

SABBATH THOUGHT 2023-01-07—MERCY & GRACE

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Did you ever notice that the last words in the Bible are “The **grace** of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen.” (Rev. 22:21)? The Greek word for *grace* is *charis*. It is not to be confused with the English word *charity*, which comes the Latin word *caritas*. Both have a sense of benevolence or good will toward others. There is a subtle, but important, difference between *grace* and *charity*:

DEFINITION: **Grace** is benevolence toward others who are DEPENDENT upon such acts whereas **charity** is benevolence toward others who are NOT DEPENDENT upon such acts.

For example, the king in the parable of the servant who owed him 10,000 talents was an act of grace, not charity:

MATTHEW 18:23-27 Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is compared to a man, a *certain* king, who would take account with his servants. 24 And after he began to reckon, there was brought to him one debtor who owed *him* ten thousand talents. 25 But since he did not have *anything* to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. 26 Because of this, the servant fell down *and* worshiped him, saying, ‘Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ 27 And being moved with compassion, the lord of that servant released him, and forgave him the debt.

Forgiving the debt was certainly an act of grace because the debtor could never repay it. However, the unpaid debt was also grounds for selling the servant and his family into bondage according to the law. For that reason, there was also mercy because the king withheld from doing so. With that in mind, we can say:

DEFINITION: **Mercy** is *not* receiving a PUNISHMENT WE DESERVE and **grace** is receiving a GIFT WE DO NOT DESERVE.

Obviously, all that God does for us is a gift of grace including everything from making the sun to shine to eternal life. We are utterly dependent upon God in this life as well as for the next. But God is also merciful not to condemn us when we sin. In that regard, people are alive only because God is merciful.

When it comes to mercy and grace from God, it is difficult at times to distinguish between them. Both are a reflection of His agape love and we are entirely dependent upon both His mercy and grace. Perhaps, they are much the same in God’s eyes when it

comes to eternal life. We know that eternal life is a gift by the grace of God¹ but we also know that we are not dead because He is merciful². In some regards, they are two sides of the same coin. This seems to be the case in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 concerning reward and works. There we find both grace and mercy from God when it comes to eternal life:

1 CORINTHIANS 3:12-15 Now if anyone builds upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay *or* stubble, 13 The work of each one shall be manifested; for the day *of trial* will declare *it*, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall prove what kind of work each one's is. **14 If the work that anyone has built endures, he shall receive a reward. 15 If the work of anyone is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but *he himself shall be saved, yet as through fire.***

But mercy and grace are something we can, and should, give to others. Are they not a measure of agape love working in us? In other words, mercy and grace are motivated by agape love:

MATTHEW 12:35 The **good** man out of the **good** treasure of his heart brings out **good** things ...

There are many examples of mercy and grace in the Bible. Notice the grace of Tabitha:

ACTS 9:36, 39 Now *there* was in Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha; which, being interpreted, is called Dorcas. **She was full of good works and of alms** that she did. ... 39 Then Peter arose *and* went with them; *and* when he arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood around him, weeping and showing *him* **the tunics and garments that Dorcas had made** while she was with them.

Tabitha provided items needed by others. Even though she may have spent some money purchasing the materials, what she made and gave to others was of far more value because she put her own time and effort into creating clothing that was worth more than the original cost of materials. Could she have just bought the clothes or given the money to those in need? Scripture does not say, but her grace was likely a reflection of her means. That is key to understanding the grace we offer to others. Compare Tabitha's works to Paul's charge to the rich:

1 TIMOTHY 6:17-18 Charge those who are rich in this present age not to be high minded, nor to put *their* hope in *the* uncertainty of riches; but *to put their hope* in the living God, Who abundantly gives us all things for *our* enjoyment; 18 To do good, **to be rich in good works, to be generous in giving**, to be ready to share;

¹ Rom. 5:17, 21; Titus 3:7; 1 Pet. 3:7.

