

God's Plan for the Ages

Understanding the Dispensations

Lesson 9 – The Dispensation of Grace

The Time The sixth dispensation began after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, on the day of Pentecost, and is the dispensation in which we live today. It will conclude with the rapture. It is also known as the Church Age.

The Scripture The Scripture portion which covers the sixth dispensation is Acts 2 to Revelation 3.

Introduction – What is Grace?

Grace is an important word and we need to understand what it means.

The grace of God means "the _____ of God."

It is often defined as God's "**unmerited favour**" (God's favour towards man which man did not merit or earn or work for in any way).

The word grace is also defined as " _____ " (God's amazing love and kindness towards those who do not deserve it at all).

The Bible gives two simple definitions of grace (Ephesians 2:1-9, Titus 3:3-7):

1. Ephesians 2:7

Grace is God's "**kindness toward us through Christ Jesus**"

Because of Jesus Christ, God is able to be kind even to those who were dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1-3)!

2. Titus 3:4

Grace is "**the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man**"

God is kind toward man (even the kind of man who is described in Titus 3:3)!
How gracious God is to those who deserve no kindness at all!

God has always been a gracious God.

He was gracious to Adam and Eve when He provided them with coats of skins (Genesis 3:21). God was gracious to Noah (Genesis 6:8) and to the whole earth when He promised never again to bring a world-wide flood (Genesis 9:11). God was gracious to Abraham (Romans 4:3,4) Moses (Exodus 33:12-17), David (2 Samuel 12:13) and Israel (Ezra 9:8).

But God's grace **is most clearly seen today. God's grace is seen in a way that it was never seen before.**

*"And of his fulness have all we received, **and grace for grace.***

For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." **John 1:16-17**

In past ages God's grace was like a stream. The stream was always there, it was always flowing, and the water of God's grace could be seen in every age. Today, however, the stream of God's grace has become a mighty river and has flooded its banks.

Today the grace of our Lord is **"exceeding abundant"** (1 Timothy 1:14).

God's GRACE has also been defined in this way:

G_____

R_____

A__

C_____

E_____

This is best seen in 2 Corinthians 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"

GOD'S RICHES ("that ye might be rich")

AT CHRIST'S EXPENSE ("He became poor" and died on the cross for us).

1. Man's State at the Beginning

At the beginning of the dispensation of grace we see sin at its worst.

For the most part, the Jewish nation had rejected their Saviour and Messiah:

"He came unto His own, and His own (the Jewish people) received Him not" (John 1:11).

They were blinded by their own unbelief and sin and finally shouted **"Crucify Him!"** (Mark 15:13). Man had reached the depths of sin and the night of sin could hardly become any darker. Man proved that his wickedness was very great but God took this opportunity to prove that His grace is even greater!

God's grace is far greater than man's sin. We see this in Romans 5:20:

*"Moreover the law entered, that the **offence might abound"***

This means that the law makes sin look even worse. The law is like a magnifying glass that lets us see sin more and more as it really is.

*"But where **sin abounded, grace did much more abound"***

Sin abounded but grace SUPER ABOUNDED! Man's sin gave God a wonderful opportunity to show how gracious He really is.

After the Jewish nation crucified their own Messiah, what did God do?
 When sin really showed itself as something terrible and ugly (as men refused to receive God's Son and God's salvation), what did God do?
 Did He destroy the world? Did He judge everyone?

No, God did something very amazing. God began to reach out to all men everywhere. Most of the Jews did not want to come to the Saviour, so God reached out to all men and said, *"And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."* (Revelation 22:17).

The world was darkened by sin so God decided to flood the world with grace. *"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,"*

(Titus 2.11). God was **reaching out to all!**

2. Man's Responsibility

a. The responsibility of the _____

Romans 6:23 tells us that *"The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"*. This is the gift of God's grace and God offers this gift to all men.

God does not force His gift on anyone. Those who refuse to take this gift do not have it. God offers it to all but not all receive it.

There is only one way to receive God's gift of eternal life. A person must receive Jesus Christ as Saviour by believing on His Name (John 1:12).

According to John 3:16,18,36 what is man's responsibility today? _____

What command does God give to unsaved people (1 John 3:23)?

b. The responsibility of the _____

Having received God's grace for salvation, we also receive the riches of God's grace for our new life in Christ.

