

Community Church of Issaquah

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## What Is God's Grace?

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Let me begin with the question I asked you to consider this week. That question is “What does God’s grace mean to you?” I realize that is a difficult question and you may have struggled even thinking about it. After all, that’s the kind of question you would ask a minister, not the other way around, but today, we’re doing the reverse to begin our time of seeking guidance and understanding as we hear lessons from the Scriptures. So, let me ask the question again, “What does grace – God’s grace – mean to you?”

If we step outside of the Biblical meaning of grace, we could perhaps consider what we know to be a “grace period.”

That is something we have heard about before. So, what is it? Here’s a simple answer:

A grace period is a set amount of time after a deadline when a financial obligation can be met without penalty. Grace periods can be found in many different types of contracts, including:

- Credit cards: Most credit cards offer a grace period of 20–30 days before interest is charged on purchases.
- Student loans: Many student loans offer a grace period after graduation.
- Mortgages: Mortgages typically include a grace period.
- Insurance: Insurance contracts often include a grace period.

- Life insurance: If a life insurance premium payment is missed during the grace period, the policy may lapse.
- Politics: A grace period may be observed during the transition to a new administration.
- School districts: State law may allow school districts to offer a grace period for families to provide immunization records.

Grace periods can help avoid skipped payments or default, which can negatively impact a person's credit score.

The intent of a grace period is to allow a time when there is no penalty for what might occur. Is that how God's grace is to be defined? A time that God offers when we won't be penalized if in a space of time if we miss something or don't follow God's covenant with believers? Actually, no, that is not what God's grace is all about.

The scriptures today are pretty clear. In Acts we heard, "We believe that it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as we are." In the verses from First Corinthians we heard, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." The underlying message is simple, Jesus gave up all so that we might be saved through our belief in him. That sounds like a simple message, doesn't it? Yet there is much more to this principle of generosity.

In church, we have often heard and repeated, "We are saved by God's grace and not by anything we have done."

That has been a message in my Christian life for as long as I can remember. I'm pretty sure it has been for you as well. And I would not in any way try to undermine or change that belief. But there is more to that doctrine that we sometimes don't think about or might not even know.

Most often, the Bible verses we are more familiar with come from the book of Ephesians. In the second chapter, verses 8 and 9, we hear this familiar message: "For by grace you have been saved through faith: and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast." Does that sound familiar to you? Perhaps one of the reasons we love these verses so much is that word "faith." That faith seems to rest on our understanding of this verse, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life." We know that to be John 3:16.

Between these two verses it is obvious that God's unconditional love brings His mercy to us, and this love extends God's unmerited grace to us through salvation. Yes, God's grace is freely offered to us all; but there is a condition: we must believe in Jesus. This is not simply our mentally believing in the existence of Jesus. Instead, it means we have heard the Word of God and the Word of God has convicted us of our need to embrace Jesus as the 'Lord and Master' of our life." That means that our faith compels us to fully submit to the deity of Jesus as our Savior.

Yes, we are saved by the grace of God because we have chosen to believe fully in the being of Jesus Christ. Does that mean once we believe and receive God's grace that we are home free? No, it doesn't mean that. If we were to read just one verse more from that passage in Ephesians, verse 10, we would have an answer to that question. Let me share that verse. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good work, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Most church goers don't want to connect God's grace to any requirement to do anything. In the Old Testament, we find the story of Elijah, who is said to have walked with God, and God took good care of him. But God's grace was conditional upon Elijah's obeying God. It's the same for with God's grace for us. Sadly, we many have come to believe that God's grace is a one-time event of our deciding to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior. It isn't a single event. It is a lifetime of following Christ.

It is interesting if you look at the tense of the verbs in many passages of scripture. "For by grace are you saved," is past tense. It already happened. 2 Timothy 1:9 says, "He who saved us and called us with a holy calling." Both 'saved' and 'called' are past tense. It's done. There is also present tense like this verse in Philippians chapter 2, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Is it clear that we are to do this today...in the present time? Now let us continue our English grammar lesson with words for our future. Hebrews 10 – "For you have need of

endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.” Something for the future.

All of this “take me back to high school English class” had a purpose. It is simply this, “Grace is not a one-time experience.” We are saved by God’s grace for a purpose and that purpose is to continue doing the work of God. Yes, we must confess our belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who came to provide a way for all of us to gain entrance into heaven. There is much comfort in that. But once we receive God’s grace, like Elijah, we are compelled to be obedient and do God’s work.

Let me repeat that verse from Ephesians with the direction for what we are to do once saved by grace. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good work, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Yes, I am aware that there is much discussion about the concept of “once saved, always saved” meaning that once we accept Christ, whatever we do after, we’re still on the list for entrance into heaven. That is not the message we have today. Our message today is that once we are saved by God’s grace, we are expected to be active in doing God’s work.

God’s work is different for each of us because each of us live different lives and have different experiences. Did you think that once you were saved and began doing God’s work that you would be required to be a minister? Well, let

me give you the news – you are. Every believer in Jesus Christ is a minister, and that means you. It just does not mean being a pastor. Have you looked at the bottom life of our bulletin inside? It says, “Every member is a minister.” And that is true. Once saved by grace to do God’s work, you become a minister of the Gospel. I’m sorry to tell you, but you might not have a pulpit to use for your work. But you don’t need one. You need the obedience of God’s calling and His work to give you guidance. It’s there.

Saved by God’s grace to do God’s work. That is the simple message for today. Were there any answers to the question, “What is God’s grace?” for you today, I hope so.