

GRACE IS FOR SINNERS

**Rom. 5:1-2; 6:14-18 and 11:6; Eph. 2:6-10
and 5:1-2; Col. 2:6**

...And For Saints

By

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Opening.

"I write for people who are about to lose their faith. I write for the fallen. I write to shake the rigor mortis religious by their shoulders. I revisit my darkest days to find those who are still there, then I show them how to get out. The Scripture is a lot more scandalous than you're used to hearing. I'll tell you what I see. I'll write from the depths of me."

— Serena Woods, author of *Grace Is For Sinners*

Grace is like oxygen to the Sons and Daughters of God; it is the air we breathe, the nutrient we absorb, the lifeblood in our veins. Without it, we *die*; apart from it, we *wither* ...our souls a shriveled and shrunken version of their former selves. When grace is not pulsing through our very being, we tend to live under a cloud of contempt—primarily for others, but equally for ourselves. It's an *unholy* and incredibly *unhealthy* place, one not fit for God's Creatures to dwell in, one where Royalty {1 Pet. 2:9-10} should never be found.

Grace cleanses, purifies, empowers and provides; it clarifies the essential issues of Life in the Kingdom of God. It draws us *near* to the heart of our Father and moves us *out* in the service of others. **Grace is gratitude.**

Essay— Grace Is For Sinners.

Deliverance From Sin, Darkness, and Death— The Gracious Gift of a Gracious God.

Grace stands in opposition to our works, which lack the power to save us, no matter how good or self-glorifying. In Romans 11:6 Paul establishes a precedent for the remnant of grace, a precedent which represents *everything* God offers, initiates, or provides in His Kingdom. He says, **"But if it is by grace it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace"** {NAS}.

The intrusion of human works— any works— into redemption distorts the very idea of grace {Eph. 2:5-9}. If works could save *anybody*, from *any* background, in *any* country or any culture, from any ethnicity or religion, the reality of grace would be nullified! The thing which differentiates your relationship with Jesus from every form of 'religion' which Mankind, under the influence of our enemy, has ever devised is: not *only* is God saying, "You don't have to *do* anything to earn this; I've already done it. My Work is finished!," He's saying, "I don't *want* you to do anything. The reality is ...you *can't* do anything!" **If you worked for it, labored over it, earned it or deserved it, it wouldn't be grace. Salvation by grace, redemption by grace, deliverance by grace**

is the gratuitous forgiveness of God, the limitless largesse of a heart greater and mightier than human comprehension.

In Ephesians 2:8 Paul said, “For it is by *grace* [*The grace,*’ the one introduced by Paul in Ephesians 2:5. ‘Grace’ is God’s contribution to the equation. By His ‘grace:’] **you have been saved *through faith*** [Perfect tense = ‘with the result that you stand saved forevermore’]...” “**Saved, delivered, rescued, preserved,**” is from *sozo*, meaning- ‘bring through *safely*, *keep* someone from *harm*, *rescue* from danger, affliction and death,’ and its ultimate spiritual usage, ‘*preserve* and *protect from the 2nd death.*’ It’s important that this verb is in the passive tense because it spells out quite clearly this ‘permanent preservation,’ this ‘rescue’ for all Eternity, is not something we *do*, *have* done, or *will* do in the future; it’s a *gift* we receive {which is precisely what Paul’s about to reiterate}.

I want to give you a single technical point in relation to this passage. From Dana & Mantey’s *Manual Grammar of the Greek NT*, and I quote, “The perfect tense is the tense of *complete* action; it views action as a *finished* product.” It signifies “the progress of an act or state to a point of culmination and the *existence* of its finished results.”¹ The Greek perfect tense, and we can say this in all grammatical honesty, is as perpetual a statement as can exist in any language. Just so we’re on the same page: perpetual means ‘lasting or enduring forever; eternal; permanent; continuing indefinitely without interruption; unceasing.’ It is the quintessence of permanence in 1st century speech. And this perpetuity, this unceasing and forever-enduring factor, exists from the moment we lay our lives at the feet of our Lord in faith *regardless* of any other factor thereafter!

