

**THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE**  
**(Lesson Two)**  
**A DEFINITION OF GRACE (Part 1)**

**EPHESIANS 1**  
**NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION**

*1 From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints [in Ephesus], the faithful in Christ Jesus.*

*2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!*

*3 Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ.*

*4 For he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we may be holy and unblemished in his sight in love.*

*5 He did this by predestining us to adoption as his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the pleasure of his will –*

*6 to the praise of the glory of his grace that he has freely bestowed on us in his dearly loved Son.*

*7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace*

*8 that he lavished on us in all wisdom and insight.*

*9 He did this when he revealed to us the secret of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ,*

*10 toward the administration of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ – the things in heaven and the things on earth.*

*11 In Christ we too have been claimed as God's own possession, since we were predestined according to the one purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will*

*12 so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, would be to the praise of his glory.*

*13 And when you heard the word of truth (the gospel of your salvation) – when you believed in Christ – you were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit,*

*14 who is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of his glory.*

*15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,*

*16 I do not cease to give thanks for you when I remember you in my prayers.*

*17 I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you spiritual wisdom and revelation in your growing knowledge of him,*

*18 – since the eyes of your heart have been enlightened – so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints,*

*19 and what is the incomparable greatness of his power toward us who believe, as displayed in the exercise of his immense strength.*

*20 This power he exercised in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms*

**21 far above every rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.**

**22 And God put all things under Christ's feet, and he gave him to the church as head over all things.**

**23 Now the church is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.**

The word rendered “*grace*” in the New Testament is the translation of the Greek word **charis**. Regarding this word, archbishop, Richard Trench remarked: “It is hardly too much to say that the Greek mind has in no word uttered itself and all that was at its heart more distinctly than in this” We make bold to say that the divine mind has in no word uttered itself and all that was at its heart more distinctly than in the word **charis**.

In its use among the pagan Greeks, the word **charis** referred to a favour done by one person to another out of the pure generosity of his or her heart, with no expectation of reward. The Greek philosopher **Aristotle**, in defining the word **charis** stressed that it is given freely, with no expectation of return, and finding its only motive in the bounty and free-heartedness of the giver.

In the New Testament the word **charis** refers to God’s grace and favour towards mankind in general or to any individual in particular. This grace and favour is a free act, totally excluding merit or deserving. It is not hindered by guilt, but freely forgives sin. The apostle Paul, in all his epistles, sets grace and works against one another in direct contrast, showing that they mutually exclude one another. Paul argued that the essence of grace is that it is unearned and unmerited.

**Charis**, the Greek word translated “*grace*” by the writers of the New Testament, refers to that spontaneous act of God that came from the infinite love in His heart. It is exemplified in the process of God becoming a man, the process known to us as the incarnation. It is also exemplified at Calvary when He stepped down from His judgment throne to take upon Himself the guilt and penalty of human sin. Grace allowed God to satisfy His justice and maintain His government. Grace made possible the bestowal of salvation upon the sinner who receives it by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who became a Sin-offering for him on the Cross. Grace may be described as “love that stoops.” Philippians **2:5-8** illustrates this beautifully: “*You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross*” (**New Living Translation**).

In the case of the Greek, the favour was done to a friend, never an enemy. In the case of God the favour was done, not for His friends but for His enemies, you and me, sinners, bitter in our hatred of God. God had no strings attached to the salvation He purchased for man at the Cross. Salvation is given to the believing sinner out of the pure generosity of God’s heart.

The Greek word **charis** referred to an action that was beyond the ordinary course of what might be expected, and was therefore commendable. What a description of that which took place at the Cross! It was an act that was beyond the ordinary course of what was expected. In **Romans 5:7-8** Paul wrote: “*For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*”

The word **charis** was chosen by the writers of the New Testament, particularly the apostle Paul to designate the relation and conduct of God towards sinful man as revealed in and through Jesus Christ, especially as an act of spontaneous favour wherein no mention can be made of obligation.

The word **charis** also refers to the salvation which God provides, which salvation includes foreknowledge, predestination, justification, sanctification, and glorification (**Romans 8:29-30**).

Arthur W. Pink defined grace in the following terms: “Divine grace is the sovereign and saving favour of God exercised in the bestowment of blessings upon those who have no merit in them and for which no compensation is demanded from them. Nay, more; it is the favour of God shown to those who not only have no positive deserts of their own, but who are thoroughly ill-deserving and hell-deserving.

It is completely unmerited and unsought, and is altogether unattracted by anything in or from or by the objects upon which it is bestowed. Grace can neither be bought, earned, nor won by the creature. If it could be, it would cease to be grace. When a thing is said to be of grace we mean that the recipient has no claim upon it, that it was in nowise due him. It comes to him as pure charity, and, at first, unasked and undesired." Perhaps the most succinct but cogent definition of grace that I have ever heard is "The almightiness of God that invades the helplessness of man."

