

2010

What Does the Bible Say About Grace?

Grace (χάρις)

"Against a still common view it must be stated that in Paul χάρις does not mean primarily a divine attribute. It does not mean, in good Greek fashion, God's graciousness, nor concretely his free love. It almost always means the power of salvation which finds expression in specific gifts, acts, and spheres and which is even individualized in the charismata.

"In Paul ... χάρις is never merely an attitude or disposition of God (God's character as gracious); consistently it denotes something much more dynamic—the wholly generous *act* of God. Like '*Spirit*,' with which it overlaps in meaning (**Romans 6:14** – "*For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace*". and **Galatians 5:18** – "*But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.*"), it denotes effective divine power in the experience of men."

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THE BIBLICAL USE OF THE TERM "GRACE." The word "*grace*" is not always used in the same sense in Scripture, but has a variety of meanings. In the Old Testament we have the word *chen* (adj. *chanun*--khan-NOON), from the root (*chanan* ch-an-an). The noun may denote *gracefulness* or *beauty*, **Proverbs 22:11** – "*He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend.*"; **31:30** – "*Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.*", but most generally means *favour* or *good-will*. The Old Testament repeatedly speaks of finding favour in the eyes of God or of man.

The favour so found carries with it the bestowal of favours or blessings. This means that grace is not an abstract quality, but is an active, working principle, manifesting itself in (beneficent -be-nef-i-cent – **meaning:** *performing acts of kindness and charity*) acts, **Genesis 6:8** – "*But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.*"; **19:19** - *Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die.*"; **33:15** - *And Esau said, Let me now leave with thee some of the folk that are with me. And he said, What needeth it?*

2010

let me find grace in the sight of my lord.”; Ex. 33:12 - And Moses said unto the LORD, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight.; 34:9 - And he said, If now I have found grace in thy sight, O LORD, let my LORD, I pray thee, go among us; for it is a stiffnecked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance.”; I Samuel 1:18 - And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.”; 27:5 - And David said unto Achish, If I have now found grace in thine eyes, let them give me a place in some town in the country, that I may dwell there: for why should thy servant dwell in the royal city with thee?”; Esther. 2:7 - And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter.”

The fundamental idea is that the blessings graciously bestowed are *freely* given, and not in consideration of any claim or merit. The New Testament word (*charis* - khar'-ece), from *chairein* - (khairein), "to rejoice," denotes first of all a pleasant external appearance, "loveliness," "agreeableness," "acceptableness," and has some such meaning in *Luke 4:22 - And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?" ; Col. 4:6 - Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man. "*

A more prominent meaning of the word, however, is *favour* or *good-will*, *Luke 1:30 - And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.” ; 2:40 - And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.” , 52 - And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.” ; Acts 2:47 - Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. ; 7:46 - Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.” ; 24:27 - But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.” ; 25:9 - But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?”.*

It may denote the kindness of beneficence of our Lord, *II Cor. 8:9 - For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”* , or the favour manifested or bestowed by God, *II Cor. 9:8 - And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:”* (referring to material blessings); *I Pet. 5:10 - But*

2010

the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.”

Furthermore, the word is expressive of the emotion awakened in the heart of the recipient of such favor, and thus acquires the meaning "*gratitude*" or "*thankfulness*," *Luke 4:22 - And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?" ; I Cor. 10:30 - For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks?" ; 15:57 - But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." ; II Cor. 2:14 - Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place." ; 8:16 - But thanks be to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you." ; I Tim. 1:12 - And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;"*

In most of the passages, however, in which the word *charis* is used in the New Testament, it signifies the unmerited operation of God in the heart of man, affected through the agency of the Holy Spirit. While we sometimes speak of grace as an inherent quality, it is in reality the active communication of divine blessings by the inworking of the Holy Spirit, out of the fulness of Him who is "full of grace and truth," *Rom. 3:24 - Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:" ; 5:2 - By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." , 15 - But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many." ; 17:20; 6:1 - What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" ; I Cor. 1:4 - I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;" ; II Cor. 6:1 - We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain." ; 8:9 - For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." ; Eph. 1:7 - In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;" ; 2:5 - Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved);, 8 - For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God;; 3:7 - Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power." ; I Pet. 3:7 - Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.; 5:12 - By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand..*

2010

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1. The Word *Charis*

In the English New Testament the word "grace" is always a translation of *χαρις* (*charis*), a word that occurs in the Greek text something over 170 times (the reading is uncertain in places).

