

Changed Lives



We have already discussed the major elements which help us facilitate change in our personal lives in order to conform to scripture. These are 1) recognition, 2) repentance and 3) forgiveness. In the following pages of this lesson we will discuss God's grace: how to activate it and utilize it. And we will add another element to the list of facilitators - responsibility.

Grace is God's ability added to our lives. Where we are unable, God IS able. He partners with us and shares His ability with us, adding it to our own. This idea of partnering with God is indicated in His desire for sons and daughter, rather than servants or slaves.

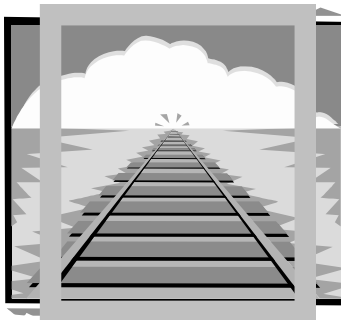
In the past century, grace has been misunderstood and misused. In recent decades the term "unmerited favor" has been used to define grace. From that definition of unmerited favor, the definition of grace has slipped to undeserved love. Both undeserved love and unmerited favor are true concerning God's love and favor toward us. However, with twenty-first century usage of the word favor and our culture's reinterpretation of love, these are not accurate definitions of grace.

Grace is God's favor and it is indeed unmerited or earned. But it is not favor in our current usage of the word as fondness or even love as an emotional attachment. It is favor in the 14th or 15th century usage of the word. In the era of royalty and chivalry, to act with someone's favor, particularly the king's favor, meant that a person was acting of behalf of the one bestowing the favor. Knights competed wearing their lady's "favors" as a sign that they were competing for them, with their blessing, encouragement and wearing their name into battle.

By that definition, we wear God’s name and carry His blessing and encouragement into the battle of life; having not earned that right, but carrying it anyway. This is a picture of our grace as scripture presents it. Grace is more than a fondness, or God’s love for us which has replaced His law and His righteous judgment. Rather, what the law itself could not do (bring us into right standing with God) because it was weak in our flesh, God sent His son and condemned sin in the flesh, His own flesh. Now we, being partakers of Christ in both His death and resurrection, by faith, we have assistance, encouragement, blessing, and ability because Christ is in us and the Spirit of God is alongside us filling us with this grace.

Activating God’s Grace

If we were to visualize God’s grace as a set of train tracks which lead us into the Kingdom and to the sonship of God’s desire, we would see that there are two parallel rails. These rails represent *repentance* and *forgiveness*. The acknowledgment of our need keeps us on the track. Repentance toward God activates His grace toward us; forgiveness toward others activates God’s grace in our relationships. This track leads to a deeper relationship with God. This is the path to sonship.



Responsibility is the next element we need to add in order to insure continued movement forward. Remember that to respond actually means to return to the promise.¹ Combine this *response* to the *ability* added to us by God and we have movement toward the goal - the prize of our high calling, the nature and character of Christ. To be transformed and conformed to His image is sonship.

We are given grace. It is a gift. And it is by and through grace that the changes and movement it made. But we are responsible to use the grace that we are given.² To respond to the promise of God requires both faith in God’s promises and the belief that God’s Word is sufficient for the need. It is not enough to believe God’s Word is inspired and true. We must also trust and believe that it is sufficient and capable. God’s Word is alive and powerful.³ The Church today has little problem believing that the Bible is the inspired word of God. Our problem is trusting that it is capable to deal with every human problem or condition. When wielded by the Spirit, scripture is fully sufficient to answer every human need.

1. Respond: see definition on page 10
 2. Hebrews 12:15
 3. Hebrews 4:12

Binding the Strongman

“How can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.”
 Matthew 12:29

Jesus talked about binding the strong man in response to the accusation that He cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub. He was speaking of spoiling the demon realm, the demonic and among God’s people. “strong man” and the demonic; in fact, the demons and Samaria, not the man by casting out a demon.



power that had rooted itself in Jesus was stating that the possessor of Israel were the real rulers of Judea Romans.

In Matthew 12:22 (healed the man) by binding the strong man (casting out the demon). Similarly, today if we wish to heal the epidemic of moral decay in the United States and particularly the Church, we too must bind the strong man. In this case the strong man is not simply a demon, it is divorce.

