

## CHAPTER 3

# The Blessing of Grace

On the evening before Jesus went to the cross, He gave His disciples a very powerful object lesson. During the last meal He would share with them before His suffering, He rose from the table, took a bowl of water and a towel in hand, and began to wash their feet. Of course, this is not what any of them would have expected. In that day, the task of washing feet belonged to the servant in the home. This is why Peter protested so strongly: “Never shall you wash my feet!” Jesus answered by saying: “Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me (John 13:8).”

Clearly, Jesus was giving His disciples a picture of His very purpose for entering the world. On the next day, He would give His life to pay the penalty for the sins of the world. This is how He came to “wash” us. When we place our trust in His sacrifice, He forgives us, and this is what qualifies us to live in the presence of a holy God. This is the essence of the gospel (good news). Our natural inclination is to think our salvation comes from what we do for God, but it actually comes from what we allow Him to do for us.

When I was in college, a very generous individual made a way for me to travel to Israel with a small group. We stayed at the Ramada Shalom. (What a great name for a hotel...) One day, as I was walking up a stairwell there, I met a custodian. He was very kind and seemed intrigued to learn more about this visitor from the U.S. I learned he was Muslim by birth, and somehow our conversation turned to what is necessary for a person to go to heaven. As we sat on the steps of the stairwell, he shared with me his understanding. He said that if I were to draw a line down the center of a sheet of paper, and then write all the good things I have done on one side—and all the bad things on the other, if the good things outnumbered the bad, I would get in.

I then shared with him my understanding. I told him that none of us can make it into heaven with even one mark against us. This is because God is utterly holy, and He can't have fellowship with that which is unholy. I explained that this is why Jesus died for us. By His sacrifice, He paid the penalty for our sins, and when we put our trust in Him, it's as if He tears up the entire list of the bad things we have done. He forgives us completely, and this is what enables us to enter His presence.

I remember the look on his face as I shared these things. He seemed very glad—and even relieved. Later that day he went out of his way to find me, and he gave me an apple with a knife in it. It was his way of thanking me.

And yes, I was glad the knife was for the apple and not some other purpose...

I also remembered how Jesus promised that anyone who gives even a cup of cold water to one of His disciples will never lose his reward (Matt. 10:42). Since that day I have found myself hoping and praying often that Jesus' promise applies to apples as well as water.

In Eph. 2:8-9 the apostle Paul writes:

For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.

The word “grace” here comes from the Greek word *charis* (khar<sup>2</sup>-ese), which means “favor.” As we learned in Chapter 1, there are two primary words for favor in the Old Testament: *chanan*, which is used for unmerited favor, and *ratsab*, which is used for merited favor. In the New Testament, this one word (*charis*) is used for both, and the context determines which one it refers to.<sup>1</sup> In this passage, it clearly refers to unmerited favor. Our salvation is “the gift of God.” Therefore, we can’t earn it by what we do. We can only rely on Him, by faith, to do for us what we can’t do for ourselves.

When Peter learned he could have no part with Jesus unless he let Jesus wash him, he said:

Then, Lord, not only my feet, but my hands and my head as well! (John 13:9)

Jesus responded this time in a way we might not expect:

Whoever has already bathed needs only to wash his feet, and he will be completely clean. (John 13:10)

Peter was already “clean” because he had placed his faith in Jesus (Matt. 16:16). However, as long as he lived in this world, he would pick up the “dirt” of the world—as we all do. James 3:2 says that we all stumble in many ways. This is why we must keep coming back to Jesus to let Him wash us over and over again.

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of verses in which *charis* refers to *unmerited favor* include John 1:16, Eph. 2:8-9, and Titus 3:7. Verses where it refers to *merited favor* include Luke 1:30, Acts 2:47, 1 Pet. 2:20.

Unfortunately, our concept of salvation can be very shallow. In Scripture, there are three distinct aspects of salvation, and it's vitally important for us to understand each one.