In secular Greek of all periods it is also a very common word, and in both Biblical and secular Greek it is used with far more meanings than can be represented by any one term in English. Primarily (*a*) the word seems to denote pleasant external appearance, "*gracefulness*," "loveliness"; cf. the personification (*Personification* is giving human traits (qualities, feelings, action, or characteristics) to non-living objects) in "the Graces."

Such a use is found in *Luke 4:22 - And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?*" , where 'wondered at the charm of his words' is a good translation; and similarly in *Colossians 4:6 - Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.*" Objectively, *charis* may denote the impression produced by "gracefulness," as in *III John 1:4 - I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*" Greater *gratification* have I none than this' (but many manuscripts read *chara*, "joy," here). As a mental attribute *charis* may be translated by "*graciousness*," or, when directed toward a particular person or persons, by "favor."

So in *Luke 2:52 - And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.*" , "Jesus advanced ... in favor with God and men." As the complement to this, *charis* denotes the emotion awakened in the recipient of such favor, i.e. "gratitude." So *Luke 17:9 - Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not.* " reads literally, 'Has he gratitude to that servant?'

In a slightly transferred sense *charis* designates the words or emotion in which gratitude is expressed, and so becomes "thanks" (some 10 times, *Romans 6:17 - But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.*" , etc.). Concretely, *charis* may mean the *act* by which graciousness is

2010

expressed, as in **1 Corinthians 16:3** - *And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem.*”, where the King James Version translates by "liberality," and the Revised Version by "bounty." These various meanings naturally tend to blend into each other, and in certain cases it is difficult to fix the precise meaning that the writer meant the word to convey, a confusion that is common to both New Testament and secular Greek. And in secular Greek the word has a still larger variety of meanings that scarcely concern the theologian.

2. Grace as Power

Naturally, the various meanings of the word were simply taken over from ordinary language by the New Testament writers. And so it is quite illegitimate (*not authorized*) to try to construct on the basis of all the occurrences of the word a single doctrine that will account for all the various usages.

That one word could express both "charm of speech" and "thankfulness for blessings" was doubtless felt to be a mere accident, if it was thought of at all. But none the less, the very elasticity of the word enabled it to receive still another—new and technically Christian—meaning. This seems to have originated in part by fusing together two of the ordinary significances. In the first place, as in (e) above, *charis* may mean "a gift."

In **1 Corinthians 16:3** - *And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem.*”; **2 Corinthians 8:19** - *And not that only, but who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace, which is administered by us to the glory of the same Lord, and declaration of your ready mind.*” it is the money given by the Corinthians to the Jerusalemites. In **2 Corinthians 9:8** - *And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.*” it is the increase of worldly goods that God grants for charitable purposes. In **2 Corinthians 1:15** - *And in this confidence I was minded to come unto you before, that ye might have a second benefit.*” it is the benefit received by the Corinthians from a visit by Paul. In a more spiritual sense *charis* is the endowment for an office in the church (**Ephesians 4:7** - *But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.*”), more particularly for the apostolate (**Romans 1:5** - *By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name.*”; **12:3** - *For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*”);

2010

15:15 - *Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God,” ; 1 Corinthians 3:10* - *According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.” ; Ephesians 3:2* - *If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:” ,7 - Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.”).*

So in **1 Corinthians 1:4-7** -

⁴*I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;*

⁵*That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge;*

⁶*Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you:*

⁷*So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:*

charis is expanded into "word and all knowledge," endowments with which the Corinthians were especially favored. In **1 Peter 1:13** - *Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;”* *charis* is the future heavenly blessedness that Christians are to receive; in **3:7** - *Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.”* it is the present gift of "life."

