



JUNE 27, 2021 | PASTOR PETER YI

“Grace Be With You” (Philippians 4:23)

²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

There are many important words in the Bible that we cannot live without. Some of them are justification, love, peace, joy, faith, hope, sacrifice, bless, holy, law, forgive, Gospel, and God. All of these words are very important words. The Christian life could not be understood apart from knowing the meaning of those words. And if we don't understand the Christian life, how could we live out the Christian life? Apart from knowing these words, we would have no idea what to do, nor would we know how to live. But amongst all those words and the ideas or concepts that they represent, perhaps the most important word of them all is the word 'grace.' Of all the world religions, Christianity alone defines and emphasizes this word. The whole essence of Christianity is based on this one word, grace. Without grace there is no Christianity and without Christianity there is no ultimate meaning of the word grace. If words can have beauty, then 'grace' must be the most beautiful of all our words. It's such a wonderful concept that we name our children "Grace" and we name our churches Grace. Three of my close pastor friends in Toronto, their churches have "Grace" in their names. Grace Toronto Church downtown, Grace Fellowship Church in Rexdale, and Sovereign Grace Church in Bradford. Even amongst the tens of thousands of songs we sing as Christians, the most famous one is called Amazing Grace. This is what we'll be talking about today.

In the New International translation of the Bible the word grace appears 128 or so times. Of all those occurrences only 7 of them are in the Old Testament. Now, that doesn't mean that grace was an idea that wasn't known in the Old Testament. There are words such as gracious and compassion and forgiveness and lovingkindness that all carry the idea of grace, but certainly we can see that grace is a dominant, overarching idea in the New Testament. When we look at the New Testament the word doesn't appear in Matthew or Mark. It occurs only once in Luke and 4 times in John, which is surprisingly infrequent, but no one would say that the idea of grace is absent from the Gospels just because the word doesn't appear very frequently.

However, it is when we get to the letters that the word starts to appear over and over again. Can you guess which of the letters have the most occurrences? I'm sure all of you would have guessed Romans, but in addition to Romans are Galatians and Ephesians. In Philippians the word is only found three times. The first time is in Paul's greeting at the beginning of the letter where he says, "Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The second use of the word is later in chapter one when Paul writes, "It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the Gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me." Then of course the third and last time is in the final verse of the letter. Did you know that every one of his letters begin and end with the word grace? Thus, the word occurs at least twice in every one of his thirteen letters, for a total of around 100 occurrences.



Some scholars say that the fact that Paul begins and ends his letters with grace, show that it acts as bookends, meaning that all his letters are letters of grace. They begin with grace, and they end with grace and everything in between is about grace. Just consider the basic structure of Paul's letters. He begins with a greeting of grace. Then he usually offers a prayer of thanksgiving to God for something God has done in them. Prayers of thanksgiving imply that God had done some undeserved thing in the lives of his readers, and that's why he gives thanks. Then he usually gets on to some theological subject which is always based on the Gospel, which is a message of grace. And as we get to the latter part of each letter, he moves toward practical application of grace in our lives and how we should act graciously to one another. Paul is the Apostle of grace.

So, let's define it. What is grace? Grace is a kindness or a favor that we receive that is undeserved. It's a very simple definition but there's so much packed in it. So, let's explore this amazing word more deeply.

The first thing we should know about grace is that it comes from God.

