

Living By Faith: God's Grace (Part 3)

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I said at the beginning of my previous sermon in this series that I wanted us to be able to rightly understand grace's value to our salvation by more clearly seeing it against the backdrop of God's justice. When we get the one with the other, then God's grace begins to become much more apparent, because we do not deserve any grace, if I can put it that way. I am going to continue this, through the beginning of this sermon especially.

I gave you a rather detailed background of the term *charis* and its secular usage in the Greek language, and had just begun to give its spiritual usage when time ran out. I did this because it becomes clear that God, through the apostles, gave the term spiritual significance that is far beyond what it means in its secular usage.

We saw that in the secular usage the term indicates that people with *charis* are perceived as being gifted, and tend to be influential in their dealings with other people, and thus there is in the term a sense of being enabled or empowered. The apostles appeared to have picked up on this and used it to indicate the undeserved benevolence of God toward sinners, and this is considerably far more important than the term originally meant. With secular usage, the emphasis is on physical gifts received. In the Bible, regarding its spiritual usage, the emphasis is on spiritual gifts *given* by God to those who are called for their growth and salvation.

Now grace implies empowerment. Hang onto that. Grace infers empowerment by God to be used for service and accomplishment in spiritual growth. The received part is still retained—that is, we do receive it—and it results in our giving thanks to God for His abundance and providence, because those receiving recognize that they have been gifted, and acknowledge Him for so doing. And then they give more thanks. We should be doing that.

I then gave you grace's theological definition from *The Merriman-Webster Dictionary*, which clearly emphasizes God's giving. *The Merriman-Webster Dictionary*, which is a secular dictionary, gives a very concise and accurate definition of grace. This is what it says: "The unmerited divine assistance given humans for their regeneration or sanctification." That brief definition covers literally scores of different applications shown in both the Old and New Testament.

The key word in that definition, at this point in the sermon, is "unmerited," meaning that grace—a divine assistance—is *in no way earned*. In regard to our spiritual well-being, this is *very* important. It can hardly be emphasized too much. In regard to our spiritual well-being, this is very important to understand, because what it produces, if things are working correctly in our relationship with God, is something very important to living by faith.

Our salvation is accomplished through God's benevolence from beginning to end. Do you hear that? It is *He* who rescues us. It is *He* who saves us. We may think differently, because we feel put upon so often. That is natural to feel put upon that way because that is what human nature does.

Now grace—divine assistance—is not given because God is obligated. He is not compelled. He is not forced. He is not duty-bound to do so. He gives grace freely, not by constraint. It is entirely an act on

His part, and nothing forces Him into it. All He literally owes us, brethren, is death, because we have sinned against Him. If He followed through on that obligation, there would be nobody in God's Kingdom.

He gives grace because that is the way He is in His character. This is another very important part so that we know our God. This is the way God's nature works. He is a giver. He loves to give. He loves to save. He loves to help. He loves to give to those who are less well off than He is. It is part of His nature to do that. We will cover a verse that shows that so clearly. He gives grace because it is His purpose being worked out, not because He owes us for what we think we have earned, or for what our pride is demanding for us because we believe we are entitled to what we desire. We get the desire, and we think we should have it, and we think we are entitled to it.

Can you begin to see why things are in the United States of America where now people are talking so much about entitlements? There are people who have nothing, and yet they feel that they are entitled to be taken care of. They are contributing little or nothing, but they feel they are entitled to what the government supplies. Just apply this to God. God is *our* Governor. Do we feel entitled that He is forced or pressured into doing these things for us, when in stark reality all we are earning is death? Yet we will feel entitled to receive gifts from Him. But that is not why grace is given. It is given because it is in God's nature to do such a thing. Oh, that we were *all* like that!

It would be incorrect to say that biblical grace has no connection whatever to its secular usage. However, spiritually, its application takes on a vastly greater dimension in two areas: (1) God's grace is the single most important aspect of our spiritual and eternal salvation, and (2) God's giving of it to us is completely and totally unmerited, unearned.