In the second place, *charis* is the word for God's *favor*, a sense of the term that is especially refined by St. Paul (see below). But God's favor differs from man's in that it cannot be conceived of as inactive. A favorable "thought" of God's about a man involves of necessity the reception of some blessing by that man, and "to look with favor" is one of the commonest Biblical paraphrases for "bestow a blessing." Between "**God's favor**" and "**God's favors**" there exists a relation of active power, and as *charis* denoted both the favor and the favors, it was the natural word for the power that connected them.

This use is very clear in **1 Corinthians 15:10** - *But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”* , where Paul says, "not I, but the grace of God which was with me" labored more abundantly than they all: grace is something that *labors*. So in **2 Corinthians 12:9** - *And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my*

2010

strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weakness"; compare [2 Timothy 2:1](#)- *Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*”, "strengthened in the grace," and [1 Peter 4:10](#) - *As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*”, "stewards of the manifold grace." Evidently in this sense "grace" is almost a synonym for the Spirit, and there is little real difference between "[full of the Holy Spirit](#)" and "full of grace and power" in [Acts 6:5](#) - *And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:*”, [8](#) - *And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.*”, while there is a very striking parallel between [Ephesians 4:7-13](#) -

⁷*But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.*

⁸*Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.*

⁹*(Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?*

¹⁰*He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)*

¹¹*And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;*

¹²*For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*

¹³*Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:*

and [1 Corinthians 12:4-11](#), -

⁴*Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.*

⁵*And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.*

⁶*And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.*

2010

⁷*But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*

⁸*For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;*

⁹*To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;*

¹⁰*To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:*

¹¹*But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.*

with "gifts of grace" in the one passage, and "gifts of the Spirit" in the other. And this connection between grace and the Spirit is found definitely in the formula "*Spirit of grace*" in [Hebrews 10:29](#) - *Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?*" (compare [Zechariah 12:10](#) - *And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.*"). And, as is well known, it is from this sense of the word that the Catholic doctrine of grace developed.

3. Grace in Justification

This meaning of *charis* was obtained by expanding and combining other meanings. By the opposite process of narrowly restricting one of the meanings of the word, it came again into Christian theology as a technical term, but this time in a sense quite distinct from that just discussed. The formation of this special sense seems to have been the work of Paul.

When *charis* is used with the meaning "*favor*," nothing at all is implied as to whether or not the favor is deserved. So, for instance, in the New Testament, when in [Luke 2:52](#) - *And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.*" it is said that "Jesus advanced ... in favor with God and men," the last possible thought is that our Lord did not deserve this favor. Compare also [Luke 2:40](#) - *And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.*" and [Acts 2:47](#) - *Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*" and, as less clear cases, [Luke 1:30](#) - *And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for*

2010

thou hast found favour with God.” ; Acts 7:46 - Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.” ; Hebrews 4:16 - Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” ; 12:15 - Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;” ,28 - Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:” . But the word has abundant use in secular Greek in the sense of unmerited favor, and St. Paul seized on this meaning of the word to express a fundamental characteristic of Christianity. The basic passage is

Romans 11:5-6 -

⁵Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

⁶And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.

where a definition is given, "If it is by grace, it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace." The fact that the word is used in other senses could have caused no first-century reader to miss the meaning, which, indeed, is unmistakable. "*Grace*" in this sense is an attitude on God's part that proceeds entirely from within Himself, and that is conditioned in no way by anything in the objects of His favor.

So in *Romans 4:4 - Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.”* . If salvation is given on the basis of what a man has done, then salvation is given by God as the payment of a debt. But when faith is reckoned for what it is not, i.e. righteousness, there is no claim on man's part, and he receives as a pure gift something that he has not earned. (It is quite true that faith involves moral effort, and so may be thought of as a sort of a "work"; it is quite true that faith does something as a preparation for receiving God's further gifts. But it simply clouds the exegetical issue to bring in these ideas here, as they certainly were not present in Paul's mind when the verses were being written.)

