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GRACE

What does the Bible mean by grace?

Basically, it is God's favour shown to humans, and is rightly termed 'unmerited favour' for we have not earned it in any way. The term is most widely understood in connection with God's grace given to those people who put their trust in Jesus as Lord and Saviour. The full expression of that grace is in the salvation of those who truly believe. It has been said that under law God demands righteousness from all people and under grace God gives righteousness to those who believe. It is by God's grace that we may be saved, and not by any righteousness of our own. It is by grace, and only by grace, that we may be saved. (See Ephesians 2:1–9.)

The era of grace began in the world with the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus

Titus 3:4–5; John 1:17; 1:12–13, 3:36; Romans 3:24–27; 5:2; 15–21; 6:14; 2 Corinthians 6:1–3; 8:9; Galatians 1:3–15; 2:21; 5:4

The law (Heb. *Torah*) makes God's righteous demands. The Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20), and our Lord's summary of the law (Matthew 22:37–40) are of special significance.

Grace is God's gift to enable mankind to live holy lives

It might be said, then, that: *law demands – grace gives.*

Deuteronomy 5:6–22; 1 John 4:19–5:21 (speaks of the love of God in giving Jesus, His Son); John 1:12, 3:16; Romans 3:21–24, 8:3, 10:4–10; Philippians 3:9, 4:13; Hebrews 7:19; Psalm 51:11–17; Ephesians 5:15–20

In life we can either live under law, or under grace

This is the fundamental choice before all people, whether they acknowledge it, or not. The biblical record shows clearly that under law, before the time of Christ, mankind as a whole failed, and ended by crucifying Jesus. Similarly, the era of grace will also end in the failure of mankind – this time evidenced most clearly in its final persecution of Jewish people and believing Jews and Christians. This will be a time of a turning away from truth – even by some within the church. But it is mankind that fails – not God's plan of grace.

2 Corinthians 4:3–4; 2 Timothy 3:1–8; 1 John 4:1–3; 2 Peter 2:1; Jude 4, 8, 11–13, 16

The simplicity and freedom of grace is God's final plan of salvation for the world

Any other 'gospel' is an anathema to God. Acts 4:12; Romans 10:9–13 (see also Ezekiel 34); Galatians 1:8–9; John 10:1–21

Common Grace

There is a second concept of grace – the idea of common grace. Put simply, common grace is God's loving and favourable attitude to humans *per se*, being demonstrated in all those blessings that stop short of actual salvation. The key text that illustrates this is Matthew 5:44–5: “. . . *Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven. For he makes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust . . .*”

Many things that life has to offer may be enjoyed by and available to even those who refuse to believe. Health, friendships, successes and human love are generally available to all mankind to greater or lesser degree. The fact that so many fail to enjoy these things seems to be at least partly because of the sinful and fallen world in which we live. Passages that underline this idea of *common grace* are: Psalm 36:5–7; Psalm 145:9, 14–17; Acts 14:15–17; Acts 17:24–28. These passages testify to the good will of God towards all humanity. When we sin and suffer for our sins, this is in spite of God's goodness, and in spite of his gift of grace through Jesus. We emphasise, however, that the key understanding of grace is in relation to what Jesus has done on the cross.