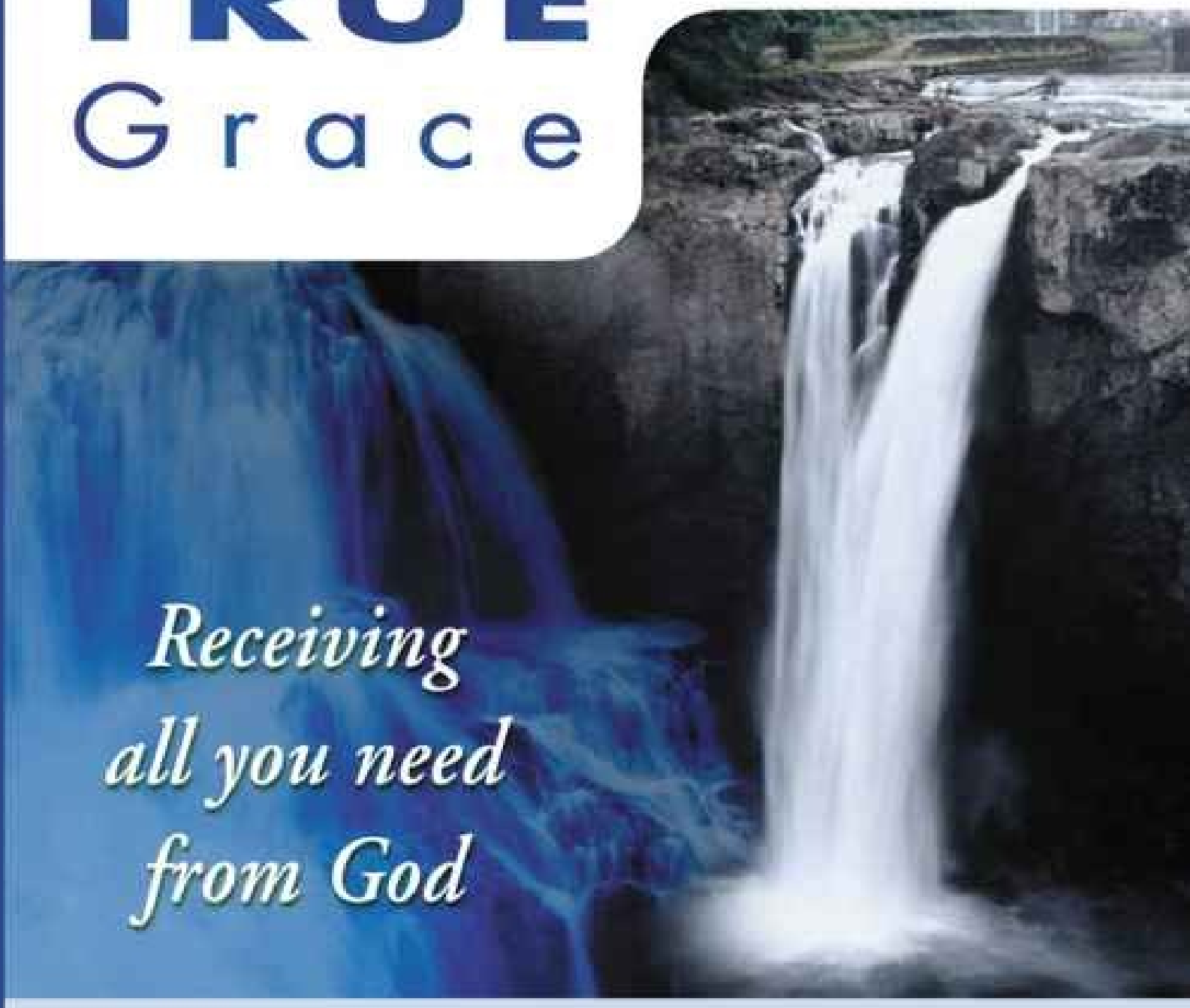
TRUE Grace



Receiving all you need from God

Colin Urquhart

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Kingdom Faith Resources
Roffey Place, Old Crawley Road,
HORSHAM West Sussex, RH12 4RU.
Tel: 01293 851543
E-mail: resources@kingdomfaith.com
www.kingdomfaith.com

First published in Great Britain in January 2002 by Kingdom Faith
Kingdom Faith Trust is a registered charity (no.278746)

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ISBN 978-1900409308

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Diane, David and Cliss for all their loving hard work in producing this book; and to the Kingdom Faith team and church for their supportive prayers. They form a wonderful family of faith of which I am privileged to be a part, together with my wife and family. To God be all the glory, the One in whom we put our trust!

Colin Urquhart

What Is Grace?

"God gives His everything to those who deserve nothing." This has become my simple definition of God's grace. The only way to qualify for God's grace is to deserve nothing! Only the proud, those who trust in their own abilities and opinions, would dare to think God owed them anything. The humble know they deserve nothing; yet, by God's grace have received everything!

The common definition of grace is that it is the *free, unmerited favour of God*. This states three essential truths:

First, God gives to us freely. He alone has made the decision to give, and He does so freely. It is not possible to buy His favour or earn reward from God.

Second, we do not deserve anything we receive from Him. It is all unmerited, not a reward for what we have done. Jesus tells us that even when we have done everything we should, we are still unprofitable servants!

Third, grace is a sign of God's favour. He has decided to give to us out of His love. He wants to bless us, and therefore wants us to receive from Him.

God's love is unique; it is a love that is given freely. God so loved the world that He gave His Son. This demonstrates the Father's graciousness. Jesus so loved us that He gave His life for us on the cross. That is grace expressed through the Son. And now the Holy Spirit is given to live in believers. This too is a great work of His grace. Truly, as Christians, we are a favoured people, the children of His grace.

Jesus called you to be His disciple; He chose you to be His child. He has cleansed you from your sins and made you a new creation by His grace; and now wants you to live in His favour for the rest of your life.

When Jesus quoted from Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth, He made it clear He had come, *"to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Lk 4:19)* That favour extends to all who believe in Him; so today we are living in the time of God's favour, His grace. This grace is available to all who turn to Him, who put their faith in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord.