Moving on he says, “**And this is *not* from yourselves....**” “**This**” *what?* There has been endless debate, going all the way back to the Reformation, to Luther, Calvin and Zwingli, about to what this demonstrative pronoun {*touto*} actually refers. Is it “**grace**” which is “**not from ourselves**” ...or is it “**faith**” which is “**not from ourselves**”? I’m going to suggest it is neither; and I have a very solid foundation for this suggestion. Grace is feminine, faith is feminine, but “**this**” is neuter. “**This**” refers back to the entire action of salvation, of preservation from judgment, deliverance from evil, *everything* involved in the divine achievement we call entrance into Jesus’ Kingdom and the receiving of His Eternal, Abundant Life. **The basis of this salvation is grace, the means to receiving it is faith.** It *does not* have its source in Man {*ex humon* = literally, ‘it is not *from* you’}!

“It,” this righteous rescue of the unholy and unrighteous, this deliverance from the devil’s grasp and all it involves, “**is the *gift* of God** [Notice Eternity with *Abba* is a ‘gift,’ unearned and undeserved.]— ***not by means* of works** [Meaning the efforts and energies of Man, all the living and laboring of Humankind. Why not?], **so that *no one* can boast,**” v. 9. This passage teaches one simple truth: **The recognition of**

Humanity's need, of *our* need, for the grace of God, and just how awesome the scope of grace is in meeting that need.

V. 10 says, “For we are God’s workmanship [His ‘Master-piece’ of Grace], created in Christ Jesus to *do* good works....” Not “*by* good works,” but “to *do* good works... *for* good works” {NAS}. We saw our desperate need for grace in salvation in vv. 8-9 and now we see our desperate need for grace in spirituality. **There is no divine production in life apart from grace.** This won’t be popular with post-modern Pharisees or those laboring to earn God’s love, but it has the virtue of being absolutely true. We labor *with* the grace of God *in* the power of God; and in the End — by this I mean the Ultimate End — the King of Glory receives what is rightfully His. And these, Paul writes, are “works which God prepared in *advance* [from the Ages of Eternity] for us to do,” for us “to *walk in*” {NAS}. Which tells us very clearly in one final clause that the purpose of our lives is to “walk in” the “works” which *Abba* has prepared: to *live*, to *love*, and to *labor* in the same way we were saved — by grace.

Grace stands in contradiction to the Law. Both Jew and Gentile are saved by the glorious grace of God, through no merit of their own — Acts 13:38-39; 15:1-11; the entire Letter to the Galatians *and* to the Hebrews.

The Foundation of Our Intimacy With the Spirit.

Grace is the totality of our Spirituality. Everything we have by way of divine power, resource, presence and provision is courtesy of grace. Everything we know of the nature of *Abba*, every ounce of divine wisdom distilled in our souls, every step of maturity taken in concert with the Spirit, every Word of challenge, comfort or encouragement from the heart of God was *given* us in grace, *received* by us in grace, after having been communicated to us {you guessed it} *by* grace!

Abba’s Children are not under the harsh light of the Law, but rather the shadow of His wings, where mercy and grace abound — Romans 6:14-18.

Here’s how this section sounds in *The Message*. “Sin can’t *tell you* how to live. After all, you’re not living under that *old* tyranny any longer. You’re living in the *freedom* of God. So, since we’re out from under the old tyranny, does that mean we can live any old way we want? Since we’re free in the freedom of God, can we do anything that comes to mind? Hardly. You know well enough from your own experience that there are some acts of so-called freedom that *destroy* freedom. Offer yourselves to sin, for instance, and it’s your last free act. But offer yourselves to the ways of God... and the freedom never quits. *All your lives* you’ve let sin tell you what to do. But thank God you’ve started listening to a new Master,

one whose commands set you free to live openly in *His* freedom!" {6:14-18}.

