Grace for Living - It Might Not Be What You Think It Is

(appropriate for High Schoolers and older)
Michael R. Daily, September 2019

Other youth bible studies by Michael Daily available at: http://gciweb.org/2011/04/youth-bible-study-materials-michael-r-daily/

(Portions taken from material by the Rev. John S. Mahon)

"The rule to attend summer camp is that you must memorize and recite certain Bible verses to be eligible to go. Everyone completed their verses except Lisa. Lisa did some of the verses, but she didn't finish all of them. But we decided to 'give her grace' and let her go anyway."

When people say things like this, what do they think the meaning of grace is? (To "cut someone some slack" and pretend they met the agreed upon requirement).

Is that really what grace is, according to the Bible?

There is a trend in the Church today to confuse discipline (good in God's eyes) and legalism (bad). There is also a trend to confuse license (bad) with grace (good). This study will look to the Bible and to some dictionary definitions to help clarify issues of grace and license.

License: a disregard for standards of personal conduct (a.k.a. licentiousness)

Grace: unmerited divine assistance given to humans for their regeneration or sanctification

Grace is assistance given to us by God that we don't deserve. There are two types of grace. There is the grace of regeneration (i.e. the grace of salvation) by which we are allowed to enter heaven and the divine assistance, grace, God gives us to enable us to live the Christian life. Whenever you are reading the New Testament and see the word "grace" ask yourself which type of grace the verse is referring to because they are not the same.

Grace is not about cutting people slack. As Christians we are saved by grace (**Ephesians 2:8-9**) and allowed to enter heaven. How does that work? When we appear before God at the Judgment is He just going to cut us some slack, lower His standard of perfection, pretend we never sinned, and then let us into heaven? No. God's standard is perfection and He will not lower it for anyone (**Colossians 1:19-22**, **Hebrews 12:22-23**). He maintains His requirement of perfection for a person to enter heaven. But then, by grace, He provided us divine assistance to meet His standard of perfection in Christ. God did not cut anyone slack or lower His standard. He helped us meet His standard, at a horrible cost – the death of His Son on the cross. Christ took your sin and punishment on Himself and gave you His perfect righteousness. Because of that when you stand before God you will, in fact, be perfect and allowed to enter heaven! So, it cost God a lot to provide you with the divine assistance that enables you to go to heaven.

But tonight we will talk not about the grace that saves and regenerates people. Instead we will talk about the grace given to us by God for our sanctification – grace to live the Christian life.

If you gather all of the Bible passages on grace, then remove those that are talking about the regenerating grace of salvation, the verses that are left talk about the grace God gives us for living the Christian life. The picture of grace for living that emerges may surprise you.

The word "grace", you may find, might not mean what you think it means.

Grace for Living: unmerited divine assistance given to humans for their sanctification

Progressive Sanctification: Over our entire lives we are gradually, but steadily, changing to be more like Jesus in our faith and character, by the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

(II Corinthians 3:18)

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

This maturing in our faith and character results in a growing obedience to thinking, speaking, and acting the way God wants us to. One of the tools He uses to help us grow in obedience is grace. Understanding the true meaning of grace will help us do two things: 1) pray more effectively for ourselves and others and, 2) apply real grace, instead of a false grace (license), in our relationships with others.

Grace for Living the Christian Life

As Christians God gives us grace (undeserved assistance) to obey Him as we go about our daily lives.

Romans 6:14

For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

This verse is not talking about the grace of salvation but the grace God gives us to live the Christian life. Because God gives us supernatural assistance we are able to overcome sin in our lives. This is not possible for non-Christians. They are enslaved to sin. They can't stop sinning even if they wanted to **(Eph 2:1-5, II Timothy 2:24-26)**. Grace is not about cutting people slack, its about enabling them to obey God more fully beyond what they could do by themselves. Most Christians don't think of grace in this way but that is what the Bible teaches.

Romans 1:4-5

who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, <u>Jesus Christ our Lord</u>, ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake,

God's Grace enabled Paul and the other Apostles to help the Gentiles come to obedience in the Christian faith - a task they could not have accomplished by themselves.

