

TRANSFORMING GRACE: LIVING CONFIDENTLY IN GOD'S UNFAILING LOVE

by Jerry Bridges

All Christians by definition believe in grace. When we think of grace, we almost always think of being saved by grace. But the Bible teaches we are not only saved by grace, but we also live by grace every day of our lives. It is this important aspect of grace that seems to be so little understood or practiced by Christians. Most of us tend to base our personal relationship with God on our performance instead of on His grace. If we've performed well (whatever well is in our opinion), then we expect God to bless us. If we haven't done so well, our expectations are reduced accordingly. 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.

Moreover, we are always challenging ourselves and one another to try harder. We seem to believe success in the Christian life (however we define success) is basically up to us: our commitment, our discipline, and our zeal, with some help from God along the way. We give lip service to the attitude of Paul, "***But by the grace of God I am what I am***" (1Cor 15:10), but our unspoken motto is, "God helps those who help themselves."

The realization that our daily relationship with God is based on the infinite merit of Christ instead of on our own performance is a very freeing and joyous experience. But it's not meant to be a one-time experience; the truth needs to be reaffirmed daily. That is what this book is all about.

Book's definition of Grace:

God's unmerited favor to us through Christ whereby salvation and all other blessings are freely given to us. And, God's divine assistance to us through the Holy Spirit.

Thesis:

We are brought into God's Kingdom by grace; we are sanctified by grace; we receive both temporal and spiritual blessings by grace; we are motivated to obedience by grace; we are called to serve and enable to serve by grace; we receive strength to endure trials by grace; and finally we are glorified by grace. The entire Christian life is lived under the reign of God's grace.

Bridges argues that God's grace is not simply for our justification and glorification but is also for our sanctification and daily Christian growth.

Why grace? Spiritual Bankruptcy

You and I and every person in the world are spiritually bankrupt. We owed a debt we cannot pay.

Romans 3:10-12 (NIV) "There is no one righteous, not even one¹ there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

Chapter 7 or 11?

So what kind of bankruptcy did we declare? Was it permanent or temporary? Most of us would say we declared permanent bankruptcy. We believe He completely paid our debt of sin and secured for us the gift of eternal life. There is nothing more we can do to earn our salvation, so using the business analog we would say we filed permanent bankruptcy.

However, I think most of us actually declare temporary bankruptcy. Having trusted in Christ alone for our salvation, we have subtly and unconsciously reverted to a work relationship with God and our Christian lives. We recognize that even our best efforts cannot get us to heaven, but we do think our good efforts earn God's blessings in our daily lives.

One of the best kept secrets among Christians today is this: Jesus paid it all. He not only purchased your forgiveness of sins and your ticket to heaven; he purchased every blessing and every answered prayer you will ever receive.

Why is this such a well-kept secret? For one thing, we are afraid of this truth. We're afraid to tell even ourselves that we don't have to work anymore, the work is all done. We are afraid that if we really believe this, we will slack off in our Christian duties. But the deeper core issue is that we don't really believe we're still bankrupt. Having come into God's Kingdom by grace alone, solely on the merit of Another, we're now trying to pay our own way by our performance. We declared only temporary bankruptcy; we live by good works rather than by grace.

Of course, all human comparisons of spiritual truth ultimately fall short such as the bankruptcy analogy. But the good news of the Bible is that in the spiritual realm there really is total permanent bankruptcy, it doesn't work like commercial bankruptcy but is much better in two significant ways.

First the Christian's total debt has been paid by the death of Christ. The law of God and the Justice of God had been fully satisfied. The debt of our sins has been marked paid in full, God is satisfied and so are we. We have peace with God and we are delivered from a guilty conscience.

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Hebrews 10:22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Second not only has the debt been paid fully, there is no possibility of going into debt again. Jesus paid the debt of all our sins past present and future. This is true not only for our justification, but for our Christian lives as well. God is not keeping score, granting or withholding blessings on the basis of our performance. The score has already been permanently settled by Christ.

So, who needs grace? Canyon

All of us, the saint as well as the sinner. The most conscious dutiful hardworking Christian needs God's grace as much as the most dissolute hard living sinner. All of us need the same grace. The sinner does not need more grace than the saint, nor does the immature and undisciplined believer need more than the godly zealous missionary. We all need the same amount of grace because the currency of our good works is debased and worthless before God.

Neither merits nor demerits determine how much grace we need, because grace does not supplement merits or make up for demerits. Grace does not take into account merits or demerits at all. Rather, grace considers all men and women as totally undeserving and unable to do anything to earn the blessings of God.

