

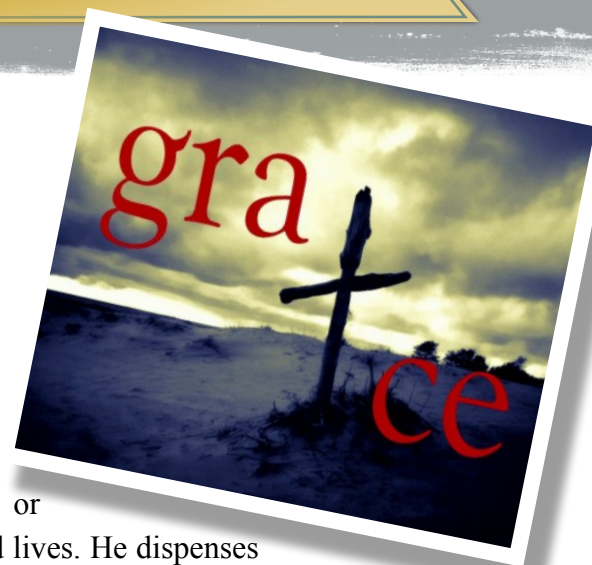
# GRACE—EXPERIENCING IT

## PART 2

### A LIFE OF GRACE IN THE AGE OF GRACE

“ *being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*”

*Romans 3:24 NKJV*



#### Review of Study 12

God's grace is His free favor and kindness to us; it is not merited or repayable. His grace has a God-directed influence upon our hearts and lives. He dispenses His grace based upon His love and kindness toward us, not because of something we do to earn it. All God asks in order to receive His grace is faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. God's grace is what saves us when we believe in Christ. The good news is no one is so bad that He will deny him or her salvation, because His desire is to save everyone (1 Tim. 2:4).

### BIBLE TRUTH

Adult Study 12 discussed God's grace, now we must consider two other aspects of grace: 1) the Age of Grace and 2) experiencing the grace life.

#### The Age of Grace

Adult Study 9 presented the basics of the Age of Grace (AOG), an age kept secret (not revealed in any way) by God from the very beginning. We live in that Age. The AOG is often called the Dispensation of Grace (because God is dispensing His grace based upon faith alone) or the Church Age. Age of Grace seems the easiest to understand, so that term is used in these studies.

God had to keep the AOG a secret, not to deceive or deprive us, but to ensure His eternal plan would work. If His secret were known ahead of time, the plan would not

work. Our fate and the fate of the world depended upon that secret being kept—at all costs. Had the secret (called the *mystery* in the Bible) been found out ahead of time, the powers of darkness would not have crucified Christ; without His death no one could ever be saved. **"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the ruler of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory"** (1 Cor. 2:7-8). The mystery (secret) was not that Christ had to die: that was well prophesied. The secret was God had a whole new, un-prophesied, Age of Grace in His plan.

Study 9 mentioned that Christ's death was certainly not fair and seemed very wrong, an innocent Man dying at

the hands of sinners; yet, it was absolutely essential if any sins were to be forgiven. Sin cannot be overlooked or ignored by God because that is not justice. Sin somehow has to be forgiven, and that can only occur if the penalty is paid. If no sins were forgiven, all of us would be condemned to Hell. God's love compelled Him to provide the payment for all the sins of the world; that payment required the sacrifice of His Son on the Cross. Christ's death means that God is just in forgiving us because the price has been paid in full. At the same time, He is the justifier (the one Who can rightfully proclaim us free from the penalty and blame) **"to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus"** (Rom. 3:26).

For thousands of years God kept this secret in His mind, hidden from everyone, even the angels in Heaven. He did not reveal it in any way or to anyone, not even in symbols or typology in the Bible. If it were in symbols or figures of some sort, Satan would have found out—he is no dummy. We must recall the *mystery* was the world's greatest secret of all time; but now that it is revealed, it is the "good news" we must proclaim to others **"and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ"** (Eph. 3:9; also see Col. 1:25-26; Rom. 16:25-26).

When we understand the mystery, we see how God is working in special ways in our Age, and we learn how to correctly interpret Scripture: **"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"** (2 Tim. 2:15). Rightly dividing the word of truth means to interpret the Bible correctly, so that we follow God's Word for us **today** (not what He wanted for some other age); correct interpretation results in the Bible making a lot more sense.