Jesus: Full of Grace

Jesus came to make God's grace available to you. You could never remove the guilt of your own sins nor deserve God's forgiveness. You could not make your own way into God's favour; your sin rendered you unworthy to receive anything from Him. No amount of effort or religious fervour could ever repair the damage done to your relationship with God through your sin and disobedience.

To restore your relationship with God and to make it possible to receive all He wants to give you, He had to become man Himself in Jesus. The One through whom all creation came into being now took upon Himself the weakness and frailty of humanity. He did not force people to receive the truth He proclaimed: **the Good News that God was prepared to give those who believe in Jesus Christ the Kingdom of God as a present reality, and an eternal inheritance in heaven.**

> *He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. (John 1:10-11)*

To believers in Jesus, it seems incomprehensible that God should send His own Son to save them from the consequences of their sin and restore them to His Kingdom, only for the majority of people, including their religious leaders, to reject Him! Sadly, that was the case!

> *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (John 1:12-13)*

John, who wrote these words, was one of Jesus' first disciples and he goes on to testify to what it meant to believe in Him and so receive from Him:

> *From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. (John 1:16)*

This was the experience of *all* who believed in Jesus. From His grace they received one blessing after another. He was always giving, although they deserved nothing.

In the gospel accounts we see the disciples portrayed as those who were sometimes guilty of unbelief; they argued with each other and were proud about their status. Peter denied Jesus, Judas betrayed Him and they all deserted Him in His hour of need.

Yet to these twelve, as well as to many others, Jesus gave and gave of Himself. He imparted blessing whenever there was opportunity. He lived with grace flowing from His life continuously, *irrespective of the performance of His disciples.*

Called By Grace

The first disciples were called by grace to follow Jesus: *"You did not choose me, but I chose you." (John 15:16)*. What a strange combination of people: fishermen, a tax-collector, a zealot, and others we know little about! They were the first of what Paul was to describe later:

> *But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. (1 Cor 1:27)*

He did not choose people because of their natural qualities or abilities. He was to prove that if people had good hearts, He could empower them to be effective in communicating the gospel in word and power. The gospel was for *all*.

> *Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. (1 Cor 1:26)*

In the world people are chosen for human wisdom and intellect, their influence or because of their noble birth. These things mean little in God's Kingdom, where relationship with Jesus and yieldedness to His purposes are what really counts.

To be a disciple today is to be called into a personal relationship with Jesus. From the very start, his or her calling is a work of God's grace. Nobody ever deserves to be called, and no-one is chosen on the basis of ability or prestige. To be a follower of Jesus, it is essential to be in right relationship with Him. All sins and past failures need to be forgiven. The new believer is then given a new life and becomes a new creation. Whereas he or she was formerly unacceptable in God's sight, now by faith in Jesus a wonderful work of grace takes place. He or she is to be given an entirely new status before God. The new believer is put right with God, drawn into an entirely new relationship with Jesus. The disciple is a child of God, a co-heir with Jesus Christ of all God has to give.

Religious law can only tell someone what to do, what God commands and expects of His people; but it cannot enable him to obey or to fulfil His

expectations. In fact, law can only produce guilt as a person recognises his inability to live up to God's standards. It demonstrates that it is impossible to live a life pleasing to God by depending on human ability or effort.

Through faith in Jesus, a wonderful miracle occurs:

> *But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known … This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. (Rom 3:21-22)*

God makes His grace available to *all* who believe. His riches and the resources of His Kingdom are available to *all* who trust in Jesus to be their Saviour and Lord, irrespective of their background or former way of life.

The Christian life begins with this gift of righteousness. Those who have lived under religious law and denominational thinking have worked to try to make themselves acceptable to God, but without success. For it is impossible for anyone to work his way into God's favour. He can only put his faith in Jesus Christ, and he will find then that he is immediately in God's favour.

> *We are made right in God's sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in the same way, no matter who we are or what we have done. For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet now God in his gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Jesus Christ, who has freed us by taking away our sins. (Rom 3:22-24 NLT)*

Lavish Grace

The apostle Paul, spoke of grace in lavish terms. He considered himself the chief of sinners because he persecuted the Church, imprisoning believers and even assenting to their deaths. His encounter with the risen Jesus, on his way to Damascus to inflict further persecution on believers, began a remarkable revelation of grace in his life. Paul's attitude was that if Jesus could save him, He could save anyone! If it was possible for him to receive such forgiveness and acceptance, and even to be made an apostle, there could be no limit to God's grace!

All believers in Jesus Christ are drawn into this same grace. They are not only forgiven and accepted; they are placed in Christ Jesus. His life becomes their life, their inheritance:

> *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. (Eph 1:7-8)*

It is amazing to Paul that he could have so hated Jesus by persecuting those who loved Him, only to find that in His love, Jesus gave him all the riches of His life. No wonder he said:

> *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so no one can boast. (Eph 2:8-9)*

There is absolutely nothing we can do to contribute to our salvation. It is entirely the work of God from start to finish. It is His gift to all those who accept Jesus as their Saviour and Lord.

For many people this is a problem; they feel there must be *something* they can do for God to contribute towards receiving His acceptance and approval. Such striving leads to much religious fervour, but not to salvation. This can only be received through faith in God's grace. That grace is manifested uniquely in what Jesus did on the cross. There He overcame sin, oppression, rejection, sickness and every work of the devil. Obviously neither you nor I could have

contributed in any way to what Christ achieved through His crucifixion. It was something He did *for* us.

He took your sin, your failure, your need, your problems, your sicknesses even, and overcame them. Yet He not only died for you; He took you to the cross so that you died with Him.

This seems a strange concept. Yet it is at the heart of understanding the gospel of God's grace. Paul summed up his personal testimony by saying:

> *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing! (Gal 2:20-21)*

Either you believe in the cross, where Christ died for you, or you believe in your own works, your own effort and ability. Before his conversion Paul was an exceedingly religious man. He was convinced that in persecuting the Church he was genuinely serving God's purposes. The blindness he experienced on the road to Damascus was a dramatic way of showing him how blind he had been in thinking that he could earn acceptance with God through his own deeds.