“Grace ceases to be grace if God is compelled to bestow it in the presence of human merit ... grace ceases to be grace if God is compelled to withdraw it in the presence of human demerit ... grace is treating a person without the slightest reference to desert (reward) whatsoever but solely according to the infinite goodness and sovereign purpose of God.” C. Samuel Storms

Grace- It really is amazing Amazing Grace

If you have trusted Christ as your Savior, then all the expressions of God's forgiveness are true of you. He has removed your sins as far as the East is from the West. He has put them behind his back and hurled them into the depths of the sea. He has blotted them out of his record book and promised never to bring them up again. You are free from accusation, not because of anything whatsoever in you, but because of His grace alone to Jesus Christ.

Do you accept the fact that the Bible's definition of grace -- gods unmerited favor shown to people who are totally undeserving of it -- applies to you not only in Salvation but in your everyday life? This meaning of grace never changes. Jesus said I've come that you may have life and have it to the full.

John 10:7-10 (NIV)⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, ...⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. ... I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

Do you have life, that is, eternal life? But do you have it to the full? Are you experiencing both the peace of God that comes with Salvation and the joy of God that comes with living by grace each day? If not, you may be saved by grace, but you are living by works.

Phases of the Christian experience: Justification, Sanctification and Glorification

<p>Justification</p> <p>Based on Grace</p> <p>*****</p> <p>Justification</p> <p>Based on Grace</p>	<p>Sanctification</p> <p>Based on Works</p> <p>*****</p> <p>Sanctification</p> <p>Based on Grace</p>	<p>Glorification</p> <p>Based on Grace</p> <p>*****</p> <p>Glorification</p> <p>Based on Grace</p>
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The entire Christian life from start to completion is lived on the basis of God's grace to us through Christ.

How are we given Grace? The generous landowner

Matthew 20:1-16 (NIV) *The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard*

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

“About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went.

“He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’

“‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered.

“He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

“The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

“But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Fair or Unfair?

The landowner was not only fair with his workers, he was progressively more generous with each group of workers he hired throughout the day. Each worker, regardless of how long he had worked, received the day's wages. He received not what he had earned on an hourly basis, but what he needed to sustain his family for a day. The Landowner could have paid them only what they had earned, but he chose to pay them according to their need, not according to their work. He paid according to grace, not debt.

The landowner of Jesus's parable, who obviously represents God, was a very gracious and generous man. From the very beginning he was concerned for the welfare of the workers as much as for his vineyard. In the labor culture of that day, the workers needed the money they earned to buy daily food for their families. They lived a day-to-day existence. That is why landowners were instructed to pay a hired man his wages, one denarius, each day before sunset because he was poor and was counting on it. **Deuteronomy 24:15.**

Those 11th hour workers were hired because they needed to receive a day's wages. They had been standing all day waiting for someone to hire them so they could earn money to support their families. They needed to work more than the landlord needed their work. He hired them, not because of His need, but because of their need. He represents God and His gracious awareness of our needs and His

continuous work to meet them. God calls us to serve Him, not because He needs us, but because we need Him.

There is another valuable lesson to be learned from the parable of the generous landowner. God is not only generous; He is also sovereign. God has the right to dispense his blessings as He chooses.

We are not created equal, nor are we given equal opportunities throughout life. Each of us has his or her own unique set of circumstances. The workers who labored all day did not grumble because they received too little pay, but because less deserving workers receive the same as they.

If we are to succeed in living by grace, we must come to terms with the fact that God is sovereign in dispensing His gracious favors, and He owes us no explanation when His actions do not correspond with our system of merits.

Romans 11:33-34 (NIV) Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"

So where does all this emphasis on the fact that God doesn't owe us anything leave us? It leaves us in the blessed position of being 11th hour workers in God's Kingdom. It leaves us going home at the end of the day from God's vineyard profoundly grateful, knowing that the gracious landlord has been generous beyond all measure. In a word it leaves us content, and "godliness with contentment is great gain". ***1 Timothy 6:6-11 (NIV) 6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.***

Grace to others

Grace is not only to be received by us it is to be extended to others. We cannot exercise grace as God does, but we can relate to one another as those who have received grace and who wish to operate on the principle of grace. We will not experience the peace with God and the joy of God if we are not willing to extend grace to others.

Matthew 18:23-34 The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant.

How do we respond to God? Cheap grace vs Costly Grace

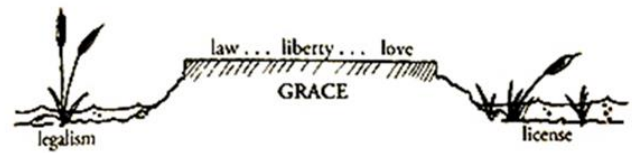
Would you think, "If you take the pressure off and tell me all of my effort will never earn me one blessing, then I'm afraid I will slack off and stop doing the things I need to do to live a disciplined Christian life?" The Bible recognizes the possibility that the grace of God can be misunderstood and even abused. It speaks of godless men who changed the grace of our God into a license for immorality ***Jude 4***. Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ***Romans 6:1. Galatians 5:13*** warns us not to use our freedom to indulge the sinful nature.

