time it is probably one of the least understood. What is God's grace? How do we appropriate God's grace? How do we deal with perfectionism? Is grace really amazing? Is grace sufficient to meet all my needs? Does grace really mean that we are forgiven? We'll look at each of these questions and more in the weeks to come.

By definition, all Believers believe in God's grace. Many of us frequently quote Sha'ul's well-known words in Ephesians 2:8-9 (HCSB): **"For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift - not from works, so that no one can boast."** John Newton's beloved hymn *"Amazing Grace"* is said to be the all-time favorite hymn in the United States.

The Bible teaches we are not only saved by grace, but we also live by grace every day of our lives. However, most of us tend to base our personal relationship with God on our performance instead of on His grace. In this sense, we live by works rather than by grace. We are saved by grace, but we are living by the "sweat" of our own performance. We give lip service to what Sha'ul said, **"But by God's grace I am what I am...."** (1 Corinthians 15:10); but our unspoken motto is, "God helps those who help themselves." (You do know that statement or even concept is not in the Bible, correct?)

The realization that our daily relationship with God is based on the infinite merit of Yeshua instead of on our own performance is a very freeing and joyous experience. That is what this series is all about.

What Is God's Grace

I'm sure many of you have heard the acronyms: **"God's Riches At Christ's Expense"** or **"Gift's Received At Christ's Expense."** While both of these are true, neither really adequately describes the full scope of what "God's grace" means from a biblical viewpoint. **Grace** is God's free and unmerited favor shown to guilty sinners who deserve only judgment. It is God holding out His hand of fellowship to people who are in rebellion against Him.

Grace stands in direct opposition to any supposed worthiness or performance on our part. In other words: Grace and works are mutually exclusive. Sha'ul said, **"For if God's choice were based on what people do, then his grace would not be real grace."** (Romans 11:6 TEV) Our relationship with God is based on either works *or* grace. There is never a 'works + grace' relationship with Him.

Furthermore, grace is similar to our sanctification as it is progressive. Sha'ul said, **"He who began a good work in you [by His grace] will [also by His grace] carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus"** (Philippians 1:6 NIV). John Newton captured this idea of the continuing work

of grace in our lives when he wrote in the hymn "Amazing Grace," "Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home."

Grace in the Tanakh: Grace in Hebrew is חֵן, (*hen*)¹. The first occurrence of this word is in Genesis: **"But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord."** (Genesis 6:8 NKJV) Interestingly, most English versions of this Hebrew word translate it as "favor" or whatever is "pleasant and agreeable." Queen Esther found "favor," which is *hen* in Hebrew, in the eyes of Xerxes the Persian King (Esther 7:3). Esther's appeal to the King to recognize her and not to destroy her people was Israel's salvation because she found "favor," *hen*, in the King's eyes. Yet we know that God orchestrated the entire situation because He is the one and only dispenser of His *hen*. It was God's grace that allows us to celebrate Purim every year.

Grace in the Brit Hadashah: The ultimate vision of God's grace was not revealed until the writers of the Brit Hadashah caught God's vision in the light of Yeshua HaMashiach. The Greek word for grace used in the Brit Hadashah is χάρις (*charis*)². Like *hen*, *charis* is frequently translated as "favor."

According to the "Practical Word Studies in the New Testament," *charis* means "grace, kindness, mercy, goodwill; the underserved favor and blessings of God. It means the favor and blessings of God; the undeserved and unmerited favor and blessings of God; the depth and richness of the heart and mind of God; the kindness and love that dwells within the very nature of God."

Grace means the favor of God showered upon mankind who didn't deserve His favor. No other word so expresses the depth and richness of the heart and mind of God. This is the distinctive difference between God's grace and man's grace. Whereas we sometimes do favors for our friends and thereby can be said to be gracious, God has done a thing unheard of among humans: He has given His very own Son to die for His enemies (see Romans 5:8-10).

According to the Holman Bible Dictionary, we owe our distinctly Messianic understanding of God's grace to Rabbi Sha'ul. The Pauline epistles employ the word *charis* and its related forms twice as frequently as the rest of the Brit Hadashah writings combined. It was precisely his experience of God's grace that led to his profound sense of thanksgiving.

Sha'ul's sense of God's grace owed much to his experience of being turned from the persecutor of the Kehilah to Yeshua's missionary to the goyim (gentiles) (see 1 Corinthians 15:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:12-14). So convinced was he that this was all God's doing and not of his own merit that he could describe his apostolic calling as coming even before his birth (Galatians 1:15). He was an apostle solely because of God's grace (Romans 1:5), and his entire ministry and teaching were due to that divine grace (see Romans 12:3; 15:15; 1 Corinthians 3:10; 2 Corinthians 1:12; Galatians 2:9; Ephesians 3:2, 7, 8).

Sha'ul had such a profound sense of human sin to believe that a person could never earn God's acceptance (Romans 3:23). As a P'rushim (Pharisee), he had sought to do that by fulfilling the divine law. Now he had come to see that it was not a matter of earning God's acceptance but rather of coming to accept God's acceptance of him through Yeshua. So, he came to see a sharp antithesis between law and grace. Law is the way of self-help, of earning one's own salvation. Grace is God's

¹ Vine's expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words.

² Ibid.

way of salvation, totally unearned (see Romans 3:24; 4:4; 11:6; Ephesians 2:8). Grace is appropriated by faith in what God has done in Messiah (Romans 4:16). God's grace comes to sinners, not to those who merit God's acceptance (Romans 5:20-21). It is through Yeshua's atoning work on the execution stake that God's grace comes to us, setting us free from the bondage of sin (Romans 3:24-31). Yeshua breaks the reign of sin and brings life and acceptance with God through divine grace (Romans 5:15, 17). God's grace is so bound up with Yeshua that Sha'ul could speak of the "grace of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah" (2 Corinthians 8:9; 2 Timothy 2:1). It was in the beloved Son that God's grace came supremely to mankind (1 Corinthians 1:4; Ephesians 1:6-7). For Sha'ul, grace is practically synonymous with the Besorah. Grace brings salvation (Ephesians 2:5, 8). Grace brings eternal life (Romans 5:21; Titus 3:7). To share in the Besorah is to be a partaker of grace (Philippians 1:7; Colossians 1:6).

In my next post, we will continue to explore this topic of "What Is God's Grace."

Your challenge until then is to look at each of the Scripture references that I have given you in this post.