

"The Grace of God"

Someone said grace is "God's Redemption At Christ's Expense." Hello, I'm Phil Sanders; and welcome to our Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." I'm excited today to tell you what the grace of God can do in your life. I believe you'll get excited too.

Welcome to "In SEARCH of the Lord's Way!" We know the Lord's Way is the right way, and we search the Scriptures, because we want the Bible to lead us to the truth. We're delighted that you're with us today! And we want to be a part of your life each week. We hope you'll listen closely and tell a friend about this program.

When people say salvation is a gift, some think it's too good to be true. They figure they must earn their way to heaven by doing some great thing. They can't imagine God giving us His blessing, the forgiveness of our sins, and a home in heaven.

Someone has taken the word "GRACE" and made the acrostic "God's Redemption At Christ's Expense." Well this is a fairly accurate description of grace. The word grace (in Greek charis) means "favor." One who has the love, blessing and favor of another may be said to be in the "good graces" of his benefactor. The distinguishing factors of God's grace are twofold: first, God's grace is a gift and is not earned; and second, God's grace is undeserved and unmerited. Usually we think of having to earn a place of favor with others, but God gives us his favor as a gift.

God accepts, and loves and blesses the person who stands in His grace. And in spite of one's past, when a person is washed in the blood of Jesus Christ, he stands in a right relationship and the favor of God. Now even though we deserve to be punished for our sins, God graciously forgives us and no longer holds our transgressions against us. In Christ we become new creatures, transformed into children of God, and transferred into the kingdom of God. In Christ God hears our prayers and gives us every spiritual blessing. Living in God's favor is a precious gift that we must never cheapen or ignore.

We offer the information on this program free. And if you'd like a printed copy of our study, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or by e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, if you like, you can call our toll-free telephone number, that number is 1-800-321-8633. We also stream this program on our website at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Titus 3:3 to 7, and explore God's grace.

Our reading today comes from Titus, chapter 3, verses 3 to 7. Where Paul describes the great salvation we have by the grace of God. "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Oh what a wonderful gift.

Let's pray together. "Father we're thankful for our salvation that comes by Your kindness, and by Your mercy and grace. Father help us to never take it for granted, but to love and to serve You always. In Jesus name, Amen."

You can't earn God's grace; it's a gift. In Romans 4, verse 4, Paul says "Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness." Grace is not a wage for

our labors, a prize for winning a competition, or an award for meritorious service. Grace is a gift. When a man can earn no wage, can win no prize, and deserves no award, yet receives a wondrous gift, he has been given unmerited favor and undeserved kindness. This is what God in his love has done for us through Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:1 through 10 helps us to understand how God has loved us and saved us. Paul first describes what it means to be lost: he said, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." Sin causes spiritual death and separation from God. Sin isn't merely inappropriate; sin kills one spiritually.

However, God has a solution to sin. Verse 4, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." The most wonderful sections of the Bible begin with the word "but." We were spiritually dead, but that's not the end of the story. God, rich in mercy and love, saved us by his grace.

Verses 8 to 10 explain, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it's the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." We are saved by grace through faith. It takes both. We're not saved by grace alone or by faith alone, but by grace through faith. Grace reflects all that God does in our lives to bring us home to Him. Faith reflects our response of trust, love, and obedience to His grace.

God's grace works through faith. God desires that we appreciate his great gift by responding in faith. Paul said in Titus 3:3 to 5, "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, and He did it by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit." God chose to wash us and renew us as an act of loving kindness. Well how does He wash us?

Well this washing that regenerates and renews is when we are born again of water and the Spirit in baptism. By faith, when we repent and are baptized, God washes us clean from sin and causes us to be born again into His family. The faith that matters to God is a faith willing to trust God and accept His teaching. In baptism we accept His blessing by obediently responding to Him. Galatians 3:26 to 27 says, "for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

The faith that saves is the one that responds to grace with an obedient faith. We're sons of God by faith, but this is a faith that will repent and be baptized. God causes us to be born again when we "put on Christ" in baptism. God grants all the blessings and favor that goes with being a Christian in baptism. What a great God we have! Baptism is not, as Paul said, some work we do to earn salvation. It's how we lovingly obey Him in faith.

Now obedience is not the same thing as earning. Let's say I had a treasure worth \$100,000 hidden in my backyard. And I told you that I would give it to you, provided you go and dig it up. Do you think

that a few minutes of digging earned \$100,000 for you? Now you met a condition for a gift by obeying my words. You didn't earn the gift, you merely received it by doing what I asked you to do. Now that's how it is in salvation. We don't earn salvation by repenting or being baptized; we merely comply with God's conditions for receiving the gift.

In Numbers 21, the children of Israel while wandering in the wilderness came to the land of Edom, where they grumbled and spoke against God, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food." Well the Lord became angry and "sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. The people repented and confessed their sin. They asked Moses to intercede for them with God, and Moses asked God to remove the serpents.