## The Three Aspects of Salvation

### Justification

The first aspect of salvation is called "justification." In Rom. 5:1, the apostle Paul writes:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

To be justified is to be considered righteous (just) in God's sight, even though we are not righteous in and of ourselves. In 2 Cor. 5:21, we read:

God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

When we trust in Jesus' sacrifice, the *Great Exchange* takes place. All of our sin is placed on Him, and all of His righteousness is placed on

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us. As hard as it may be for us to comprehend or accept, He sees us as being as righteous as His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

God is completely just, and His justice requires a just punishment for sin. However, rather than placing on us the penalty we deserved, He allowed it to fall on His Son. This is how God was able to remain just while justifying us (Rom. 3:26).

When God justifies us, He makes us righteous in our *position* (standing) before Him, even though we are not righteous in our actual

*experience* (how we live). Then, He begins the process of making us more and more righteous in our actual experience, which is the next aspect of salvation.

## Sanctification

The second aspect of salvation is “sanctification,” which means “to make holy.” In 1 Thess. 5:23, Paul writes:

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your entire spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This verse gives us a picture of how God designed us. We are utterly unique in this world in that we possess a living body, soul, and spirit. Plants have a living *body*, but no *soul* or *spirit*. Animals have a living *body* and *soul*, but no *spirit*. The soul consists of the mind, will, and emotions—everything that *animates* the body. We, however, possess a living *body*, *soul*, and *spirit*. The spirit is what gives us the capacity for a relationship with God, who is spirit (John 4:24).

This verse also reveals how God works to sanctify us. He begins by sanctifying us in our *spirits*. When we trust in Him for the gift of salvation, our spirits are born of God’s Spirit (John 3:1-8). Then, His Spirit works to sanctify us in the totality of our beings (spirit, soul, and body). This is how God works to make us righteous in our *experience* before Him (more on this later in this chapter).

When we are justified, it doesn’t mean we won’t sin again, but when we sin, it doesn’t mean we are no longer justified. To use an analogy, when a young boy is adopted, it doesn’t mean he will never disappoint his new parents, but even when he stumbles, his standing as

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their child remains intact. Out of their faithful love for him, his parents will discipline him, but they won't disown him. And our justification remains intact even as God works to sanctify us. Sanctification is a process. It begins when we are justified, but it won't be complete until we go to be with Him in heaven one day.

## Glorification

The third aspect of salvation is "glorification." In 1 Cor. 15:43, Paul writes that we will be "raised in glory." That is, we will be raised with an entirely new nature.

We receive the gift of eternal life when we receive Christ. According to John 17:3, Jesus Himself is eternal life. Therefore, we possess eternal life *now* when we possess Him. In 1 John 5:11-12 we read:

... God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

We receive this life of Christ when we are justified. Then, He works to make our nature more and more like His (Rom. 8:29). This is how He works to sanctify us, but this process won't be complete until we enter heaven one day. Only then will we be made entirely new. In heaven there will be no barrier between ourselves and God in our *spirits*. Our *souls* will be made completely whole, and we will receive new *bodies* that are fit for eternity. In 1 Cor. 15:53, the apostle Paul writes: "... the perishable must be clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality."

Glory!

To summarize, when we place our trust in Jesus' sacrifice for us, He makes us **righteous in our position before Him (justification)**. Then He works to make us **righteous in our experience before Him**

**(sanctification)**. And in heaven, He will make us completely **righteous in our nature before Him (glorification)**. And we can express these three aspects of salvation another way. God saves us first from the **penalty of sin**. Then, He saves us more and more from the **power of sin**. And one day He will save us from the very **presence of sin**.<sup>2</sup>

### Three Aspects of Salvation

| Justification                             | Sanctification                              | Glorification                           |
|---|---|---|
| Made Righteous in our Position before God | Made Righteous in our Experience before God | Made Righteous in our Nature before God |
| Saved from the Penalty of Sin             | Saved from the Power of Sin                 | Saved from the Presence of Sin          |

The important thing for us to remember is that we are saved by grace alone, and this applies to every aspect of salvation. By grace, we *are saved, continue to be saved, and will be saved*.

This brings up a question though. How can grace make us more righteous in our *experience* before God? After all, if we know He will forgive us when we sin, wouldn't this make us more likely to sin—knowing He will forgive us anyway? And wouldn't this make us less righteous in how we live?