The very One he was opposing was the Lord who had died to save him from his sins and self-righteous, religious legalism. The man he was had been *crucified with Christ* and now no longer lived. Saul of Tarsus, the Pharisee, became Paul the apostle. What a transformation — not only in him, but in any who are saved through the grace of Jesus Christ:

> *For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. (2 Cor 5:14)*

What Jesus did on the cross He did for all mankind. He paid the price with His own life for the sins of everyone, of every generation. Potentially anyone can turn to Christ and receive the forgiveness, acceptance and new life that God offers through His grace to all who put their faith in Jesus, thus becoming a new creation!

> *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ. (2 Cor 5:18)*

Paul explains that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ. The gospel is the good news of how we can be reconciled to God, having been separated from Him through our sins.

Although Jesus died for all, not all are saved; only those who avail themselves of the grace offered by putting their trust in Jesus personally, receive salvation from Him. Every individual who does this is not only crucified with Christ, but is raised to a new life in Him.

> *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above … For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. (Gal 3:1,3)*

Grace To Live A New Life

Christ died for all; those who trust in His grace are raised to a new life in Him. Their former life is dead, buried, finished with. Now they are a new creation. And it is this dramatic transformation that is vividly portrayed in water baptism:

> *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 baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism in 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. (Rom 6:1-4)*

There is a common misunderstanding about God's grace. It is wrongly assumed by some that because He was so gracious in forgiving and accepting them when they first turned to Christ, that it doesn't matter too much if, having been saved, they continue to sin and please themselves. Surely God is so gracious He will forgive them over and over again for their self-indulgence!

By His grace God has given us new life so that we might now live a new life, free from the bondage of sin. He makes it clear:

> *And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised to life. (2 Cor 5:15)*

Paul is emphatic about this. Once saved, the believer's body becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit. God lives in him, not to enable him to persist in a life of sin, unrighteousness or selfishness, but in order that he may live to fulfil God's purposes for his life!

> *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body. (1 Cor 6:19-20)*

Of course God's grace persists throughout the believer's life. This does not

signify that God has a casual attitude towards sin and disobedience. Far from it! If sin separated man from God, as Christians make clear to non-believers who are in bondage to sin, is it not even more serious in the life of one who is born again and in whom God lives by His Spirit, one who has been set free from bondage to sin?

God does not give us His grace to sin; **He makes all His grace available to keep us from sin and to enable us to walk on the path of loving obedience to Him**. For by His mercy and grace we are saved from what we were, in order to live the new life at one with Jesus.

From the start of your new life, *"you are not your own."* God has purchased you with the blood of Jesus for a life devoted to God. You were expensive! The price has already been paid and there can be no refunds. The blood has already been spilt for you. Now in gratitude to God, you are to live for Him, to please Him, to fulfil His purpose for your life. He makes all His grace available to you to accomplish that!

> *And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. (2 Cor 9:8)*

Grace is God giving His everything to those who deserve nothing. Your Christian life began with God giving to you in a wonderful way. He has already shown His love for you by dying for you on the cross. He has shown you His mercy and forgiveness. He has given you His full acceptance. He has given you new life. He has given you His Holy Spirit to live in you. He has blessed you in so many other ways.

What begins with grace, continues with grace. He keeps giving. His grace continues to abound to you. In *all* things! At *all* times. So you will have *all* you need to live the new life for His praise and honour. So that *"you will abound in every good work."* This is the purpose of His continuing grace towards you! Paul speaks of *"the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" (2 Cor 9:14-15)*

Peter expresses the same thoughts in a different way:

> *His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. (2 Pet 1:3-4)*

This was not written by a refined man of letters like Paul, but by one who began life as a rough and ready fisherman. But there is only one gospel, and one new life in Christ for all, no matter what their previous background or culture! Every believer is given everything needed for a godly life! Every believer is called to receive His glory and goodness! Every believer is given the same rich and wonderful promises! Every believer is enabled to escape the corruption in the world caused by the evil desires of the flesh, and to share in the divine nature, to live in Christ! Peter continues:

> *Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. (2 Pet 1:2)*

God does not grace us to persist in sin. Quite the opposite; He gives us whatever we need to walk free from sin! This does not mean we will live in perfection, but through His mercy we can be cleansed daily from the guilt of any sins we commit and enabled to say "No" to the evil desires that attack us.

> *For 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. (Titus 2:11-12)*

The writer to Hebrews urges us to draw near to God's throne when we pray, not a throne of judgment, but of grace!

> *Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Heb 4:16)*

His mercy is always available, you do not need to live in condemnation because of your failures. His grace is available to help you! No matter what your need or situation, God will give you the necessary grace to enable you to walk through that situation victoriously with Him. He does not grace you to sin, to fail or be overcome by your circumstances. Quite the contrary:

> *But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. (2 Cor 2:14)*

He *always* leads you in triumph; that is the nature of His grace. Of course you have to learn to depend on His grace, to believe that He will give you

whatever you need, no matter what the circumstances. This should not prove difficult, for He wants to give to you far more readily than you desire to receive from Him.

Grace To Live A New Life

Jesus taught Paul an important truth when he was going through a particular time of torment:

> *He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor 8:9)*

This is true for you as well. No matter what your situation, no matter how weak you feel in the face of the issues or problems you have to face, God's grace will always prove sufficient for you! He will always give all that you need at all times — if you look to Him and put your trust in Him!

This is why God's power is made perfect in your weakness. When you know you are weak, there is every incentive to trust in His grace and power. God actually wants you to live in such dependence. Paul says:

> *"Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ's power may rest on me … For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Cor 12:9,10)*

This does not mean Paul went around in unbelief saying he was a no-good, helpless failure. He knew well who he was as a new creation in Christ. He knew also that apart from Christ he could do nothing.

