

A Biblical Introduction to Grace

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1) Introduction:

This study will endeavor to show by the Word of God what grace is. Grace is a word that gets tossed about in religious circles, but so few grasp its true meaning. To the body of Christ, understanding grace is absolutely critical if we are to cooperate with God in being the church He has called us to be. Grace is so universal in God's kingdom that a proper understanding of it will free us to serve God acceptably in all areas of our lives. Jesus Christ said that if we CONTINUE in His Word, then we are His disciples indeed and we shall know the TRUTH and the TRUTH shall make us free (John 8:31-32).

It will be necessary to define grace before we look at all the areas it touches. So, just what is grace?

a) Grace defined

Grace (noun) - A divine influence on the heart, with an outward manifestation in our lives.

In other words, God is attempting to influence mankind to do His works in the earth. God, in love, is putting things on our heart to do. We, in love, must respond to that influence and choose to obey everything the Lord places on our hearts. When we obey, God's grace is effective and accomplishes what God pleases. If we disobey God's commandments, God's grace is resisted and blocked in our lives. As both God and mankind have a part in grace, it is a relationship and a cooperation between God and man. We get the privilege of co-laboring with God.

b) When does grace start in our lives?

For the rest of the study, it will be helpful to remember that grace is God's influence which mankind obeys. God is certainly at work in the earth, attempting to influence all people everywhere to come to Jesus Christ and receive salvation. As Jesus Christ defined eternal life as knowing the Father and Christ (John 17:3), salvation is a relationship between mankind and God. For a relationship to happen, there must be two willing parties. God is definitely willing to have a relationship with all people. The question is always, are WE willing?

Hebrews 13:9

Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace...

Ephesians 1:7

In whom (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace;

Ephesians 2:8

For by grace are you saved through faith...

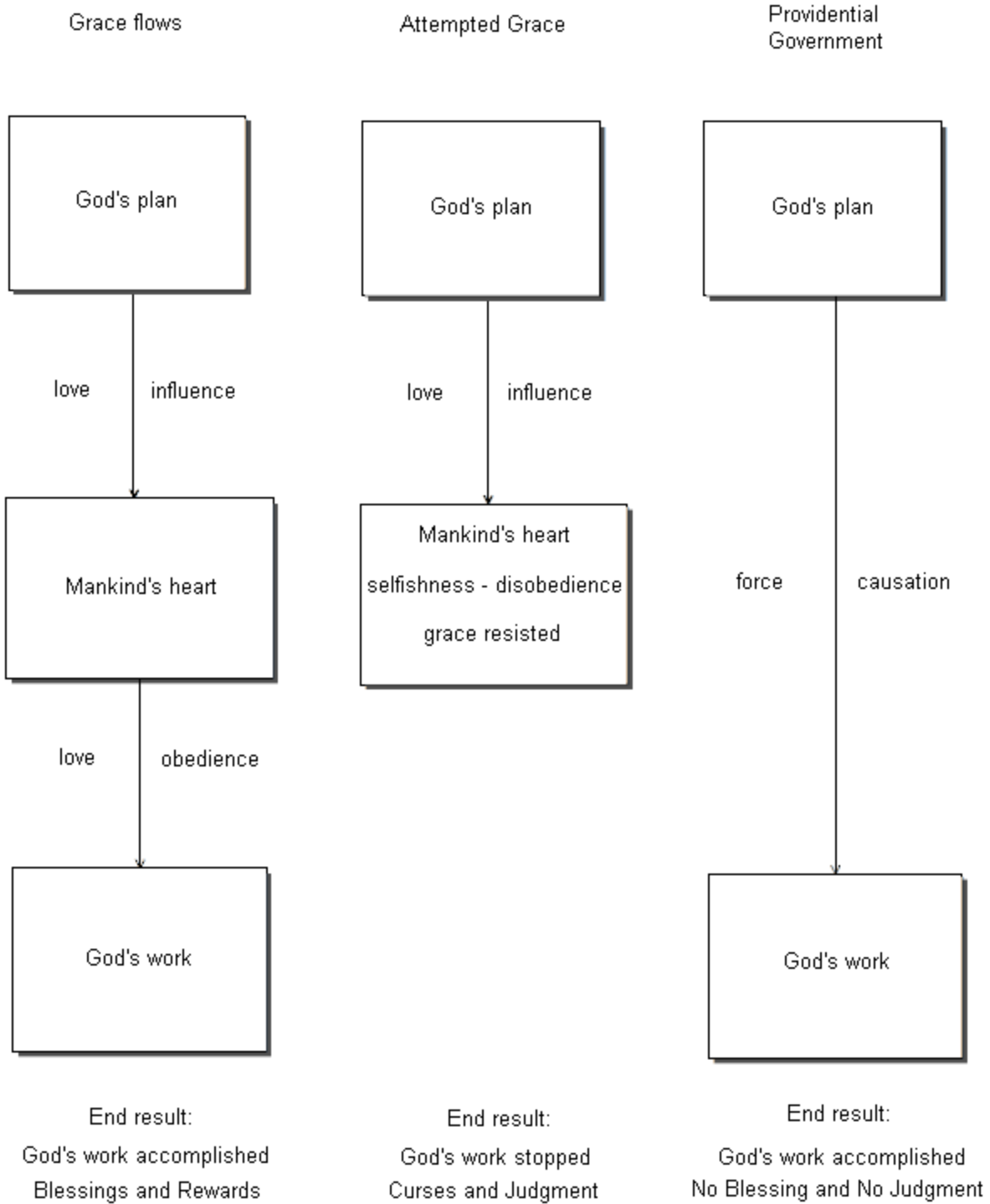
The Father is attempting to draw all people in the earth to His Son, Jesus Christ. He is attempting to influence them to repent and turn to their Saviour, Jesus. It would be grace if they would obey the influence, but yet most people are resisting God's will. Why doesn't God just force everyone to be saved, if He loves everyone so much? Why is grace an influence instead of a causation?

God's kingdom works by love. God is after a people that will worship Him in Spirit and Truth willingly. God wants a willing relationship. A man doesn't force a woman to marry him, if he loves her. The body of Christ is engaged to be married to Jesus Christ. God wants a willing bride. God's kingdom is made up of people who choose to lay down their lives for God and others. If God were to force anyone to be saved, it would not change the person at all. There would be no change of heart or character. God wants love and God wants relationship. Both of these things are contrary to causation or force.

