

Growing in Grace

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[0 : 0 0] Oh, good morning. My name's Richard, if you don't know me, and I'm part of the membership here at Hernhill Baptist Church, and I hope that later I will be forgiven for this.

Not the whole sermon. I was giving a lift this morning to someone. Actually, I was giving a lift to Liz, our service leader, this morning, and she was doing a mental checklist of what she needed, and she goes, oh, thinking out loud, I need a reader, and I need a preacher, and I happen to say, thank goodness, I've got a sermon prepared for this morning, and I think it just happens to be on the right theme, too. Liz is actually my wife, and I noticed how she described me as Servant Richard as I came up to preach.

So this morning, we're looking at Growing in Grace as the next in our series titled Growing in Christ. Now, to those of you who are more observant, you may point out that the sermon title for today that was published was actually Grace and Mercy. However, the verse that was sent to me a few weeks ago was from the end of 2 Peter chapter 3, the verse which says, Growing in Grace and Knowledge. So this morning, I've decided to concentrate on the grace aspect of each of those two phrases. Of course, when one says the word grace in front of a group of Christians, if not all of you, a number of you are immediately thinking, God's riches at Christ's expense. Lovely. Some of you may have remembered something that I used in a sermon of mine a while back, where I suggested an alternative, which was God requires a Christian example as another acronym to think about grace. And I'll come back to these two different acronyms later in the sermon, as I feel they represent two sides, if you like, of the same coin of grace.

But with reference to the verse in question about grace, by looking back through the chapter, we see that the purpose of growing in grace and knowledge is to avoid errors. Errors of people that lack wisdom. And growing in grace will help us avoid living unholy lives, and more importantly, help us to live positively holy lives, and enable us to discern the truth of scripture.

And I definitely felt yes, amen to that, when Peter says, Paul's letters contain some things that are hard to understand. But the warning is, ignorant and unstable people distort scriptures for their own destruction. A very strong warning there as to how we use the scriptures.

[3 : 2 6] Before we go any further on the biblical scriptural side of things, let's have a look at some of the dictionary definitions of the word grace. So Anne, if I could have the first part of the PowerPoint, please.

Smoothness and elegance of movement. I won't try and demonstrate that. A short prayer of thanks said before or after a meal, which I was tempted to go down a rabbit hole and find out where that came from and why, but I didn't. Used as a form of address to a duke, duchess or archbishop.

In Greek mythology, there are three graces. Forgive the pronunciation if it's incorrect. Euphrosyne, Aglaia and Thalia, representing charm, grace and beauty, which you probably see better looking around the congregation than up here. Thank you for overlaught.

Courteous, goodwill. The free and unmerited favour of God, which is probably a definition we're most used to as Christians. A period officially allowed for payment of a debt of fulfilment of some obligation.

And bring honour or credit to someone or something by one's attendance or participation. So to grace something with your presence.

[4 : 57] It usually implies that the person gracing and a function with their presence is above that, but we're gracing you with our presence. I'm not sure that that's necessarily what God thinks of when he attends us.

He's not condescending to us when he comes alongside us. In his grace. I think we can safely ignore the first four of those dictionary definitions.

But I hope that by looking at some of the uses of the word grace in the New Testament, we will see elements of the latter four being demonstrated. In other words, the unmerited favour of God.

The grace period where things are not demanded of us straight away. Of being honoured by one's presence or giving honour by being present in someone's life.

And of course, courteous goodwill as a very basic building block of relationships with each other. In the New Testament, the word grace is used over 140 times.

[6 : 04] The majority of those times are used by Paul in his writings. And the Greek word is spelt C-H-A-R-I-S, but is pronounced charis, as in where we get the word charisma and charismatic from.

And in the Greek, it really means goodwill, loving kindness or favour. And who wouldn't want to grow in the goodwill, the loving kindness or favour of God?

Interestingly, well to me, maybe not to you, when I read a number of the different verses and passages where grace is used, I sometimes found it difficult to get a concrete understanding of what was meant.

And often felt more of a sense of the meaning of what was being said. And I was comforted to see that a number of different commentators, where I looked up sermons on grace, expressed a similar frustration, as it were.

And that it was difficult sometimes to pin down exactly what was meant by grace, as opposed to just a feeling of grace, and that grace was good and important, helpful and necessary.

[7 : 27] So, with what might seem like a promise of vagueness, let's look at a few of the New Testament verses to see how different aspects of the meaning of grace are seen.

So, in two sets of three. In Ephesians 2, For by grace you have been saved, through faith, through grace, God's favour, unmerited reward, not through things we have done.

Romans 5, Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more. That sense of grace being patient, and not demanding the penalty of sin, but allowing us time to repent.

In 2 Corinthians, My grace is sufficient for you. When Paul talks about the thorn in his side, and we're never told whether that's metaphorical or literal, or what it really means, or how God's grace works in that situation.

But there is a sense of, if God's grace is with you, then we can cope, we can manage. Acts 15, Why are you placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples?

[8 : 46] We will believe we will be saved through grace, and not by observing the law. For no one can fulfil the law perfectly. In 1 Corinthians, By the grace of God, I am what I am.

I won't try and sing it, I am what I am. It's usually a declaration of, Take me as you see me. Take me or leave me. This is me.

This is how I've always been. But that's not what it's saying here. By the grace of God, I am what I am now, and not what I used to be.

I am now saved. I used to be unsaved. It's an acknowledgement that God has been at work in his life, in our lives.

