

9,10,26 2 Tim. 1:1-2, The Unsearchable Riches of His Grace

When we talk about the character or personality of God, we normally think of “love” as being the crown jewel of Who He is, and we have more scriptural justification for that than could be listed if we had hours or even days to list each verse or action that proves this. 1 Jn. 4:8 simply states, “God is love” which covers them all.

The problem we face is that the word “love” has come to mean so many things to different people that even though we know it’s true, *God is love*, after we learn this, and it passes through our grid, what comes out the other side is rarely the same as what the Bible means, and often it’s either far less or something completely different than what John meant when he made his declaration about this.

Since Paul begins nearly every one of his letters emphasizing the word “grace”, we can know that this word is extremely important to him, and I can’t count the number of theologians I’ve read who say that “grace” is the one word, more than all others, that describes and defines the age we are living in – the Church Age. This is not the Age of the Law; it’s the Age of Grace, and just as “justice and holiness” found expression through the Law, the one thing about God more than all others that finds expression in our dispensation is Grace. When we see grace in action, we are seeing the primary essence of the living God’s character and nature finding expression in His creation.

And we would never have understood the depths of God’s grace, or of His love, apart from the Cross. Up until that time, what Paul calls the hidden mystery of God’s purpose for His creation was unknown; it was not yet revealed. This was also true regarding God’s own inner motivation for *establishing* that eternal purpose which required the unveiling of “the riches of His grace”.

Understanding the true meaning of grace, both its definition and especially its practical expression in the lives of God’s people, was limited until Christ sacrificed His life to secure His Bride which is made up of those who could be saved and brought into union with Christ, by pure grace. None of us deserve all that God has

given us; all that He has sacrificed and worked for over the past 2000 years; and the reality of this plan and purpose that finally arrived in the timeline of history was something the Lord had planned prior to creation itself, but He hid it until the time was right.

(Col. 1:25-26; Eph. 1:9-10; Eph. 2:7-8; Eph. 1:4; Eph. 3:4-5;) I (Paul) became its servant by the commission God gave me to fully proclaim to you the word of God, the mystery that was hidden for ages and generations but is now revealed to His saints. . . having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. . . that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace, you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. . . even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world. . . When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

God's plan to accomplish this was decided and determined prior to creation, in the eternal counsels of the Godhead, and was then revealed to the apostles and prophets of the Church Age; a unique 2000-year segment of human history when the Lord would be doing something He had never done before. He would lay the groundwork for this at the Cross and the resurrection of Christ, and then He would begin to create and shape a completely new species of humanity in Christ, and the Holy Spirit would call out and develop that new humanity until it's completion, which involves bringing her to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, when it would then be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. After that, God would return His focus to the Abrahamic covenant and complete all the promises He made to Israel regarding the coming Millennial kingdom of her Messiah.

And all of this, and much more (things related to the eternal state) are founded on the one expression of God's love that is brought up more often than anything else in the New Testament – God's matchless, inexpressible grace.

So, what we will do tonight, is make sure we have as clear an understanding as possible of both what grace is by definition, but especially what it is by implication to us.

Before we begin, here's the first section of 2 Tim. chapter 1;

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, a beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

In Paul's appeal to his beloved son in the faith, he begins with establishing the connection between grace, mercy and peace. This is where the "implications" come in. Those who understand grace and mercy will experience peace. This is Paul's desire for Timothy and the Holy Spirit's desire for all of us. So, we'll start with the definitions.

The word "grace" ("charis") means;

"Good will, loving-kindness, favor of the kindness by which God, exerting his influence upon souls, offers Christ to them, keeps, strengthens, and increases them in spiritual life, faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to the exercise of the Christlike virtues."

And don't worry, I'm just starting with the technical meaning of these words, but we will look more closely at what they imply as we go through our study. A dictionary or lexical definition alone won't necessarily clarify the wonder of what these words are meant to mean to us personally. But, we'll get there.

The second word is "mercy" ("eleos") and it means,

"Kindness or good will towards the miserable and the afflicted, joined with a desire to help them: to exercise the virtue of mercy, show one's self merciful. Of God towards men: in general providence; the mercy and clemency of God in providing and offering to men salvation by Christ."

The best way to distinguish grace from mercy is simply to say that in grace we receive what we do not deserve, and in mercy we do *not* receive what we *do* deserve.

For example, God's love existed before there was a need for mercy or grace. Mercy came into play to provide for the need of sinful man and grace is that which saves us because all the demands for righteousness have been met in Christ. We are saved by grace, not by mercy. Mercy provides the offer of a Savior, but grace is God's response to those who appeal to His mercy for salvation. Mercy is the undeserved offer of the suffering Savior to even the worst of us. Grace takes hold of the one who responds to that offer and places him in the place of total forgiveness and regenerates him into a member of a new creation.

