

GROWING IN THE GRACE OF OUR LORD.

The Concluding Verse of the Second Epistle of Peter, Admonishes the Established Christian to “Grow in Grace..” How Many Correctly Understand What This Requirement Involves? If Grace is ONLY the Unmerited Forgiveness of Sins, How Do We Grow In It?

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Grace has a long history. We find in Genesis 6:8 that “Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD”.

Grace also has a long history in Christian Theology. Today, it is understood by the majority as being the ‘unmerited pardon of sin’. Grace, however, has not been exempt from an evolutionary process in its definition. It has emerged through the centuries along differing veins of thought. Some rest comfortably with the fundamental idea that grace negates the need to do anything under the New Testament understanding. That ‘grace’ presents a counter-alternative to keeping the Law. It is seen as an antinomian administration, tolerant of a disregard for keeping Biblical Law, particularly any derived from the Old Testament. In other words, that under the New Covenant, Lawkeeping is no longer required or necessary.

We are Not Under the Law!

A key Scripture to this understanding is Paul’s declaration in Romans 6:14, that ...”*We are not under the Law but under Grace*”... Yet, in his following statement, we see that any idea of our continuing in sin as being a strictly forbidden proposition. He, seeing the obvious in advance, that some would construe his statement as approving or licensing our continuing in the sinful condition.

Other New Testament believers take serious issue with the ‘no works’ concept that is most prevalent in the religious world today.

What is especially ironic in the dialog and counter-dialog regarding this fundamental issue is that both sides tend to rely on a single narrow definition as to what Grace really is. We’re all poorer as a result.

The clue that suggests we ought to be seeking a more comprehensive definition of Grace is the admonition that we are to ‘Grow in Grace’. How

does one do that? The question that ought to be obvious is that IF Grace is only unmerited pardon, how do we grow in it, except by incurring more and more sin? Yet, in many places, continuing in sin is unequivocally forbidden. The Apostle Paul goes on to make that explicitly clear in the very next verse to the one quoted before, ..”*What, shall we sin that grace might abound? God forbid!*”... What do we do with that?

A Grace That Confounds Grace?

Paul saw and addressed this paradoxical situation in the very first verse of Romans 6. He starts with the same question in verse 1 that he comes back to in verse 15. Paul understood man’s natural thought processes, and anticipated the need to clarify in advance this predictable mis-conclusion on the part of so many. Where Romans 6:1 and 15 discuss the confounding phenomenon of abounding in sin, (making necessary an abounding in grace), while declaring the condition “forbidden”, yet, it is not an abounding that Peter is writing about in 2 Pe.3:18. It is this admonition that we ‘Grow in Grace’ that ought to give rise to the obvious question: Do we have the right definition of what grace is? If it’s just forgiveness of sins, then how do we ‘grow’ in that without doing the very thing which we are prohibited from doing? And, once our sins are forgiven, the application of unmerited pardon in our lives would cease, unless and until we continue committing more sins!

Does the religious world convey to the believer the true definition, the real essence, of what grace is?

The word is not under-defined in scripture. There are MANY passages which use the word ‘grace’ in contexts leaving little doubt as to exactly what is meant. But, it’s the inescapable proclivity of our ‘natural man within’ who prefers the easy answers, who would rather embrace the easier-to-digest

‘sound bite’ passages than to search out substantial answers to the important questions in life. It is those concise and seemingly clear ‘sound bites’, such as Romans 6:14, that are chosen to provide us the definition, rather than allowing the full range of scriptures easily available.

The point here is that we are without excuse. We ought to know what we so easily could know. But our instinctive aversion to that which our ‘natural minds’ oppose, the Law of God, (the definition of true righteousness), overcomes the desire in many for fundamental honesty with this most important component. (Rom.8:7) Salvation is impossible without grace. Yet grace requires faith, and faith to be effective requires a total reversal of conduct and attitude toward God and His righteous standards.

James uses that dreaded word in his Epistle, (Jas.2:18)... *”Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith **by** my works”*... What do works have to do with it? He goes on to say, ...*“Faith without works is dead”!* Under the correct definition of grace, the answer to this becomes clear.