Ephesians 3:7-8

of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. ⁸ To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the <u>Gentiles</u> the unfathomable riches of Christ,

Mission Trips to Africa

God's divine assistance helped Paul preach the Gospel effectively to the Gentiles. When I was on mission trips to Zambia, Nigeria, and Cameroon there were over 70 teenagers and their families praying faithfully for God to give me the grace to preach the gospel while on the trip. What was the result? One result was that I shared the gospel one-on-one using the 5 minute Bridge Illustration with quite a few people and a high percentage of them prayed to receive Christ. Results occurred in a week that were greater than what would normally happen in a year in the US when fewer people were praying for me. The lesson? God gives grace in answer to our prayers for divine assistance to obey Him more fully. Its critical that we pray for God to give His grace to each other so that we can obey Him more fully.

II Corinthians 9:13-14

Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for <u>your</u> obedience to your <u>confession of the gospel of Christ</u> and for the <u>liberality of your contribution</u> to them and to all, ¹⁴ while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you <u>because of the surpassing grace of God in you.</u>

God's grace enabled the Christians in this passage to obey Him in confessing the gospel and making financial contributions to other Christians beyond what they could normally do in the flesh. We learn from this passage that we should pray for each other to be obedient to the command to share the Gospel and to give liberally to others. Do you routinely let people know you are a Christian? Do you live a lifestyle of being generous with others? These are things we can put on our prayer lists for each other.

II Corinthians 1:12

For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that <u>in holiness and godly</u> <u>sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world</u>, and especially toward you.

The people of the World are watching us. God can give us grace to help us conduct ourselves properly in holiness and godly sincerity in the World.

New Job

A few years ago I was promoted, going from overseeing the work of 20 people to 100 people. The new job was in a part of the company that was unrelated to any other work I had previously done. My new office was all the way across campus from my old office (1.0 mile away) and no one knew me in the area I was moving to. At 8:00am on my first day in my new office there was a knock on the door. A woman entered and said, "Hi, my name is Jane, I'm your new secretary". I said, "I'm Mike Daily". Then the next thing she said was, "Are you Mike Daily the Bible Teacher?" (pause) "I guess I am". God had arranged for a certain reputation about me to get to the new people I would be working with before I ever showed up. Now I would have to live up to that reputation – I could not slack off. God, by His grace, was helping me continue living the Christian life in front of the non-Christians.

Hebrews 4:16

Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Grace is God's unmerited assistance that we receive when we are in need of help. Let's look at a few more examples of God's grace assisting us in daily life.

<u>Health Degradation – Paul's Thorn in the Flesh</u>

In order to continue in chronic sin it usually requires three things: health, money, and time. What if you were struggling with a chronic sin that you could not overcome, so you prayed and asked God to help you overcome it. What might He do? God might degrade your health just enough that that sin you struggle with becomes something you can conquer. But not so much that you could not fulfill the ministry and other things He wanted you to do. Instead of praying that God would restore your health back to where it was (so that you can continue to sin?) you should thank Him for His assistance in overcoming the sin that you could not otherwise overcome. God is giving you grace (assistance) to accomplish something He wants for you that you could not otherwise accomplish. Is there any evidence in the Bible of God doing this? Yes, with Paul. Paul was given great revelations he needed to write most of the New Testament but it caused him to struggle with pride. God gave him a serious, permanent physical ailment (thorn in the flesh) that degraded his health just enough that it enabled Paul to overcome his sin but not so much that it prevented him from fulfilling his ministry.

(II Corinthians 12:7-10)

Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!⁸ Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. ⁹ And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰ Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

We often talk about the grace God gave Paul to endure this thorn in the flesh but the thorn itself was also an act of grace wasn't it? God may also do something similar in areas of your money or your time to help you as well.

II Corinthians 9:8

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;

This is the "no excuses" verse. Because of the supernatural assistance God gives us we have complete sufficiency to do all the good deeds He wants us to do!

Philippians 4:13

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Making excuses is not a good strategy. "Well, Mr. Daily, I wasn't able to get my bible study done because I was really busy this week and the dog ate my" When you make excuses what you are really saying is, "I don't believe what God has said about giving me divine assistance for every good work. It's just not true".

Do these two verses sound like cutting people slack? No. Grace is God supernaturally enabling us to do good deeds beyond what we normally could do. Its not about cutting people slack! This means we can pray for ourselves and others that God would give us grace to enable us to perform "every good deed". Because of the Grace of God we don't really have an excuse not to.

