

What Grace Is and Isn't

As His free gift to us, grace gives us access to God's power for everything we need in life. But amid the current-day distortions of grace, it's crucial that we get a true revelation of this undeserved favor of God.

In December 1999, my church, River of Life, in Corona, Calif., was in the midst of a genuine outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We were seeking God like we never had before. I was praying, on average, more than five hours a day. We were holding services five nights a week. Never in my life had I sought God with such fervency. Never had I so separated myself from the things of the world. Never had I lived as holy a life as I did during this time.

Then, on Dec. 30, near the end of a service, I was sitting on the edge of the platform when suddenly the presence of God came upon me powerfully. I fell straight back and was lying on the platform. I couldn't move. I was frozen in place for 30 minutes or so.

While I was on the ground, one of the men in our church came over and grabbed my feet and prayed for me. About 10 minutes after he finished praying, I felt another person grab my feet. It was gentle at first and then quite firm. As this second set of hands held my feet, my body began to shake. When the hands lifted off my feet, I could move my body again.

Later, I found out no one had grabbed my feet the second time—at least no one whom people could see. And when I finally sat up, the Lord spoke something to me that would forever change my life. He said, "You have sought Me like never before. You have lived holier than at any other time in your life. You have pursued My presence far beyond any other time in your life. You think you are worthy to receive the outpouring of My glory. However, during this time, your sin is

worthy of eternal damnation.”

In the natural, I felt that no one could have pointed a finger at my life. I was doing everything I knew to do to be pleasing to God. I felt my motives were pure. All I truly wanted was Him. Yet even in this state, I still had sin in my life. I still fell short of the glory and holiness of God, and the sin in my life—as all sin is—was detestable to God. It was deserving of His judgment and warranted an eternity in hell.

Although I had preached that the sin we commit even as Christians is repugnant to God and worthy of hell, I never really saw it until that night. I had a true, deep revelation that I still fell far short of the glory and righteousness of God, even as a Christian. The words the Lord spoke that night shook me to the core of my being.

Yet even as He was speaking those words, I heard the Lord speaking in a second voice. The first voice spoke to me Person to person; the second echoed through the heavens. In that second voice He said, “But My mercy endures forever.”

At that moment, I knew that if God’s mercies were ever to cease, I would be a goner. I knew that without His everlasting mercy, I couldn’t survive one moment. His mercies cover me—praise the name of the Lord!

Grace Comes Before Mercy

Yet here is the thing: People often confuse grace with mercy.

Although many people find grace complicated, in reality it is simple to understand. Take a look at what the apostle Peter has to say about it. He writes, “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as *his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness*, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (2 Pet. 1:2-3, KJV, emphasis added).

Simply put, grace is the favor of God that gives us access to the power of God for everything we need for life and godliness. I want you to consider that statement again: *Grace is the favor of God that gives us access to the power of God for everything we need for life and godliness.* That is not a complicated idea. The reason many Christians find it difficult to understand grace is that they confuse it with mercy.

Grace is the undeserved, unearned favor of God that gives us access to the power of God for everything we need for life and godliness. Mercy is when we have sinned and deserve judgment, yet because of the blood of Jesus we don't receive the punishment we should. Grace gives us favor to access the power of God; mercy releases us from the judgment of God.

Grace is favor, and that favor gives us access. It gives us the legal right to access the power of God for everything we need. None of us deserves access to God and His power (Rom. 3:10, 23). Because of sin, we all deserve an everlasting hell. Yet God has given us access to all He is and all He has.

Mercy is when we are released from the judgment we deserve. God has shown us mercy by not making us pay the penalty for our sin. As long as we remain in Christ, that mercy keeps us from the judgment we truly deserve. We all need His mercy, and that mercy will endure forever.

Yet we are not saved by mercy. We are saved by grace. Without the grace—the favor—of God, we could never have access to the mercy of God.

God favored us *while we were yet sinners*. This is very important for you to understand. God first released His grace before He was able to extend to us His mercy. Romans 5:8 tells us, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that *while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (NKJV, emphasis added).

We didn't deserve the favor of God. We deserved hell. But God

so loved us—He placed such value on us—that while we were still His enemies, He sent Jesus to die for us so that we might have access to Him.

With that access, we now can receive mercy for all our sins. It is this access that comes to us undeserved and unearned. It is this access that has allowed us to be forgiven, cleansed and made a new creation.