Jude 4 (NIV) For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

Romans 6:1 (NIV) What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

Galatians 5:13 (NIV) You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.

These passages recognize possibility that the Bible's teaching that grace alone is the basis for God's blessing can be misconstrued as an excuse for indulgent unlawful living. I believe it is because we are afraid of this attitude that we often change the doctrine of grace into a doctrine of works.



The solution to this problem is not to add legalism to grace. **Rather the solution is to be so gripped by the magnificent and boundless generosity of God's grace that we respond out of gratitude and reverence** rather than out of a sense of duty. We have loaded down the gospel of the grace of God in Christ with a lot of "oughts." I ought to do this and I ought to do that, I ought to be more committed, more disciplined, and more obedient. We are substituting duty and obligation instead of a loving response to God's grace.

We need to seek to practice commitment, discipline, and obedience. We need to be thoroughly committed to submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in every area of our life. But we need to be committed in these areas out of a grateful response to God's grace, not to try to earn God's blessings.

Our motivation for commitment, discipline and obedience is as important to God perhaps even more so than our performance. God searches the heart and understands every motive. Our motives must spring from a love for Him and desire to glorify Him. Obedience to God performed from a legalistic motive, that is fear of the consequences or to gain favor with God, is not pleasing to God. Thus, our good works are not truly good works unless they are motivated by love for God and the desire to glorify Him. Only when we are thoroughly convinced that the Christian life is entirely of grace are we able to serve Him out of a grateful and loving heart.

How do we love God?

Charles Colson once asked several experienced Christians how they love God. The answers they got ran the gamut of spiritual exercises, reading the Bible, prayer, attending church, tithing along with giving up favorite sins and warm feelings in one's heart. Amazingly no one answered what was Jesus's own response to the question of how to love God.

1 John 5:3 (NIV) In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,

John 14:15,21,23 (NIV) "If you love me, keep my commands. ...²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them." ...²³ Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

Our love for God expressed through obedience to Him is to be a response to His love not a means of trying to earn it. ***1 John 4:19 (NIV) We love because he first loved us.***

One clear evidence that we are living by grace is a loving obedience to the commands of God. Anyone who thinks since God's love is not conditioned on "my obedience, I'm free to live as I please", is not living by grace, nor does he understand grace. Jesus said that if we love Him, we will obey his commands.

Obedience to the commands of God are privileges to be used, not duties to be performed. We should actively promote spiritual disciplines. They are absolutely necessary for growth in our Christian lives. And since ours is a largely undisciplined age, many believers are losing out on the benefits of those disciplines that could help them grow to maturity in Christ. But we should promote them as benefits, not his duties. Perhaps we should stop talking about being faithful to have a quiet time with God each day as if we were doing something to earn a reward. It would be better to talk about the privilege of spending time with the God of the universe and the importance for our own sake of being consistent in that practice.

The sufficiency of God's Grace

God always gives us what we need, perhaps sometimes more, but never less. John Blanchard said "so God supplies perfectly measured grace to meet the needs of the godly. For daily needs, there is daily grace; for sudden needs, sudden grace; for overwhelming need, overwhelming grace. God's grace is given wonderfully, but not wastefully; freely but not foolishly; bountifully but not blindly."

Manna and the Israelites in the desert. *Exodus 16:16-21 (NIV)*

This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Everyone is to gather as much as they need. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.'" The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. And when they measured it by the omer, the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Everyone had gathered just as much as they needed. Then Moses said to them, "No one is to keep any of it until morning." However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them. Each morning everyone gathered as much as they needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away.

God's distribution of the manna illustrates the way He distributes grace. There's always an ample supply; no one ever need to go without. But there is only as much as we need - and even then, it is on a day-to-day basis. God doesn't permit us to store up grace. We must look to Him anew each day for a new supply. Sometimes we must look for a new supply each hour!

God's grace is sufficient for all your needs; it is sufficient regardless of the severity of any one need. The Israelites never exhausted God's supply of manna. It was always there to be gathered every day for 40 years. And you will never exhaust the supply of God's grace. It will always be there every day for you to appropriate as much as you need for whatever your need is.

Conclusion:

We are brought into God's Kingdom by grace; we are sanctified by grace; we receive both temporal and spiritual blessings by grace; we are motivated to obedience by grace; we are called to serve and enable to serve by grace; we receive strength to endure trials by grace; and finally we are glorified by grace. The entire Christian life is lived under the reign of God's grace.