Therefore, God's grace will always be an influence, which must be responded to in love. God has His part. We have our part. It's not until we obey God's influence to be saved that we partake of God's grace. When we put faith in Jesus Christ (our part), God washes us from sin and saves us (God's part). Jesus Christ has defined love as obedience to His commandments (John 14:15). When we obey God's commandments/influences, we are walking in grace. If we disobey God (sin), that stops His grace in our lives and breaks our relationship with Him. It then takes our repentance of that sin, to restore both our relationship with God and God's grace in our lives. There is no relationship without grace. There is no grace without relationship. Both require our obedience.

As grace starts when we are saved, it can properly be said that grace is ONLY for those who are currently in the body of Christ. The Bible makes no reference to unbelievers/sinners partaking of God's grace UNTIL they become believers/saints through Jesus Christ. Also, it should be noted that God's grace is for human beings. Only humans are made in God's image and only humans have a heart that can obey God in love. God created the world and all the plants and animals in it that He might have a relationship with mankind. As the Bible was written to mankind, it should be self-evident that the rest of God's creation is exempt from obeying it, as they can't read or understand it.

Grace is how God would prefer to work through all people, everywhere. His wish is that all people would respond to His influences in love. However, God does have a way of operating through mankind, even when they stubbornly refuse to obey Him. In Moral Government terms, this is known as "Providential Government". It is when God bypasses the freewill of someone, for the sake of accomplishing His purposes in the earth. God suspends an individual's freewill for a period of time. During this time, that person is "off the hook" for what God does through them. We can only be held morally accountable for the things we choose to do. The person will not receive blessings or curses for the actions God forces them to do. Again, this is not God's normal mode of operating with mankind and should be considered an exception to the rule of love and grace.



c) Old Testament "Grace" vs. New Testament Grace

If grace begins when we are born again, how did God operate with mankind before Jesus Christ died for our sins?

The Old Testament saints had a lot working against them. Yes, they had the promise of the Messiah, but what could they do until He came? They could not have their conscience washed from sin. All God could do is give them natural types or examples of Jesus Christ. That is the meaning behind the Passover lamb of Exodus 12 or the animal sacrifices that the people had to continually offer for their sins.

Hebrews 10:1-4

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

The animal sacrifices were never God's ultimate will for mankind. They were a bandage on the problem of sin, not a solution. They were a means for mankind to have some kind of relationship with God by obeying His commandments. The Bible says that the animal sacrifices could only cover the sin, never remove it. Even the best of the OT saints could not be washed from the sin in their conscience. This explains the existence of Abraham's bosom in Luke chapter 16. The righteous OT saints did not go to heaven when they died, because their sin had not been taken care of yet. They weren't spiritually perfect or holy and therefore could not go to be with the holy God. It was not until Christ died that those OT saints were washed and made spiritually perfect, qualified to ascend to heaven with Christ.

Hebrews 2:14-15

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He (Christ) also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

The OT saints were afraid of death and in bondage to sin. They hadn't been cleansed from sin and therefore could not obey God out of a clean heart. God was not able to speak to each person's heart individually by His Holy Spirit, as He can now do to the body of Christ. God audibly spoke to the entire nation of Israel at Mount Sinai, but their reaction was, "Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die." (Exodus 20:19). Therefore, God sent them prophets that would speak the Word of God to them, such as Moses.

God's Word does not use the word grace in the OT the same way it does in the NT. The sin problem hindered what God wanted to do in His people; grace is no exception. Grace does appear in 37 verses in the OT, compared with 122 verses in the NT. This means that the word grace appears about 30% as often in the OT as in the NT, despite the fact that the OT is more than 3 times the size of the NT.

Besides the lesser frequency of the word 'grace', we also see a dramatic difference in how the word is used in the OT:

Genesis 6:8

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

Ruth 2:10

Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?

This is the primary usage in the OT. It is said often that someone found grace in someone else's sight. This usage of grace is synonymous with 'favor'. When someone said they found grace in the Lord's eyes, it meant they had God's favor. The word grace is also used in respect to human to human relationships and finding grace or favor in a fellow human being's sight. Grace is never used this way in the NT.

Old Testament - Outward examples of what could not yet be inwardly done.

New Testament - The fulfillment of the outward examples, inwardly.

So, we see that grace is a matter of the heart. God can't influence a dirty, sinful heart the way He can a heart that is washed free from sin and made alive in Christ. While someone is in sin, all God can influence them to do is repent and be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. That's the starting point of our walk with God. However, AFTER that, God can then begin to lead us in all things that pertain to righteousness and godliness.

John 13:34

A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

It's very interesting that Jesus said that this was a NEW commandment, to love as He loves. The OT saints couldn't do it. They could treat each other well, but they couldn't be motivated by a cleansed, free, innocent heart. They could will to obey God, but their motivation was always clouded by a fear of judgment and death.

1 John 4:18

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

There is no fear in God's perfect love. God's grace works by our love towards Him. That's why there is such a disparity in 'grace' between the Old and New Testaments. They had fear of death in the OT which has been removed in the NT. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says that in Christ ALL things become new. For the remainder of this study, we'll look at just how new things are in Jesus Christ, as it pertains to grace.

2) The God of ALL grace (Father, Son and Holy Spirit):

1 Peter 5:10

But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus...

All grace is from God because grace is divine influence. There is only one true God and one Saviour, Jesus Christ. God's grace is dependent on us being made free from sin and then continuing to live that way through our obedience. Only God can free us from sin. Only then are we made free to walk in HIS works. Satan and the world are trying to influence us to sin, but only God is influencing us to live a righteous life through His Son!