"Grace" then, in this sense is the antinomy to "*works*" or to "*law*"; it has a special relation to the guilt of sin (*Romans 5:20 - Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” ; 6:1 – What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? “*), and has almost exactly the same sense as "*mercy*." Indeed, "grace" here differs from "*mercy*" chiefly in connoting eager love as the source of the

2010

act. Of course it is this sense of grace that dominates [Romans 3-6](#), especially in the thesis [3:24 - Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:](#)” , while the same use is found in [Galatians 2:21 - I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.](#)” ; [Ephesians 2:5 - Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, \(by grace ye are saved;\)](#)” , [8 - For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:](#)” ; [2 Timothy 1:9 - Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,](#)” . The same strict sense underlies [Galatians 1:6 - I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel.](#)” and is found, less sharply formulated, in [Titus 3:5-7](#) –

⁵*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;*

⁶*Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;*

⁷*That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

. ([Galatians 5:4 - Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.](#)” is perhaps different.) Outside of Paul's writings, his definition of the word seems to be adopted in [John 1:17 - For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.](#)” ; [Acts 15:11 - But we believe that through the grace of the LORD Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.](#)” ; [Hebrews 13:9 - Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.](#)” , while a perversion of this definition in the direction of antinomianism is the subject of the invective in

[Jude 1:4 - For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.](#)” And, of course, it is from the word in this technical Pauline sense that an elaborate Protestant doctrine of grace has been developed.

2010

4. Special Uses

A few special uses of the word may be noted. That the special blessing of God on a particular undertaking (*Acts 14:26 - And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.*” ; *15:40 - And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.*”) should be called a "grace" needs no explanation. In *Luke 6:32-34* –

³²*For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.*

³³*And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.*

³⁴*And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.*

, and *1 Peter 2:19-20* –

¹⁹*For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.*

²⁰*For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.*

, *charis* seems to be used in the sense of "that which deserves the thanks of God," i.e. a specifically Christian act as distinguished from an act of "natural morality." "*Grace for grace*" in *John 1:16 - And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.*” is a difficult phrase, but an almost exact parallel in Philo (*Posterity of Cain*, 43) may fix the sense as "*benefit on benefit.*" But the tendency of the New Testament writers is to combine the various meanings the word can have, something that is particularly well illustrated in *II Corinthians 8* and *9*.

In these two chapters the word occurs 10 times, but in so many different senses as to suggest that St. Paul is consciously playing with the term. *Charis* is the money given to the Jerusalemites by the *Corinthians (8:19)*, it is the increase of goods that God will grant the *Corinthians (9:8 - Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also?)*, it is the disposition of the givers (*8:6 - But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.*”), it is the power of God that has wrought this disposition (*8:1 - Now as touching things offered unto*

2010

idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.” ; 9:14 - Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.”), it is the act of Christ in the Incarnation (*8:9; - But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.”* contrast the distinction between "God's grace" and "Christ's act" in *Hebrews 2:9 - But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”*), it is the thanks that Paul renders (*9:15 - And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.”*).

That all a Christian is and all that he has is God's gift could have been stated of course without the use of any special term at all. But in these two chapters Paul has taught this truth by using for the various ideas always the same term and by referring this term to God at the beginning and the end of the section. That is, to the multiplicity of concepts there is given a unity of terminology, corresponding to the unity given the multiple aspects of life by the thought of entire dependence on God. So *charis*, "grace," becomes almost an equivalent for "Christianity," viewed as the religion of dependence on God through Christ.

As one may think of entering Christianity, abiding in it, or falling from it, so one may speak of entering into (*Romans 5:2 - By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”*), abiding in (*Acts 13:43 - Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.”*), or falling from (*Galatians 5:4 - Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.”*) grace; cf. *1 Peter 5:12 - By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand.”* . So the teaching of Christianity may be summed up as the word or gospel of grace (*Acts 14:3 - Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.” ; 20:24 - But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.” ,32 - And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”*).

