



Lesson 24

BY GRACE ARE YE SAVED

Reading Romans 5

GRACE

In the Bible God's grace means His loving kindness towards men. It is totally undeserved by any man or woman and is entirely the free gift of God. It is understood most clearly in God's gift of the Lord Jesus to achieve salvation. You will need to remember this clearly as you study this lesson.

A matter of life and death

We all know only too well that our life will end sooner or later with the coming of death. God sent His son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the world to open up a way of life. This way of salvation from death is the very heart of the Christian Gospel.

Our sins separate us from God, who is the source of all life. Jesus came to bring man back to God, by showing the way of life. A man may know his Bible perfectly, from Genesis to Revelation; he may have a thorough understanding of Bible teaching - but that will not save him. Unless he accepts the sacrifice Jesus has made for him; in true humility, he can have no hope of life.

A wrong way of thinking

Many people think that the good things they do and the bad things they do are added up to see how they stand before God. They think that, so long as there is more good than bad, they have a right to God's favour. This is simply not true!

Even many who claim to be Christians and acknowledge that God has paid a great price to bring about salvation, feel they have to earn this blessing by the things they do.

It is very easy for us to think we have to earn God's gifts. But a gift cannot be earned. Only wages are earned, and Paul tells us:

"The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"
(Romans 6:23).

It is very easy for us to fall into this wrong way of thinking. God has done so much for us; we want to show our thanks by pleasing Him: and so we come to think that the things we do 'pay for' God's blessings.

It is one of the most important teachings of Scripture that forgiveness of sins and eternal life in God's Kingdom are gifts of God, and cannot be earned or paid for

What the Scriptures teach

- We are all sinners condemned to death;
- We cannot save ourselves, and we must have the humility to accept this;
- God has provided a way of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ;
- This way is open to us if we have faith (or belief) in the Gospel, which is found in God's Word, the Bible.

Believing in God

Read these words carefully:

"God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved); and hath raised us up together, and make us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2:4-9)

God loves us abundantly, even though we are sinners,

and has made us alive together with Christ.

(This salvation is a gift.)

He has given us this high place in Jesus,

so that in the future He might bless us even more (with life in His Kingdom).

This salvation is God's gift. We need to believe Him. We cannot do anything to earn salvation, so no-one can boast

Now read Romans 3:20-28 very carefully. You will see that the message is the same. Nothing the Jews could do by keeping the law, and nothing we can do in our lives, can make us appear righteous in God's sight. We are all sinners.

But by His grace, God counts as righteous those who trust in Jesus.

Only God and the Lord Jesus are righteous, but if we believe Jesus died for us, and accept the sacrifice he made for us, God will forgive our sins and count us righteous. Notice again the apostle repeats the vital truth that all is of God, and no man can boast about being saved.

"Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1-2).

These verses tell us plainly the position of a true follower of the Lord Jesus. Such a man has peace with God, because he has been brought into harmony with God through the sacrifice of Jesus. He has been accepted by God, and is a future citizen of the Kingdom of God.

He has been brought into this relationship by his belief in God. Because of these things, he has access to God - he can approach Him in prayer. Such a disciple has entered into grace.

Does it matter how we behave?

We have seen, then, how a man may come near to God, and be accepted through His grace. Such a man has become 'right with God'.

But we have not said anything about how that man should live. Are we free, then, to please ourselves, and go our own way? The apostle Paul thought people might think that way. You have already read chapter 5 of his letter to the Romans. Now look at the first verse of chapter 6, which says:

"Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?"

He answers the question in the next verse:

"God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

Read on to verse 14, and note especially verses 11 and 12:

"Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof."

If we really believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall act as if we believe in him. We will try our very best to do what he says. Then we shall truly be his followers.

On the other hand, a man who does not try to do God's will and obey Him is not a true disciple. If he really believed, he would obey. He has no real faith, and so no access to the grace of God.

The apostle James tells us: "Faith if it hath not works, is dead" (James 2:17). Faith which does not make a man strive to follow the Christian way of living, and overcome sin in himself, is no faith at all.

Beginning a new life in Christ

How can we show our acceptance of what God has done for us, and our determination to live according to His commandments? We have already read Romans 6, verses 1 and 2. Look at the next two verses:

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

Jesus died and rose again for us. We associate ourselves with his sacrifice, by being buried, not in a tomb as he was but in water. This is Christian baptism. When a man comes out of the water, he has become a 'new man in Christ', and he is ready to live a new life. He has become a true disciple of the Lord Jesus. He can then be described as being "in Christ".

Discipleship

Baptism is a new start, and all our past sins are forgiven when we are baptized. Yet, however hard we try, we still go on doing wrong things and thinking wrong thoughts.

But remember - a Christian who has been baptized can come to God through Christ. He can confess his failings, and show he is sorry for them. And God will forgive him for Christ's sake.

So we must never give up. With the love of the Father to help us, we shall reach God's Kingdom in the end, for it is, as Jesus said, "the Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

The importance of faith

FAITH is belief or trust in God

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). To have faith is to trust God completely, putting our life into His hands and relying on Him in all the ways of our life, as a small child depends on his father, and looks up to him.

We have this kind of faith, then, as we have already seen, we have access to the grace of God. But we cannot believe in anything if we do not know about it; and we cannot believe in God's Word unless we understand its teaching. That is why, in all the lessons in this course, the teaching of the Bible has been emphasized. Read for yourselves Romans 10: 13-17, and notice particularly the last verse:

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

Disciples in Old Testament Times

If belief in the work of Jesus is essential for our salvation, what will happen to God's servants in Old Testament times? How can they be saved, if they lived before Christ came?

Those who lived in Old Testament times knew about Christ! They did not know him by the name of Jesus, but they knew him as the promised son of God - the Messiah and Lamb of God.

They understood from God's word that all men need salvation. They were told that God would provide this in the death of a perfect man, who would be the 'Lamb of God', and give his life for the salvation of all men.

Abraham was one of the great men of the Old Testament. Galatians 3:8 tells us that the gospel was preached to Abraham', and we read of Jesus saying to the Jews:

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56).

So Abraham and many other Old Testament disciples believed in Christ, even as we do, although they did not have the great privilege we have, of being able to read the Gospel stories which tell us about the Lord's life and work.

Because the Old Testament, as well as the New, tells us the story of the grace of God working for our salvation, we need to study the whole of the Bible, and not the New Testament only.

Summary

1. No man can save himself - and no man can be saved without humility.
2. It is the grace of God that brings salvation: this grace brings to us the good news of the work of Jesus and the Kingdom of God.
3. We have to have faith in order to benefit from God's grace.
4. If we have faith, we will try to live according to God's commandments.
5. True faith will show in the way a man lives; it will prove that his discipleship is real.

Chapters to read

Psalms 32; Romans 4; and read again Galatians 3; also Titus 3:4-6 and 2:11-13

Learn by heart

Romans 5:1-2