It may seem this way—until we experience the power of grace...

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<sup>2</sup> Verses that speak of the initial aspect of salvation (justification) include Rom. 3:23-24 and Titus 3:3-7. Verses that speak of the ongoing aspect of salvation (sanctification) include Phil. 2:12 and Heb. 7:25. Verses that speak of the final aspect of salvation (glorification) include Heb. 9:28 and 1 Pet. 1:13. For examples of verses that speak of multiple aspects of salvation, see Rom. 5:9 and Heb. 10:13.

## The Power of Grace

### Grace Heals Us.

In Chapter 1 we learned that peace is a function of right alignment (righteousness), and our healing comes from this same alignment. That which needs to be healed is misaligned, and grace is what aligns us, first in our *relationship with God*. Out of His great *mercy*, He washes away our sins, which allows us to come into union with Him. Then, He *helps* us grow in our relationship with Him, which produces more and more healing in us.

Then, our alignment with God carries over to our *relationships with others*. We are moved to love others as He loved us—and as He loves them. We realize we must forgive others as He has forgiven us (Eph. 4:32), and we must seek the forgiveness of others, when necessary, just as we seek His forgiveness (Matt. 5:23). In Rom. 12:18, the apostle Paul writes: “If it is possible on your part, live at peace with everyone.” We can’t take responsibility for what others do, but we *must* take responsibility for what we do, and if we will, we will grow in the peace we experience with both God and others.

And this carries over still further to our *relationship/interaction with the world* we live in. Many of the struggles we experience in the tangible aspects of our lives (addictions, obsessions, psychosomatic disorders, etc.) come from our attempts to fill the void only God can fill in us, or to medicate the wounds we have sustained in our relationships with others.

What then is the solution?

It’s to experience healing in our relationship with God first. Then He works to heal us in the other realms of our lives. Each aspect of our lives (spirit, soul, and body) corresponds to the primary realms of



our lives (our relationship with God, others, and the world). God heals us first in our relationship *with Him*—in our *spirits*. Then, this helps us grow in the healing we need in our relationships *with others*, which we experience primarily in our *souls*. And this helps us find healing in the tangible aspects of our lives, which we experience in our *bodies*.

We can see this work of grace as being much like a fountain:



Many of our problems come from trying to meet our needs in the opposite order. For example, we put *things* (in the realm of our bodies) before *people* (in the realm of our souls), or we rely on *people* to meet needs only *God* can meet within us (in our spirits).

This is where grace holds so much promise for our healing. The healing that rises up from our *spirits* to our *souls* heals the lies we have believed in our *minds*, including the lies we have believed about God. It heals the wounds we have sustained in our *emotions*, whether through neglect or active abuse. And it heals our *wills* where we may have lost the will to live at all. And this healing in our souls has a profound effect on the health we experience in our *bodies*.

Contrary to the idea that grace gives us an excuse to sin, it's what heals all the ways our lives have been broken by sin, and it produces in us the wholistic peace (*shalom*) that comes from the God of all peace (1 Thess. 5:23).

**Grace Satisfies Us.**

In Chapter 1 we learned that grace is not just what brings us into alignment with God, it's what we experience *from* Him when we are aligned *with* Him. This grace produces in us a deep sense of *satisfaction*, which works to sanctify us as well. When we experience the peace that comes from our union with God, we can't be satisfied with anything less. When we stumble, we only want to return to Him as quickly as possible. In 1 John 1:9 we read:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

This is how Jesus continues to “wash our feet” (sanctification) even after we are clean (justification), so we can continue to share in His life (John 13:8).

Then, this satisfaction, like our healing, carries over to the other realms of our lives. The Bible speaks of how good it is for us to experience the favor of both God *and others*. In Pr. 3:3-4 we read:

Never let loving devotion or faithfulness leave you;  
bind them around your neck,  
write them on the tablet of your heart.  
Then you will find favor and high regard  
in the sight of God and man.

In Luke 2:52 we see the characteristics of Jesus' life in His youth:

And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

Our problem is that we so easily seek the favor of others above God's favor, which only interferes with our experience of His favor (e.g., John 5:44). When we seek His favor first though, a beautiful thing happens. God is able to use our relationships with each other as instruments of His grace and blessing in our lives.