Knowing this is the beginning of true humility. Jesus said, *"Apart from me you can do nothing." (Jn 15:5)* The humble man believes this and so does not attempt to do anything apart from Him. He wants to do everything in dependence on Him. James says:

> *God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. (James 4:6)*

It is the proud who walk independently of God, trusting in themselves rather than in Him. Paul's "thorn in the flesh" kept him from becoming proud in the midst of the wonderful things God was doing in his life. **You will find that there is always some area of your life where in order to walk in victory, you have to depend on God's grace!** This keeps you humble before God and before

others.

Living in God’s grace means that you live in the constant awareness that He continually wants to give to you — blessing upon blessing, grace upon grace. He never comes to the end of His giving. Of course you have to be prepared to receive all that He wants to give! Therefore you have to stay humble before Him, ready to ask for what you need. There is to be no proud independence! The more you are aware of your weakness, the more readily you can depend on His strength.

Made Rich

He even wants to make you rich!

> *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. (2 Cor 8:9)*

Although Paul says this while talking about money, clearly he is speaking of a wonderful spiritual truth that extends to every area of our lives. Jesus left the glory of heaven and, by comparison, shared the poverty of our humanity. He even died the death of a condemned criminal, in order to make all the riches of heaven available to us now and for all eternity! He has blessed us *"with every spiritual blessing in Christ." (Eph 1:3) "We have nothing, yet possess everything." (see 2 Cor 6:10)*

> *I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way — in all your speaking and in all your knowledge. (1 Cor 1:4-5)*

This is grace indeed, that He should want you to be rich in every way. Material wealth is certainly included in this so that *"you also excel in this grace of giving." (2 Cor 8:7)* However, He wants you to be rich also in all your speaking and knowledge!

In this world you are to be like Jesus. Because He is gracious, He wants you to be gracious. Because He excels in giving to you, He wants you to excel in giving to Him and to others. The more His grace abounds in your life, the more you have to give to others. If, for example you are rich in love, that love will abound to others.

God gives you the fulness of His life so that rivers of living water may flow out of you. If you seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, Jesus promises that, *"all these things will be given to you as well." (Matt 6:33)* You will not have to worry about anything, what to eat or drink, what to wear or what tomorrow will hold for you. God will take care of you as your loving Father, and in taking care of you, He will take care of your needs, through the provision of

His grace.

He will do this abundantly not meagrely. **He will lavish His grace on you,** so that in *all* things, at *all* times, you will have *all* that you need, so you can abound in every good work. He became poor so that through His poverty you might become rich.

What a God! We deserve nothing, yet He gives us everything! He is ready to care for us and make us rich with all the wealth of heaven! What love! What grace!

However, Jesus does say that we are to put His Kingdom first; His rule or reign is to be the focus of our lives. We are not looking to His grace to enable us to continue in a life of sin, compromise or selfishness. No, we want Him to grace us to live in righteousness; in ways that are right in His eyes, fulfilling the plan and purpose He has for us.

In order to understand how much God wants to give to you, consider what He has already given you as a Christian:

- **He has given you His mercy and forgiveness.**
- **You are totally accepted in the Beloved, in Christ.**
- **He has given you salvation, so that now you can live a new life.**
- **He has given you His own Spirit to live in you and enable you to live that life.**
- **He has given you His Kingdom; the life of that Kingdom is within you.**
- **He has given you authority over all the power of the evil one, so that nothing will harm you.**
- **He has given you His word of truth that enables you to live in freedom.**
- **He has given you His very great and precious promises that enable you to participate in the divine nature.**
- **He has placed you in Christ and given you every spiritual blessing in heavenly places.**

"Enriched in every way…" "That through his poverty you might be made rich." Are you beginning to realise the amazing scope of God’s grace towards you? There is nothing He wants to withhold from you — grace in all things, at all times so that you have all you need! Yes, His grace is certainly sufficient for you! What a great God!

Of course, it is for you to appropriate these blessings of His grace. There is little point in having so much available to you if you don’t make full use of these resources. God in His grace gives; it is for you to receive gratefully all He has chosen to give you:

How much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. (Rom 5:17)

God's purpose is for you to *reign in lifeM*. You are not a survivor, but a victor, one who is to exercise authority over the circumstances of your life. You are not a survivor; you are to be an overcomer! Those who walk in righteousness are able to *reign*.

God does not reign in sin; neither can you! He reigns in righteousness, so you are to do likewise! To be in right relationship with Him and to walk together with Him in such righteousness enables you to *reign in life*, to be an overcomer. And God will give you the grace to do this. He will give you whatever you need to sustain you in your relationship and walk in truth, integrity and righteousness.

Grace To Obey

Grace is not grace if it is dependent in any way on what you do. It is not that you walk in right ways to obtain the gifts of God's grace. Completely the opposite is true. God gives you His grace to enable your walk of righteousness! So Paul urges that as God's fellowworkers we do not *"receive God's grace in vain." (2 Cor 6:1)*

There is little point in God gracing you to walk in obedience if you choose disobedience instead! There is no value in God giving you grace to trust Him if you trust in yourself! What value is it to you that God graces you to walk in righteousness, if you choose unrighteousness? This would be to deny His grace, to throw it back in His face. "You may grace me to do Your will, but I don't want to do it! I want my own way instead!" What an attitude!

Some begin their Christian lives in grace by trusting in God and His provision for them, only to fall back into religious law and formalism by trying to please Him by the things they do for Him. They strive to remain in His good books by their own efforts. They *"have fallen away from grace." (Gal 5:4)* This turns the Christian life into a hard and unrewarding slog, where there is little joy or sense of fulfilment. The flesh, your own self life, can never accomplish what can only be done by God's grace! So Paul urges Timothy:

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. (2 Tim 2:1)

God will give him everything he needs to do His will. He will enable him to endure opposition and hardships for the sake of the gospel. He will give him the grace to persevere and remain faithful, no matter what the circumstances.

Paul teaches another young protégé, Titus, that grace *"teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and ungodly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age." (Titus 2:12)* How great is your need of such grace today in the liberal society in which we live.

Instead of beginning with God's grace and then returning to religious law and self-effort, you are to *"grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (2 Pet 3:18)* More grace, not less.