At just the right time, God revealed the *mystery* to the Apostle Paul. The mystery has been an unbelievable blessing to all humans around the world because in our

Age, God is pouring out His grace. That blessing, around the world, is most likely the reason Satan would not have crucified Christ had he known the mystery. Satan had no desire to have people blessed and saved as they have been in the AOG. The mystery is an unprecedented and unparalleled event in God's eyes, so it has to be even more so in our eyes. We are compelled to explain and proclaim this precious Bible truth.

God's grace is the hallmark of everything in our Age; here are some reasons the AOG is so special:

1. We are saved by God's grace through faith (no works are asked as a demonstration of our faith) (Eph. 2:8-9).
2. All people are equal; God treats everyone with favor and kindness. There is no preferred nation (as Israel had been), group, gender, or race of people (1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 3:11).
3. All believers become members of the Body of Christ (a spiritual body/church) through a spiritual baptism, which is part of His gracious plan (Eph. 5:30).
4. His kindness and favor are witnessed by the fact we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in Heaven, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and transformed in our minds (Eph. 1:3).
5. God is making one new *person* (one new body of believers) out of all who believe (Eph. 2:15).

**Discuss:** Will a believer today have to endure to the end to be saved (Matt. 24:13). (No! Matt. 24 is a prophecy of a future time when we will already be in Heaven. Those left on the earth will have to endure to the end; today we are already seated in Heaven and are sealed into that position.)

Because people do not recognize that the Age of Grace is a distinct age, separate from other ages, they roll all Scripture together and get a confusing salvation message. In past ages, people had to have faith *and* be obedient to what the Lord asked. Noah had faith in God; but in addition, he had to obey and build the Ark, if not, he would have drowned. Abraham believed God and was willing to sacrifice his son (faith plus obedience/works), but God in His mercy stopped Abraham before he sacrificed his son. Under the Mosaic Law (most of the

Old Testament and up to the Apostle Paul's writings) faith plus a step of obedience (faith plus works) were required for receiving God's grace. Today, God's revealed will is for us to have faith alone, without works—that is why our Age is very special. To be clear, people in all ages were saved by God's grace; no one ever deserved it. The difference in the Age of Grace is that God dispenses His grace without works, while in other ages, faith plus some measure of obedience were required. Because grace is the outstanding characteristic of our Age, it is called the Age of Grace.

### The Grace Life

God's grace not only saves us, it has an ongoing divine influence upon our hearts, changing us from within and guiding us all of our lives. Here are several important ways the grace of God works in us after salvation.

#### 1. By God's grace we are taught how to live.

The indwelling Spirit guides us from within so that we can live according to His will. This requires an adjustment of our heart to the presence of the Holy Spirit, Who will enable us to walk (live) in accordance to His will. **"If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit"** (Gal. 5:25). We do not need to worry about keeping the law (10 commandments) in order to be "right" with God. **"For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit"** (Rom. 8:3-4). These verses may be hard to understand, but the main point is the requirements of the law are *fulfilled in* us by the Spirit; they are *not fulfilled by* us. Thus, the ability to please God does not come from following rules, but from the Holy Spirit working within us to change our hearts and minds.

By grace we are transformed from within (by the Holy Spirit) to live, think, and follow His desires. God uses the Holy Spirit to first create heavenly motives and desires

within us, then gives us the power and ability to perform them, **"...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure"** (Phil. 2:13). The Holy Spirit does not disclose His presence in a way that can be sensed (seen, felt, ...), you will be conscious of your own faculties changing due to His quiet and powerful work within you. As your character and values are molded to conform to Christ, you live and act accordingly.

#### 2. By God's grace we are given spiritual blessings and a position in Heaven.

The moment we are saved, we are blessed with all spiritual blessing in Heaven. **"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ"** (Eph. 1:3). Chapters 1-2 of Ephesians list those spiritual blessings, they are things like God's selecting believers based upon faith in Christ, making us accepted in the Beloved, redeeming us through His blood, forgiving our sins, sealing our salvation.... These are all the spiritual blessings anyone could imagine, and more. These blessings assure us that God has taken care of us in every detail, for all eternity.

Another blessing we receive is a heavenly position. As far as God is concerned, we are already seated in Heaven next to Christ. The actual seating will occur in the future, but that seating is so sure, so guaranteed by God, that He views it as a reality now. **"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus"** (Eph. 2:4-6). The position we have, right next to Jesus Christ, will never change.

