

What Grace Is and Is Not 12-13-15

Understanding the Scriptures requires us to understand the Scriptural meaning of words. This might sound simple, but one of the great problems that causes division among people to profess Christ is the failure to understand what the Bible means by a word. Faith is not believing alone; love is not an emotion; baptism means immersion; church is not a building. All words that many have been deceived or are ignorant of their true meaning.

Scriptures do not leave us without understanding. Many of the important words of the Bible are clearly defined. For example, 1 John 5:3 defines love; fear of the Lord is defined in Proverbs 8:13; Faith is defined in Hebrews 11:1. We tend to define words two ways: a simple definition that is specific to the word, and then the Scriptural characterization of a word, which is the revealed substance of the word.

An example of this is the word "Gospel". The specific definition of Gospel is "good news" (*ev-angelos*). The Scriptural characterization of the word is found in I Corinthians 15:1-4, which tells us that the Gospel is the "death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ according to Scriptures". This fuller meaning gives us a better understanding of the idea.

Our purpose here is to understand the meaning of the word "Grace". To define the word is simple enough; the word GRACE in Hebrew: *techinnah* - means "favor from supplication"; in Greek: *charis* - means a favorable gift. Sometimes these words are translated "favor" in the Bible. We often say then that Grace is "unmerited favor".

But what is the Scriptural characterization of the word? To understand this we need to discern how it is used in the Bible. It is first revealed in Genesis 6:8-22. There we see Noah found "grace" in the eyes of God. How was it manifested? God revealed to Noah His plans, and then gave Noah a plan to follow for his salvation.

Subsequently, Grace is seen in Genesis 19:17-22 in the man Lot. In verse 19 Lot declared that he (and his wife, sons and daughters) had found Grace in the eyes of the Angels (and God). How was that Grace manifested? By God revealing to him His plan to destroy the city of Sodom, and giving him a plan to escape. Now what is interesting here is that Lot's son-in-laws, while given Grace too, did not accept it. And more interesting is Lot's wife, who accepted the Grace of God, but then did not follow to completion God's plan, and was lost.

Another Old Testament example of Grace is in Ezra 9:8 (with Haggai 1). There we see that men received Grace from God after their obedience in building the temple, God's command in Haggai 1. Not too that in Haggai 1 God was bringing a famine to the land to drive them to obedience. Once more the pattern is that Grace is God revealing His plan to men, and then telling men what they need to do to avoid destruction.

Does this pattern hold true in the New Testament as well? In Titus 2:11-12 we are told that God's Grace has appeared and brings salvation to all men, telling them what they must do. Indeed, it follows precisely the theme of Grace in the Old Testament. God reveals Himself and His plan, and then instructs us on what we must do to be saved.

Thus we have seen that Grace can be characterized in Scripture as God preparing a plan of salvation, without any merit or action on our part, and then requiring us to be obedient to cause that Grace to bring us to salvation. Grace as defined in Scripture ALWAYS requires obedience for Salvation to occur.

From this pattern we can make some very important observations about what Grace is NOT. First, Grace is not the same meaning as salvation. Consider again the words in Titus 2:11-12; Grace has appeared to BRING salvation through instruction. It is not salvation itself, but it is the offered means of salvation. Thus it is clear that Grace is entirely without merit (Romans 5:5-8), yet salvation still requires our active acceptance to be received. Grace is to all men, but salvation only to those who are obedient.

Second, Grace does not work outside of God's "plan of salvation". We cannot say "God has offered Grace" and then dictate our own plan of salvation. Grace IS the plan offered; to attempt to meet God without obedience is to attempt to meet God apart from Grace. The *Sinner's Prayer*, *Once Saved Always Saved*, *Saved by Faith Only* are all absent from Scripture and therefore separate from Grace (the revealed mind of God), and thus an attempt at a salvation by works and not Grace. Grace is only in the plan God offers Salvation through.

Finally, Grace is no a "spotlight" that follows us in our lives. Instead, Grace (as the revealed mind of God for our actions) is a path that we follow. As described in 1 John 1, Grace is walking the light, an action that causes us to be in fellowship with Christ. We cannot leave the path and remain in Grace. We cannot sin and think that Grace would cover that (Romans 6:1-3).