2010

So "grace be with you" closes the Epistles as a sufficient summary of all the blessings that can be wished Christian readers. At the beginning of the Epistles the words "and peace" are usually added, but this is due only to the influence of the Jewish greeting "peace be with you" (**Luke 10:5** - *And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house.* , etc.), and not to any reflection on "grace" and "peace" as separate things. (It is possible that the Greek use of *chairein*, "rejoice," as an epistolary salutation (so in **James 1:1** - *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.*) influenced the Christian use of *charis*. But that "**grace and peace**" was *consciously* regarded as a universalistic combination of Jewish and Gentile custom is altogether unlikely.) The further expansion of the introductory formula by the introduction of "mercy" in First and Second Timothy is quite without theological significance.

5. Teaching of Christ

In the Greek Gospels, *charis* is used in the words of Christ only in

Luke 6:32-34 -

³²*For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.*

³³*And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.*

³⁴*And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.*

; 17:9 - *Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not.* .

As Christ spoke in Aramaic, the choice of this word is due to Luke, probably under the influence of its common Christian use in his own day. And there is no word in our Lord's recorded sayings that suggests that He employed habitually any especial term to denote grace in any of its senses. But the ideas are unambiguously present. That the pardon of sins is a free act on God's part may be described as an essential in Christ's teaching, and the lesson is taught in all manner of ways. The prodigal knowing only his own wretchedness (**Luke 15:20** - *And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father*

2010

saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”), the publican without merit to urge ([Luke 18:13](#) - *And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.”*), the sick who need a physician ([Mark 2:17](#) - *When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”*), they who hunger and thirst after righteousness ([Matthew 5:6](#)), these are the ones for whom God's pardon is inexhaustible. And positive blessings, be they temporal or spiritual, are to be looked for from God, with perfect trust in Him who clothes the lilies and knows how to give good gifts to His children ([Matthew 7:11](#) - *If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?”* ; here [Luke 11:13](#) - *If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”* has "*Holy Spirit*" for "*gifts*," doubtless a *Lukan interpretation*, but certainly a correct one). Indeed, it is not too much to say that Christ knows but one unpardonable sin, the sin of spiritual self-satisfaction— "That which is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God" ([Luke 16:15](#) - *And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.”* ; compare

[Luke 17:7-10](#)

⁷*But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat?*

⁸*And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink?*

⁹*Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not.*

¹⁰*So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.;*

2010

Matthew 20:1-16 –

¹*For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.*

²*And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.*

³*And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace,*

⁴*And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.*

⁵*Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.*

⁶*And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?*

⁷*They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.*

⁸*So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.*

⁹*And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.*

¹⁰*But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.*

¹¹*And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house,*

¹²*Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.*

¹³*But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?*

¹⁴*Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee.*

¹⁵*Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?*

¹⁶*So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.).*

2010

6. In the Old Testament

There is no word in Hebrew that can represent all the meanings of *charis*, and in the Septuagint *charis* itself is used, practically, only as a translation of the Hebrew *chen* (חֵן), "favor," this restriction of meaning being due to the desire to represent the same Hebrew word by the same Greek word as far as possible. And *chen*, in turn, is used chiefly only in the phrase "*find favor*" (*Genesis 6:8 - But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.*" , etc.), whether the reference is to God or men, and without theological importance.

Much nearer Paul's use of *charis* is *ratson* (רַצוֹן), "*acceptance*," in such passages as *Isaiah 60:10 - And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee.*" , "In my favor have I had mercy on thee"; *Psalms 44:3 - For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them.*" , "not ... by their own sword ... but ... because thou wast favorable unto them."

Perhaps still closer parallels can be detected in the use of *chesed* (חֶסֶד), "kindness," "*mercy*," as in *Exodus 20:6 - And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.*" , etc. But, of course, a limitation of the sources for the doctrine to passages containing only certain words would be altogether unjust.