When these are put together, as Paul does, we can see that all we have done which deserves punishment is forgiven and an innumerable number of eternal blessings that we do *not* deserve are bestowed on us in Christ. And all of this is because everything we deserve to be punished for has been placed on Christ at the Cross and is removed from us, forever. And this has opened the door for God to give complete forgiveness to us; but He also now has the freedom, without any compromise to His own nature, to shower us with kindness and blessings beyond description for all eternity.

St. John Chrysostom wrote that when it comes to us acting in God's image, "Mercy imitates God and disappoints Satan" - which brought a verse to mind, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy". When we act in mercy to others, we begin to breathe the air of the heavenly realm.

Another passage we're familiar with is David's way of putting this idea of the 'atmosphere of heaven' being breathed by God's children in a world that knows nothing of its power;

(Psalm 23:6) Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

And we could add Micah 5:6-8,

What does the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

So, like everything that matters most, mercy is more than something we do, it's intended to become a natural expression of who we are as offspring of a merciful God.

Remember, the things we are starting with are only introductory comments on the implications of God's love (expressed in what the Bible means by "grace" and "mercy") so we can see that His love is far superior to any so-called unconditional love we, as humans, could exercise or even imagine.

In several messages he gave on 1 Cor. 13, Dr. Henry Drummond called love, "the greatest thing in the world". And that love is "what God is like to infinity. . . to realize the personal, unchanging love of God is a supreme experience." He then breaks down a few brief points from scripture that help us distinguish God's love from human love.

- 1) The love of God being imparted is not experienced by the unsaved and unresponsive (John 5:24).
- 2) In its appeal, God's love reaches out to the whole world (John 3:16).
- 3) God's love abhors this present world system (1 Jn. 2:15-16).
- 4) His love is directed especially toward His Spirit-born children (Rom. 5:9-10).
- 5) The Christian demonstrates his reality (as a disciple of Christ) before the world by divine compassion, (John 13:34-35).
- 6) The love of God never ends (John 13:1).
- 7) God's love is characterized primarily by sacrifice (2 Cor. 8:9).

It would be nearly impossible for any of us to imagine a type of love that would include grace and mercy at this level, but this is Who God is, and whether we believe it or understand it, or not, will not lessen His full expression of what all this means for us, forever.

So, you can see why the better we understand grace and mercy, and especially the more we understand the ways in which these terms define the God Who is now our Father, the greater is going to be the inner peace we find growing in our souls.

A lack of peace within us (which is something I'm sure we all struggle with) is due to either a lack of believing or of understanding our current relationship with God, which is based on grace and mercy, not on Law or religious obligations. We either don't believe what the Bible is telling us about God's nature and relationship with us as His children, or we have accepted a false understanding of the terms we've been looking at.

Something God has intended to be unconditional has been turned into something requiring merit or "good works" on our part to be effective. Grace and mercy have been redefined to include conditions, but the conditions have already been met in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, and we are the recipients of *His* work and labor of love, not the deserving beneficiaries of *our* works.

If your son mows the yard, you can be grateful and give him some money, but if he doesn't, it has no effect on what grace and mercy have accomplished in establishing an unbreakable, everlasting relationship of love and safety. And knowing that this relationship exists, and can't be undone, can give us a confidence and reassurance of our eternal safety in Christ.

Now, let's expand this by looking at how others over the years have come to understand and genuinely appreciate the grace of God. Here's some comments by Sparks on this;

There is such a difference between assuming responsibility for ourselves and recognizing that God has assumed that responsibility. And because God has assumed the responsibility we should cooperate with Him. There is all the difference between trying to work for our justification, and working *because* we are justified; between trying to work for our perfection, and working because our perfection is secured in Christ. The difference is not merely technical, it is practical, and of immense value. Sometimes it is necessary for the Lord to say to us (just as one example): "Look here, you are making far too much of your own praying, far too much of your own study in the Scriptures, you are unconsciously coming to think that everything depends upon how much and how fervently you pray." And then you go out and talk to other people about your prayer life as a kind of setting up against their

own. You do not mean it, but the implication is that this is what accounts for your growth, and it is going to count for other people's growth. The Lord says, 'The cause, the secret, the spring of everything is Myself, and sometimes you will just have to cease straining, and rest back in Me, in loving trust. Learn to do that a little more, and then you will pray better, and I shall be able to do something more!'

The reason I read that is because of what I mentioned earlier. We can gain an understanding of grace to some degree, but then Monday morning comes and the enemy starts whispering to us again, accusing us, etc. and we don't know how to apply a theological concept to our daily lives as believers trying to grow and understand this new life we've entered.

Theological definitions are only as helpful as our ability to see their application to the moment we're living in. There is nothing more impractical than unapplied theology; just as there is nothing more valuable to us than a growing understanding and experience of *applied* theology.

