

## **Grace Place Statement on Grace**

Grace is more than a mealtime prayer. In Scripture grace is the undeserved favor of God; it permeates the relationship of God with man – the relationship of man with God and other believers. Grace impacts salvation, the deliverance from sin – it is the dynamic of forgiveness as well as providing proper motive and attitude. Grace is foundational to the life of a Christ-follower. The impact and foundation of Grace is readily apparent in the statement that one's salvation is based "solely on grace alone, through faith alone, based on the perfect life, atoning death and victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ alone – plus nothing." That statement summarizes the theological view of Grace Place of saving grace. It was grace, expressed in God's gift of his son on the cross, rather than our own worth that resulted in our salvation.

## **The Definition of Grace**

Little difference is found in the Hebrew and Greek words translated *grace*. The Hebrew root *chen* (favor, grace) and the Greek *charis* (grace) are very similar in usage. The first use is found in Genesis 6:8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. In the Old Testament God's grace was rooted in his desire to be gracious. The seeking of God's grace was not on the basis of an individual's righteousness, but because of God's mercy (Daniel 9:18).

An interesting observation from the New Testament is that Jesus himself never used the term grace. Rather than talking about grace, he modeled grace - examples can be seen in the healings, the forgiveness of sins, and many of the miracles he performed. Further, he used parables to teach grace, e.g. the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan.

Jesus' example of modeling grace is neither surprising nor limited to the New Testament. Much of Scripture deals with *living out* grace. The subject and use of grace in the New Testament is influenced by Hebrew usage. Grace comes from God and results in our worthiness and being set apart. Grace is both the gift of Jesus Christ and the living out of grace in righteous on the part of the one receiving it. Grace is the power that enables individuals to be committed Christ-followers.

While Scripture does not specifically define grace, we can discover that grace is based on God's love and mercy; it is the unmerited or unearned favor of God - not the result of our intrinsic worth or effort, but in God's desire to be gracious to us. It does not have its origin in us, nor can we demand it. Ephesians 4:7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

## Scriptural References

For the purposes of this paper, New Testament references will primarily be used to illustrate the roles and impact of grace. Further, it is not the purpose of this paper to deal with every New Testament reference to grace; rather, select passages that deal with how grace impacts life and the behavior of Christ-followers. Unless otherwise stated, quotes are from the New International Version.

### Three views of salvation.

God is holy. We are not. How can we ever hope to be acceptable to God? Is it the result of our good behavior? Wherein does our salvation (rescue from sin) lay? Can we earn God's favor through our good behavior? Is it grace plus what we do or by grace alone?

There are at least three main theological views pertaining to soteriology – the study of salvation.

- 1) Man saves himself; he is his own savior by his own good works.
- 2) Jesus and man are partners in salvation. Jesus did his part and we must do our part. We work together with Jesus to save ourselves. It is grace plus works.
- 3) Salvation is by grace alone through faith (belief) alone.

Which view is scriptural?

### Salvation is by grace.

It is the position of Grace Place that the scriptural evidence overwhelmingly points to the truth that we are saved by grace alone. Consider the following texts:

**Ephesians 1:7-8** In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

**Ephesians 2:1-8.** As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins ... Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his

grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—

**Titus 3:5-7** He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

**Romans 3:24** ...and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

**Romans 5:15-16** But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.

### **The role of Law (works).**

Apostle Paul gave one of the most definitive statements on the role of the old covenant law in the New Testament.

**Galatians 3:24-25** So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

The old covenant Law was a temporary teaching tool to prepare humankind for good news of the coming of Jesus and his message of grace. It revealed sin and revealed man's need of a savior. To attempt salvation on the basis of our obedience often leads to becoming judgmental and exclusive. However, now that Christ has come and saved us by grace, there is no longer any need of the law. He has displaced the law as the focus of revelation and the way to life. For a number of reasons that truth was and still is difficult for some to translate into their view of salvation. Consider how Jesus and other New Testament writers contrast the Law with salvation by grace alone. The Law plays no salvific role.