Jesus' Followers are bound by something higher, deeper and stronger than any Law ever uttered: the Royal Law, the Life of Love — Matt. 22:34-40; Mk. 12:28-34; Lk. 10:25-28; John 13:34-35; and James 2:8-13. In Ephesians 5 Paul wrote, **"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved Children...."** See the picture, see the imagery? Just like little children who feel safe and secure in the love, acceptance, and protection of their parents, seek to emulate and imitate them, so shall it be for the Children of God. **"And live a life of love, just as Messiah loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God,"** vv. 1-2. **"Just as,"** meaning 'exactly like' your **"Messiah,"** meaning you and I are to follow the footsteps of the One who **"loved"** us enough to give up *everything* on our behalf and **"sacrifice"** Himself **"to Abba"** in our place.

"My Command is this," said Jesus in John 15:12: **"Love each other as I have loved you [Selflessly, sacrificially ...with blood, with sweat, with tears]."** And what does this look like in *praxis*? Well, Gentlemen, Ladies, Kings and Princesses: **"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends,"** v. 13. And there it is.

In Galatians 5:13 Paul wrote, **"Do not use your freedom [Which is the *primary issue* under grace — 'freedom,' not bondage. Do not use your liberty in love:] to indulge the sinful nature [the 'sin within'], but through love serve one another. For the entire Law is summed up in a *single* command, 'Love your neighbor ['Love the other, any other'] as yourself,"** v. 14. So, the Apostle *repeats* what the Master has stated, over and over again in the course of His Mission: the totality of divine revelation comes down to this issue right here. Our willingness to love the other, the different from, the opposite of, the weird, the wild, the wonderful. **And as a critical component of this, to let ourselves be loved— in the midst of our mess— not cleaned up, tidied up, washed up, dried up, polished up or prettied up; but here and now, alive and kicking, naked and exposed.**

The Royal Law, the Life of Love, is a universal reality, a Code of Honor encapsulating Life in the Kingdom of Grace. The Mosaic Law belonged to the nation of Israel in an Age when Israel was God's Chosen Nation as a witness to the world. It has never been given by God to any other nation besides Israel. Furthermore, it wasn't transferred to the Body and Bride of Christ in any way, shape or form; and any pastor, church, or organization functioning under the Mosaic Law as the means of salvation, spirituality or service is doing so outside the dictates of Scripture. The Truth is: ignorance may be bliss, but it's definitely not victory!

Our Eternal Residence.

The Messianic Age in which we currently reside, which began with the birth of Jesus and will close with His glorious Return, is the Age of Grace. In Ephesians 2:6-7 Paul said, that God has **“raised us up with”** Jesus, **“and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ** [Which is our unique privilege and position as the Children of God in the Age of Grace.] **...in order that** [a phrase used to express a ‘final purpose clause’] **in the coming Ages** [all the Ages following this, including Eternity] **He might show the incomparable riches of His grace ...expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”**

Scripture says we are to live our lives by means of grace through faith. Colossians 2:6 says, **“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord....”** As *Kurios*, ‘as Master, as Sovereign,’ not Savior, not Redeemer, not Friend, not Lover, not Prince-ruler as Hebrews 12 puts it, **“Author and Finisher of our Faith,”** but **“Lord”** and Liege, Sovereign Ruler of our Creation. Now, **“continue to live in Him ...rooted and built up in Him** [When you build something up you ‘strengthen and secure’ it, you give it what it needs to grow, right? We could say ‘grounded and growing in Him.'], **strengthened in the Faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness,”** v. 7. Why? Because grace is ‘the attitude of gratitude’ and our hearts are overflowing with a hunger for grace. It was by grace through faith we **“received Christ Jesus as Lord,”** therefore, by grace through faith we’re to **“continue ...in Him.”**

Notice the phrase **“as you were taught.”** The idea of someone teaching us the Word is powerfully present in the New Testament of the 1st century, just not so much in the Church of the 21st!

Grace is a glorious treasure and incredible resource to which we have access in and through the Lord of Glory— Romans 5:1-2. **Grace is both our present state and permanent condition.**

Paul begins Romans 5 with, **“Therefore,”** drawing on his dissertation in ch. 4 concerning Abraham as the **“father of the faithful”** {vv. 11-17}, he says, **“since we have been justified through faith....”** *Dikaïos* was a legal term in ancient Greece; it means in context to ‘be vindicated’ before the Universe, ‘acquitted’ of all our crimes, ‘declared righteous’ in the eyes of *Abba*. It’s a soul-shaking, heart-healing, Hallelujah-inducing fact of Reality! Because of this fact, **“we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Which is what Scripture calls **“reconciliation”** {Rom. 5:10-11}, the offer of peace from holy God to fallen Man ...and fallen Man’s embrace of it.