Understanding grace is important to our rightly balancing our pride and humility. I did not emphasize it, but this is one of the major things that is connected to grace that we have to understand—its being unmerited, unearned. It is simply something given, and if we will humble ourselves before God, then our pride is coming under control. If we are truly humble, He responds to us because we recognize what we really are in comparison to what we are freely being given, and that is humbling. So the truth is that He owes us nothing in the way of blessings. There are no automatic entitlements. Every sin that we have committed has been against Him, and will continue to be against Him and His Son personally, and yet He continues to give us wonderful gifts.

Just think, we start a series of things that He is to us, things that we know are real. Number One: He is our Creator. He has given us life. He has not only created us, He has given us life. Already He is giving us things we do not deserve. They are just given to us.

Let us make a giant leap. He has given us hope of something far, far better than what we now have. Now without what He freely gives, we are nothing. We do not even exist. That is where we have to start in our relationship with Him. This is so that we get the relationship between Him and us on a proper footing.

He has everything. We have nothing, and we *are* nothing. He is everything, and we are totally dependent on what He gives. We can see this even physically. If He did not give us air to breathe—and He does this freely, generously—and if He did not give us water to drink, we would die.

What we have to begin to do is get a good grip on this, and understand, that even as it is in the physical realm as our Creator, it is even *more* so in the spiritual realm, and it is more so because of the importance of what we are dealing with.

I want you to turn to Ephesians 2, and we will read several verses there. These are scriptures that we are familiar with, but I hope that when we are done with Ephesians 2:4-10, that we will understand what Paul is writing here.

If you are aware at all with chapter 1 of the book of Ephesians, you will understand much better what Paul is talking about here.

Ephesians 2:4-8 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 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.

In the space of five verses Paul twice asserts that we are saved by grace. That appears in verses 5 and 8. I want you to understand, that as it is written here in the *King James Version*, it is written in the past tense. That is correct. Sometimes people get a little bit excited because they think, “Hey! We’re saved already!”

No. That is not what Paul is saying. It is *written* in the past tense because of the period of time Paul is writing of here, which in this context is immediately following justification. That is why you have to begin there in verse 4 and understand the *timing* of the context that Paul is writing about where he says, “God has raised us up.” He has raised us up from a spiritual death when He has saved us, but the salvation issue is not over yet. We are not through the wilderness yet. So these people to whom Paul was writing were within the sanctification process, and that is where we too are located spiritually.

Now to get a handle on the “past tense” issue here, I want you to think of the Israelites in the wilderness. While in the wilderness they were in a saved condition from their slavery to Egypt. So they have been saved, they have been redeemed from their slavery in Egypt. However, many of them lost their faith, and they died in the wilderness without reaching the Promised Land. This is one of the major reasons why Paul wrote Hebrews 3 and 4. With whom was God displeased? With those who sinned. And why did they sin? Because they lost their faith. Paul said, “They believed not.”

When they left Egypt they were in a saved condition, but during the journey they lost their faith. They turned their back on God, and they died. So, there is a period of time in which we too are in a saved condition. This is why in the last sermon I went through this very carefully—I believe once, if not twice—to show you that we *can* lose salvation. It is not a done-deal until we get through the wilderness. Until then we are in a circumstance where we can lose it. But if we lose it, it is not going to be God’s fault. It will be because we will not accept the gift that He is giving. This is where grace begins to really come to the fore.

We must understand clearly that salvation is not unconditionally guaranteed, but the period of time Paul is writing about here, they were in a saved condition. They had not yet lost it. These people here

to whom Paul was writing had not yet lost it. Salvation occurs because of what God freely gives, but salvation can be lost if we also refuse God's freely given gifts. We need to keep going on.

The Israelites refused God's gifts, and they died in the wilderness. If we look back on what they did, all along the way they would not believe Him. This issue is really a very simple process in human life, and I can describe it this way—maybe a simple explanation that attaches the basic parameters of what we are talking about here in terms of salvation.