The main lines seem to be these: (1) Technically, salvation by grace in the New Testament is opposed to an Old Testament doctrine of salvation by works (*Romans 4:4 - Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.*" ; *11:6 - And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.*"), or, what is the same thing, by law (*Romans 6:14 - For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.*" ; *John 1:17 - For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*"); i.e. men and God are thought of as parties to a contract, to be fulfilled by each independently.

2010

Most of the legislation seems to presuppose some idea of man as a quantity quite outside of God, while

Deuteronomy 30:11-14 -

¹¹For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off.

¹²It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?

¹³Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?

¹⁴But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.

states explicitly that the law is not too hard nor too far off for man. (2) Yet even this legalism is not without important modifications. The keeping of the law is man's work, but that man has the law to keep is something for which God only is to be thanked. *Psalms 119* is the essence of legalism, but the writer feels overwhelmed throughout by the greatness of the mercy that disclosed such statutes to men. After all, the initial (and vital!) act is God's not man's. This is stated most sharply in

Ezekiel 23:1-4 -

¹The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying,

²Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother:

³And they committed whoredoms in Egypt; they committed whoredoms in their youth: there were their breasts pressed, and there they bruised the teats of their virginity.

⁴And the names of them were Aholah the elder, and Aholibah her sister: and they were mine, and they bare sons and daughters. Thus were their names; Samaria is Aholah, and Jerusalem Aholibah.

“ —Oholibah and her sister became God's, not because of any virtue in them, but in spite of most revolting conduct. Compare *Deuteronomy 7:7 - The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest*

2010

of all people:” , etc. (3) But even in the most legalistic passages, an absolute literal keeping of the law is never (not even in such a passage as [Numbers 15:30-31](#) -

³⁰*But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people.*

³¹*Because he hath despised the word of the LORD, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him.*

“) made a condition of salvation. The thought of transgression is at all times tempered with the thought of God's pardon. The whole sacrificial system, in so far as it is expiatory, rests on God's gracious acceptance of something in place of legal obedience, while the passages that offer God's mercy without demanding even a sacrifice ([Isaiah 1:18](#) - *Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*” ; [Micah 7:18-20](#) -

¹⁸*Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.*

¹⁹*He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.*

²⁰*Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.*

etc.) are countless. Indeed, in [Ezekiel 16; 20; 23](#), mercy is promised to a nation that is spoken of as hardly even desiring it, a most extreme instance. (4) But a mere negative granting of pardon is a most deficient definition of the Old Testament idea of God's mercy, which delights in conferring positive benefits. The gift to Abraham of the land of Canaan, liberation from Egypt, food in the wilderness, salvation from enemies, deliverance from exile—all of Israel's history can be felt to be the record of what God did for His people through no duty or compulsion, grateful thanksgiving for such unmerited blessings filling, for instance, much of the Psalter.

The hearts of men are in God's keeping, to receive from Him the impulse toward what is right ([1 Chronicles 29:18](#) - *O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee:*” , etc.). And the promise is made that the God who has manifested Himself as a forgiving Father will in due time take hold of His children to work in them actual

2010

righteousness (*Isaiah 1:26 - And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city.*” ; 4:3-4 –

³*And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem:*

⁴*When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning.*

32:1-8 -

¹*Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment.*

²*And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.*

³*And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken.*

⁴*The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly.*

⁵*The vile person shall be no more called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful.*

⁶*For the vile person will speak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, to practise hypocrisy, and to utter error against the LORD, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail.*

⁷*The instruments also of the churl are evil: he deviseth wicked devices to destroy the poor with lying words, even when the needy speaketh right.*

⁸*But the liberal deviseth liberal things; and by liberal things shall he stand.*

33:24 - *And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity.;*

2010

Jeremiah 31:33-34 –

³³But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

³⁴And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Ezekiel 36:25-26

²⁵Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.