And then the LORD said to Moses, "You make a fiery serpent, and you set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live." Well, and Moses made a bronze serpent, he set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived (Numbers 21, verses 8 to 9). Now all they had to do was look by faith on the serpent. They didn't earn their healing, but they did have to comply with God's instructions. Now obeying is not the same as earning. Obedience is an act of faith and trust that God will keep his promises.

In John 9, Jesus encountered a man who was born blind. Jesus wanted to heal this man and show the power of God, so He spat on the ground, He made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his eyes, and said to him, "You go wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went away and he washed, and came back seeing (John 9, verses 6 to 7). Now who would argue that washing in a pool is the same as earning our eyesight? The man earned nothing, but he believed strongly enough to do what Jesus told him to do. You see faith is not merely accepting what God says, it's trusting enough to do exactly what the Lord asks us to do!

Let me make it very clear that the Bible does not teach that baptism is how we earn salvation. But the Bible does teach baptism is necessary to salvation—just as looking on the brass serpent was necessary; just as washing in the pool of Siloam was necessary.

Now God tests us to see if we really love Him and believe in Him. Now these tests are God's conditions, not ours. He gave them to us. When we meet God's conditions, we say to Him, "We trust You enough to obey Your will. We know that You will keep Your promises." God's grace is so wonderful, and we must never cheapen it or presume upon it. People presume on God's grace by changing the conditions or by setting those conditions aside. They presume God will bless them even if they fail to respond rightly to Him.

Some people think the grace of God means I can respond to Him any way that I want. They think grace has no conditions. Do you think the blind man would have argued about doing things his own way, if he really wanted to see? Do you think the Israelites would have argued with Moses about looking at the serpent? Why then does anyone argue about repentance or baptism? Wouldn't it be better to trust God and obey?

The New Testament contains the new covenant of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This new covenant contains what God promises His people and what God expects of His people. In this covenant God is the benefactor who gives more to us than we can ever repay. If we count our blessings, they include salvation, forgiveness of sin, eternal life, the right to pray, and sonship. If we lived for thousands of years, we could never repay God for what He's done for us. And God doesn't expect repayment. He expects love, loyalty, and faithful obedience from His children.

Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14, verse 15). In verse 23 Jesus said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him." Faithful obedience is not legalism or works righteousness or anything else but love. Paul said, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love" (Galatians 5, verse 6). When we love the Lord and want to please Him, we're willing to do everything He asks and do it the way that He wants it done. We won't argue with Him about it.

So, when the Lord asks us to believe, we're willing to trust Him and His word completely. When the Lord asks us to repent of our sins, love turns us away from sin that offends God. We couldn't imagine continuing to offend the God who has been so good to us and blessed us. When Jesus asks us to confess Him before others, we will gladly say to the world that Jesus is the Son of God. He is Lord and Christ!

When Jesus says to us in Mark 16:16, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved," we believe Him. We're baptized because we trust, we love, and we want to please God. The Bible says, "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6 and verse 4). If the baptism of the New Testament is immersion, and it is, then I will be immersed without question so as to please God.

Acts 2:38 commands us to "be baptized." Now that command is in the passive voice not the active. The active voice is used when the subject performs an action, but the passive voice is used when the subject is being acted upon by someone else. In baptism God is active in saving us; and we are passive, receiving God's grace and forgiveness. Let God's grace work on you in baptism. Let God cleanse your soul, bury you and raise you with Christ, give you newness of life, add you to His church. God does all this when we're baptized into Christ and His death.

Some say, "Why you don't have to be baptized to be saved!" But they miss the point. God works His grace on us through baptism into Christ. And if you love Christ Jesus, and I know you do, let Him save you through the washing that regenerates. God gives you that washing in baptism.

Let's pray together. "Heavenly Father, help us always to be obedient to Your will, help us to trust in You and not argue, help us to love You with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and to give ourselves fully and freely to You. In Jesus name, Amen."

God gives laws for our good, not to punish or enslave us. He doesn't dream up foolish laws just to prove that He's in charge. No! God gives us laws to protect us from troubles in life. Even God's laws are gracious to us. As a loving parent God cares and is concerned about our welfare. Psalm 103 and verse 13 says, "Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him." Now everything God does, He does to favor and bless us. When we understand that, we'll see God more clearly.

Titus 2:11 to 14 says, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." God wants to bless you richly by guiding you with His Word! Let Him.

Where are you in your life? Do you have a close, loving, peaceful relationship with God? Are you at peace in your soul? God hasn't left you; it may be that you have left God. You can draw close to Him

again by trusting in Him and obeying His Word. Believe in the Lord Jesus, repent of your sins, step out and confess Him before others, and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2, verse 38). Now it may be that as a Christian brother or sister you've wandered away from God and the church and need to come back home. Let God's grace back into your life.

We hope you've been blessed by today's study of God's Word about His grace. If you want a free printed copy of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org.

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We do ask that you focus your heart on God today by worshiping at church. Everybody needs a church family. And there's probably a church of Christ that's near you. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be glad to help you find one. We'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.