Then, because of the satisfaction we experience in our growing alignment with God and others, we no longer feel the need to look for satisfaction in the things that could never satisfy us in the first place. When this happens, we experience something else that is very beautiful. God is able to use the tangible things in this world to accomplish His purpose for them, which is to serve as instruments of His favor in our lives. In fact, when we find our greatest satisfaction in Him, we experience even greater satisfaction in all the gifts He gives, because we are able to receive them with gratitude, contentment, and peace.

### **Grace Moves Us.**

As we have seen, God's unmerited favor (grace) moves us to live in a way that merits His favor. To say this another way, the pleasure He finds in us because of who we are moves us to please Him by the things we do. And there is no more powerful motivation than this. To give an example, professional athletes who perform at very high levels are certainly motivated by the desire to win, but some possess an even greater motivation. Take the man whose mother worked multiple jobs to put him through school. He is motivated not just by what can be gained, but what has already been given. This is the most altruistic (selfless) motivation of all, and it's the most powerful because it's intrinsic in nature (arising from within) rather extrinsic (arising from factors outside us—what can be gained or lost). Blessed are those who have someone in this world who has birthed in them this kind of motivation. It produces in them a passion like no other. And blessed are we when we realize this is the motivation we already have in Christ.

In all these ways, grace makes us more and more righteous in our *experience* before God. It *heals* our past, *satisfies* our present, and *moves* us into an entirely new future.

And there is, perhaps, no greater example of this than Peter...

On the night Jesus washed His disciples' feet, Peter promised to lay down his life for Him (John 13:37), and he boasted he would never fall away—even if everyone else did (Matt. 26:33). However, just as Jesus predicted (Matt. 26:34), Peter denied Him three times, and when he realized this, he went out and “wept bitterly” (Matt. 26:75).

After Jesus' resurrection, He told His disciples to wait for Him in the region of Galilee. Can you imagine how Peter must have felt as he waited for Jesus there? Jesus called Peter to be a fisher of men (Matt. 4:18-19). Was all of this off now? Was this why Peter decided to go fishing when he reached Galilee—for fish (John 21:1-3)?

When Jesus finally spoke to Peter, He asked him three times if he loved Him. This gave Peter a chance to reaffirm his love for Jesus for each time he denied Him, and each time Peter reaffirmed his love for Jesus, Jesus reaffirmed His call to Peter (John 21:15-18). Surely there was no greater way for Jesus to express His love. Not only did He forgive Peter, He still believed in him—and He had a job for him.

This is when Peter learned something we will all need to know at some point in our lives. God doesn't love us only at the beginning (when we first trust Him), even after we have failed Him miserably, He loves us *still*.

Earlier, when Jesus first washed Peter's feet, He told him he would not understand until later (John 13:7).

Was this when Peter finally understood?

From this moment on, Peter was a different person. At Pentecost, he preached with a clarity and power he never possessed before (Acts 2:14-41). His life was marked by humility (1 Pet. 5:1-3), and the letters he wrote breathed with grace (e.g., 1 Pet. 1:2, 4:10, 5:5; 2 Pet. 1:2).

What then can we learn from Peter's example?

To begin with, we must rely completely on grace for our right standing before God. One of the best ways for us to determine if we are truly doing this is to ask ourselves if we can say the following:

**I see myself as being as righteous in the sight of God as the Lord Jesus Christ.**

If we are not able to say this, it's because we are not relying completely on grace. We are still trusting in ourselves to do what He has already done for us.

Then, we must learn to rely on this same grace *always*. His grace is something we must “stand” in (Rom. 5:2), and it's something we must “continue” in (Col. 2:6). Our heart to receive God's grace must grow, more and more, to become as constant as His heart to give it.