A seal is placed on us when God saves us, that is, He makes sure our salvation can never be lost. This certainty was not true in previous ages, thus the confusion in Christendom today. Salvation is an eternal inheritance that cannot be taken away. Not only can it not be taken, but it is guaranteed to be securely held until He comes to

get us. Even our own actions cannot negate our salvation. He will not change His mind if we commit a terrible sin(s); He knew all about that sin before He saved us: **"...the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of his glory"** (Eph. 1:13-14).

**Discuss:** What if we commit the unpardonable sin (1 Jn. 5:16)? (Note: There is no unpardonable sins in the AOG; God forgave Paul who was the chief of sinners. God already knew every sin you would commit before He saved you. You did not merit your salvation, and your future lack of merit cannot take it away. Salvation is based entirely upon God's faithfulness and Christ's merit, not anything you do.)

### **3. By God's grace we can live a life infused with a gracious attitude and heart.**

His grace leads to good works and charitable giving. He provides the necessities of life and works within to produce a Christ-like attitude. With our necessities provided and with Christ's mind, we are equipped to do all sorts of good works for others. **"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work"** (2 Cor. 9:8).

Because of His grace in our lives, we are asked to demonstrate that grace. We are to be gracious in our speech and thoughts, indeed all our actions. **"Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one"** (Col. 4:6). Food that is properly seasoned has a pleasant and rewarding taste; our speech should have a pleasant "taste" to the hearer. For those with anger, resentment, or bitter hearts, the Lord can change you and provide the wisdom to know how to answer those who annoy or threaten you. Thus, Solomon says that being a wise person is based upon having a gracious tongue, **"The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious, but the lips of a fool shall swallow him up"** (Eccl. 10:12). A person with a gracious mouth does not always have to be right (and prove it, over and over), does not have to have

the last word (as though the last to speak were right), and is not concerned with telling others off. In fact, a godly person will want his or her speech to be helpful to the hearer, a form of speech that tends to comfort and encourage others. Put yourself in the other person's shoes and give thoughtful and considerate responses. Recall those people who have the knack of building others up and praising them, and try to develop that pattern of speech in your life.

A gracious person is a humble person. **"But He gives more grace. Therefore he says: 'God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble'"** (James 4:6). Being humble does not mean you should let others take advantage of you or that you cannot have a mind of your own; those things are expected. However, humility indicates you cannot exalt yourself, constantly talk about yourself, or think more highly of yourself than is appropriate. As you humble yourself, you will then be able to empathize with the poor, the needy, and those of lower estate, **"Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion"** (Rom. 12:16). This perspective enables you to reach out to them and to be a source of comfort and hope for them. Personal humility and the desire not to be above those who are worse off than you is a mind-set that is developed in you when the Holy Spirit transforms your life.

**Discuss:** What is the difference between being humble and being a doormat or suffering abuse?

## TAKE TO HEART

### Summary

The Age of Grace (AOG) was God's secret (mystery) for thousands of years. Had Satan and the powers of darkness known what God would accomplish in our Age, they would not have crucified Christ. Had Christ not died, no one could be saved, not in any age. The AOG was crucial to the salvation of all humans in all ages, and that all depended upon keeping our Age a mystery. Today, God dispenses His grace based upon faith in Jesus Christ. This abounding grace is more than Satan could have imagined; he was totally outwitted because of God's secret. When God dispense His grace, it first saves us and then works in our lives to change us from within. Thus, God's grace not only saves us, it also has a divine influence, changing our lives by molding our minds and hearts to conform to His will. By His grace we are 1) taught how to live for Him, 2) given spiritual blessings and a position in Heaven, and 3) can live a life of grace as we experience Him in every aspect of our lives.

### Gospel

**"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"** (Rom. 3:23-24).

This is the gospel in pure form right from the mouth of God. We are justified (declared righteous; thus, saved) by His grace free of charge. We are bought back (redeemed) from the penalty of sin by Jesus Christ. This all costs us nothing, but it was at great price to God—the death of His Son.

### Encouragement

God had a plan for each of us that existed before creation. That plan included Christ's death so that we could be saved by His grace through faith. Then, He designed it so the Holy Spirit would dwell within us in order to help us live according to His will. Finally, He chose to bless us super-abundantly with all spiritual blessing, making sure we are totally and completely cared for throughout eternity. May the Lord enable you to speak freely of His grace. The truth of His grace is a precious thing to share. Please take joy in what the Lord has done for you, from beginning to end, perfect in every detail. You are His child, accepted and blessed by the Almighty God. In God's mind, you are already seated in Heaven with Christ (and He will insure this happens in the future). Welcome to His family; what a joy you bring.