- **It doesn't matter what the temptation; God's grace will always enable**

you to overcome it.

- **No matter what the pressures on you; God's grace will enable you to withstand them.**
- **Your need might be great; God's grace is greater than the need.**
- **The opposition may be strong; God's grace will enable you to break through.**
- **He is with you always, conscious of your need, and ready to respond to your trust in Him:**

Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. (Isa 30:18)

Lay Hold Of His Grace

It has always been God's nature to be gracious. David knew this:

> *The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. (Ps 145:8-9)*

God expresses His love in giving; His giving is a work of grace because those to whom He gives deserve nothing from Him! So we do not have to be slow in expecting God to give to us, and to give us His very best. We could never make ourselves worthy of any of His gifts; **so we simply have to accept His grace and lay hold, by faith, of the inheritance He has chosen to give us.**

In the parable, the prodigal son comes to his father and asks for his share of the inheritance, and is given it. Unfortunately he goes off and wastes what he is given. His elder brother, who was reluctant to forgive him when he returned home repentant, was just as much a waster, but in a different way. He did not even believe his father would give him a goat to have a feast with his friends.

God does not want you to abuse His generosity by misusing the grace He gives you. But neither does He want unbelief to keep you from taking hold of what God will give you if only you ask. The father's response to the elder son's frustration, anger and jealousy is significant:

> *"My son", the father said, "you are always with me and everything I have is yours." (Lk 15:31)*

This is the true measure of the heavenly Father's graciousness towards His children: *"Everything I have is yours."*

When you look at yourself it is hard to imagine that God could say such a thing to you. But when you understand His loving and gracious nature, then you begin to understand that He has no desire to withhold anything from you. After all, it is He who chose you and has made you a co-heir with Christ:

> *Now, if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we might share in*

his glory. (Rom 8:17)

You have shared in His sufferings by being crucified with Christ. So now you are able to live a new life in Him and have the assurance that you will share in His glory.

He gives you the grace you need to share in the cost of following Christ. He gives you the grace to overcome whatever opposes you. The cost of remaining faithful to Him is minimal compared with the eternal glory of your rich inheritance. Nothing in the whole of creation can separate you from God's love, and therefore from His grace. You are a child of His grace!

No wonder Jesus *"came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (Jn 1:14)* His ministry demonstrated this. He had a heart of compassion which moved Him to action, reaching out to people with mercy and grace. Through that compassion He forgave sinners, such as the woman under sentence of death because she was caught committing adultery. He did not condemn her, but told her to go and leave her life of sin. *(See John 8:11)*

Jesus looked upon the crowds of people and saw that *"they were like sheep without a shepherd." (Matt 9:36)* His heart of love moved Him to be merciful and gracious. They needed someone to lead them and care for them. So He taught them what they needed to hear to enable them to put their trust in the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep.

Jesus looked at the sick people around Him and His heart of compassion moved Him to action. He graciously healed all who came to Him in faith. He did not ask them questions to discover if they deserved to be healed; He knew nobody could ever deserve to receive a miracle of God's grace. No, He wanted only to know if they believed He would heal them there and then. In other words, that He would be gracious to them.

After listening to Him teach all day, Jesus didn't want to send the people away hungry; He fed them, even though this required a miracle. What love! What grace! With a boy's picnic He fed thousands of people. He took this meagre offering and multiplied it so that it met the need.

This is all we can do; make our lives available to God, weak, sinful failures though we have been; and allow Him to lavish His grace upon us. We simply have to understand that it is impossible to deserve grace. If you receive something you deserve, it is a reward for what you have done. A reward is not grace. **Grace is only grace when we have done absolutely nothing to earn, deserve or achieve what is given.**

Some Christians believe theoretically in God's grace, but they still do not approach Him with the confidence of faith that expects Him to give to them

freely!

This is clear to see in connection with healing. If someone does not receive an immediate response when praying to be healed, he is prone to search within himself to see if there is anything that hinders him from receiving from God. He takes his eyes away from Jesus and His grace, and onto himself. This suggests that God will only heal when all the other issues in his life have been resolved! When will that be? Never, not this side of glory!

When will you ever deserve to be healed? Never. How can you earn your healing? You can't! Does God want to heal you? Of course, by grace, not as a result of you trying to make yourself into what you think He wants you to be.

If there is anything in your life that prevents God's best purposes for you He will make you aware of this as you keep your eyes on Him; not as you search within yourself. Don't play 'hunt the problem'. **You won't find your answers in yourself or your past; only in Him and in His grace.**

You see, the greatest hindrance to receiving from the Lord is unbelief in His grace, in His willingness to give to you despite the fact that you deserve nothing. In the New Testament, faith and grace go together. It is faith in His grace that enables us to receive salvation, or the answer to any other need! Jesus said:

> *If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (Matt 7:11)*

You do not earn gifts!

- **Salvation is a gift from God; it cannot be earned.**
- **The Holy Spirit is a gift from God; He can never come to live in you as a reward for services rendered.**
- **Every act of healing, every answer to prayer, is a gift of God's grace to you or any of His children.**
- **He even gives you His Kingdom, the gift of eternal life and authority over all the power of the evil one.**
- **He gives and gives and gives; and every gift is an expression of His grace.**

The question is whether you *believe* in His grace towards you, not in theory, but in the particular situation in which you are placed! There are no limits to His ability, nor to His grace! The limitations are in us; in our unwillingness to be sure and certain of God's desire to give to us when we turn to Him in prayer.

Jesus gave many wonderful prayer promises. In none of these does He teach us to expect that God will decline to give us what we ask for!

> *Ask and it will be given you … everyone who asks receives. (Matt 7:7,8)*

> *I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. (Jn 14:13)*

Sometimes there are conditions attached to His promises; but there can be no doubt of God's desire to respond to the faith we place in His grace, by giving in response to our prayers.

The first healing recorded by Matthew was that of the leper who came to Jesus with what seemed like very tentative faith:

> *"Lord, if you are willing you can make me clean." Jesus reached out and touched the man, "I am willing", he said, "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy. (Matt 8:2,3)*

This is grace in action. Jesus simply removes the word, if. *"I am willing"*, He says, I am willing to be gracious. This is something you need to remember again and again and again. When you pray there is to be no *if!* He wants you to be sure and certain of His graciousness towards you.