I have to say that I still struggle to believe God could see me as being as righteous as the Lord Jesus, which means I still need to grow in my reliance on His grace. There is something I have found to be very encouraging though in the words of Peter (yes, Peter). In 2 Pet. 1:5-8, he gives us the qualities we need to grow in if we are going to be effective and productive in our knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then he tells us what the root cause is if we don't possess these qualities:

But whoever lacks these traits is nearsighted to the point of blindness, having forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. (2 Peter 2:9)

Notice what Peter does *not* say. He doesn't say we aren't trying hard enough, and He doesn't say we have neglected our spiritual disciplines, as important as they may be. He says we have “forgotten.” We have forgotten the grace we first received, but if we will remember, God's grace will continue to produce in us the same effect it had at the beginning. It will *heal us* and *satisfy us* and *move us*—always.

And how is this even possible?

It's because, as we learned in the last chapter, when God created the heavens and the earth, it wasn't the last time He would descend low on behalf His entire creation. His greatest act of descent on our behalf was His entrance into our world in the Person of His Son. In Matt. 20:28, Jesus said:

... the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

This is what Jesus was expressing when He washed the feet of His disciples, and this is what He actually did for us all the very next day when He gave His life for us on the cross. How then could we refuse the gift He came to bring us? When we attempt to achieve our own righteousness by the things we do, we are saying, in effect, that what He did was unnecessary. In Gal. 2:21, the apostle Paul writes:

I do not set aside the grace of God. For if righteousness comes through the law, Christ died for nothing.

Jesus spoke the following parable to those “who trusted in their own righteousness” (Luke 18:9):

Two men went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed, “God, I thank You that I am not like the other men— swindlers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and pay tithes of all that I acquire.”

But the tax collector stood at a distance, unwilling even to lift up his eyes to heaven. Instead, he beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner!” I tell you, this man, rather than the Pharisee, went home justified. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 18:10-14)

Here is the great irony. If we think we are unworthy to receive God's grace, we are actually closer to the kingdom than we think, because *we are unworthy*. Just one thing remains for us though when we realize this. We must rely on His grace alone.

And here is another irony. If we rely on our righteousness, not only will we miss the only way we can become righteous in our *position* before God, we will miss the only thing that can make us righteous in our *experience* before Him. And we will miss the only thing that can make us righteous in our *nature* before Him in heaven one day.

What then must we do?

If it was enough for a humble tax collector to say, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner!" it's enough for us.

Have you done this?

The One who washed the feet of His disciples is standing before you now. Can you see Him? He has a bowl of water and a towel in His hands. Will you let Him wash you now?

Will you let Him wash you always?

## Summary

- The New Testament word for grace is *charis*, which can refer to *merited* or *unmerited* favor.
- We are saved by grace (unmerited favor) through faith (Eph. 2:8-9). It is the gift of God, so we can't boast about anything we have done.
- The three aspects of salvation are *justification* (righteous in our position before God), *sanctification* (righteous in our experience before God), and *glorification* (righteous in our nature before God).

- Every aspect of salvation is accomplished by grace. By grace, we are *saved*, *continue to be saved*, and *will be saved*.
- Grace accomplishes God's work of sanctification in us by healing us, satisfying us, and moving (motivating) us.
- If we are not able to see ourselves as being as righteous as the Lord Jesus, we are still not relying fully on grace.
- Just as we must rely on the grace of God to save us at the beginning, we must rely on His grace *always*.

### **Primary Applications:**

1. Rely completely on the grace of God to make you righteous before Him.
2. Rely always on the same grace you received at the beginning.

### **Assignment:**

1. Memorize Eph. 2:8-9 and 1 John 1:9.
2. Take a moment to ask yourself if you see yourself as being as righteous in the sight of God as the Lord Jesus Christ. If this is a struggle for you, it may be because you realize there are things you need to do in order to align your life with Him. If this is the case, be careful to rely on His *mercy* for you first. Then, rely on His *help*, step by step, to do all the things you need to do. If necessary, rely on a trusted friend or mentor to help you walk this out, but do it all only by the grace God gives you.



## Discussion Questions

1. Are there specific ways God spoke to you through this chapter?
2. What are the three aspects of salvation? Briefly describe what each one means.
3. What are the three ways God's grace works to make us more and more righteous in our experience before Him? Can you see ways He is accomplishing each of these in you? If so, how?



7. Are you continuing to rely on God's grace by faith, just as you did at the beginning? If not, how can you be careful to do this