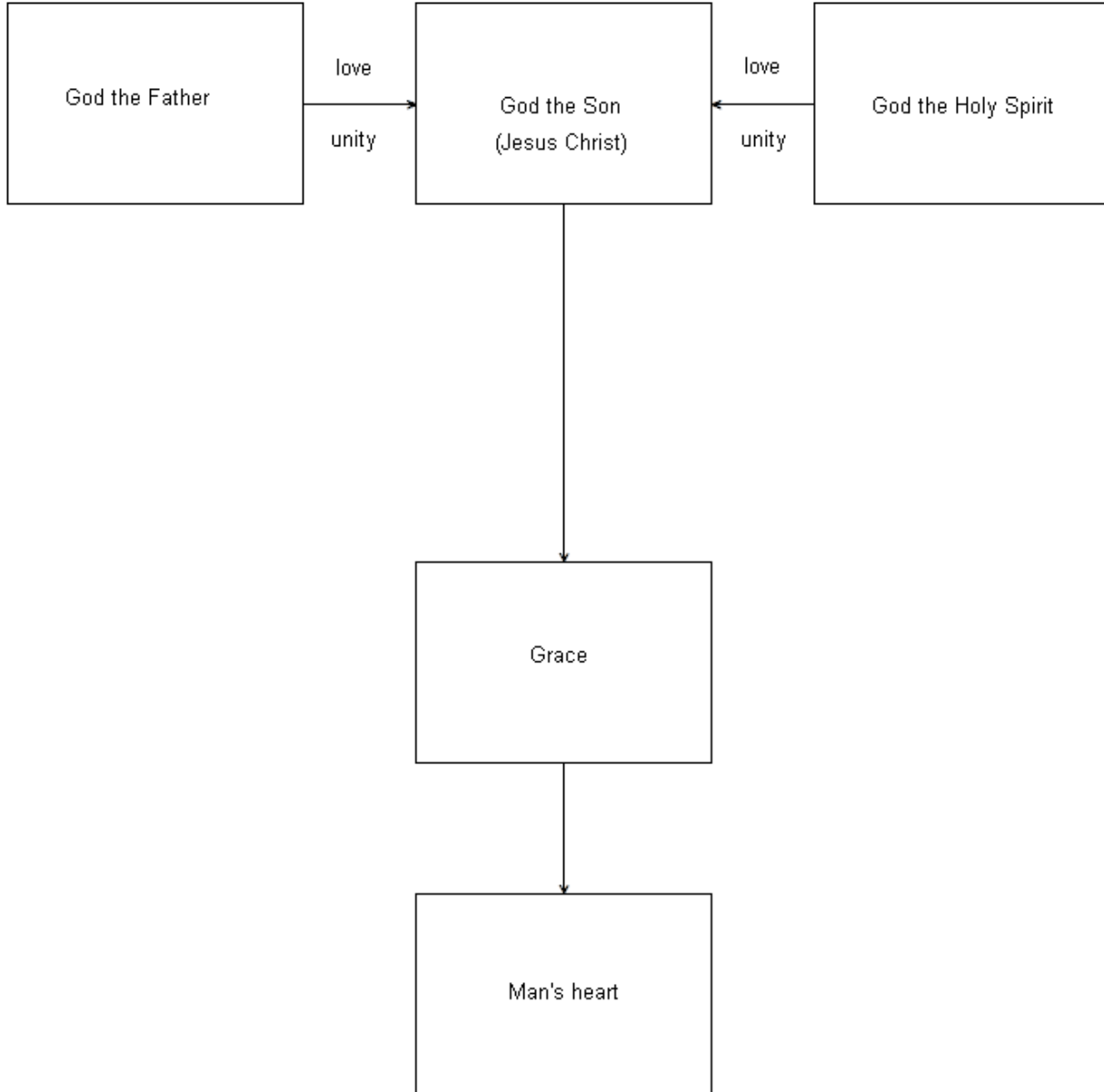
The Bible says in Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord". Yet, the Bible reveals that God is 3 personalities, Father, Son (The Word - Jesus Christ) and the Holy Spirit. They have separate minds and wills, yet they are one. They are one in purpose. They are all motivated by love for each other and love for mankind. They are in perfect unity and agreement at all times.

Revelation 1:4-5

...Grace be unto you, and peace, from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before His throne; And from Jesus Christ...

In these verses we see that Grace does come from the Father, the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ. The 3 persons of the Godhead are joined together by the word 'and' in these verses. #1 Him which is, and which was, and which is to come (the Father) AND #2 the seven Spirits (the Holy Spirit) which are before His (the Father's) throne AND #3 Jesus Christ. The number seven is typically used throughout the Word to represent perfection. So, when it says seven Spirits, it is focusing on the perfect qualities of the Holy Spirit. Grace comes from all three and they are united in how they minister grace to mankind.

Deuteronomy 6:4 - "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord."



a) The Father ministers grace:

We briefly talked about the Old Testament and how God was hindered from ministering His perfect grace through the people because of the sin in their consciences. The Father knew that even before He created mankind, that IF they would choose to sin against Him, Jesus Christ would be the atonement to draw them back to Him. In Revelation 13:8 it says that Christ was slain from the foundation of the world. That's not a literal statement, as Christ was actually crucified around 30 AD. Yet, in the mind of God, He was already prepared to offer His Son, if needed. The Old Testament lasted approximately 4,000 years and was a testimony to the longsuffering of God in preparing a people, natural Israel, that would be ready to receive the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 1:10-11

Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.

The OT prophets prophesied of the grace that should come, but they did not have it themselves. They prophesied of Christ to come, but they only had types, shadows and examples of Christ in the natural.

The Father is pictured as being the one who designs the plans of God. Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are largely pictured as being servants to the will of the Father, in love. It is the Father who called us unto His Son.

Luke 20:13

Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him.

This is the Father's heart towards mankind. He sent His Son to the lost world, in hopes that they would receive Jesus as Saviour. Again, grace is an influence, not a causation. That's why He can say "it may be they will reverence Him". The Father provided the way through His Son, but He cannot force anyone to receive Him. It has to be their choice. They must respond in love and obedience to be saved and partake of His grace.

Galatians 1:6

...Him that called you into the grace of Christ...

We can have confidence before God that He did send His Son Jesus Christ as the only acceptable sacrifice for our sins. No other religion effectively addresses the problem of sin in the conscience. Other religions focus on working your way to heaven. Only in Christ Jesus can we have faith and confidence in His work and stand justified before God. The Bible is clear that Christ is the ONLY means the Father has provided for us, "for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

b) Jesus Christ ministers grace:

John 12:32

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

2 Corinthians 8:9

For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.

When we witness people lay down their lives for us, it inspires us. It moves us. Even sinners can appreciate self sacrifice to a degree. They put value on it. People are willing to extend themselves to help someone who previously did the same to help them. It was this motivation God hoped to produce in mankind by the sacrifice of His Son. It's a fresh start. "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 8:12). To those who want to be right with God, a fresh start in Jesus Christ is extremely appealing. It is a powerful influence for them to want to change.

Jesus Christ has a very unique place in the grace (influence) of God. Only He came to earth and died in our place. Neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit did this. It was on Jesus Christ that all hope of the Godhead influencing mankind's hearts was placed. The Father says, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him" (Matthew 17:5). The Spirit glorifies Jesus (John 16:14). Jesus was the only of the 3 that came to earth and showed how to live an earthly life that pleases the Father. That's why we identify with how He lived. He's the only one that took on flesh and became a man. The mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5)! Christ had to come in the flesh so that He could suffer the penalty we deserved - death (physically, because only a sinner can die spiritually). He: 1) came in the image of man to receive man's judgment and 2) came in the image of man to show man how to live towards the Father. He emptied Himself, relying on God the Father and the Spirit and the Word. He lived by grace, truth and the Spirit.