“Through whom [This Lord and Liege, this Savior and Sovereign] **we have gained access by faith** [There’s that little phrase for the second time in as many vv.: ‘by faith,’ and it opens the door to every single aspect of relationship with God and communion

with our Creator.] **into this *grace* in which we now stand.** Notice “we,” first person, the Apostle included.

“Danger, Will Robinson, Danger:” technical point of grammar coming. So if you’re looking for an opportunity to glaze over, now is the time to do it. The verb Paul uses is the perfect active indicative of *histemi*. The indicative mood means this is an undoubtable occurrence. You once stood ‘outside this grace, but now you are *firmly ensconced* within it!’ The active voice is used because our faith is the *means* by which we ‘gained access.’ **We received this gift from the hand of God, and we did it willingly, knowingly, and consciously.** This, my Friends, is critical to the concept of faith. **Trusting in, believing on, accepting and embracing does *not* happen by accident! Faith, like love, is a *choice* we make, a *conscious decision* to accept a Reality far beyond what we can visibly and tangibly see, hear, smell, taste and touch.** *That* is the heartbeat of faith. And finally, with the perfect tense Paul settles the issue unequivocally: **the glorious grace of our glorious God is the realm of Freedom in which we stand forevermore.**

Now, there’s a fantastic term he uses for our **“gaining access... into this grace:”** *prosagoge*. It’s used only *three* times in Scripture— here, Ephesians 2:18 and 3:12— and it carries these two incredible images.

[i] In Classical Greek it was the customary word for ushering someone into the presence of *royalty*. *And* it was the customary word for a worshipper of God approaching the Almighty. What Paul’s saying is, “Jesus Christ the Son ushers us into the presence of the Father. He opens the door to the King of All Creation, and on the other side of that door... is *grace*.” Not cold condemnation, not fiery vengeance, but the sheer undeserved, undiluted, unimaginable grace of God, the loving-kindness we can never lose.

[ii] In later Greek *prosagoge* was used for the place where ships come in to dock, a ‘harbor and haven.’ Because of Jesus we have entry to the presence of Sovereignty, a Deity we need never fear— reverence, yes; respect, yes; worship with our hearts and lives, absolutely ...but not fear. John said, **“perfect love drives out fear!”** Because of Jesus we have access to the haven of His glorious grace. It is Jesus, and no other, who ushers us into the presence of the Father, who sets us down in the Land of Undying Love, in Fields of Freedom shimmering with the golden hues of grace.

A Share In the Glory of God.

So, the first two vv. of Romans 5 celebrate our access into the presence and power of *Abba* Himself. We have ‘the right to approach the Almighty,’ which is the very language of the Temple and Tabernacle where the priests ‘came near to the dwelling place of Deity.’ Theologian N.T. Wright says we’re now in a place, “a status,

a position where we are *surrounded*” by *Abba*’s “love and generosity, invited” by our King “to breathe it in as our native air.” And “as we do ...we realize that *this* is what we were made for, that this is what truly human existence ought to be like....

When we stand” in *Abba*’s presence, “not trembling but *deeply grateful*, and begin to inhale His goodness, His wisdom,”² His profound power and infectious joy, we’re given an invitation to go farther than we’ve ever dreamed down this path of authenticity, to become our truest selves, those reflections of the Master and image-bearers of *Abba* we were *meant* to be. Paul puts it like this: “**And we rejoice** [‘we exult,’ NAS] **in the hope of the glory of God.**” Our “**hope**,” unlike the uncertainty of an unbelieving world, is the confident expectation, the absolute assurance, of one “**day sharing in Jesus’ glory.**” This is the “**glory**” lost through sin and selfishness, arrogance and idolatry {the Story of Genesis 3}. It’s something deeper, truer, more fundamental to our natures than ‘original sin.’ This is *original glory*, the glory we shared with God *before* the Fall That Changed It All; *this* is the Story of Genesis 1-2. Here’s the beauty of it. As co-heirs with the Son of God, when we finally inherit what is ours eternally the *whole* of Creation will be set free from corruption; it will share in our new-found Freedom — forevermore.