Salvation is the gift of God; it is not a reward. Salvation does not find its source in man. Furthermore, salvation is not out of a source of works. This explains salvation by grace. It is not produced by man nor earned by him. *"It is the gift of God"* (**Ephesians 2:8**). It is a gift from God with no strings attached to it. This is a favourite doctrine of Paul, and it should be a favourite doctrine of all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity and with understanding.

One reason why salvation is a free gift of God and not earned by works, is given us in the words; *"lest any man should boast"* (**Ephesians 2:9**). Grace glorifies God. Works glorify man. Since no person can bring salvation to himself by his own efforts, no one can boast. Our boasting can only be in the Lord.

Salvation cannot be *"of works"* because the work of salvation, past, present and future has already been completed on the cross. This is the work that God did for us, and it is a finished work. When Jesus Christ said shortly before His death, *"It is finished,"* He meant it. You and I can add nothing to it and we dare not take anything from it. When Jesus died, the veil of the temple was torn in two, from the top to the bottom, signifying that the way to God was now open. There is no more need for earthly sacrifices. One sacrifice, the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, has finished the great work of salvation. God did it all, and He did it by His grace.

We are saved because of God's unmerited favour, not as the result of any effort, ability, intelligent choice, or act of service on our part. However, because we are saved, we will endeavour to embrace holiness and please God out of gratitude for His free gift of salvation. While no action or work we do can help us to obtain salvation, God's intention is that our salvation will result in us living holy lives.

It is necessary for us to state that the doctrines of grace are not recent additions to the great doctrines of the Bible. They did not originate with Augustine, Martin Luther or John Calvin. The doctrines of grace are synonymous with the Gospel that was taught and preached by Paul and the other apostles of our Lord. Every departure from the doctrines of grace in any degree, is a departure from the Gospel, for such departure always involves the introduction of some obligation on the part of human beings to make a contribution towards their own salvation, a contribution they are unable to make. This supposed ability of persons to make a contribution to their own salvation is not only unrealistic with respect to them but it is dishonouring with respect to God.

Paul is very explicit on this point in **Romans 11:5-6**: *"Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work."* There simply is no way out of this equation. If human beings contribute anything whatever to their salvation, even if it is their own responsiveness of heart or the exercise of a faith inherent in them or somehow manufactured by them, then salvation is no longer by grace. For it becomes a co-operative effort between humans and God in which the decision of the individual and not of God, determines the issue.

It is Paul whose whole theology of salvation by grace is presented as an equivalent to the Gospel itself by showing that if persons are saved entirely without making any contribution themselves, they must be saved by sovereign grace, for if they contribute anything whatsoever, and that contribution is essential to their salvation, then in the final analysis, they are saved by their contribution. If we are saved by any kind of co-operative effort between us and God, no matter how little is our contribution and how much is God's contribution, then grace is no more grace. It is an all-or-nothing situation.

But one may argue that our contribution does not have to be in the form of actual good works to our credit; it could be merely that we decide to respond positively to the moving of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Others do not respond positively and they are lost.

We do, and we are saved. The decision is ours. Our responsiveness is our contribution. But Paul is clear on this, for our responsiveness would at once become the key, as indeed it is often said to be from the majority of pulpits today. It would make the salvation of the individual a joint effort and immediately raises the question of why one person responds positively and another does not. Is it that the person who responds positively thereby demonstrates a superior spiritual nature and awareness? Is salvation then limited to those of superior nature? Paul's answer would be a resounding No! In **Romans 9:15-16** he writes, *"For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy."* The **New English Translation** renders verse **16** as follows: *"So then, it does not depend on human desire or exertion, but on God who shows mercy."*

The apostle John would agree with Paul for in **John 1:11-13** he writes concerning our Lord, *"He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."* The **New English Translation** renders the passage as follows: *"He came to what was his own, but his own people did not receive him. But to all who have received him – those who believe in his name – he has given the right to become God's children – children not born by human parents or by human desire or a husband's decision, but by God."*

The apostle James would agree with both Paul and John. In **James 1:17-18** he says, *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures."* The **New English Translation** renders the verses as follows: *"All generous giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or the slightest hint of change. By his sovereign plan he gave us birth through the message of truth, that we would be a kind of firstfruits of all he created."*

The same is true of faith. It is not even **our** faith that saves us. The faith that we place in the Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation does not originate with us, it does not inhere in us. Paul makes this clear in **Ephesians 2:8**: The **New English Translation** provides the following rendering: *"For by grace you are saved through faith, **and this is not from yourselves**, it is the gift of God."*

Unfortunately, so much importance has been attached to the exercise of faith as the basis of salvation that this has become our contribution. The question is "How can a dead person exercise faith in his or her own resurrection sufficient to guarantee it." The truth is that we do not even contribute our own saving faith, and so boasting is excluded entirely.

If this is not the case then we have to ask in what way do persons differ, for certainly some respond positively while others do not. Paul asks accordingly: *"Who makes you to differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it?"* (**1 Corinthians 4:7**). Now it is true that very few of us would overtly say, "I was a better individual than others intrinsically because I was receptive and had faith while they did not." But perhaps many of us quietly believe that this is the essential difference between the saved and the unsaved. If this is indeed so then we believe another Gospel which is not a Gospel at all, for it assumes a capability in persons that they simply do not have. Saving faith is not merely **offered** to the unsaved by God: it is **bestowed** upon them. This is Paul's Gospel.