Often children will not believe their parents, and it seems as though when they get to be teens they begin to hit, maybe, the peak of their disbelief of their parents and begin thinking that their parents are nothing but old fogeys, and that they are “out of it.” Now that, in a spiritual sense, is exactly what happened to those people in the wilderness.

Those people in the wilderness did not believe God despite all the evidence that He gave to them, that He was there to provide for them, and *was* providing for them. Every morning they got up, the manna was there. Every night the fire was there. Every day the cloud was there. When they needed it, He brought out water. That gives us a principle. We need to be looking for God's gracious providence to us; that He *is* there, that He is providing for us, and that He will continue to take care of us.

The really big issue in this paragraph of Ephesians 2 is verse 8. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.”

Now to what does that phrase—“It is the gift of God”—refer? Is it referring to the word “salvation,” or is it referring to the word “faith,” because both of them play a part in what we are looking at here?

First of all, I want you to think about the logic of those who might say that faith is the gift of God, and argue that is what is intended. Would God say, in verse 8, that it is a gift, and then in verse 9 say, “. . . not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”?

Now *is* it? Does logic tell you that God would say that salvation is a gift, through faith, and then turn around and say something that would indicate that works might be involved in this? I think in order to do this, we would have to say that there would be illogic in God's reasoning. How can we prove it though spiritually which of the two—salvation or faith—is the gift? Well, the answer is this. It is actually rather simple, and that is, without the gift of grace, we would never have godly faith—*any* faith in the *first* place. Faith—our trust in God—is a fruit of the grace that God freely gives. I am going to prove this to you.

We are going to add a couple more verses to this so that you will understand that what I am telling you is true when we conclude the explanation for these verses. The first one is a verse that everybody in the church of God knows by heart, but I am going to read it to you anyway. John 6:44 says, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Jesus meant exactly what He said. Christ is our Savior. He died for our sins. No one can come to the Savior unless God draws that person. Now either Jesus was telling the truth, or He was not. I prefer to believe Jesus. No one comes to the Savior unless God acts first. That is an expression of His grace, and it comes to us undeserved, unearned. Nothing that we have done precipitates His giving us that

gift. He alone makes that choice on the basis of *His* thinking, His design, and so that is the beginning of an outright spiritual gift.

Are you beginning to connect it now? You cannot have faith—*the* faith, the kind of faith that God wants in His Son Jesus Christ—until He draws the person and begins to put that person's mind in a position where he can really believe Jesus Christ in the way that God desires. That is an outright gift of faith, and the faith you see is the result of God doing that.

Let us really make this clear, and go to the book of Romans. Understand that the apostle Paul is making an argument here, and he is doing this in order to convince those who are reading the letter to the Romans so that they will understand where they stand in relation to God in His calling.

Romans 9:9 For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son."

We all recognize the illustration that Paul is drawing upon, and that is Abraham and Sarah being awarded a child. Then he skips in verse 10 to Rebecca, who was the wife of Isaac.

Romans 9:10-15 And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."

Now here comes the conclusion regarding the calling of every person God draws toward His family.

Romans 9:16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

Jesus said no one comes to the Father except the Father draws the person, and so the calling is a gift of God's grace. We just saw in Romans 9 the word "election" used. We begin to see that not only is our calling an act of God, but also our election is an act of God. We see the time element in the calling here, and it is so vivid. It is so clear, and you can understand why Paul used it, and that is the calling of Jacob and Esau (primarily Jacob, of course) occurred before they were ever born. They could not possibly have done any works at all.

Now we can understand and can apply this to God to us, and that is that every single person who is called into His family, into His church, is called in the same general manner. I do not know whether everybody is called from the womb. I think that we could go out and say it seems as though there is a strong possibility, especially when He gives us examples of Jeremiah being called from the womb, and David. Even Paul indicates that there is that possibility with him. He did not make a flat-out statement, but it is there. There is John the Baptist, and of course Jesus Christ.

You might think, "Who am I? I am not in the category of Paul, or a David, or whatever." But there is something great. They were not that way until God did what *He* did, and He drew them to be part of the body of Jesus Christ. But I think that I can dogmatically say that every spiritual cell in the body

of Jesus Christ is every bit as important (at least physically) as anybody. That is one of the points actually that Paul makes in I Corinthians 12. He says we actually give more honor to those who seem to be the weakest.