A Revealing Definition.

In 1st Corinthians, Chapter 15, the Apostle Paul, while explaining his former pre-converted conduct toward Christians, credits the auspices of grace for the dramatic difference in his life by saying:

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” (1Cor.15:10)

Here the Apostle Paul uses the word grace three times in the same sentence. Notice that Paul also incorporates ‘works’ into the picture, actually crediting his labors to the grace of God! You would think this would be a well-known scripture, that being the case. But, few have ever heard this passage from the pulpit. Now remember, this was the same author who wrote that well-known disclaimer in Romans 6:14. Why are a few selected passages so popular, while others are rarely ever

quoted or allowed to factor into our definition of the meaning of the term: ‘grace’? We can clearly see from this, as well as the verse quoted above, that we have more to consider regarding the application of grace, in its true definition and in its visible and substantial effects.

The Manifold Grace of God.

The Apostle Peter weighs in again, with a most interesting expression in 1 Pe.3:10, in which he refers to the manifold (many-faceted, or many and various forms of the) grace of God. Again, we can see clear evidence that God’s grace involves many other aspects than just forgiveness of sins. In the context of Peter’s expression, we can see examples of some of those many facets: Having the same suffering-capable mind (v 1), a capability to cease from sin (v 1), able to resist the lusts of the flesh (v.2) such as: licentiousness, lusts, drunkenness, reveling, binges, idolatries, (v.3), able to live the will of God (v.2), able to bear man’s contempt for resisting the natural pulls (v.6), and to live according to God in the Spirit (v.6), fervent in love (v.8), having genuine hospitality (v.9), able to speak God’s Word under inspiration (v.11), serving with God-supplied ability (v.11), tolerant in fiery trials (v.12), rejoicing while enduring sufferings as a Christian (v.13),

Then in verse 17 he goes on to say, *“For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?”*

Not only is the endowed Grace of God multi-faceted, but we’re evaluated on what we allow it to produce in our personal character! Judgment now is upon the ‘house of God’. The rest of that statement above suggests that there is a distinct difference seen in the grace recipient as opposed to those who have not and as a result do not “obey”!

In verse 18, he quotes Proverbs 11:31, *“If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and sinner appear?” NKJ*

What Do WORKS Have to Do With It?

Back to the question asked earlier. The above explanation of the wide range of manifestations of grace, and in the light of Paul's statement, that credits God's Grace as the real means of his doing the works that he did, once he became converted, how can we come to any conclusion suggesting that grace does not involve works? Not as A MEANS of salvation, but as its consequence! An appropriate response to a non-earnable gift.

We Are His Workmanship.

Growing up in the protestant world, a verse was quoted so often regarding salvation that it became one that I could cite by memory. Many can relate to the experience. The verse is found in Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9. *"For by grace are you saved thru faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast,"* This was and is one of the old favorites of so many. But what most have failed to notice, is the very NEXT verse, which puts a perspective into the subject that most would rather ignore. The thought continues: *"For, we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, unto good works which He has before ordained that we should walk in them!"* The oversight is not unintentional or insignificant!

This continuing verse presents the complete picture where chopping it off after the end of the ever-popular verse 9 does not. You see, there are 'before ordained' works, that an unconverted person would not be doing, but the grace recipient would be found doing: 'walking in them'! When is that 'before ordained' time period? Is it referring to the Old Testament laws, judgments and statutes? Most people under the "Law-averse mindset" will here begin to take exception. There are years of theological conditioning, and a premise lending some apparent basis for their reaction.

Works Cannot Save!

Those who hold to the 'grace without works' position, do so largely on the correct observation that works do not and can not produce salvation. Any suggestion of a works-involvement will invariably draw out that re-assertion. That position is technically correct. What fails to enter into the

picture is that there are other reasons for doing 'works' than it being the basis of earning ones' salvation! This possibility escapes the majority! Though works are not the MEANS of salvation, why would we conclude they are not its product? That's the point of Ephesians 2:8-10. We're saved by grace thru faith unto good works! And not just any good works, not those of our own proscriptioin, but rather, those specific works which God 'before ordained that we should walk in them'. The implication is very strong that this is referring to long-standing requisites. We should walk in them!