If you turn your eyes away from God's grace, you have to focus your attention somewhere else instead! On yourself? On the problem? On the need? On your feelings? On the words you pray? None of these will give you your answer. It is a question of whether in your heart you believe in God's grace and expect Him to give to you in fulfilment of His words of promise! **Faith in His grace!**

It is for this reason that, when teaching the disciples how to pray with faith, Jesus said first: *"Have faith in God." (Mk 11:22)* This seems self-evident until you realise it is easy to place your focus elsewhere and try to work out in your own mind how the matter can be dealt with. To trust in God is to believe that He will give you the answer as a demonstration of His grace. So Jesus said:

> *Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. (Mk 11:24)*

Such faith begins with accepting how gracious the Lord has already been to you. **You are unlikely to have much confidence He will give to you now and**

in the future if you do not understand how gracious He has already been to you! You are not asking Him suddenly to become gracious because you have a particular need; He always has been gracious to you. In every way you have already benefited from His generosity as a child of grace. When you pray, believe that you will continue to receive from Him as that grace continues to flow towards you.

God wants you to ask. He wants you to depend on His grace, to be bold in your expectations as to what He will give you by His grace. **For to believe in His grace today is to realise that you live in the immensity of His love — a love that is expressed in giving.**

It is certainly discouraging to look at yourself and the many ways you fail Him. This only demonstrates that you could never deserve His gifts. But that is what grace is all about: God’s willingness to give to those who deserve nothing!

It is much more encouraging to keep your eyes on Jesus, and His grace!

The Holy Spirit And Grace

God will give you whatever grace you need to fulfil His call to be His disciple and follow Jesus. He has given you His Holy Spirit to keep your focus on Jesus, the Lord of grace: He *"will remind you of everything I have said to you", (Jn 14:26)* Jesus told the disciples. *"He will testify about me." (Jn 15:26) "He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you." (Jn 16:14)*

The Spirit of Truth and the word of truth are to work together to enable you to live in freedom: *"You, my brothers, were called to be free." (Gal 5:13)* He supplies the grace to believe and the grace to obey His word.

Faith in His word enables you to be set free from the effects of past traumatic events; it also enables you to live without fear concerning the future. No matter what God wants you to do, He will always supply the grace to enable you to do it! No matter what difficulties arise, His grace will enable you to overcome them! If you believe in His grace you will not need to live in fear:

> *If you make the Lord your refuge, if you make the Most High your shelter, no evil will conquer you; no plague will come near your dwelling. (Ps 91:9-10 NLT)*

> *The Lord says, "I will rescue those who love me. I will protect those who trust in my name. When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue them and honour them. I will satisfy them with a long life and give them my salvation." (Ps 91:14-16 NLT)*

When the Lord speaks to you about the future you do not need to fear or panic because you cannot imagine how you would be able to do things that may seem beyond you! Such a reaction is natural but unnecessary. You are not yet graced to do what you will need to do in the future. The Lord shows you the direction in which He is leading you, and He will supply whatever grace you need each step along the way. As you continue to follow Him, so He will supply His grace to give you all you need to take the next step, and then the next, and the next. **You do not need tomorrow's grace for today!**

Sometimes you may think it would be great to have now what you only need tomorrow. But God wants you to keep walking by faith, looking to Him continually so that there can be a steady flow of His grace in your life. Your security is in Him, not in your own competence or abilities.

> *"Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God." (2 Cor 3:5)*

You can see this truth in an extreme way in relation to persecution. You may wonder how you would cope if you had to suffer torture or even death for your faith. You may even fear you would not be able to stand such a trial. This is because you are not in such a situation now; so God does not need to give you grace to enable you to come through such persecution faithfully and victoriously. If you were in that situation He would supply the necessary grace, as many who have been through such trials have testified.

The things that cause fear are those things which stretch your faith beyond previous experience or limits. For example, if you have never preached before and you are asked to do so, you may want to opt out because you fear that you would 'dry up' in the middle of the service. Or you may simply feel totally inadequate for such a task. You may be concerned about how people will react to what you say. But perhaps your greatest fear will be that you may fail God.

He will not allow you to do that. If He asks you to do something, He will always supply the necessary grace to do it! If you trust in His grace, you won't 'dry up', and neither will you fail the Lord. He will speak through you to edify and encourage your listeners. In fact, you will probably be amazed at yourself afterwards! You had to trust in His grace and He didn't fail you! So all the credit rightly belongs to Him!

You may fear having to witness to others about Jesus. When an opportunity arises, the Lord will supply the necessary grace, once you take the first step of faith in obeying what the Holy Spirit is telling you to do.

Perhaps when visiting someone who is sick, the Holy Spirit will impress upon you the need to pray for that person's healing! If you are unaccustomed to praying for others and laying hands on them, you may want to make excuses for not obeying. You may think you do not have the necessary anointing for such a task. But if you obey the Lord, He will supply the necessary grace. He will show you what to do, will inspire your prayer and cause it to be effective. After all, the healing can only take place through His grace!

The call on every Christian's life is to follow Jesus. God will give you whatever grace you need in your particular circumstances to obey that call.

Jesus gives each believer his or her distinctive ministry, the particular way in which He wants that individual to serve Him. By serving others we serve Him; so His will for you will involve reaching out to others in some way - to give, bless, love, serve, encourage. If you are afraid of reaching out to others, He will supply the necessary grace to enable you. **He will give you the necessary grace for your distinctive ministry!**

The New Testament speaks of several different ministries given by God to His church. The Holy Spirit anoints according to the grace needed for each specific ministry. God gives the evangelist the necessary anointing and grace for his ministry. He gives the pastor his distinctive anointing and grace, very different from that given to the evangelist. This is because their ministries are very different. The evangelist catches the fish, the pastor processes them, turns them into disciples. Rarely does an individual have the grace for both ministries, except out of necessity for a limited period of time.