For sure humans can extend grace between each other, but grace, first and foremost, comes from God. Grace is not a human invention. It's not something that we created out of the goodness of our own hearts. It's not something that evolved in us over thousands and thousands of years. In fact, what we can know is that humanity has been incredibly cruel through the ages, killing, exploiting and conquering each other, both on a personal scale and on a national scale. History has shown us that humans have been a lot more grace-less than filled with grace. To be human and gracious is not the normal, it's abnormal. Grace is something that comes from God because God is a God of grace. God is good and all good things that we enjoy come from him. Theologians have come up with a term for the blessings that all human beings enjoy, whether they are Christians or not. It's called 'common grace.' As you can tell from the name, it's called common grace because it's common to all people. What does common grace include? You can say that it includes all the good things of human experience, except the grace of salvation. Every good thing that people experience, like the things of nature that are required for life to exist—the sun, water, wind, earth, plants, and animals are all a part of common grace, gifted to humanity. As well common grace includes personal traits that all humans possess such as intelligence, personality, learning, creativity, ingenuity and work. Then there are those things that give us meaning like relationships between a husband and a wife, between a parent and child, and amongst friends. Those are all what constitute common grace. God, in his goodness, out of his good character, created a world in which all people can live and breathe and be creative and laugh and love and find some degree of meaning. All of that is common grace, and all of that comes from God. And because of all this we should acknowledge God and give thanks to him.

Now, do you believe that? Or do you believe this planet and everything on it, just created itself? Do you really have an explanation for why there is something instead of nothing? Doesn't the fact that there is something instead of nothing, logically and naturally imply that there must be one that always was, who created all that there is? Just consider your own existence. Did you create yourself? Of course not. The fact of our own existence, doesn't it show not only biologically, but philosophically, that we are all created beings, dependent on someone else for our existence? And why of all creatures it is humans alone who seek out meaning and purpose? All other creatures merely survive. Only the human creature seeks out meaning. The purpose of common grace is to point all humanity to God, to the only creator. This is all because of God's grace, of his unmerited and undeserved favor. Grace comes from Him.

But even more than having God as the source of grace, grace is also found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Listen to how the Gospel writer John says it:

(John 1:17) For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Grace came through Jesus Christ. Grace entered the world in and through the person of Jesus.



Another passage that speaks at length about grace is Romans 5. Let me read the entire chapter for you. I encourage you to follow along in your own Bibles.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, while 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! ¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

¹² Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—

¹³ To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. ¹⁴ 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 is a pattern of the one to come.

¹⁵ 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! ¹⁶ Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. ¹⁷ For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

¹⁸ Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. ¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

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



What do we learn about grace from this important chapter? Paul explains grace in many different ways. First, he tells us that grace is to receive justification. To be justified is to be declared not guilty, innocent, in God's courtroom. As hard as we might try, we cannot justify ourselves. Even though our sins have piled up to the heavens, God doesn't count those sins against us. We are declared by God to be righteous. That's what justification means and to be justified is to receive grace.

Another expression of grace is peace with God. The Bible says we were enemies of God because of or sin. We were deserving of his punishment and wrath. But through Jesus, two parties who were mortal enemies, are now in a relationship of peace. That too is grace.

Here's yet another expression of that grace. We have hope. Christian hope always points to life after death. It doesn't merely look to the immediate future, but looks the way into the distant future, to the final judgment, where God will judge the entire world. Every person needs hope for that day, and that hope is yours because of grace.

Grace is also expressed in love. I suppose that grace can be demonstrated without love. A judge can issue a lenient sentence without having any love or affection for the guilty criminal. We too can show an act of kindness for a bunch of different reasons but do it without love. As well, not every act of love is an act of grace. You may love someone because they've earned your love. Or because they're beautiful and charming and smart and helpful. So, showing love doesn't necessarily mean you are showing grace, but here, Paul tells us that God shows his grace to us in a great act of sacrificial love. The greatest act of love was shown when God, gave up his Son to death, when he died on the cross for our sins. Listen to his words again,

⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

This is the quintessential definition or expression of the love of God expressed as an act of his glorious grace. Four words: Christ died for us.

Grace is also expressed in the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Listen to how Paul writes it. "Because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us." The Holy Spirit is the third person of our triune God. The Holy Spirit is God and He lives in the hearts of all Christians. In fact, it's because of the Holy Spirit that we experience the love of God pouring into our hearts, that is the love that is expressed in the death of Jesus. Here's what John Calvin says about the Holy Spirit and grace.