God's Righteousness is Eternal.

Another often overlooked detail is that God's standards of righteousness did not first appear from the summit of Mount Sinai. They have always existed. They always will. Because a nation of stiffnecked unbelievers needed a Ceremonial System **added** to teach and remind them of the fact that they were seriously unconverted, and needed to continually have performed on their behalf bloody physical rituals in order to maintain an access to God so that they might be heard, does not negate the definition of Righteousness. God 'before ordained' what right conduct is. He later codified that into a written set of laws and statutes, now familiar to all. The later addition of Ceremonial requirements, on account of the first Covenant being violated continually does not remove or abrogate all moral standards. Galatians 3:19 explains that the law was 'added' because of transgression (of those previously known moral standards.) It goes on to explain the purpose of the Ceremonial Law in verses 23 and 24. The law added was for the purpose of 'guarding' the people of God against the day when faith could take over! The Law was our 'schoolmaster', an educational environment, orienting the unconverted to and reserving them for a future personal relationship with Christ.

The Administration of Grace.

Our concept of Grace has been too long limited by a single definitive idea. 1Peter 4:10 explains that Grace is a many-faceted administration. We need to look at its full scope. It is involved in all of these

listed areas. With each, just a few Scriptures are given. There are many more that could be added:

1. Belief is facilitated thru grace:

Acts 18:27 “...and when [Apollos] had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed thru grace”.

Hebrews 13:9 “...For it is good that the heart be established by grace...”

2. Repentance is also a gift!:

Acts 5:31 “Him has God exalted to His right hand to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins

Romans 2:4 “Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?”

3. Forgiveness

Romans 3:24 & 25 “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood, thru faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed.”

4. Understanding and Knowledge;

2Tim.2:1&7 “You therefore my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus....and may the Lord give you understanding in all things”

Ephesians 3:2-3 “..if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery [of Christ]..”

1Cor.1:4-5 “I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge.”

5. Labors (not as a means, but as a response);

1Cor.15:10 “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

Heb.12:28 “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”

6. Inspiration and Service

Rom.12:1-3 ...”present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service, And do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think...”

Rom.12:6-18 “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given, let us use them:

*in prophesy according to faith,
or in ministering,
or in teaching,
or in exhortation,
or giving with liberality,
or in diligent leadership,
or cheerfully being merciful,
or loving without hypocrisy,
or having kind affections,
or exhibiting brotherly love,
or in giving honoring preference,
not lagging in diligence,
and fervent in spirit serving God,
rejoicing in hope,
being patient in tribulation,
continuing steadfast in prayer,
distributing to the needy saints,
given to hospitality,
blessing one’s persecutors’
rejoicing with those who rejoice,
in sorrow with the sorrowful,
exhibiting a same-mindedness,`
not aloof,
associating in humility,
not lofty in self-opinion,
not punitive,*

regarding proprieties...”

All of these Paul lists under the gifts God gives us according to His grace! (verse 6).

Eph.3:7-8 ...”the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. To me who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

Rom.15:15-16 ...”because of the grace given to me by God, that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God....”

7. Perfection:

Eph.2:10 ...”we are His workmanship...”

Titus 2:11-14 “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”

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 give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

Eph.4:7, 13 & 16 “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift ...til we all come to the unity of the faith and the know-ledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love”

8. A Glorified Sonship: The Ultimate Manifestation of Grace!

1Pe.1:13 “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

God’s Power Working in Us!

Incredible as it may seem, locating verses that define grace as being forgiveness of sins are the harder verses to find! Rather, the overwhelming majority are seen as referring to grace as being the **power of God working in us**, producing a new way of life in accordance with Gods specific Will, and exhibiting a zeal for God-ordained works!