In this present dispensation the grace of God is:

- The cause for our **justification** (Romans 3:23-28)
- The basis for our **eternal security** (Romans 5:1-2,6-10)
- The reason for **positional truth** (Romans 5:20-6:10)
- The means for **practical sanctification** (Romans 6:11-14)
- The means of **effective service** (Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 15:10)
- The mode of **giving** (2 Corinthians 8 and 9)

As a believer, my responsibility is:

- To _____ in God's grace (Acts 13:43).
- To _____ the Gospel of grace (Acts 20:24).
- To _____ in grace (2 Peter 3:18).
- Not to _____ the grace of God (Galatians 5:13-15, Titus 2:11-13, Romans 6:1-2)
- To _____ others by grace, utilizing my spiritual gifts (1 Peter 4:10-11)

In summary, we are to **live in yielded dependence** on the Lord and His Word, **by the enablement of the power of the Holy Spirit** (Romans 12:1-2, Galatians 5:16)

3. Man's Failure

a. The failure of the unsaved

Even though God has graciously offered men His free gift of salvation, only a few have believed on Christ and received this gift (Matthew 7:13-14).

The great majority of people have refused to receive God's gift and have refused to have Christ reign over them as King and as Lord (Luke 19:12-14).

During this age of grace God patiently waits for men to be saved. God's day of grace will not last forever. When men refuse God's grace then they must face God's judgment.

b. The failure of the saved

Sadly, too many believers *'fail (to live under) the grace of God'* (Hebrews 12:15) and bring upon themselves divine discipline (Hebrews 12:5-11) some even to the point of premature physical death for disobedience (Acts 5:1-6, 1 Cor 11:27-32, 1 John 5:16)

Within the church, there are those who have perverted the gospel of grace, preaching "another gospel" by adding works to God's gift of salvation (Galatian 1:6-7).

The grace of God has also been twisted or misrepresented by many, often leading to the errors of licence (continuing living according to our lusts with disregard of God's commands for holy living) or legalism (emphasizing a system of rules and regulations for achieving both salvation and spiritual growth).

These failures crept into the church in its early days and continue even to this day.

4. God's Judgment

As we have seen already, the day of God's grace and longsuffering does not last forever. Romans 2:4 describes those people who despise the goodness and longsuffering of God.

Will these people escape the judgment of God (Romans 2:3-6)? _____

The day is coming when God's judgment will fall on this unbelieving world and upon the apostate church. The 120 years of grace in the days of Noah finally came to an end and God judged the world with a flood. This longer day of grace that we are living in now (nearly 2000 years) will also come to an end and God will again judge the world. The time of greatest grace (this present age of grace) will be followed by the time of greatest judgment (the time of great tribulation).

The believer will not face this judgment, but we will give account to God of what we have done (2 Corinthians 5:10) and how we have responded to His grace (Romans 14:10-12). We cannot lose our salvation, but we can forfeit heavenly rewards and experience chastisement here while on the earth. Jesus Christ can also remove the testimony of a Church that is living in disobedience to Him (Revelation 2:5)

Conclusion – God's Grace demands a _____

It is a dangerous thing to reject the grace of God.

It is a very serious thing for a person to reject the Person and work of Jesus Christ and to refuse God's free gift of salvation.

- Are you a sinner saved by grace?
- Are you pointing others to the Saviour who is so gracious to sinners who deserve nothing but His wrath?
- Are you growing in both your understanding of God's grace and dependence on His grace for each step in your daily walk in Christ?

**“But grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
To him *be* glory both now and for ever. Amen.”**

2 Peter 3:18

Lesson 9: Additional Reading

Contrasting the Dispensations of Law and Grace

It is important for us to clearly grasp being in Christ as a member of the church is a unique position in God's plan of the ages. **The church is not Israel and Israel is not the church** and we are not under law but under grace not only for justification but also for sanctification, as grace is the rule of life for the believer in this present dispensation, during the church age.

Today there are churches, and groups within Christendom that fail to recognize these distinctions and as such bring much confusion about matters of faith and practice for the Christian because they seek to bring believers back under the dispensation of the Law.

So, let us look at eight unique features of this present dispensation from the past one, contrasting requirements under law and grace:

1. The Temple

Under the law there was an earthly temple in **Jerusalem**.