In **John 1:17**, we are told that *"the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came about through Jesus Christ."* Here we have a contrast between what was "given" through Moses, and what "came" through Jesus Christ. The Law was "given" to Moses for it was not his own; but "grace and truth" were not "given" to Jesus Christ for grace and truth belonged to Him; they were His own essential perfections. Grace and truth were not merely "given," they "came." They came in all their fullness, they came in all their glorious perfections.

The Law revealed God's justice, but it did not reveal His mercy; the Law testified to God's righteousness, but it did not testify of His grace. The Law was God's "truth," but not the whole truth about God Himself. In **Romans 3:20** Paul writes, *"For no one is declared righteous before him by the works of the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin"* (**New English Translation**).

A knowledge of sin comes through the law. We never read that “through the law comes the knowledge of God.” **Romans 5:20** informs us that “*the law came in so that the transgression may increase*” (**New English Translation**). The Law made sin exceedingly sinful; it gave sin its strength; it made known the extent of the wickedness of sin; it condemned the sinner, but it did not reveal God.

The Law revealed God’s hatred of sin and His determination to punish those who committed sin; it exposed the guilt and corruption of the sinner, but it could not rescue sinners from their condition or from their doom. It was grace that rescued us from our condition and made us citizens of heaven.

Under the Old Testament Law, righteousness was secured by behaving. Under the Gospel, righteousness is secured by believing. The Law could witness to God’s righteousness, but it could not provide it. Only Jesus Christ can do that. The righteousness of the Law is a reward for works. Gospel righteousness is a gift through faith.

It may be said that God has two kinds of attributes: absolute attributes and relative attributes. Absolute attributes refer to what God is in Himself. Relative attributes refer to how God relates to the world and to human beings. One of His absolute attributes is love: **1 John 4: 8** informs us that “*God is love.*” God as to His very nature and essence is love. When God relates that love to you and me, it becomes grace and mercy. God in His mercy does not give us what we deserve, and God in His grace gives us what we do not deserve.

In **Romans 3:23-24**, Paul writes the following: “*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (**New English Translation**). The Greek word translated “*freely*” in verse **24** is translated in **John 15:25** as “*without reason.*” We are justified without reason! There is no reason in us that would merit the salvation of God! It is all of grace!

Let us consider the argument of Paul in **Romans 4:1-5** as rendered in the **New English Translation Bible**.

*1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh, has discovered regarding this matter?*

*2 For if Abraham was declared righteous by the works of the law, he has something to boast about - but not before God.*

*3 For what does the scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”*

*4 Now to the one who works, his pay is not credited due to grace but due to obligation.*

*5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in the one who declares the ungodly righteous, his faith is credited as righteousness.*

The word “*credited*” in **verse 3** is the translation of a Greek word that means “to put to one’s account.” It is a banking term. When a man works, he earns a salary and this money is put to his account. But Abraham did not work for his salvation; he simply trusted God’s Word. It was Jesus Christ who did the work on the cross, and His righteousness was put on Abraham’s account.

In **verse 5** Paul makes a shocking statement: God declares the ungodly to be righteous! God justifies the ungodly! In **Exodus 23:7** The Law said, “*I will not justify the wicked.*” According to **Deuteronomy 25:1**, the Old Testament judge was commanded to “*exonerate [or justify] the innocent but condemn the guilty.*” In **1 Kings 8:31-32** when Solomon dedicated the temple, he asked God to condemn the wicked and justify the righteous. But Paul informs us that God justifies the ungodly - because there are no godly for Him to justify! He declares the ungodly to be righteous! He put our sins on Christ’s account in order to put Christ’s righteousness on our account. The reason why God justifies the ungodly is that they are the only ones who can be justified! There are no godly persons!

**In 2 Timothy 1:8-9 Paul writes** *“So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me, a prisoner for his sake, but by God’s power accept your share of suffering for the gospel. He is the one who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not based on our works but on his own purpose and grace, granted to us in Christ Jesus before time began”* (**The New English Translation Bible**).

Paul informs us here that God’s act of saving us was not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace. Paul’s argument is that the salvation that God offers is not controlled by the works of the sinner. The works of a sinner do not enter into the economy of God whereby He gives salvation to the individual. Salvation is not earned nor merited by anything that the sinner does. It is dominated by God’s purpose in salvation, and that purpose is to glorify Himself, both in the giving of salvation to the individual and in the life of the person who is the recipient of that salvation. In saving sinners, God is dominated by the mercy that flows spontaneously from His heart. The pure mercy shown to the sinner by God does not take into account any so-called good works that the sinner may do. Salvation, therefore, can never be earned. If it could, the sinner would be glorified. Salvation must be a free gift with no strings attached to it. That is grace.