We can quote verses we've memorized and even expand on hundreds of Biblical principles, but if we can't attach what we've learned to the enemy's challenges like "has God really said?", then all the mentally stored verses in the world aren't going to help us remember that we're safe; that we actually can be 'at peace' about some experience that, for the moment, is confusing and overwhelming us.

Part of me has always wondered if the real problem of having only a mental apprehension of some verse or principle is our problem, our challenge, or if the real problem is *partly* an inability to apply something in the moment, but *even more* than that, I've often felt that the problem is actually that our 'apprehension' is not correctly apprehended.

Here's what I mean. We've learned something in the Bible and it seems like we understand it, maybe we even have some ideas about how best to apply it – like what circumstances or attacks of the enemy could be overcome if we brought what we've learned against the attack.

So, that's our plan based on our knowledge of things. Then we find ourselves in a situation that fits and we make our application, but "peace" is not the outcome. We're still uncertain and confused. See if you think that what this next author says is a possibility. It was something I found where the writer was talking about the time Jesus healed a blind man, but not completely, at least not at first. Here's the verses;

(Mark 8:22-25) Then He came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Him, and begged Him to touch him. So, He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town. And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything. And he looked up and said, "I see men like trees, walking." Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everything clearly.

Now, here's the writer's comments on this passage;

By God's grace, we have to move beyond seeing men like trees walking to seeing clearly, and that is something that requires supernatural intervention on God's part in renewing our minds into a fuller understanding of what we're studying. The passage about the two disciples on the road to Emmaus is crucial because not only does it emphasize that the Lord's highest priority was to focus them on the Scriptures so that they could understand what has taken place, but he also revealed to them that the only way they were going to understand what the scripture really said, the true spiritual understanding, was if the Lord personally opened their minds to be able to understand because as we've seen before, it's possible to have a great deal of knowledge, even accurate knowledge, about what the Bible says academically without knowing the meaning behind what we've learned, and that second aspect determines whether we will truly understand what the scriptures are saying and be able to experience spiritual life.

So, knowing a verse or principle theologically is vital and being able to think through possible personal applications so we can experience the value of what we've learned in real life is also vital. But we should also be praying that the Lord

will make sure we actually know the meaning behind the passage or principle before we start planning our defensive strategies.

This is just another place in the Bible where we are warned to take the honorable road the Bereans took. Don't believe everything you think you've figured out, or things others have told you without also praying personally for the Spirit to 'open your understanding' so you can clearly see the meaning of the passage. It's an extra step in learning the Bible, but without it, not only could we be wrong, but if we're unwilling to take that step, it also implies that we, at least subconsciously, think we can learn and understand without a moment-by-moment need of God's grace.

Fortunately, as we've seen in our *definition* of Grace, God is both free and more than willing to show us what we need to see as long as we remain humbly teachable when we study. That's why I have such respect for the people in our fellowship who tell me they always go back over the transcript once or twice after hearing the study. They want to know if they missed something the first time, or if I said something that was off. Like we saw in Acts with the Bereans, God places great honor on people willing to be hesitant and thorough even though it might be time consuming to do that. They realize how important sound doctrine is to spiritual life, so they're aligning their priorities with the Lord's priorities; and that will always pay off.

(Jer. 29:12-14) You will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with *all* your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD.

Like I've mentioned before, the Lord does not open His treasure house of spiritual knowledge to those who are only mildly curious – but only to those whose whole heart is committed to learning of Him.

I'm sure most, if not all of you, realize that this is one of the primary reasons for the global apostasy of the Church in this last generation. Serious, prayerful study is difficult; this generation has been conditioned to avoid that which is hard, and takes time, and to run with sound-bites and readings that are simple and quick.

That's not what God responds to; He deserves more and He withholds His greatest treasures for those who hold Him as their highest priority in this life.

Serious study to know our God has been replaced by 21st. century offerings of "Chicken Soup for the Soul" style messages that either tell us what we'd already know if we perused it ourselves, or it's kept at the level of milk, even pabulum. God has fulfilled His promise of bringing a famine of hearing the Word of God to this land – His people are being destroyed through lack of knowledge (Amos 8:11 & Hos. 4:6).

Now, let's look at grace from another angle so we can get a broader personal grasp of the real wonder of what God's grace is.

A book by L.S. Chafer entitled "Grace, And Exposition of God's Marvelous Gifts" does the best job I've seen dealing with this subject. Here's his introduction;

When used in the Bible to set forth the grace of God in the salvation of sinners, the word "grace" discloses not only the boundless goodness and kindness of God toward man, but reaches far beyond and indicates the supreme motive which *actuated* God in the creation, preservation, and consummation of the universe. What greater fact could be expressed by one word?