If God hadn't given us favor to access His power, we could never be free. We would be bound for all eternity to death and destruction. Satan's goal in the Garden of Eden was to cause sin to enter the world so that mankind would no longer have access to the eternal power of God for everything we would need for life and godliness. He knew that if man sinned, we could no longer eat from the tree of life—the tree of total provision and continual supply. The grace of God gives back to us the access to God's power for everything we need.

Everything Comes Through Grace

On top of that, all the things we receive from God come to us through His grace.

We are saved through grace. Acts 15:11 says, "But we believe that *through the grace* of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they" (emphasis added). We know that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved.

We believe through grace. We read in Acts 18:27, "And when he was minded to pass over into Achaia, the brethren encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples to receive him: and when he was come, he helped them much that had *believed through grace*" (ASV, emphasis added). We're saved by grace, and the Bible says we have the ability to believe by grace. How often do we struggle with unbelief? Yet the Bible says that the power to believe comes by grace.

We receive our inheritance by grace. Acts 20:32 says, “And now I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you the inheritance among all them that are sanctified.” Although we deserve an eternity in hell, Jesus not only saved us but also left us an inheritance. Through grace we’re built up, become strong and receive our inheritance. That inheritance is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). Your inheritance is that you have been predestined by God to be changed into His image.

We obey by grace. The Bible says that through God’s grace, we receive the power to obey. Romans 1:5 says, “Through whom we *received grace and apostleship, unto obedience* of faith among all the nations, for his name’s sake” (emphasis added). In so many churches, Christians are beaten over the head with rules and regulations. They are told they have to do this and do that in order to be pleasing to God, and then they feel defeated when they struggle to obey. The Bible tells us God’s grace gives us the power to obey; it is not something we do of ourselves. So many people are living in condemnation because they don’t have a revelation that grace gives them access to the power of God so they can obey the will of God.

We stand by grace. It is grace that gives us the power—the ability—to stand against the devil. Romans 5:2 tells us, “Through whom also we have had our access by faith *into this grace wherein we stand*; and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (emphasis added). A lot of people say they can’t resist temptation. That’s a lie from the pit of hell, because grace—God’s grace—gives us the power to stand.

We receive spiritual gifts by grace. People often look at me and think I am special. They think I have a special calling and special gifts and that this is why I see the power and anointing of God operating in my life.

They don’t realize I was kicked out of high school six weeks before graduation and that I spent five years abusing drugs

and alcohol, stealing money from employers, friends and family to pay for my drug habit. They don't know the sexual misconduct I was involved in. They have no idea how lost I was.

Now I travel all over the world ministering to millions of people. Lives are changed. People are saved, healed and set free. In our meetings, we have seen the kinds of manifestations of God that I used to only read about in books on revival. None of this happens because I am so spiritual. It happens because of God's grace. Romans 12:6 says, "*And having gifts differing according to the grace* that was given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of our faith" (emphasis added). All the gifts of the Spirit are received by grace.

God Has Given to Us All Things

Everything you need comes by grace, which is God's favor on your life, regardless of whether you deserve it or not. However, if this is true, why do most of us live lives that are broken, defeated, sick and without power?

It is because we don't understand the grace of God. We have failed to understand what grace is and how it can be multiplied in our lives. Through grace, we have favor that gives us access to the power of God for *all* things.

Let's look again at 2 Peter 1:2-3 in the American Standard Version: "Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that his divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness."

All things that pertain unto life—that means everything we need for life has been given to us: clothes, money, relationships, food, spiritual food, strength to stand against the devil, an ability to obey God and the power to cast out demons and heal the sick.

Don't tell me that you can't live a godly life, that you can't live for God, that you can't remain pure and save yourself for your husband or wife. Don't tell me that you can't avoid drugs, drinking or listening to ungodly music.

You say, "Brother Steve, it's too hard." No. You don't understand. Everything we need for life and for godliness has been given to us through God's divine power. Everything you need to live the life God desires for you has been given to you already.

The key to obtaining the power of God is access. It's like what happened one day when I was having lunch with a very famous international minister. This man is powerfully anointed, and everybody wants to get close to him. He is also a very private man.

After lunch he pulled me aside from the other ministers who were with us, many of whom were also well-known, and talked with me privately. He wanted to give me private access. He told me I could call him anytime, which is something he rarely ever does.

He was giving me access. I don't deserve it. I definitely wasn't the most well-known person at the table. But he chose to give me undeserved access. He showed me favor.

God has given you and me access to His very presence and power. Through His undeserved grace and favor, God has chosen to give us the legal right to tap into His power for everything we need.

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