

“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound ...” go the words of the well loved song. Yet coming into a practical understanding of grace is no less amazing. The common understanding of the meaning of grace is “unmerited favor.” Yet that definition does not do justice to the workings of grace and how it may be attained by anyone who has the desire to have or increase favor. It is common to think that there is nothing that a person can do to influence God’s favor since it is defined as undeserved. This is a mistake. There are things which can be done to influence the favor, or grace, of God. In fact, the bible teaches that we should learn to grow in grace. “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Pet 3:18) It doesn’t seem reasonable that the scriptures would exhort us to “grow in grace” if that were not possible.

There are certainly different types, or categories, of grace. Specific references are made to Common Grace, Special Grace, Saving Grace, and Sanctifying Grace. But too many categories sometimes complicate matters. I just believe grace, or favor from God, has to be good, no matter what name it has been given or what category it occupies. I am practical enough that I want to know what can be done to receive the favor of God and if anything can be done to influence His favor.

Because most of us believe that God loves everyone equally and “causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust,” we jump to the conclusion that He equally distributes His benefits and grace to all. This is far from the truth. In fact, the scriptures are full of examples and exhortations intended to influence our behavior so that the Lord may reward us for the things we do. I don’t believe we should think that any one is going to become good enough to earn God’s favor, but through Jesus Christ it is possible to be in a position to receive favor from God.

Take the gift of salvation, for instance. The bible clearly says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph 2:8, 9). Since salvation is a gift and offered to everyone, one might mistakenly jump to the conclusion that every one has it. But being offered a gift and receiving a gift isn’t the same thing. Even a gift must be received and that requires a decision to be made and

acceptance to happen. Some feel that even decision and acceptance is too much for God to require, since they believe that is a type of work. However, the key to understanding this little mystery is also held in scripture. “[I]f you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation”(Rom 10:9-10).

The key to understanding how to receive God’s grace is in the little word “unto”. The Greek word that this word is translated from means “in the direction of”. What this tells us is that our effort turns us in the direction of the grace gift and God does the rest. This is important to understand because it means that we need to act in order to receive His favor, and yet we can never really credit our efforts with the end result. All we do is act in the direction of His grace and promises, and He bestows the favors and the benefits upon us.

In Acts 20:32 it is recorded, “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” The qualifier in the verse is that this grace is for those who are sanctified, which means to be set apart or consecrated. So the benefits of God’s undeserved favor are given to those who have decided to act separately from the norm.

Another good example of influencing the favor of God through actions is explained by Paul the apostle in his writings to the church in Corinth in Greece. He was commending them for receiving an offering from among the Christians to help the poor in another area. To them he said -

“But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work”. (2 Cor 9:6-8)

It is interesting that he says that because they have given willingly God is “able to make all grace abound.” Does that mean that if they

hadn't given that a benevolent God would not be able to make that same grace abound toward them? I think that is the point. There are things that the Lord instructs us to do so that He may reward us through His favor. Does that mean any of us will earn His favor through our efforts? I don't think earning it is the point, none of us are worthy by ourselves. But by obedience to follow His example and instructions we turn ourselves "in the direction of" His grace and we receive the benefits that He graciously wants us to have. The apostle continues by saying -

"Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness."

My prayer, also, is that we would turn toward our benevolent and gracious Heavenly Father who wants to give us His favor and blessing. And should we receive it, that we will use it to increase the fruits of righteousness.

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