Jesus healed a blind and dumb Jesus plundered the house

Further the scripture says, *“If My people, who are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and I will heal their land.”* 2 Chronicles 7:14

It is understood that we have many ills in our society: drugs, school violence, teen pregnancy, and abortion to name but a few. But these as well as many others can trace their explosion to the breakdown of the family and divorce. In order to bring a deeper level of healing for our society and nation, that strong man of divorce must be bound before many of these others ills can be healed.

As we begin to address the heart issues that cause divorce, we also release grace into our lives and families. Divorce begins with the withdrawal of affection and then our commitment. The same type of heart issues that lead to the breakup of marriages also lead to church separations, job instabilities and other relational failures where commitments are necessary. Recognition of those issues which bring about relational failures, followed by repentance, forgiveness and responsibility will inject grace into our every day lives. This grace, in turn, brings salvation and deliverance out of the religious and into the practical. Salvation become more than “going to heaven someday”. It becomes a way of life, which in turn becomes visible in the family, on the job and in the market place.

Actualizing Grace

Through a committed relationship with Jesus, you can:

1. Understand the things of God.
(*John 14:26, 16:13-15; I Corinthians 2:9-13*)
2. Become a new person with the capability for living in a totally new manner.
(*Romans 6:4-22; II Corinthians 5:17; Philippians 4:13*)
3. Be empowered to change, to mature into Christlikeness, and to have an increasingly intimate knowledge of God Himself.
(*John 17:3; Romans 8:2, 28-29; II Corinthians 5:17; Philippians 1:6, 4:13; Colossians 1:9-11; I Thessalonians 2:13; II Peter 1:3-4*)

Ideologies and therapies focus on self. God's plan establishes your true position in Christ, giving you grace and provision to be:

1. Forgiven of all your sins (*Colossians 2:13-14*) and become a new creation (*II Corinthians 5:17*) by partaking in God's divine nature (*II Peter 1:4*).
2. A child and heir of God and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ (*Romans 8:14-17*).
3. A citizen of heaven (*Philippians 3:20*), blessed with every spiritual blessing (*Ephesians 1:3*) and fully complete in Christ Jesus (*Colossians 2:9-10*).
4. Strong in the Lord (*Ephesians 6:10-17*) as a functioning and maturing member of the body of Christ (*Ephesians 4:11-16*).
5. More than a conqueror through the Lord Jesus Christ (*Romans 8:37; I John 4:40*) since you have been released from sin's slavery (*Romans 6:5-7*) and have been delivered out of the domain (authority) of darkness and into the kingdom of Christ (*Colossians 1:13*).
6. An ambassador of Christ (*II Corinthians 5:20*), a member of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a citizen of a holy nation, a possession of God (*I Peter 2:9*) and a holy temple of the living God (*II Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21*).
7. Transformed by the renewing of your mind (*Romans 12:2*), taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (*II Corinthians 10:5*).
8. Full of His peace (*John 16:33*) and joy (*John 15:11, 17:13*).
9. Changed by the Word of God (*I Thessalonians 2:13; II Timothy 3:16-17*).
10. Led by the Spirit of God (*Romans 8:14*) to understand the things of God (*I Corinthians 2:9-13*).
11. Able to accomplish (or endure) anything in God's will for you through Christ Jesus (*Philippians 4:13*), knowing that God is in total control of your life (*Romans 8:28-29; I Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 1:6*).
12. Empowered to practice biblical love, thus proving yourself to be a disciple of Christ (*John 13:35*).



SUMMARY

A committed relationship with Jesus is more than a one-time salvation experience. It is on-going, life-yielding, character-changing process which will result in sonship with God and partnership with Christ as a joint heir of creation. God's grace is a free gift which I must choose to put to work on my behalf.

AFFIRMATION

I choose to respond to God's grace for my life. I choose to respond in faith toward God and His promises. I will activate the grace God has given me and align my life and marriage to scripture. I believe that God's love has provided His best for me, so I will allow His word to conform me to the image and nature of Christ. My marriage will reflect my faith in 1) God, 2) the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus and 3) the ability of God's Word to change, mold and provide for me.