Jesus Christ said that there is no greater love, than a man lay down His life for his friends (John 15:13). It can also be said that there is no greater influence God could have on mankind, than Jesus Christ. There is no greater grace. God did all He could in sending Christ for us. It also stands to reason that no other influence God could have given would have been sufficient to reconcile us to the Father. The innocent had to die for the wicked, that they might be justified through faith in Him. It had to be a willing death. Only Jesus Christ could satisfy God's righteous requirements so that repentance and forgiveness of sins could be granted to mankind. Jesus Christ allowed God's mercy to be extended to sinners, without diminishing God's justice.

1 Corinthians 1:4

I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;

Romans 3:24

Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

c) The Holy Spirit ministers grace:

Hebrews 10:29

...the Spirit of grace...

John 16:13-14

Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He

shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for He shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

The Holy Spirit is in agreement with both the Father and Jesus that Jesus Christ is God's grace to mankind. Accordingly, The Father and Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to minister in the earth, starting on the day of Pentecost. He is now empowering all believers that are baptized with the Holy Spirit. He is empowering the church of Christ to be witnesses of Christ, to this lost and dying world. The Spirit Himself is witnessing Christ to hearts of all the world. Just like the Father and Son, the Spirit is ministering grace/influence in love. He is drawing mankind to Christ, not coercing them. As that is how God operates towards sinners, that's how we should operate as well. We need to be witnesses of Christ to the world and influence them to come to Christ through our words and actions.

2 Corinthians 13:14

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.

3) Grace is the opposite of our own works (Law vs. Grace):

a) Jesus Christ's example

Philippians 2:5-8

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Jesus Christ, as God, made the decision, in love, to be our redeemer. The fact that Jesus Christ died on the cross to redeem mankind is amazing and is definitely grace to our hearts. To accomplish the death on the cross, Jesus emptied Himself of all wisdom, knowledge and power and was born on earth as a man. This is key, because if Jesus hadn't emptied Himself of all these attributes, He wouldn't have had to rely on the Father. So much can be said of Christ's life and how He relied ONLY on the Father's influence/grace through the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. Christ came to show us the pattern of life for all those who would be called by His name - Christians. Not only is Christ's accomplished work through the cross grace to our hearts, but so is His example of how to perfectly walk in the grace of God. Christ's life is the textbook example of how to walk in God's grace. In 1 John 2:6, it says that we ought to walk as Jesus walked. Let's examine what Jesus said about walking in His Father's grace.

Luke 2:40

And the child (Jesus) grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon Him

Even years before Jesus Christ would start his 3.5 year earthly ministry, the grace of His Father was upon Him, teaching and instructing Him in the way of the Lord. Jesus wasn't ignorant of this fact, even as a 12 year old boy. In Luke 2:49, Jesus says to his earthly parents, "How is it that ye sought me? know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" That is how we walk in the grace of God. Our business is to do God's business. Our work is to do God's work.

John 4:34

Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work.

Jesus said that his meat/food came from doing God's will. If natural food can sustain a natural body, how much more if we apply that concept spiritually? Our meat, our food, our life comes from obedience to God's commandments. As we choose to walk in grace, we are choosing not only to feed others with Truth, but we ourselves shall be fed. Choosing to do God's will is the way of life.

John 5:17

But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.

This is another key to understanding God's grace. Jesus said the Father works AND I work. That is the 2 sides of grace. God influencing us to do certain works and then us choosing to do exactly those works. This is why it takes an emptying of self to walk in God's grace. Either God's works are going to be done through us, or our own works are going to be done, but not both at the same time. Are we working God's works or are we working our works?

John 5:19-20

Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth Him all things that Himself doeth...

Another part of grace is that the Father loves the Son and reveals Himself to the Son. That is love and that is relationship. It's only because Jesus Christ had a love relationship with the Father that He was able to walk in His Father's works/grace. Jesus knew that works done with His own understanding would come to nothing. He NEEDED the Father to show Him how to minister in the Father's name. The church of Jesus Christ cannot hope to walk in God's grace without a close relationship to the Father through Jesus Christ! That relationship comes through love, which is a laying down of our lives for God and others.

John 9:4

I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

Because we know that God is sending us forth, we can have confidence in doing His works. We aren't leaning to our own understanding, but as we acknowledge God in all our ways, He is directing our steps. We are God's representatives or ambassadors, walking in the power of the Holy Spirit. We can have confidence that whatever God asks us to do at the moment, we are ready to do, regardless of if we have ever done that specific thing before. The thing WE need to be concerned with is obeying God. It shouldn't matter what the specific thing is. We have a simple life, obeying God. It's His business what works He wants to do through each of us. Let Him "worry" about that.

John 10:32

Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father...

God is choosing to reveal Himself to the world through His church. The church and the Holy Spirit are the 2 witnesses mentioned in Revelation chapter 11. Because God is a Spirit (John 4:24), the world cannot see Him physically. However, they do see us, the church of Jesus Christ, physically. As a result they can see the Father work, through us! They can see us act out the Father's love. As we love the Father by obeying Him, His grace can flow. That is the root definition of the word 'influence' - a flowing! The Holy Spirit is flowing through 'whosoever will' to the lost world. We can stop God's grace flowing to others if we refuse to walk in love towards God and others. Let us 'grieve not the Holy Spirit' (Ephesians 4:30), but please Him, by obeying God always. Let God's grace flow through you to others.

John 14:10

Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works.

For the grace of God to be effective in our lives, we must live a life of faith. We must believe that we are in a relationship with the Father through Christ. We must know that fact as sure as any. The Father is choosing to do His works through us, because we have a relationship with Him through Christ. Period.

Salvation starts when we start our relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. God saves us and can later fill us with His Holy Spirit, so that we are then equipped with everything we need to minister in His name. If we have any doubt about our salvation, then how can we hope to have confidence that we are doing God's will in ministry towards others?

John 17:4

I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.

God does not leave any work half done. We need to be very serious about finishing those things the Lord has asked us to do. God doesn't give up. If we truly want to walk in God's grace, we must be prepared to do God's work no matter what obstacles might try to be in the way. No matter how unpleasant we might feel at any given moment. No matter how much pain we might have to endure or how long it takes. We must have Christ's attitude, "I MUST work the works of Him that sent me..." (John 9:4). It is possible that someone can start in grace and then faint and stop walking in that grace. Grace is dependent on our love and

obedience for it to continue. If we choose to stop obeying God, we are hindering God's work and letting it be unfinished by our choice. This is not a choice God or His church can be satisfied with.

Hebrews 2:9

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

2 Corinthians 5:19

...God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself...