²⁶A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

Zechariah 8;

Daniel 9:24 - Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.” ;

Psalms 51:10-12

¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

¹¹Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.

¹²Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.

With this promise—for the Old Testament always a matter of the future—the Old Testament teaching passes into that of the New Testament.

2010

7. Summary

Most of the discussions of the Biblical doctrine of grace have been faulty in narrowing the meaning of "grace" to some special sense, and then endeavoring to force this special sense on all the Biblical passages. For instance, Roman scholars, starting with the meaning of the word in (say) **2 Corinthians 12:9** - *And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*" , have made **Romans 3:24** - *Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:*" state that men are justified by the infusion of Divine holiness into them, an interpretation that utterly ruins Paul's argument.

On the other hand, Protestant extremists have tried to reverse the process and have argued that grace cannot mean anything except favor as an attitude, with results that are equally disastrous from the exegetical standpoint. And a confusion has resulted that has prevented men from seeing that most of the controversies about grace are at cross-purposes. A rigid definition is hardly possible, but still a single conception is actually present in almost every case where "*grace*" is found—the conception that all a Christian has or is, is centered exclusively in God and Christ, and depends utterly on God through Christ. The kingdom of heaven is reserved for those who become as little children, for those who look to their Father in loving confidence for every benefit, whether it be for the pardon so freely given, or for the strength that comes from Him who works in them both to will and to do.

* * * * *

EPISTLE of St. James, chap. iv. ver. 6. — *But he giveth more grace.* On these words a commentator hath made this remark. — "The word *charis* here rendered *grace*, is rarely used to signify any inward motions or secret operations of the holy spirit on the mind, unless when it expresseth the extraordinary gifts, and miraculous endowments conferred on the Apostles and first Christians."

Scripture is the best interpreter of scripture. As what our blessed Saviour saith in one place, (Matt. vii. 11.) "How much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" — He in another (Luke xi. 13.) expresseth by "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy spirit to those that ask him?" — thus comprising *all good things in one*: — so the word (*charis*) *grace*, which is in the New Testament generally applied to express the *free and undeserved favour of God to man through Jesus Christ*, in general, doth sometimes, in a more limited sense,

2010

denote the *gracious and undeserved assistance of the holy spirit*; and that not only in his *miraculous gifts* but in his *ordinary influences*. In both these respects he is called the spirit (*tes charitos*) of grace. — Heb. x. 29. comp. with ch. 6. 45. *Grace* is used for such influences of the holy spirit as are attainable by *every* Christian. — Heb. xii. 28. In like manner, St. Peter's admonition, 2 Ep. iii. 18. *Grow in grace* (*en chariti*) *and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, must be supposed to extend to every Christian, and consequently the word *grace* to refer to the *ordinary inspiration* of the spirit of God, as distinguished from His *extraordinary* and *miraculous gifts*. There are several other passages wherein (*charis*) grace must be understood to include the like sanctifying influences of the holy spirit, as mentioned in Acts xi. 23. Eph. iv. 7. And St. Paul expressly says, Eph. iv. 7. "*Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.*"

How the word *grace* was admitted so frequently into our Liturgy, into the writings of our Divines — and in the English language was used to denote the influence of God's spirit, may be easily accounted for from the nature of language. The word *grace* is formed from the Latin *gratia*, in which language, after the Romans became Christians, it was used among other significations, to denote the *ordinary inspiration of the Holy Ghost*. Our Saxon ancestors were converted to Christianity by a Roman monk, and furnished by him with a Latin Liturgy, in which the word *gratia* occurs very often. The Saxons before their conversion had words in their language to express *favour* or *good will* in general, and these they could apply to God as well as to man; but as they had no notion of that particular species of God's good will, by which he affords to man the *assistance of his Holy Spirit*, so they had no vocable (*an utterance*) for it, until they adopted the word *grace* into their language. Hence then the primitive and correct sense of the word may be easily ascertained.