But some people go to the opposite extreme and say, "Well, if God is assisting me with His supernatural power then I don't really have to make any effort. I can just sit around doing my "slug imitation" and God will move me when He wants to." This isn't true either.

I Corinthians 15:10

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

God wants us to give it everything we've got – our whole mind, heart, soul, and strength (Mark 12:30). Then, He will add His supernatural assistance to our efforts to accomplish more than what we could ever have done on our own.

A Salesman Out of Town

Imagine, guys, that you are a salesman out of town on a business trip. Your name is John. Girls, imagine this story is about your husband. You are far away from home where no one knows you. Before you left you had a fight with your wife and it was a bad one. The dog got so riled up he bit your hand. Your hand is wrapped in a bandage and throbbing. Now you have spent the day going from one company to another trying to sell your product without success. No one wants to meet with you. They are very busy and you are wasting their time. They look at their watch, they roll their eyes. The products of your company are just not that good, they tell you. Even though you have come from out of town and you had appointments set up where people had agreed to meet with you, their assistants are now telling you they are too busy to meet with you. All day long the world has been beating you up. Now, its 6pm, and its cold and dark. As you trudge back to your hotel in a cold, heavy rain you feel miserable and unappreciated. The hotel is just across the street. As you step off the curb onto a wet spot on the street you quickly realize the wet spot is actually a 4 inch deep puddle. Now your right foot is soaked! As you enter into the warm, comfortable lobby of the first class hotel, you hear soft music coming from the bar off to the right. You hear the light clinking of glasses and the quiet laughter of people relaxing. As you look in that direction you see a beautiful woman sitting alone at a small table. She looks over at you and smiles. She motions to you. Its obvious she wants you to join her. And why not? You deserve something good happening to you once in a while. As you begin to turn in her direction you feel at tap on your shoulder. "Hey John (your name)! Hey, Bible thumper John! I didn't know you would be in town." (Its one of your co-workers from the home office). "How's the wife?" Then you remember, "That's right I am married. That's right I am a Bible thumper. I better behave myself". So, you talk to your co-worker for a moment and go up to your room alone and call your wife.

This is an example of the grace of God. God's unmerited assistance in helping you obey Him when it is beyond your natural abilities to do so.

Ladies, is this the type of grace you want God to give your husband in these kinds of situations. Is this the type of grace you will be praying God gives your husband? Or would you prefer the following type of "grace" (i.e. license). Your husband spends the night with the woman. But John's been going through a really difficult time lately so we'll "give him some grace" and just pretend it never happened. How does that sound?

Don't make the mistake of thinking grace means ignoring sin from time to time. That's licentiousness.

(note: this confusion between grace and licentiousness has occurred since the very beginning – see Jude 1:4).

(Jude 1:4)

For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, <u>ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.</u>

Does God always give grace in every situation? No. If He did it wouldn't be grace, it would be called something else. This is why we need to pray for each other. That God would give us or others grace to obey Him when it is otherwise beyond our abilities to do so.

Hebrews 12:15

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

Fair Treatment vs Center of His Will

There will be many times in life when you will be treated unfairly. In those situations, we may be tempted to become bitter.

bitter: accompanied by severe pain, exhibiting intense animosity, marked by cynicism and rancor

Grace enables us to supernaturally avoid bitterness in difficult situations. God often closes doors in our lives by allowing us to be treated unfairly. He closes these doors so that we will remain in the center of His will and accomplish the purposes He has for our lives. When this happens we need to ask for grace to help us not get bitter but instead understand that God is in control and is using something that, at the moment feels unfair, but that happens to be the most effective way of keeping us in the center of His will. Don't pray that you will be treated fairly – God will often say "no" to that prayer. Instead pray that God would keep you in the center of His will for your life – and use whatever means are necessary. That is a prayer He will say "yes" to.

Lisa – the girl who did not finish her verses for camp

Let's go back and talk about Lisa, the girl who did not finish her verses for camp. What should we do? We could give her a false grace (license) and let her go to camp anyway. What lesson would that teach her? It would teach her that it is not really necessary to fully meet the requirements. Is that a good life skill? No. The Bible calls that being lukewarm.

(Revelation 3:15-16)

'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.

What about all the other students that did complete all of the work? It won't be long before they find out Lisa didn't finish the work yet she still gets to go to camp. What is the lesson for them? There is no benefit from fully meeting the requirements - quitting halfway is good enough. Is that a good life skill to develop? No. Their boss is not going to be impressed when they fail to meet the requirements on the job, are they?