From these verses, we see that it was the Father that influenced what Christ did in ministry on earth. Christ had already emptied Himself of all His wisdom and started over, relying simply on the Father. That is why we can say the Father reconciled us to Him through His faithful servant, Jesus Christ.

b) Paul vs. James

Galatians 2:16

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

James 2:14

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?

Paul says that we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, not the works of the law. James says that if we have 'faith' and no works, faith will not save us. So which is it, works or no works? That is not the appropriate question. The question should be: *whose* works? Paul and James are not contradicting one another. They were both writing by the same Holy Spirit. Paul is talking about the works of the law, which are the works of men. James is talking about the works of God, which should show forth in our lives, if our faith is in Jesus Christ. We aren't saved by works, but now that we are justified by faith in Christ, God asks us to do HIS works. Our old man and our works are DEAD and now we are ALIVE in Christ and HIS WORKS do show forth in us, as we obey God.

c) The Lord of the harvest:

Romans 2:4

Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?

If it had been up to us, none of us would have been saved. We had no power to save ourselves. We didn't even know that we needed to be saved! It took God's faithfulness in opening up our hearts. The Truth of Christ shone brightly into our hearts and we *knew* we needed Him. The Father drew us to His Son. Our salvation was God's work, not ours.

Matthew 20:6-7

...Why stand ye here all the day idle? ... Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.

If a farmer commands his servants to plant a field and harvest it, who gets credit for the work? The servants are an afterthought because the farmer gave the commandment and the servants merely carried out his command. The works that we now do in God's kingdom originated in the heart of God, not our hearts, therefore, He gets the glory.

A man with a pickaxe can do a lot of work. Who gets the credit for the work, the man or the pickaxe? We are the pickaxe in the hands of God. We are the tools or instruments that God is using to do His work in the earth. Now imagine if the pickaxe kept jumping out of God's hands. God wouldn't be able to use it. A natural pickaxe isn't alive, so it has no problem yielding itself to be used. We, however, are alive and did not lose our freewill just because we gave ourselves to Christ. We must continually yield ourselves to God, if He is going to be able to use us. Just because we yielded to God yesterday doesn't mean we will today. It must be a constant choice of our wills: "I *must* work the works of Him that sent me..." (John 9:4).

2 Corinthians 12:9

My grace is sufficient for thee: for my (Christ's) strength is made perfect in (your) weakness...

2 Timothy 2:1

Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

This is how we can be weak, yet strong in the grace of God. We are as helpless as the pickaxe. We need God to show us what to do! God is good and He knows all that can be known. Beyond that, He has all wisdom, power and authority. It wouldn't be wise at all to resist anything God is asking us to do, even if we don't understand every little detail of *why* God asked us to do it. If we are sure God spoke, we must obey, immediately.

It is pride that has to know *why* before it will yield to God. Pride says to God, "if I can't understand it (with my natural mind), then I'm not doing it!". We may never fully know why God asked us to do something, but we can have faith in Him. We can believe that whatever He is asking is exactly what needs to be done. We can trust Him.

1 Corinthians 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.

Romans 16:12

Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord.

Mark 16:20

And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with signs following.

Again, these verses show a partnership between us and God. Just as Jesus submitted Himself to the Father in ministry, we submit ourselves to God. God might say, "go here and do this!". We then reply, "OK Lord, here I go!". God could then say, "Well done. Now go over here and do this!". That is the life of a true Christian. We have unity with God. We are working with God. It doesn't matter what He asks. We must respond, "yes, Lord, here I go!". Our lives become ultra-simple. This is why Jesus Christ could say His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:30). God is doing everything, except causing us to love and obey Him.

d) Grace gives God glory:

2 Corinthians 4:15

For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.

2 Thessalonians 1:12

That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace truly produces God's works when we obey God. For us to walk in God's grace, we MUST lay down our lives, wills and desires so that His will can be accomplished. When we choose to do this, we acknowledge His Lordship in our lives. His works will then show forth through us.

When people try to lean to their own understand and wisdom, it produces the works of the flesh, the works of men. These are not things that glorify God. If we can do all things in our own strength, why would we need God? Some have gone so far as to credit God for their own works. They do whatever is in their mind to do and then say 'to God be the glory'. That's an insult to God. He's a God of Truth and does not appreciate people crediting their selfish works to Him.

1 Peter 4:10-11

As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as

good stewards of the manifold (various, multi-colored) grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

God is worthy of receiving glory from our lives. For that to happen, we must guard our heart and actions, that the things we say and do are truly lining up with God's will for our lives. That way it truly is God ministering His grace through us and He can receive the glory for it, in Truth.

Matthew 5:16

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

How can people see our works and glorify the Father? Because we are doing God's works, not our own. People can tell the difference between our works and God's works. God's works are done in Truth and in the power of the Holy Spirit. God bears witness to His works, that they are indeed of God. God does not claim credit for the works of men. That is far from Him.

4) God's grace is for righteousness and godly living (not sinning!):

a) Confusion about grace:

Below are 4 statements about 'grace' that I found on the Internet. Keep in mind these are representative of the confusion about grace that exists in the church today. The sad thing is that there are some half truths in these statements. When we mix truth with error, we get error.

"Grace is the unconditional love of God for us, exactly as we are, apart from our own efforts. This is the accepted definition of "grace," with the ending phrase reassuring us that we have no worries about our present state of sinfulness."

"Grace is basically a gift. It does not come as a result of something a person did or in recognition of an accomplishment or milestone. So, unlike a birthday or Christmas gift that one receives in recognition of an event, grace is given to us by God for no reason. All of us are recipients of the grace of God regardless of how "good" or "bad" we are."

"When believers sin, God's grace pours forth in great abundance."

"Definition: Grace is all that God is free to do and does for mankind on the basis of the work of Jesus Christ. It is a resource that can be never earned or deserved, but can only be received as a gift. It is God's work on behalf of mankind. Therefore, it functions apart from all human works, cooperation or merit. Grace is universally free and is designed to impart happiness and joy on its recipients. Thus, grace depends entirely upon God's essence, character and attributes."

As we've already seen, grace is a partnership between us and God. It is God influencing our

clean hearts and then our yielding to that influence in love. The religious 'Christian' community has grossly distorted grace. They think that it is a one way street. God doing everything, mankind doing nothing. Because they think that grace is God doing everything, it doesn't matter what they do. That allows for them to sin and yet be 'saved'.

Romans 6:1-2

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

Romans 6:14-15

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.

Titus 2:11-12

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

Yet, the Word of God plainly says otherwise. Sinning doesn't cause grace to abound. Obedience to God's Word causes grace to abound! God's grace teaches us to DENY lust and to live a righteous and godly life in *this present world*. God's grace is the remedy FOR sin, not an excuse TO sin. It also enables us to "go and sin no more" (John 5:14).