[The grace of God has no charms for men till the Holy Spirit gives them a taste for it.](#)

What he's saying is that the only reason we experience God's grace, is because the Holy Spirit has worked in our hearts. Do you see the working of the Trinity here? It's God's love, expressed in Jesus' death, that's poured into us through the Holy Spirit. This is all of grace, a gift of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

There's more to grace than that. Paul tells us that to receive grace is to be saved from Gods' wrath through Jesus. All of us deserve God's wrath, because all of us have sinned against Him. And there's nothing you and I could do to save ourselves from it. God has to do it. And he has! This rescue, this saving is an act of his grace.

Lastly, from Romans 5, to receive grace is to receive eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. This grace, unlike common grace is called 'special grace.' Special grace is reserved for God's elect, his chosen. It's reserved for those who confess their sins, who acknowledge their need of God and his Son. It's reserved for those who receive God's forgiveness. It's reserved for those who humble themselves before God; they open up their hands before God and say, "I have nothing to give you, except my sin." They beg the Lord to forgive them and accept them, to make peace with them and adopt them as his children.



All of us have received God's common grace. But have you received God's special grace in and through his Son, Jesus? Why would you just want to receive common grace, when special grace offered to you? Go to God and ask him to have mercy on you and he will.

We said that grace is from God the Father. Then we said that grace is received through Jesus the Son. And finally, grace, though undeserved, is the eternal possession of every Christian. Because grace by definition is a gift from God, it remains a gift that is never taken away once it is given. If you have grace, you will always have grace. That's the promise for every Christian. Because grace is grace, because we never earned it or worked for it, because it was always a gift of God, the very nature of grace is that once it is given to us, it is ours forever. If even for a moment we could lose grace, then it would cease to be grace, it would at that very moment become works. Do you understand? Grace implies that it's forever, irrevocable, irreversible, yours forever and ever.

This is why Paul begins and especially ends his letters with the words, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen." You see, grace is a guarantee. Grace is your future. Listen to another verse from Romans 4:16:

(Romans 4:16) Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by **grace** and may be **guaranteed** to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.

As well, grace is a new state under which we have come to live. It's like a citizenship, like a new set of principles by which we live. Listen to Romans 6:14 and 15:

(Romans 6:14) For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under **grace**.

(Romans 6:15) What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under **grace**? By no means!

The state which we all were in previously was under the law and the condemnation of the law, but now we are in a state of grace. Paul here is emphatically saying, how can we go back? It's like you once lived in an oppressive communist totalitarian state, and for the first time you entered into a democratic free country. Free to move about. Free to pursue your dreams. Free to earn a living. Free to worship. Free to speak your mind. Why would that person ever again consider going back to their former way of life?

Here's what Puritan pastor John Bunyan says about grace:

[Grace can pardon our ungodliness and justify us with Christ's righteousness; it can put the Spirit of Jesus Christ within us; it can help us when we are down; it can heal us when we are wounded; it can multiply pardons, as we through frailty multiply transgressions.](#)

That's what grace can do for you. It can multiply pardons, even as we multiply transgressions. That's what it means to live in a state of grace.

This is how we are to live every day. You wake up because of God's grace. You drink your coffee and eat your breakfast because of God's grace. You go to school and you go to work, all because of God's rich grace. You relate with your coworkers, family, and friends because God is gracious. You have within you the God the Holy Spirit. He is in you, making you certain that you are God's child, loved by him and secure in him.



You live as a justified person, a reconciled person, a person at peace with God, a forgiven person, a person who is guaranteed eternal life. You live to serve him and worship him and enjoy him forever, all because of grace. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Ephesians 2:8.

We are a people of grace. Experience God’s grace more, experience the grace of the Lord Jesus. Live in that state of grace every day and every moment. And as you do, extend that grace to others in love. Forgive one another, care for one another, serve one another in love.

(Ephesians 6:24) Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

And finally,

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your Spirit. Amen.

Let’s pray.