The anointing and grace needed by an apostle, a prophet or a teacher are different from those of the evangelist and pastor. What you need to understand is that God always makes available to you the grace to enable you to do whatever He calls you to do! He never leaves you to your own devices. He doesn't desert you, telling you to get on with fulfilling what He asks of you by depending on yourself. Stephen was appointed to do the work of a deacon; he served at tables. However, the grace of God was on his life to enable him to do greater things:

> *Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. (Acts 6:8)*

The grace that was on the apostles enabling them to perform great signs and wonders in the name of Jesus was apparently transmitted to Stephen when they prayed for him and laid their hands on him!

Whatever you accomplish in the name of Jesus is the outworking of what He has graced you to do; and therefore all the glory belongs to Him and not to you! You have simply been the channel of God's grace to others. That in itself is a wonderful privilege. This grace may be given you directly by the Lord, or He may use others to be channels of His grace to you, imparting a grace previously beyond anything you had known.

If you continue to live in God's grace, you will find He is able to do more and more through you to bless others, and He will also supply whatever you need at a personal level.

When Barnabas visited the church in Antioch, he saw that God's grace was active among the believers by the ways in which He was using them:

When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. (Acts 11:23)

The gospel is the good news about God's grace; and He confirms the preaching of His Word with the signs and wonders that are evidences of that grace:

So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. (Acts 14:3)

The whole of the early church lived with a keen sense of God's grace, not only expressed in how the Lord provided for them, but also in the way they gave to one another.

With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. (Acts 4:33-34)

Grace Imparted

The grace was not only on the apostles, but on all the people. The New Testament writers were concerned that the believers lived in a continual awareness of God's grace. Paul begins his letters by speaking an impartation of God's grace on those to whom he writes:

> *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom 1:7, 1 Cor 1:5, 2 Cor 1:2, Gal 1:3, Eph 1:2, Phil 1:2)*

This is more than a greeting, or a prayer even; Paul believes that God's grace and peace will come upon them in a greater way. Notice how often these same words are repeated in the scriptures. God must be saying something very important to us!

Paul ends most of his letters with a similar impartation of God's grace. Clearly he wants readers to understand that the living out of the gospel is a matter of grace from start to finish!

> *The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. (1 Cor 16:23)*

> *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen. (Gal 6:18)*

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

> *May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Cor 13:14)*

It is the grace of the Lord Jesus that Paul emphasizes, the grace that through His poverty, we are made rich in every way. No matter what their circumstances, Paul reminded the churches of the grace that was theirs already through Jesus, and His continual willingness to give to them, to supply their needs no matter

what they may be! Peter begins and ends his letters in a similar way:

> *Grace and peace be yours in abundance. (1 Pet 1:2)*

To know Jesus is to know His abundant grace:

> *Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. (2 Pet 1:2)*

Peter encourages his readers to *"grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (2 Pet 3:18)* There is to be an increase, not a diminishing, of grace in believers' lives! John also imparts grace when he writes:

> *Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love. (2 John 3)*

This is a tremendous statement of faith by the apostle, and a clear indication of the way believers lived with a keen sense of God's grace, that He was willing to give His everything to those who deserved nothing. It is even more significant that when the Holy Spirit gave John the letters that God Himself sent to the churches in Asia, they too focus on His grace and peace:

> *Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne and from Jesus Christ. (Rev 1:4-5)*

Grace comes to us from the Father, Son and Holy Spirit! From the Trinity of God! And the New Testament ends with an impartation of God's grace:

> *The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen. (Rev 21:21)*

From the beginning of our experience of the gospel to the very end of our lives, God wants us to be keenly aware of His grace, of His willingness to give to us. **Every time you read these words at the beginning and ending of the epistles, believe that you receive a further impartation of God's grace.** Believe that the Lord is speaking personally to *you*. Grace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

A Christian is *not* someone who does things for God, but who allows God to give to him or to her. He is then able to work through that believer, enabling streams of living water to pour from his or her innermost being to be a great

blessing to others.

When speaking to the elders from Ephesus, Paul reviewed his ministry among them. However, his greatest concern was to complete the purpose God had for him:

> *However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me — the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. (Acts 20:24)*

The good news of God's grace!

Hindrances To Grace

Everything God does through our lives is a work of His grace. There are three things in particular that can hinder the flow of that grace in our experience. These three things make it difficult for us to receive what God wants to give us, and they restrict the ways in which He can use us as channels of His grace to others.

Unbelief

If we do not trust God to be gracious, we will not believe He will give to us. Instead we are likely to focus on ourselves or our circumstances. We will be more conscious of our doubts and fears than of His grace. However, God promises to answer our prayers of faith, not unbelief.

Pride

The scripture says that we are not to think of ourselves more highly than we should. Instead we should have a humble estimate of ourselves. For God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. We cannot receive of His grace if He resists us.

Self

Self-dependence is the very opposite of trusting in God's grace to enable us to do what He asks of us. When we trust ourselves we use our natural resources. When we trust Him, His supernatural power and grace are released into our lives.

So unbelief, pride and self-dependence are the enemies of grace in our lives. **Faith, humility and God-dependence expressed in prayer, enable God's grace to be released in us and through us to others.**

Supernatural Gifts

When you received God's Holy Spirit, certain spiritual gifts were made available to you. These gifts of the Spirit are further manifestations of His grace; so He wants you to use them, not neglect them! Paul lists some of them, saying that:

> *To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. (1 Cor 12:7)*

The manifestations of the Holy Spirit enable you to be a channel of grace to others. God can give you a word of wisdom, giving you understanding beyond your natural reasoning ability. He can give a word of knowledge, supplying information supernaturally — a distinct help when ministering to others for He can take you directly to the heart of the problem.

He can give you a gift of faith, enabling you to believe in a way that would not be normal for you. He heals supernaturally through His Spirit, and can even enable a miracle in your life, or for you to be a channel of God's miraculous power or healing grace to another.

True prophecy, a word directly from God, is a work of His grace. He can enable you to distinguish the spirit behind things that are said to you, or that happen to you. So you can discern whether something is truly from God, is a manifestation of the soul (coming from the self rather than God), or from the enemy.