So God's grace has been extended to you in a way that is equivalent with the grace He extended to those great names in the history of faith in relationship with Jesus Christ.

Let us go back to Ephesians 2 because there is more to this. The argument exists over whether the phrase, "it is the gift of God," refers either to salvation or to faith.

One of the most renowned Greek language scholars was a man by the name of A. T. Robertson. He interpreted this to mean, "In regard to salvation, grace is God's part, faith is ours." He was wrong. He did not make any mistakes over language, but he was wrong in this conclusion. If he was correct, then we would have to reach the conclusion that salvation is achieved by our use of faith, and this directly contradicts the statement "we are saved by grace." How can you be saved by faith if God just said, "You are saved by grace"? Well, we *are* saved by grace. Faith plays a different part.

Now grammatically, because the Greek language uses neuter, male, and female genders within it, the phrase, "It is the gift of God"—taken exactly as it is in the Greek and appears in our Bibles—refers to the masculine noun "salvation," not to the feminine noun "faith." You would think that would completely clear things up, but there is a problem, and the problem is that the New Testament writers (the apostles) did not always write grammatically correct. They were like you and me. In fact, commentators say there are actually quite a few sentences that these men wrote in which the genders do not correctly match the Greek grammar.

Commentators, recognizing this, have come up with a second answer, just a shifting of the wording around so that this is more spiritually correct. These scholars that have translated verse 8 in this manner (and it is may be a little bit more understandable and it is definitely spiritually correct), translate it this way: "And this being saved by grace *through* faith is not of yourself, but is the gift of God." That sense (of both grace and faith) does not mean "of ourselves." In other words, grace would cover that linkage.

That is better, but recently somebody came up with a paraphrase. It was a Dutchman, and he did a great deal of research and wrote a great deal on these verses. I am going to give you the paraphrase that he came up with. He is not saying that this is in any way accurate in terms of the actual words that Paul wrote, but it is accurate in terms of what Paul meant. The author of this paraphrase is a man named A. Kuyper, Sr. He himself is a Dutch commentator. The paraphrase Kuyper devised covers verses 4 through 8, and it is supported and endorsed by very many of the big names regarding the Greek language and understanding grace at least to a great extent.

Here is the paraphrase. Now just relax, but concentrate, and just pretend Paul is speaking to you:

I have the right to speak about the surpassing riches of His grace, for it is indeed by grace that you are saved, through faith; and lest you should now begin to say ["you" meaning the person reading, but arguing differently], But then we deserve credit, at least for believing. I will immediately add that even this faith, or the exercise of faith, is not of yourselves; it is God's gift.

That is very clear. Both salvation and faith are gifts of God so that we can be saved. *Both* of them. In that paraphrase, salvation and faith are given clear consideration. Both are gifts, and what Kuyper did was use this paraphrase to show that the entire doctrine of grace as shown in other portions of the New Testament, that every aspect of our salvation, including faith, is the gift of God, and that is a true statement.

In order to reinforce this, Paul did so in verses 9 and 10, and he worded it in such a way, especially using the word *erga*, which in Greek means “work,” so that we would know that he meant any works whatever. He meant any level or kind of human effort, and Paul, in verses 9 and 10 removes any semblance of room for self-congratulation.

What has to be filled in here, which we will not do at this particular time, is that works have an entirely different purpose than saving us. Do you know what they are? They are two basic ones. Our works glorify the Creator. That is the main reason we give what we are required to do works. It has nothing to do with saving us. It just shows that we are putting into practice what He is teaching us and enabling us to do, and that glorifies Him.

Do you parents not want your children to glorify your family? Absolutely! By what? By their conduct. Does it add your children to the family? Absolutely not! It is no different with God. The works do not add us to the family. The works are required so that the family is glorified.