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 (sensuality, sin), and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

This verse shows that it is ungodly people who try to turn the grace of God into a justification or excuse for their sin. In doing so, they are actually denying Christ. God is a holy God and cannot influence us to sin. Grace is God's influence to mankind. It is an influence to righteousness. It is Satan that influences us to sin.

b) We can deny grace and stop walking in it:

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.

2 Corinthians 6:1

We then, as workers together with Him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace

of God in vain.

Colossians 4:6

Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

Hebrews 12:15

Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

Phrases like "continue in the grace of God", "receive not the grace of God in vain", "Let your speech be always with grace" and "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God" teach us that grace is something that is dependent on us. If we aren't diligent, if we choose not to continue with God, that breaks off any grace God would have for us. It would take our repentance over that disobedience/sin before we could then resume our relationship with God and partake of His grace.

When the Bible uses language like this, it completely and absolutely rules out unconditional grace/salvation. To insist on unconditional grace is to deny what the Word of God plainly says.

c) Grace teaches us about Jesus Christ:

2 Peter 1:2

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,

2 Peter 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.

Grace is multiplied to us as we grow in relationship with God through Christ. As God teaches us more about Him, we can then grow in grace. God is teaching us so that we can be instruments of His grace. We can intelligently cooperate with what God wants to do through us. God doesn't only ask us to do things, but also delights in showing us WHY the things we are doing are so pleasing to Him. That knowledge reveals the heart of God to us, which only draws us closer to Him.

Ephesians 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.

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Titus 2:11-12

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

These verses confirm that true grace must teach us in the way of righteousness. Wickedness does not minister grace, because grace is from the Holy God. Only pure, righteous and holy things can instruct us how to live in a way that pleases God. The grace of God also comes through wisdom. Wisdom is understanding in how to apply the knowledge that we have to the situations we face in life. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of grace. Jesus promised in John 14:26 that the Holy Spirit will "teach us all things". He will lead us in applying wisdom to the circumstances we face. No one gains wisdom without first being taught. We've seen that grace will not work without our cooperation with God. We must allow ourselves to be teachable. We must cry out to God for the wisdom, knowledge and understanding we need to walk in His grace. We must be humble. God knows everything and He's happy to teach us. Those that are walking in the fullness of God's grace are the same ones that have taken the time and effort to learn about who God is and how He works. They also continue to take the time and effort, as the learning process never ends.

5) Grace and callings:

a) Callings and the Body of Christ

Romans 12:4-8

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophecy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

Galatians 1:15-16

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

Ephesians 3:7-8

Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power. 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;

Now that Christ has redeemed us, we are the body of Christ. We do His works. He is the head. We are the body parts. God has given grace to the body of Christ as a whole. We don't have to worry about what callings other Christians have. We should encourage them to walk in those callings, but we don't get to pick and choose. God chooses our callings. He is the one who has called us. We need to trust God in how He distributes the callings and who He gives them to. We need to trust our brothers and sisters, that they are being obedient to the callings. If they aren't obeying, they aren't even in the body of Christ at that moment.

The foot doesn't try to be a hand. It lets the hand be the hand. It doesn't criticize the hand for not being a foot. We don't have to worry about doing other people's callings. We need to focus on whatever calling the Lord has put on our lives. Just as grace is diverse, there are many callings. We need to individually do what God has asked to do, no more and no less. When we try to do more or less than what God has asked, it is like adding or subtracting from the Word of God. It's like we are elevating our thoughts, ideas, understanding and words to be higher than God's Word. We need to walk according to the knowledge we have right now. As we obey, God will increase us.

The body doesn't attack itself. When doctors try to transplant an organ from one body into another, the body will naturally attack the foreign body part. It doesn't belong in the body. There is unity and harmony in a natural body. All parts working together so the whole body can benefit. The body isn't ashamed of its callings. The foot isn't ashamed to be a foot in front of the eye. The body isn't ashamed to be naked in front of itself. It is a cohesive whole. The body is comfortable in front of itself. We should not be ashamed to be seen obeying our callings before God and others.

When the body of Christ attacks itself, the energy and time that should be focused towards ministry is wasted. God needs us to walk in our callings. The lost world desperately needs Christ. Rather than criticizing one another, we should be building up one another in love. When the body of Christ has failed, it has failed because of selfishness. People are trying to play God and are coercing people to do this or that. Christ's kingdom and His body work by love. God doesn't force people to do anything. How can we? What right do we have to do that?

The only hope for unity in the Body of Christ is love. We should all be laying down our lives for God and others. If other people are missing it, rather than tearing them down, why not pray for them and lead by example by obeying God ourselves? We can perhaps provoke them to good works by our example. God says He hates those that sow discord among brethren. God hates discord (Proverbs 6:19)! He loves unity! It's our job to promote peace, love and unity in the body of Christ. We can only hope to do this as we individually cling to the Lord and purpose in our hearts that HIS will must be done, at all costs. If each body part will purpose to be whatever God has asked them to be, the Body of Christ **will** be effective in seeing God's will done in the earth. Let God be glorified.

b) God uses grace to work through us, to others:

Ephesians 3:2

If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:

Philippians 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.

God is in the business of ministering to people. As we grow in grace, we need to understand that God's grace is primarily for the purpose of ministering to others. Grace will definitely change us as individuals, but He wants His grace to impact as many people as possible for His glory.

Not walking in the grace of God definitely has serious consequences. If we don't obey God, He doesn't receive glory. If we don't obey God, the grace He wanted to minister to other people is withheld. May the Lord remind us of this, the next time we would have ministered His truth to someone, but said, "I just didn't feel comfortable" or "I felt tired" or "I had somewhere else to be" or "I've never done anything like this before". There will always be something to cling to as an excuse for not dying to self. God's Word must be lifted up as the standard in our lives. God can't respect or honor our excuses. We have to stop excusing what God hates and start triumphing the things that God delights in. It's our only hope.

c) Grace produces visible works. People see it and are drawn to God:

Acts 11:23

Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

Galatians 2:9

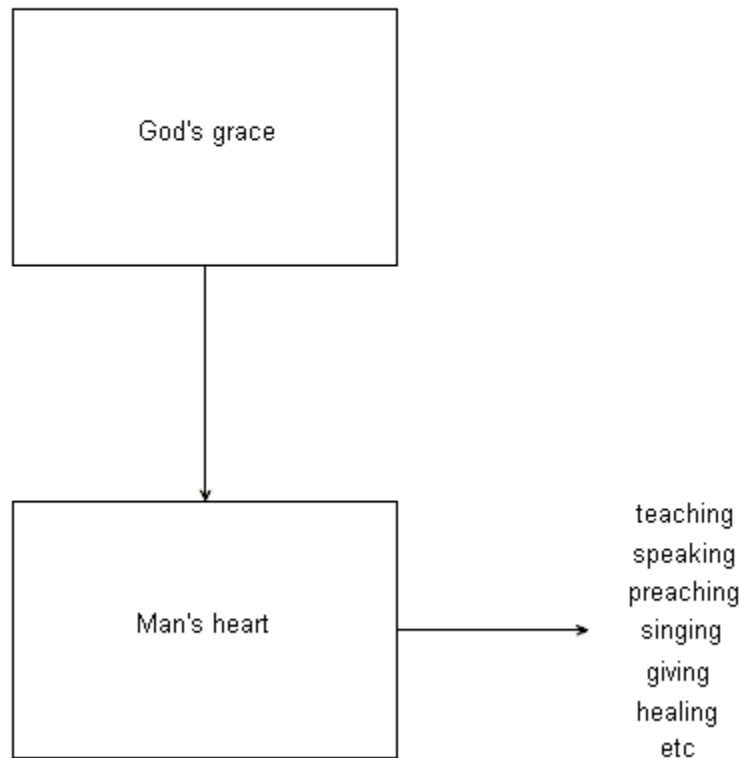
And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

Grace is God's influence on the hearts of mankind. That isn't something we can witness directly. We aren't to judge the hearts of people; only God can do that. What we can see and judge are the works of mankind. Jesus said we would know false prophets by their bad fruit (Matthew 7:15-18). The works of a man will reveal what's in his heart.

So while we don't view the influencing of the heart, we can see the end result of grace: God's works accomplished. Due to a wrong understanding of what grace is, it has become this mystical catch-all for the church. "Wooooooo.. behold.. the grace of God! We don't know what it is.. but it sure is good, isn't it?". The grace of God is tangible. When we witness God's work through other lives, we are touched. We are impacted by the grace of God. It changes us from self reliance to God reliance. The Lord will continue to open our eyes so that we can

recognize His grace when it is at work. It is a marvelous thing to behold.

The multi-colored grace of God (1 Peter 4:10)

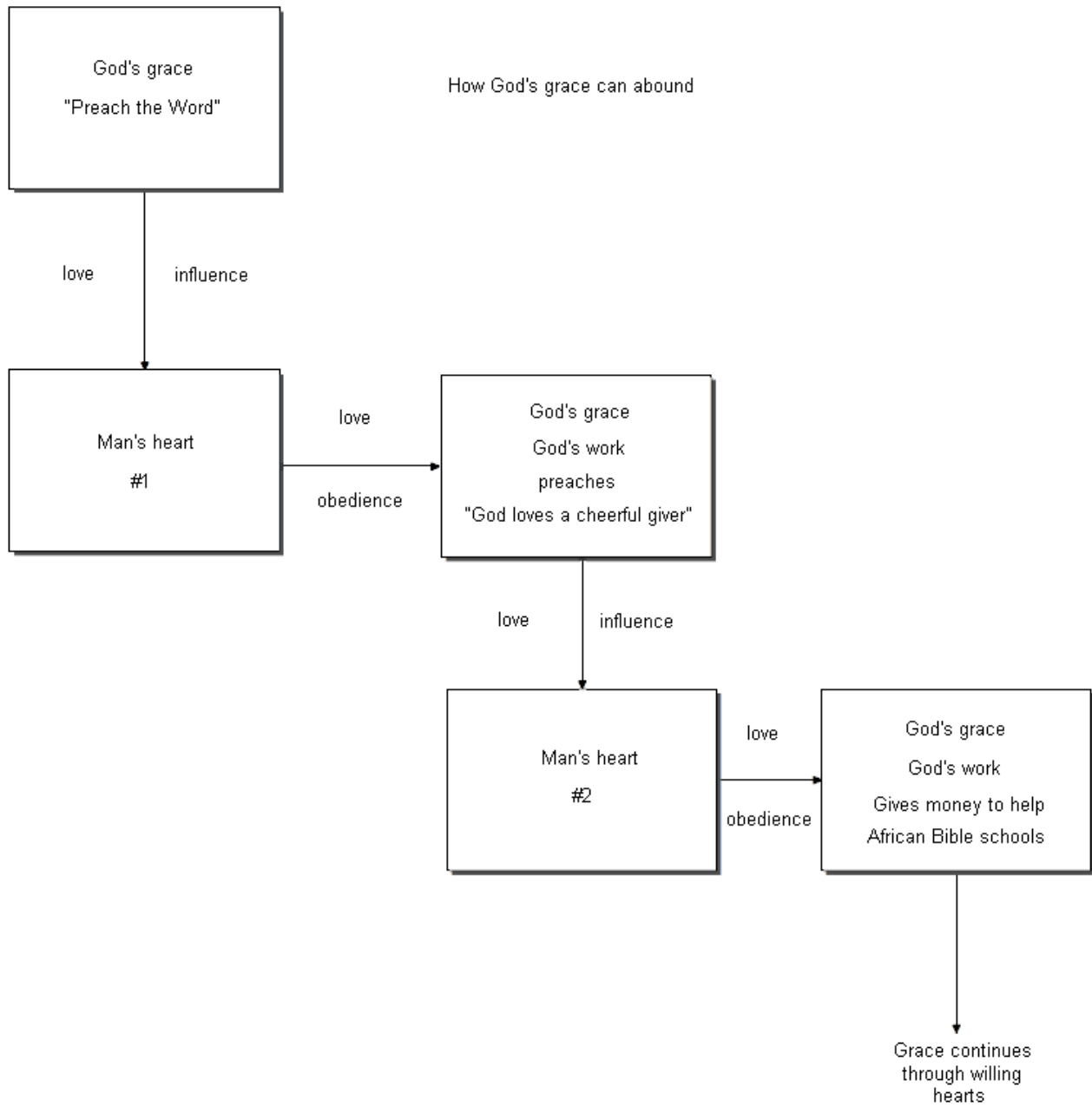


6) Grace can abound:

1 Peter 4:10

As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold (various, multi-colored) grace of God.

Anything the Lord would influence us to do is grace. God's grace is as diverse as it needs to be. For every need that needs to be met, there is grace for it! Grace is God's influence, so grace can be as deep as God is. In this verse we see our responsibility to God. We must be good stewards of the grace God gives us and minister it to others, so that they can in turn be good stewards of the grace of God to others. This is how God's kingdom can rapidly expand and how grace can abound. It's when God finds willing and obedient servants that things really take off.



Romans 5:20-21

...But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound (overflow): that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

2 Corinthians 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:

1 Timothy 1:14

And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 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.