What would be a Biblically correct way to show grace to Lisa? One of the ladies could offer to meet with her outside of club. "Let's meet at Starbucks. I will buy you a nice drink that you don't deserve. I will buy you some nice coffee cake that you don't deserve. I won't do the work for you but I will meet with you and hold you accountable and work with you until you complete all the requirements". We are not going to do her work for her but we can show her grace by providing extra assistance (that she does not deserve) to help her get all the work done and meet the requirements for camp – that's Biblical grace.

God's grace working through non-christians to accomplish His purposes.

As a final example we will look at how God also gives grace to non-Christians to enable them to accomplish His purposes even though they don't recognize it or give Him the credit. We are going to finish tonight's lesson by watching a short video about how God performed miracles through some non-believers in order to fulfill prophecy, keep His promises, and accomplish His purposes in the world. Note: the video clip can be downloaded for free from this link: https://vimeo.com/54400569 It is a clip from the 2014 documentary movie, "Above and Beyond". If you have video editing software you can add the verse below at the end of the clip:

Ezekiel 11:16-17 (NLT)

"Therefore, give the exiles this message from the Sovereign Lord: Although I have scattered you in the countries of the world, I will be a sanctuary to you during your time in exile. I, the Sovereign Lord, will gather you back from the nations where you were scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel once again."

Appendix - Grace for Living

This is additional material the Bible teacher may choose to use if more than 30 minutes is available.

War Room

In the movie "War room" (2015) a wife is praying for her husband who has been seen having dinner with another woman in a restaurant. The wife is praying and asking God to not let her husband have an affair with this woman. Just as her husband and the other woman get ready to go to the other woman's hotel room the husband experiences the Grace of God. What happened to him? He became too ill physically to spend the night with her. This is another example of God's grace (God's unmerited assistance in helping you obey Him when it is beyond your natural abilities to do so). It also gives us a lesson on how we can pray for others, doesn't it?

Compare the "War Room" situation to what happened with David and Bathsheba

II Samuel 11:1-4

Then it happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out *to battle*, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they destroyed the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem. ² Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance. ³ So David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" ⁴ David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her; and when she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she returned to her house.

Notice that David had good health, he had extra time (he was supposed to be away at battle but was not), he had the power to make Bathsheba come to him, and he had encouragement from others (why was Bathsheba naked on the roof when she knew she could be seen by the neighbors?). What David (and Bathsheba) may have lacked was someone praying for them that God would give them grace to obey Him.

Other Verses Related to Grace for Living

Romans 12:6-8

Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷ if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

I Peter 4:10

As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Ephesians 4:7-8

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high. He led captive a host of captives. And He gave gifts to men.

II Corinthians 8:1-3

Now, brethren, we *wish to* make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, ² that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. ³ For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, *they gave* of their own accord,

Romans 15:15-18

But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that *my* offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁷ Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God. ¹⁸ For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed,

I Corinthians 3:10

According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it.

Ephesians 4:29

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

Colossians 4:6

Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.

II Thessalonians 2:16-17

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, ¹⁷ comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.

II Timothy 2:1

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

James 4:6

But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."

I Peter 5:5-10

You younger men, likewise, be subject to *your* elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. ⁶Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, ⁷ casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. ⁸ Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. ¹⁰ After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

I Peter 1:1-2

To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen ² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: II Corinthians 3:18, Romans 6:14
How does this passage relate to the theme?
When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:
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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Romans 1:4-6, Ephesians 3:7-8
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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: 1 Peter 1:1-2
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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: II Corinthians 9:13-14
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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: I Corinthians 3:10
How does this passage relate to the theme?
When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:
Then I reflect on this passage, abes it primarily convict, encourage or chancing me. Explain why.
How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make
this passage a part of my Christian life?
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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Ephesians 4:29, Colossians 4:6
How does this passage relate to the theme?
When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:
How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make
this passage a part of my Christian life?
uns passage a part of my Christian me:
PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: II Thessalonians 2:16-17, II Timothy 2:1
How does this passage relate to the theme?
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When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:
How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make
this passage a part of my Christian life?
PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: James 4:6, I Peter 5:5-10
How does this passage relate to the theme?
When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:
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