The second thing is: Practice makes perfect. The more we do it, the better we do it, and it becomes internalized within us, and it becomes part of our character. The fact that we are doing them shows God that we are doing all right. We are practicing. It is just like Joe Paterno said. You have to have the will to practice, practice, practice, and then you win. It is not because you are better than somebody else. You win because you have prepared to win. He gave us the equipment to work with.

Let us add to this. Remember, working within the background or the substructure of all of this is pride and humility. If you understand from the previous sermons in this series, “Living by Faith,” if we do not get pride under control, we are in trouble. If we begin to feel as though we are entitled to things from God, we are getting off the beat. He gives gifts to us because that is the way He is. It is His nature to be generous, and kind, and good.

Let us go to I Corinthians 1. This is where this fits into the salvation process and helps us to get control of our pride and to have humility in its place.

I Corinthians 1:26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.

Paul, once in awhile, puts us in our place, and shows us what in reality we are.

I Corinthians 1:27-29 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

God is our Savior. God is our Creator. God is making us into something, and only He knows exactly what He is shaping and forming us to be in His Kingdom.

I Corinthians 1:30-31 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.”

Our Savior and the grace He brings with Him—all those gifts that He gives to us—are the result of what *He* does within us. All we have to do is believe in, and yield to, what He says. He does the creating. What is He empowering us to do? It is to yield. He is empowering us to make use of the gifts that He is giving us.

You might recall I said earlier that there is a suggestion of power in the word *charis* in the way it is used in the Greek. It is very likely that the apostles picked up on this, and they set it in a New Testament context in such a manner that grace—God’s benevolence—becomes the power of God to enable Christians to live a new life in Christ. This leads to something else, and it is right in Corinthians 4, beginning in verse 1.

I think most of you understand that many in the Corinthian congregation had a very serious problem with pride, with vanity, and that it caused a great number of problems—fights, arguments, divisions—within the congregation. You see this right away in the first chapter. Paul says, “I hear that there are divisions among you.” If there are divisions, if there are fightings, strivings, and so forth, pride is present, and people are putting one another down and making arguments that are wrong. They are judging in a very critical manner, and so he approaches this by giving an argument to put this idea in its place. We already read what he said in verses 26 through 31. Now we are going to read in chapter 2 before we go to I Corinthians 4, because he is building his argument.

I Corinthians 2:9-11 But as it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

Are you beginning to see God is making it very plain to the Corinthians, and I hope to you as well, that all of the things of God are given to us? They are revealed to us by means of His Spirit, and it is only because of the spirit that He gives to us that we are able to comprehend. So all these things are gifts to us. They are not innate. We do not have them by nature. They are not part of human nature. They are given to us so that we might understand.

Now drop all the way down to verse 14.

I Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

We understand, we discern only because of the gifts He has given us. As we saw a few verses before, it is He who gave us the faith so that we can trust our Savior.

I Corinthians 2:15-16 But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For “who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

There is the gift. But Paul is not done. He keeps building his case here, and he is building it so that we might be able to see that we have no right to judge other members of the body in an extremely critical way, and to put them down and so forth, and to feel elevated, because if we do understand, that was not innately in us. It was given to us as a gift.

Let us go to chapter 4, beginning in verse 1. Here he is talking about himself primarily, and Apollos, the minister.

I Corinthians 4:1 Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

A steward is a person whose responsibility is to take care of the master's property. That is what the ministry is to do, to take care of the gifts of teaching and so forth, and the knowledge of God.

I Corinthians 4:2-7 Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. But with me [Paul] it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself [basically he said, “I don't know if I have anything against me regarding something really critical or mean that I have done”], yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. [We are justified by the blood of Jesus Christ.] Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God. Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. For who makes you differ from another? [Our Creator.] And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

Are we going to call Him into account because we think that one of our brethren is not doing too well and maybe should be condemned, put out of the church, or whatever? Is it possible, brethren, that God did not give that person a gift that would give him better understanding because He wanted to see how people in the congregation would judge that person? Would they elevate themselves over? Those are possibilities, and that is why Paul is saying, “Hey! You're playing with dynamite, brethren.”