As Paul wrote in Romans 8:21, “**The Creation itself will be *liberated* from its bondage to decay and brought into the *glorious freedom* of the Children of God.**” Hooooaaahh! “**The Creation waits in *eager* expectation for the Sons of God to be revealed**” {v. 19}. And when the *Son* of God appears, the *Sons* of God will appear {Col. 3:3-4; 1 Jn. 3:2-3}. Paul in Colossians 3:3 speaks of our having “**died**” with Jesus, our “**life now hidden with**” Him “**in God.**” Then he says, “**When Christ, who is *your Life*, appears, then you *also* will appear with Him in glory,**” v. 4. All that you were meant to be in the long Ages of Eternity, all you desire for yourself and those you love, the *ultimate* You, will finally come to fruition! It’s a powerful theme in the New Covenant: the glory of our future in God ...as Sons and Daughters of the Great King. The apostle John puts it like this in 1 John 3:2-3, “**Dear friends, now we are Children of God, and what we *will be* has not yet been made known. But we *know* that when**” the Son of God “**appears, we shall be *like Him***” — *exactly* like Him, in fact — “**for we shall see Him *as He is.***” I.e., unveiled before a watching, waiting Universe.

I love how John finishes with v. 3. “**Everyone who has *this Hope* in him,**” the Hope of a glorious future in God’s New Creation, “***purifies* himself, just as**” Jesus “**is pure.**” This Hope alive in our hearts is one of the things which cleanses our lives of clutter, washes away the stains of futility and failure which most of us live with, of words unsaid and deeds undone. This is the power and the purity of living with an *eye* toward Eternity, awaiting your coming King!

How do we acquire this “**hope**”? How else? By a faith which is active and alive, willing to rest its heart in the goodness of the Father’s. *Elpis* is the confidence which comes through our moment by moment trust in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. *Abba* is the Author of Truth, Jesus is the Giver of Life, the Spirit is the Bringer of Light, and we need all three of these ...*desperately*.

Listen to how Peterson puts our passage in Romans in *The Message*, “**By entering through *faith* into what God has always wanted to do for us— set us *right* with Him, make us *fit* for Him— we have it all together with God because of our Master Jesus. And that’s not all: We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that He has *already* thrown open *His* door to us. We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand— out in the wide open spaces of God’s grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise**” {Romans 5:1-2}.

Finale.

Post-modern Pharisees won’t want to admit it {the level of their legalism overwhelming their theology}, but a grace which never gets abused is no grace at all. Grace, by its very *nature*, is wide open to every kind of abuse imaginable. And Believers just like you and I, Believers *named* you and I, have abused it! This doesn’t make it any less true or any less glorious. **Grace which is not fully free, unrestricted, a no-strings-whatsoever-attached gratuitous gift, is not grace.** Grace which is not accepted and embraced as simply and easily as you would accept the most thoughtful gift from a friend is not grace at all. Paul in Romans 11:6 once wrote these words to the Church in Rome, one of the wickedest cities to ever exist, “**And if by *grace*, then it is no longer by works; if it *were*, grace would no longer be grace.**”

The crazy, unheard of effect of the Kingdom of Grace’s otherworldly logic is this: just as soon as you open your heart in trust to receive the lavish gift of *Abba*’s grace, it begins to transform. It goes immediately to work reshaping the internal environment of our souls. And this, my friends, is the beauty of *grace*! It is precisely what grace is intended to do: to secure, to sanctify, to heal and make whole, to overwhelm with gratitude and appreciation. Get it... and don’t forget it. **Love is a much more powerful motivator than fear; and gratitude is a much greater response than obligation {much holier as well}.** Rather than living out of *duty* ...how ‘bout out of *desire*?

¹ : Dana & Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 200 {Italics Mine}

² : N.T. Wright, *The New Testament For Everyone*, Romans 1-8