**John 1:14-17** And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' " For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. (New

American Standard Version)

John reminds his audience that they have received grace in increasing measure. The phrase “grace upon grace” is a translation of the Greek phrase “grace in exchange for grace.” In other words, when one supply of grace is exhausted, another is available. There is no limit to the grace God has given his people in Christ.

**Romans 5:20-21** The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Galatians 5:3-4** Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

While works of the Law are clearly represented as playing no part in our salvation, one must ask in light of Scripture, do works play any part in the life of a Christ-follower.

**Ephesians 2:8-10** For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as 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 so that we would walk in them.

Scripture is clear. Salvation is only by God’s grace through faith. It is not our doing, it is the gift of God – nor is it because of works. Some suppose this statement to be permission to continue in sin, however, good works are an evidence of salvation. We are not saved because of works, but we are created for good works. The text ends with the Hebrew idiom *walk* for our manner of life. Formerly we walked in trespasses and sins (vv. 1-3), but now we walk in good works.

### **Applying Grace to our lives.**

It’s been said, *Believing in grace is one thing. Living it is another.* Scripture is clear that we are saved by grace alone. Does grace influence how we live, our values, our behavior? It is too easy to compartmentalize our lives, living with the knowledge that by grace we are saved, but at the same time falling short in our response to grace. Grace doesn’t just impact our eternity, it impacts the way we live. As if Paul were reading the minds of his audience, he provided a response to those who may have considered grace a license to do as they pleased.

**Romans 6:1-4** What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

**Romans 6:14-15** For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

The very fact that we live by grace is evidence that sin does not rule over us.

It is the fear that grace equals license that gives rise to one of two major objections to grace.

- 1) Grace is too risky.
- 2) Grace is too good to be true.

### **Objection #1. Grace is too risky.**

There is always the chance that some people will abuse grace and take it to the extreme. The objection centers on the questions; *If I'm not saved by my works, why work? If I'm not saved by what I do, why do anything?* Those questions represent what Dietrich Bonhoefer called cheap grace. "Cheap grace," writes Bonhoefer, "means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. Grace alone does everything, they say, and so everything can remain as it was before...."

A scriptural review of how the New Testament writers address grace and one's behavior should mitigate much of the concern. In Paul's letter to Titus, he focuses on the importance of those sitting under Titus' teaching to come into a closer relationship with Jesus. Rebellious, deceivers were influencing those under Titus' care. Paul describes them in verse 16 of chapter 1, *They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.*

Claiming to know God, but denying him through actions is cheap grace. Again, it is one thing to believe in grace, but another to live it out in life.

**Titus 2:11-12** ... the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age ...

Paul clearly states that salvation is rooted in grace – he then moves on to the activity of grace; it teaches us to say no to a godless, self-indulgent life and live a Christ centered life right now. It is clear our salvation and our behavior in this world is the result of grace. Paul recognized this truth in his own life as well.

**1 Corinthians 15:12** But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

**2 Corinthians 1:12** Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God’s grace.

The risk that some may abuse grace can not totally be eradicated, but scripture is clear; grace disciplines us.

### **Objection #2. Grace is too good to be true.**

Many simply think their lives are past the point of no return; *God may give grace to you, but not me – I’ve pushed the envelope too many times.* Grace is too good to be true and that is what makes it amazing.

**Romans 5:8-15** But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come. But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

### **Conclusion**

We are rescued (saved) from sin by grace alone, through faith alone, based on the perfect life, atoning death, and victorious resurrection of Jesus alone – plus nothing. Whether grace seems too risky or too good to be true does not

diminish the declaration of the Scripture that grace both saves us and teaches us how to live godly and righteously in this present world. Works, whether our own or of the law, are no substitute for grace. To reject the gift of grace is an insult to God who extends it.

**Hebrews 10:28-29** Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

Clearly, the attempt by which man would save himself by his own good works; serving as his own savior should be rejected as should the idea that Jesus and man are partners in salvation; with Jesus doing his part and we ours -- working together with Jesus to save ourselves. Grace plus works. The Scriptural position is just as clear – salvation is by grace alone through faith (belief) alone.

Rather than reject grace in any measure, we are commanded to keep on growing in it.

**2 Peter 3:18** But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.