Remember, God is the Creator. God makes people the way *He* wants them within the purpose that He is working out. He really gets into this subject in I Corinthians 12. I mean, he really lays it on the line about all the gifts that are given to people within the church, and yet everybody, brethren, is not given the same gifts equally. God does not distribute these gifts to everybody in the same manner, at the same time, to the same level. This is why Paul, late in that chapter says, “Is everybody an apostle?” He says that in sarcasm. He was gifted to be an apostle. He was not gifted to be doing something else within the body.

This principle begins to become very important. Now what I want us to see is the way we judge ourselves in relation to God. What I want for us is to be humble before Him, knowing that He is the

One who is giving the gifts. It is the Creator who gives the gifts for a person to perform his responsibility before Him in glorifying Him, before the family, and before the community. So Paul says here in I Corinthians 4:7, “For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive?” He is talking about spiritual things. “Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” He means, if you have been given it, why do you boast as if it were something innate within you to begin with?

This grace thing is important in this regard, and for us to understand that God really owes us nothing except death. If we want justice, we die. Now, if we want to receive the gifts from God, we allow Him to do it, and we do not brag that it came from us, but recognize humbly that we are what we are because He made it possible for us to be what we are. That is hard for human nature to do, to really and truly humble themselves and allow the Creator to create them as He wishes without fighting against Him and rejecting the gifts that He wants us to have.

Not every part of your body can perform every other function within the body. A cell in the liver does not do the same job as a cell in the kidney. It has been gifted by God differently, and that cell received God’s grace to carry out its work in the kidney, or in the body, or wherever. Do you get the point? That is what Paul is getting at. Let us let the Creator do His job. He is the Judge of that person. What we are talking about here not only applies to faith issues, but it applies to every aspect of Christian responsibility and work.

Our God is making us in the image of Jesus Christ, but are we going to say that we are going to be exactly like Him with all the gifts that He received? No way. We are going to fit into a different function than He. All Christian works are the fruit of, derived from, God’s creating grace. So if we are to begin to understand why this term is so important, it is because grace is the gifting power of God that leads us to be able to do the things God wants us to do—to glorify Him and to serve the body of Jesus Christ.

Even though the grace of God is the foundation for good works, we have to always understand that the good works by themselves do not and cannot earn grace. They are just freely given.

We can understand if we are making something—a tool to do a job, let us say. In making a cake, you as the baker, or you as the toolmaker, are gifting that project you are working on, and you are going to bring it to the completion that *you* want it to be; not that the cake or the tool, or whatever, wants to be. Can you understand that? That is what we are dealing with here. The only problem is the tool or the cake are not living, and they do not have a brain, and they do not have a nature, if you understand. We can fight back, or we can misbehave, and we can get proud.

If we really understand grace, I will tell you, brethren, it is really humbling, because it is the source of godliness. I am going to tie that together eventually here.

James 4:5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously?”

There were problems in the congregation that James was writing to, and that is why that statement is there. But we have a very fertile spirit in most cases, and that is why in verse 6 it begins with an adversative [“but”].

James 4:6 But He gives more grace.

The implication is that God will give us the grace to enable us to overcome the problems; in this case, the problems that were in that congregation.

James 4:6-10 But He gives more grace. [God will give more. If it is needed, He will give more. He is very generous.] Therefore He says: “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” [We want grace? We are humble before Him, and He gives it.] Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

God will give grace. If we would look at a wider context of what James says here, is that even though our human spirit strongly desires worldliness, that if we will patiently humble ourselves before God, He will empower us by means of His grace that He gives freely.

Grace is used 132 times in the New Testament, but Paul used it 101 times out of that 132, and he used it a little over twice as many times as all the others combined.

Did the apostles have an Old Testament pattern that they followed in the use of *charis*? Remember, *charis* is not an Old Testament term. It is a *New* Testament term. But did they have a pattern in the Old Testament that they could follow and use the word *charis* to be a term that was following that same pattern that is in the Old Testament?