It first started with a tabernacle in the wilderness and if followed by several temples in Jerusalem (Solomon's, Zerubbabel's, Herod's). The temple has not existed since 70 AD, when it was destroyed.

But under grace, the presence of God, which was found previously in the temple, no longer resides in a physical building. Instead the temple of God in the present dispensation of grace is:

- a. The **believer's body** - 1 Corinthians 6:18-20
- b. A **local church** – 1 Corinthians 3:16,17

As we gather together as a local church we are the temple of God, we are the place where God resides. Remember when we are talking about a local church, we are not talking about a physical building here, we are talking about the people, the believers, each who are indwelt with the Holy Spirit. This is unique to this dispensation.

2. The Priesthood.

Not only did they have a temple under the Law, they had the priesthood.

It was a select group of males only and it was Aaronic (you had to have the right genes and bloodline). (see Exodus 28-30)

Under grace however, Jesus Christ is our high priest and every Christian is a believer priest. Hebrews 7:23-28 shows us that the earthly priests all had one problem. **They died!** (v23). But Jesus Christ lives forever and **intercedes** for us. (v25)

He offered Himself as a **sacrifice**, once for all (v27)

In 1 Peter 2:4,5 we also see that every believer is a priest, who can offer spiritual sacrifices to God. This is true of all believers in this dispensation of grace. You need not be **male** in order to be a believer priest and you do not need to be of the line of Aaron under grace.

3. The Sacrifices

Under the dispensation of the law repeated blood sacrifices were required for atonement for sins. The word atonement means **a covering**. In the Old Testament, sin was covered, anticipating the day that the Lamb of God would come and take it away.

The Old Testament believer could say '*covered, covered, covered, yes my sins are covered*'. But the believer in this dispensation of grace can say '*gone, gone, gone, yes my sins are gone*'.

That's why, in contrast to those repeated blood sacrifices that blood flowed daily from those altars, we read in Hebrew 10:10-12 about the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice upon the cross.

Due to Jesus Christ finished work there are no more **sacrifices** for sin.

One of the tell-tale signs of those who have not understood, or embraced the grace of God is that they have an earthly temple, and earthly priesthood and an earthly sacrifice, because they are still living under a law mentality instead of recognizing the wonderful liberty that is ours in Christ by virtue of what He accomplished at Calvary. He died for our sins and rose again, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God as our Great High Priest, no longer needing another sacrifice. His sacrifice on the cross got the job done and when He cried out 'It is **finished**', our sins had been paid in full.

4. The Sabbath and Holy Days

As a Jew under the law you needed to observe the Sabbath and the Holy Days that had been marked in the Jewish calendar and designated by God. This was required under punishment of even death.

But under grace, as being a member of the Church of Jesus Christ, there are no special Holy Days, none whatsoever. (Galatians 4:9,10)

There are no special Holy Days under grace. **Every** day is to be lived as unto the Lord and though we gather on Sunday, as was customary of the early church to remember Christ's resurrection even that is not a mandate.

There are no holy days for the believer in this dispensation. Every day provides for us the opportunity to live the 'faith-rest' life and enter into the spiritual Sabbath that God has provided for us as we learn to walk by faith in the provision and promises of God.

5. The Dietary Restrictions

Under the law you had very specific dietary requirements to keep. The food was specific, it was kosher and it was required. There were certain foods you could not eat and the food had to be prepared in a specific way.

But under grace you can eat **anything**. We are simply asked to eat it with thanks (1 Timothy 4:1-4).

Under grace, to require a believer to follow a particular dietary code for spiritual purposes is called a 'doctrine of devils'. This passage is teaching that nothing is to be refused. You are able to eat anything with thanks to God.

6. The Jew / Gentile Distinction

Under the law there was to be a very specific separation from Gentiles. In the wilderness, the tabernacle was to be surrounded by the tents of the Israelites, Gentiles were not allowed near. When the temple came there was the court of the Gentiles, but you were an outsider looking in. You did not enjoy the same provision and privileges as the Jew.

All has changed under grace. Under grace, every believer, Jew or Gentile, bond or free have an equal position in Jesus Christ with equal spiritual blessings. All believers are one in the body of Christ. (Ephesians 2:11-19;3:6; Galatians 3:28)