To have the gift of speaking in tongues is a supernatural gift of God's grace and is to be used by the believer, not neglected, together with the gift of interpreting what is said.

God gives us whatever grace we need to fulfil His will and purpose for us; but He will not grace us for what He has not called us to be or to do. Strictly speaking, our ministries are not our calling. Our calling is to follow Jesus, as with the first disciples. Then, as we follow Him, He raises us up in different ministries.

Because there has been confusion about this, many work very hard at their ministries, while neglecting their relationship with Jesus and what it means to be a true disciple! Their confidence is in what they do, rather than trusting in God's

grace to enable them to live in close fellowship with Him. Jesus warned:

> *Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord", will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?" Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evil doers!" (Mt 7:21-23)*

We can only do His will by the grace He gives us. To take upon yourself a ministry that God has not given you is never successful, for there will be no grace evident in such a ministry.

Grace For Ministry

As in New Testament times, there are many today who call themselves *apostles* but they are not. It is evident from their lives that God has not graced them for such a ministry.

Nothing is worse than a self-styled prophet, or someone who desires to be a pastor and have his own church, while lacking the necessary anointing and grace from God.

God gives the particular grace needed for the particular ministries He gives to believers. Without that particular grace, the believer can only trust in the general grace that is his or hers. So it does not mean that someone who is out of place in ministry has no grace operating in his or her life. It simply means that the particular grace needed for such a ministry is lacking. Therefore, the fruit will be minimal.

> *But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. (Eph 4:7)*

Without that particular grace, the apostle becomes a governmental figure; the *prophet* can cause confusion and chaos. The evangelist will not see a ready response from the unsaved. The pastor's congregation will remain small, needs will go unmet, and there will be no vision or direction for the people. The teacher may be accurate in what he says, but will not impart life.

All this helps us to see that grace is absolutely essential if we are to be fruitful. As Jesus said: *"Apart from me you can do nothing." (Jn 15:5)*

The grace upon a person's life will be evidenced by the fruit and effectiveness of that person's ministry. All the glory goes to God because whatever fruit is produced is the work of His grace. We tend to exalt the person, rather than be thankful for the grace that operates through him or her!

In the New Testament, there was definitely a particular grace upon the apostles. It is for this reason that they began their letters with an impartation of grace. Those who were submitted to the apostle could benefit from the grace that was upon the apostle.

When the prophets and teachers at Antioch heard the Holy Spirit telling them to, *"Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called*

them", (Acts 13:3) they fasted, prayed, laid hands on them and sent them out. As a result, God poured apostolic grace upon them, and, *"the word of the Lord spread through the whole region." (Acts 13:49)*

So particular grace for a particular task was imparted by the Holy Spirit in response to prayer. But notice that this was a task initiated by the Holy Spirit! He will grace us for the things to which He calls us! Paul could say:

> *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. (1 Cor 15:10)*

To be graced does not mean that you can sit back and do nothing! No, Paul worked hard and suffered great cost personally in his ministry. Yet the grace of God worked so powerfully and effectively through him that he was the apostle used by God to open the gospel to the whole gentile world.

Corporate Grace

God’s grace, then, enables us to be effective. Not only does a believer have personal grace for his daily life, but he can operate under the corporate grace or anointing of the church to which he belongs. As an individual, he is part of something bigger and potentially far more powerful than himself.

Grace of a special order can be on a congregation where a move of God’s Spirit is taking place. Any individual can minister beyond his or her personal anointing because of that corporate grace. While submitted within that body, he or she can be used of God in ways far in excess of any personal anointing.

However, if a believer becomes proud or deceived, thinking that this particular grace is the result of his personal anointing, and decides to separate from that body where such grace abounds, he will receive a shock. For then he will only be able to function under his personal anointing, and the results will not be nearly so effective! He will then realise that God had been using him so effectively because of the corporate grace of the body to which he was submitted. Without such submission, he has effectively separated himself from that grace!

It is always good to be where God wants you to be, submitted as a member of His body, preferably in a congregation where God’s grace is evident through the move of His Holy Spirit that is taking place.

When the congregation is apostolic by nature, there is a particular grace upon it, for the whole body is able to benefit from the grace on the life of the apostle. It is possible to function with the authority and grace of the one to whom you submit yourself. Where there is such unity, the Lord commands the blessing. It is for this reason that Jesus prayed:

> *May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you have sent me and have loved them, even as you have loved me. (Jn 17:23)*

Wherever they went, the apostles were able to impart particular grace, enabling God’s people to break through opposition and difficulties; enabling churches to be established and built up. They were able to impart grace through the revelation of the truth they brought to strengthen the believers in their faith and witness.

There are different kinds of anointing and it seems different levels of grace. When people see the way God's grace is imparted through a particular ministry, they are drawn to that ministry in the expectation that they will be able to receive from God in a way that would not otherwise be possible. In other words, people are able to see readily the evidence of the grace of God on a particular believer's life.

All the glory, though, belongs to the Lord. When you see God using someone greatly, be thankful to Him and honour that person because of the way God's grace is flowing through his or her life. Never lose sight of the fact that the vessel of the Holy Spirit does not deserve the praise and is not to be revered in the wrong way. It is the grace of God flowing through him or her.

And what of you? All God's grace is available to you to enable you to fulfil your call as a disciple of Jesus! As He leads you into specific ministries, know He will give you the particular grace you need for that ministry, to be effective and to bear much fruit for His glory!

As you walk in close fellowship with the Lord, so God's grace will increase in your life, enabling you to be more fruitful. And know that a corporate anointing of His grace can enable you to be used beyond any personal anointing on your life!

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Further Reading:

It is strongly recommended that you read the companion book to *True Grace*, entitled *True Faith*.

About your inheritance in Christ:

In Christ Jesus — published by Kingdom Faith

True Life — published by Kingdom Faith

About how to pray with faith:

Anything You Ask — published by Hodder & Stoughton

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The Truth that sets you Free — published by Hodder & Stoughton

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