We will be occupied, in the main, with the identification and application of the extended body of Scripture relative to the teachings of grace. The value of knowing this revelation cannot be estimated, because no Christian may hope to live well pleasing to God who does not know the facts of the revealed will of God for his daily life and because appalling ignorance exists on every hand concerning these vital truths and distinctions of the Word of God.

The thing that hit me hardest when I first read that was Chafer's comment about God's "motive" in creation. Of all the things about God and about His character and nature that "actuated" Him to create what He created was His own unquenchable desire to have a family that He could spend all eternity pouring out the riches of His grace upon.

Just as a Creator must create (it's in His nature; it's part of Who He is) – a divine Being, that by nature is gracious, must have an outlet – He must have an object of His love and grace that will give Him a means of expressing Who He is. That's where we come in. Of all that God has created, from archangels to Cherubim, down to the sentience of the animal kingdom, the crown of His creation is humanity; beings made in His own image upon whom He can fully express Who and What He is as the full embodiment of love and grace.

It is realities like this, revealed to the early apostles, that explains their amazement of Him and their unconditional commitment to Him. Of all the gods man has invented, the reality, the true God, is not only different than all others, He's greater and more wonderful than anything man's imagination could ever have come up with.

That knowledge captured Paul's heart and never let go. That is the only thing that could explain a life like his.

I want to also point out that when Chafer talks about the necessity of knowing "the revealed will of God for our daily lives", he not simply referring to knowing what job to take or who to visit this afternoon, etc. Those things are important, but when you read further in the book you realize that he's raising us above these kinds of decisions (which are unique to everyone) and emphasizing that it's impossible to live in the flow of God's Spirit, to walk in the Spirit, without a solid understanding of that which governs all we are and do – which is the grace of God.

To show what I believe he means, I'm going to read several passages that I feel show us the connection between God's grace as our Source and Guide, and the unique specifics that all of us will, in some way, have to consider as we move through our daily lives. You'll see that under Law people were driven by specific actions that were an external code of conduct; but under Grace we are guided by inward life principles, not tablets of stone.

(Rom. 14:17-19) for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. Therefore, let us

pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

(Phil. 1:9-11; 4:8-9) This I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. . . this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

(Gal. 6:14-16; 5:5-6; 5:1) God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. And as many as walk according to this rule (this principle), peace and mercy be upon them. We through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love. . . Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

So, we can see that the Law is excluded from the teachings of Grace, since we are new creations by nature, the guiding *principles of life* governing the righteousness of the Law are now written in hearts of flesh, not external tablets of stone. Under Grace we are guided by an indwelling Life, not by a listing of “thou shalts” and “thou shalt nots” making their appeal to the flesh of the old creation.

This is one of the reasons I’ve spent so much time over the last couple of years emphasizing the importance of realizing that we are a new creation, a new humanity, and as such, we aren’t governed by that which governed the old creation.

For by the Law is the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:2); the Law tells us what sin is, but provides no way to overcome it, but in Christ, through the new birth, we now have a nature that has already overcome sin and if we are growing spiritually, both sin and a hatred of sin are becoming more obvious to us as time goes on. Eventually, when our old nature, the flesh, is discarded, our new nature will be our *only* nature and sin will be a thing of the past. This is another thing grace has accomplished for us – giving us the assurance that we will eventually be, in every way, in the image of the First Born of the new humanity.

(1 Jn. 3:1-2) Behold what manner of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. Beloved, we are now children of God, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when Christ appears, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is.

(Rom. 8:29) For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren.

When Christ rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, He was the first Man to be in what would become the image of God embodied in flesh and blood. God's original intent in Adam would be fulfilled in the Last Adam (the Second Man) of 1 Cor. 15. And through our new birth, our regeneration, and eventually our complete transformation in spirit, soul and body into the image of the First Born, we will be eternally established as Man created in God's image and destined to share in the Son of God's governance of His creation.

God will have gone full circle from the first to the last Adam, through the fall, the Cross, the Resurrection and the final conformity of a race of people to God's image. This is the story of the Bible and it has been Grace and Mercy that have *actuated* God to make this happen.

I'll close with some final comments by Chafer on the importance as well as the eternal implications of grace defining the life of the Christian;

The daily life of the one who is alive to God must be recognized as assuming infinite proportions when the real issues are seen. Nothing short of that

manner of life which is normal under grace glorifies God. Nothing short of this will be fruit-bearing with its eternal rewards. Nothing short of this will result in that personal experience of inner peace without which the empty heart remains as a living witness against the truth of God. The importance of a daily life lived in the full measure of divine blessing provided under grace is likewise beyond human estimation.

Finally, 2 Pet. 3:17-18; & 1 Tim. 4:16;

Beloved, since you know these things beforehand, beware lest you fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but instead, continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. . . (for in doing this) you will both deliver yourself and all who hear you.

If we could truly see it in a fuller and deeper way than ever before, it would be clear that the Cross is the one place that reveals the nature of our God.