God is definitely able to make all grace abound. Why don't we see more evidence of grace in the body of Christ? Like always, the blame lies with disobedient mankind. This is perhaps the most powerful witness that the church is not being a good steward of grace. The will of God is being hindered. Selfishness has ruled the day and God CANNOT work with it.

The only thing stopping God's grace is the stubborn will of mankind. The only thing. Otherwise His infinite grace would just flow and flow and flow! Do not grieve, do not resist the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of grace. Until we each individually come to a place where seeing God's will done is our GREATEST and ONLY treasure, the grace of God will be stifled, because God's grace is waiting on us to act!

We need to come to God, to His throne of grace. We need to ask for His grace, understanding that He'll only be able to answer that prayer as we obey Him in all things. We need to realize that God's grace can abound through our faith in Him, but not without it. God has put a lot of responsibility on His church, but it is a place of honor, not a burden. We get to cooperate with God in love, ministering His precious Truth to a world starving for God. Church, let us be about God's business while there is yet time. Jesus said, 'the night cometh, when no man can work...' (John 9:4)

7) Companions of grace:

a) Grace and peace:

1 Corinthians 1:3

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is how Paul starts the majority of his epistles, with grace AND peace from God. Why do grace and peace go together? Grace is God influencing us plus our responding to that influence with obedience. This is why grace brings peace. We are made free from sin through the grace that is in Jesus Christ. We are continuing in that grace. We are doing everything the Lord asks us to do. Peace is there when we have a real relationship with God. There is nothing between us and our Maker. The Bible does not know of any peace without

obedience to God. It says "there is no peace unto the wicked" (Isaiah 48:22). What makes someone wicked? Disregarding God's commandments so they can live how they want to live. They've put things between them and God and there is no peace as a result. As we choose to continue in grace, we can be sure the peace of God will be on our lives!

b) Grace and mercy:

Titus 1:4

To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Mercy can be defined as a withholding of judgment, as it pertains to our sin against God. It is only by the mercy of God that the current wicked world is not judged and consumed in the wrath of God right now. God is giving all people an opportunity to repent and turn from their sinful lives. They can repent of their sin and find refuge in the Lord Jesus Christ, if they so choose. How then does mercy apply to those that are in the Body of Christ now?

Our past sin was worthy of eternal death and judgment. Those who choose not to repent of their sin will be in the lake of fire forever. We continue to partake of God's mercy every moment we are serving God. He has promised never to bring up our sins again, unless we choose to go back to a life of sin. Every day that we are in God's grace is another day in God's mercy.

c) Grace and Truth:

John 1:14

And the Word was made 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.

2 John 1:3

Grace be with you, mercy and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

Truth is an accurate description of reality. It is how things really are. Jesus Christ is full of grace AND truth. It's not until a sinner understands the reality of his situation, that he is able to turn to God through Jesus Christ. The truth is that his sins have separated him from the Holy God. Until the sinner acknowledges that and accepts the sacrifice Christ has made for him, there will be no grace in that person's life. As we continue in grace, we must continue to look to God to show us how things really are and be prepared to accept all that He reveals about us, Himself and others.

d) Grace and love:

Ephesians 6:24

Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

Jesus Christ said, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). If we don't obey Christ, we don't love Him. If we don't obey Christ, we are resisting His grace. Nothing will stop God's grace faster than a stubborn, unwilling and unloving heart towards Him. On the other hand, as we choose to obey God, we can have confidence that His grace is flowing through our lives!

e) Grace and humility:

James 4:6

But He giveth more grace. Wherefore He saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

1 Peter 5:5

Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.

When we are humble, we accept the truth about ourselves. The reality of the situation. A proper understanding of grace should cause us to be humble before God. Pride would say, "look what *I* did!". Humility says, "look what God did!". The only part anyone plays in the grace of God is obedience. We all can and should obey God. What God chooses to specifically do through each of us is His decision. Since grace produces God's work, there is nothing to be prideful about. We should all be crying out to God for His grace! A heart that is focused on what God is doing won't have time to think about what the *I* has done.

f) Grace and faith:

2 Corinthians 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.

1 Timothy 1:14

And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 11:1 says that faith is the evidence of things not seen. 2 Corinthians 5:7 says that we walk by faith and not by sight. God is influencing us to do His works, but we don't see God with our natural eyes. Faith is a necessity if we are to respond to God's grace. We must believe it is the God of the Bible that is influencing us. We must know it. Our actions must reflect that faith. If we are not confident that we are doing God's will, we have no assurance that we are partaking of God's grace. Christian, it is no accident that the things on your heart to do line up with what God's Word commands us to do! Believe it and watch the works of God manifest in your life.

8) Conclusion - God's Word produces grace, when heeded:

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.

The written Word of God is the #1 influence God has given to mankind. As we read the Word, the Spirit of grace teaches us and influences us to do God's works in the earth. The Word of His grace is truly able to build us up, if we allow it! God's side of grace is beyond any shadow of a doubt. He sent His Son to die for us. He gave all He had for us. We must choose to lay down our lives. We must choose to lay down our lives. We **must** choose to lay down our lives, for God's grace to happen through us. Until each member of the body of Christ comes to that place, not much is going to happen.

As we obey the influence of God's Word, God can influence us in other ways. We can see other brothers and sisters obeying God and that can influence or provoke us to good works. As we obey the Word and seek God's leading and guidance for specific ministry, God can speak to us by His Spirit and direct us where to go, who to talk to and so forth. That all starts with a love for God and His Word. As we give God the time and attention for Him to influence us, He is able to. It is the Word of God that builds our faith in Him. We need faith if we are to walk in God's grace. Make the Word of God your treasure and you'll begin to see God's grace in your life, guaranteed!

Revelation 22:21

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

This is how the New Testament ends, with a statement about grace. Grace is important! Hopefully by now we've seen just how critical the grace of God is. Beyond that, we've learned just what the grace of God truly is. My prayer for the body of Christ is that they will understand God and His grace. We need to understand what God wants to do through us, so we can have confidence as we are ministering in His name. My encouragement for each of us is that we will just run with the grace of God and not look back. It requires a total forsaking of self, to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. If there is anything in our lives that is preventing our obedience to God's commands, we must cut it out. I also pray that the church of Jesus Christ would measure itself the same way God does: by the Word of God and nothing else. Is God pleased with our lives? If that is our criteria for how we judge ourselves, we will find success. As we please God first in all things, we will find success in all areas of our life. Let the grace of God rule in your hearts, my brothers and sisters. Amen.

Justin Reid
July 14th, 2009
contact: sinnomore@runbox.com