² Ps. 9:13.

Those who have abundance are to be generous in good works because they are a measure of the mercy and grace we receive from God:

LUKE 6:36-38 Therefore, you also be compassionate, *even* as your Father is compassionate. 37 And do not judge *others*, so that you yourself will not be judged in any way. Do not condemn *others*, so that you will not be condemned in any way. Forgive, and you shall be forgiven. 38 Give, and it shall be given to you. Good measure, pressed down and shaken together and running over, shall they give into your bosom. **For with the same measure that you mete out, it shall be measured again to you.**

Grace and mercy from God is commended by Paul and John in their epistles to Timothy³, Titus, and the “elect lady and her children.” It is obviously desirable and something worthy of thanksgiving to God:

1 TIMOTHY 1:2 To Timothy, *my* true son in *the* faith: **Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.**

TITUS 1:4 To Titus, a true son according to *our* common faith: **Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ** our Savior.

2 JOHN 1:3 **Grace, mercy, and peace shall be with us from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ,** the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

Did you realize, however, that most often mercy was omitted from all other epistles⁴ where only grace was mentioned? Does that mean that it is only about grace or that mercy was only extended to a few? No, mercy and grace from God are tightly woven together because we are dependent upon both from God. Notice this from Paul:

2 CORINTHIANS 12:7-10 But in order that I might not be exalted by the abundance of the revelations, *there* was given to me a **thorn in the flesh, an angel of Satan to buffet me,** so that I might not be exalted. 8 I besought the Lord three times for this, that it might depart from me; 9 But He said to me, “**My grace is sufficient** for you; for My power is **made perfect in weakness.**” Therefore, most gladly will I boast in my weaknesses that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 For this reason, I take pleasure in weaknesses, in insults, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

In his affliction, was it mercy or grace that motivated God to deny Paul’s request to remove the thorn? It obviously caused Paul much grief. It might seem that removing his suffering would be mercy, not grace. Perhaps that is an example of how God views our

³ Also 2 Tim. 1:2.

⁴ 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:3; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; Phlm. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Pet. 1:2; Jude 1:2; Rev. 1:4.

afflictions and trials. God sees them more as grace because it is through sufferings that we receive the greatest gift of grace:

1 PETER 5:10 Now may **the God of all grace**, Who has called us unto **His eternal glory** in Christ Jesus, **after you have suffered a little while**, Himself **perfect you [through sufferings]**, establish, strengthen, and settle you.

There it is—God is gracious to help us achieve the gift of eternal life through afflictions. For God’s children, sufferings in a physical life are part of God’s grace because of the “unspeakable gift.”⁵ We enter into the eternal Kingdom only through afflictions so they are necessary to receiving the eternal gift. In the end, it is about the gift of grace⁶, not sufferings. God never loses sight of that even if we are preoccupied by sufferings:

MATTHEW 7:11 Therefore, if you, being evil, know *how* to give good gifts to your children, **how much more shall your Father Who is in heaven give good things** to those who ask Him?

The word for *good* here is the same in Matthew 12:35 mentioned previously. It is *agathos* and has the sense of benevolence. The same word is used of good works:

EPHESIANS 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto *the good* works that God ordained beforehand in order that we might walk in them.

Mercy and grace are a manifestation of agape love, whether from God or those called to be His children. God’s grace is upon us first because He loved us first⁷. When our hearts are seeded with agape love, we desire to give mercy and grace to others:

MATTHEW 5:7 Blessed *are* the merciful [*to others*], for they shall find mercy [*from God*].

The grace of God is fulfilled through our own afflictions and sufferings. We do not always recognize God’s mercy in our lives, but we should remember it is inseparable from His grace. And His grace is always greater⁸ because it is eternal.

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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⁵ 2 Cor. 9:15.

⁶ Rom. 5:15, 17; Eph. 2:8; 3:7; 4:7.

⁷ 1 John 4:19.

⁸ Jas. 4:6.