If you remember Richard’s sermon last week [“Psalms for the Winter Blues”], he mentioned it, and I am going to give it to you. The word *charis* never appeared in the Hebrew Old Testament, but the apostles adapted *charis* to express what was already a major New Testament/Old Testament concept. Actually, there are two words they could have used, but one of them is particularly easy to understand, and it is the one that I believe was most followed by them, so we are only going to deal with that one term.

The strongest and most detailed and most specific Hebrew term is *chesed* [Strong’s #2617]. There is a “ch” at the beginning of that. It has a guttural sound at the beginning of it, so I am just going to pronounce it “hesed.” Now *chesed* is most frequently translated in English Bibles as mercy, kindness, loving-kindness, goodness, and sometimes even as pity, but in any modern translation it may appear as steadfast love. Sometimes it will be written out as covenant love. In context, *chesed* suggests strength, patience, steadfastness, and love in a wonderful combination, and therefore it produces faithfulness in actual practice.

Regardless of which English term into which it is translated, *chesed* always expresses God’s freely-given commitment to faithful covenant love. *Chesed* appears hundreds and hundreds of times.

Recall that in the Old Covenant God is married to Israel, and therefore *chesed* expresses God’s character and conduct typical of Him in the marriage covenant that He freely made with Israel, and this is of course very clearly illustrated in Ezekiel 16. He entered into the marriage without constraint. He gave Himself over to His bride. That example there is what the apostles picked up on, and then they used this combination of power and benevolence that is in the word *chesed*, and in the example of God or Jesus Christ and they attached it to *charis* to express the covenant love and faithfulness of God in the New Testament much as *chesed* does in the Old.

There is one difference. In the use of *charis* in the New Testament, they were much more specific about God's love. It is His love that gives us His Spirit. It is His love that gives us forgiveness. It is His love that does this and that and the other thing, but in the Old Testament it tends to generalize. It is there, but it is in the acts. In the New Testament, they make it very specific, and so that is the only real difference that *chesed* expresses the same ideas, the same concepts, as *charis* does. So this is what they built upon, and they used this lovely Greek word to illustrate it, and they turned it into a beautiful spiritual principle of gift-giving by our God.

Let us go back to Exodus 20, right in the midst of the Ten Commandments. Actually, this is in the second commandment that we are going to read.

Exodus 20:4-6 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy [*cheched*] to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

Notice the difference that God expresses here between His love and the simpleness of man. God carries out His punishment, if I can put it that way, for three or four generations. It is almost nothing that He is *chesed* for a thousand generations. That is how much greater His gifts are to us.

Let us go to Exodus 34. This took place whenever Moses wanted to see God. He was allowed to see the hinder part of God, but it is interesting because, as God went by him, you might say God preached a sermon. Do you know why? Because that expresses more of what He is than just taking a look at it.

Exodus 34:5-7 Now the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness [*cheched*] and truth, keeping mercy [*cheched*] for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.”

In verse 6, *chesed* is translated “goodness,” and in verse 7, *chesed* is translated as “mercy.”

Deuteronomy 7:7-9 The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. “Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments.

What I primarily wanted this for was to show you that a *chesed* produces in a much larger scale. He is faithful to His people, faithful to His Word, faithful to His promise. His mercy never fails, and He can be relied upon.

Let us look at one more in the Old Testament because this is I think beautiful and meaningful.

Lamentations 3:22-24 Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!"

It is God's character; it is what God is that is the foundation for our hope. He is a gift-giver. He loves it. He is kind. He is patient. He is good, and He gives us hope.

We can add to this Malachi 3:6. He says there we can be saved because of what He is. "I am the Lord God. I change not."

Malachi 3:6 "For I am the Lord, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.

James backed Him up, because he said, "In God there is no shadow of turning." His character never changes.

Hebrews 13:8 reminds us:

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

And He says, "I will never leave you."

Hebrews 13:5 "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

We have no room to get a big head. There is no room for us to critically judge one another. There is no room for thinking that somehow or another God gives us things because we deserve them. No, He gives us things because He loves us, and He is faithful, and He is kind, and He is generous, and He is confident that He can make us into something that is really good.