To recap these definitions we have just seen:

We are saved by grace, but not grace alone, rather by grace thru the gift of living faith, Eph.2:8, (living faith being a faith that produces works! Jas.2:18, 20 & 24.)

We, as a result, should walk in those “God Ordained Works”, Eph.2:10

Grace is multi-faceted, 1Pe.4:10

Belief comes thru grace, Ac.18:27

Grace leads to repentance, Ac.5:31

We are justified thru grace, Rom.3:24

We are strengthened by grace, 2Tim.2:1

We gain understanding by grace, 2Tim.2:7

Grace enriches utterance and knowledge, 1Cor.1:4

Grace produces ‘labors’!, 1Cor.15:10

Grace facilitates our service to others, Heb.12:28

Gifts according to grace differ, (Rom.12:6 lists 27)

Ministries are given by grace, Eph.3:7, Rom.15:15

Grace works in us producing changes, Eph.2:10

Grace brings salvation, Tit.2:11

Grace produces a zeal for good works, Tit.2:14

Grace builds toward our inheritance, Ac.20:32
Grace is administered to individuals in differing measures, Eph.4:7 (Is anyone ever only partly forgiven?) Paul then goes on to list the various grace-motivated service areas that produce growth and edification within the Church.

Grace molds character perfection, Eph.4:13

An **ultimate grace** is to be revealed at Christ's appearing, 1Pet.1:13 Also, 1Cor.15:49 and Philippians 3:20 & 21

From all of these, and these are only some of the available verses that discuss the administration of grace, we can clearly see that grace is far more than just forgiveness of sins. Those who hold to that narrow definition do themselves a serious disservice. Being averse to the idea that grace produces significant works, in fact, those specific works which God seeks to do in and through us, leaves that 'believer' deficient in the most important area. If that person receives forgiveness only, then what would prevent a quick reversion back to the former state? You see, a vital component is not being dealt with by those who limit grace's definition! A grace that deals **only** with sins already committed fails to address the more important factor.

The ACT and the Tendency.

Sin is not just an act, it is also a tendency. Being forgiven of all past sins, if not accompanied with some means of negating the natural and otherwise inescapable tendency, leaves the individual without any means of escaping a reversion back to his previous state. **We can commit sin but we ARE sinners.** We need not only to be forgiven of past and present sins committed, but we need even more to cease from being sinners! It is this second aspect that is even more important: The very one that so many would rather pointedly disregard because of the implicit suggestion of obedience.

So, we see that some pose a definition of grace that actually FRUSTRATES grace!! A 'no works' definition doesn't allow a complete remission of sin, in that it doesn't adequately deal with our tendency to sin! Grace's true definition involves not only the remission of past actions, but deals with the problem at its source. What good is dealing with the past, if there is nothing allowed that deals with our present state? We need not only to deal with past sinful acts, but also we must stop being sinners! To do that, we must stop breaking God's Law! 1Jn.3:4 explains simply: "*Whoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.*" *KJV* Other translations tend to diminish the pointedness of that, but can't sidestep this fundamental truth.

Not Of Ourselves

"No Works" advocates correctly make the point that we are not saved as a result of our works. Not everyone really understands that. It is verses like Titus 3:5 "*...not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us...*" that give basis to this position. The conclusion is drawn that since salvation is not the result of our works, then we need not have any. Some even go so far to suggest that it would be **WRONG** for us to have any works!!

The failure here is in realizing that even though salvation is not the product of our works, we should not simply conclude that neither are works the product of our salvation.

The ESSENCE of the Matter.

Here is where so many have succumbed to a fatal flaw in reasoning. The conclusion that, since works are not the means of our salvation, that therefore we need not have any. ¹ In putting this plug into the socket, they've mashed one of the prongs! Missing the essential point of grace, that God Works in US, producing what we, by ourselves, could not. *Titus 2:11-14* "*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, de-nying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed*

¹ See my article "What MUST I Do?"

*hope and glorious appear-ing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that **He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.*** Resist or exclude works, and we risk being excluded from being the product of His Workmanship! **Eph.2:10.**