I am what I am now, because of the grace of God. If it wasn't for the grace of God, I'm sure I'd be far worse, is the implication. The grace of God, that has the ability to change our thoughts, and our attitudes, and our behaviours, from Paul, who was persecuting the Christians, to now being the main proponent, of the gospel of Christ.

[10 : 04] And following on from that as well, Titus 2 verse 11, for the grace of God has appeared, that offers salvation to all people. That grace personified in Jesus Christ, has appeared, and offers salvation to all people.

So, having looked at some of the meanings, behind the word grace, and its use in scripture, what does it actually mean to grow in grace?

And this is where in a minute, I'm going to go back to the two acronyms, I mentioned at the start. God's riches at Christ's expense, and God requires a Christian example.

And as I said, I think it's legitimate to choose both, because we can grow in both experience of something, but also in expression of it.

In fact, at various times in the Bible, it is both implicit, and other times explicit, that what we know and experience of God, is not just for ourselves, but is to be shared with other people.

[11 : 16] And almost if we do not share it with other people, then actually we are not truly of Christ, and do not truly understand grace. A couple of illustrations.

For example, if you're a fan of a particular football club, you will want to watch their matches, read about the players, maybe buy the branded merchandise, visit their stadium, be involved in the atmosphere at the matches.

You'll probably want to watch with other people, and not on your own, talk and discuss what you've seen. Maybe even argue with supporters of rival teams. The more you watch, the more you read, the more you'll find you will want to talk about it, and be involved in the match day build-up, and the match itself.

And similarly, if you are a more creative type, maybe you're a chef or a baker, you're likely to want to seek out new recipes, or ingredients, and maybe try new techniques.

No doubt, you will also want to eat what you have created, and experience it for yourself. But I'm sure you will also want others to eat, and enjoy what you have created as well.

[12 : 34] And in the same way, I think that to grow in grace means both to experience more of God's loving kindness, goodwill, and favour, that charis word, but also to express more loving kindness, goodwill, and favour to other people.

Returning to the better known acronym, God's riches, what are the riches of God that Jesus' death and resurrection have enabled us to tap into?

It's a snappy little acronym. God's riches at Christ's expense, but it needs a bit of digging. In other words, what does God possess in abundance our riches, what we have in abundance, our riches, what we have that is of value?

What does God possess in abundance? What does he possess of value that we might want to share in? I would say the following list includes some of those things, but it's not exclusive or exhaustive.

And we've got the next PowerPoint coming through, please. Love. God has an abundance of love, and love is really something I'm sure we all value.

- [14 : 05] John 4, 16. We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. And whoever, God is love. And whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him.
- peace. And whoever is peace. Peace. Psalm 29, 11. The Lord blesses his people with peace, both individually and corporately.
- And as we look at Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, all these places where groups of people need to know his peace.
- Mercy in Lamentations, the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercy never comes to an end. Like the children's song we sing, mercy is when God doesn't give us what we do deserve, which is death and punishment and separation.
- Grace is when he gives us what we don't actually deserve. Forgiveness in Psalm 103. As far as the East is from the West, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
- [15 : 28] If they're that far away, they can no longer have an effect on us. Faithfulness to Timothy. If we are faithless, God remains faithful.
- For he cannot disown himself. Self-control from Psalm 103 again. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger.
- How many of us have a short fuse that God is an example of someone who is slow to anger and abounding in mercy?
- Honesty. In Numbers, God is not a man that he should lie, nor a son of man that he should change his mind.
- I've not written it there, but I think it goes on to say, God has spoken and it will happen. integrity and compassion in Exodus 33.
- [16 : 28] And the Lord said, I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.
- Now I used to sometimes think, that's a bit capricious, that's a little bit, oh, I have compassion on whom I decide to have compassion on.
- Not for you to tell me who to have compassion on, but that's not what it means. What it means is, I will have compassion when I've said I will have compassion.
- I will not change my mind. I will maintain my integrity. I will have mercy on those on whom I have said I will have mercy.
- I won't suddenly withdraw it. It's not capricious, it's a sure promise. And those are definitely, I would say, some of the important elements of grace, the spiritual blessings and riches that the Lord has, that we need.
- [17 : 42] to experience, and we need to demonstrate and share. To grow in grace, then, we need to experience these things in our relationship with the Heavenly Father.
- And we must also practice them in our relationships with each other. Perhaps the more perceptive of you will have spotted that a number of these attributes are strikingly similar to the fruit of the Spirit as listed in Galatians 5.
- And like my aforementioned football fan or chef, to know and experience more involves some sort of action on our part.
- It doesn't all happen automatically. The football players don't come and play football in your back garden. the ingredients don't magically appear in your fridge and larder.
- Recipes don't generally get posted through your litter box. for us as Christians I would suggest that to work on growing in grace means that we need to read the Bible and make sure we understand what is written by reading commentaries and study books.

[19 : 08] To read biographies of Christians that have gone before and learn from the example of their lives. Discussing scriptures with other people because they can give us insights and maybe we can give them insights and help clear up between us any incorrect thinking that we have.

It means relating with other people so that through us whether they are Christians or not they can receive a measure of grace of God because of our presence and work in their lives.

It means praying together. I would suggest it means eating together because that is often when the best fellowship happens and it means not giving up on meeting together because none of this can be done in isolation.

So let us seek to grow in the grace of God God. The verse reads like it's an order. Grow in the grace of God.

You better grow in the grace of God or else. But it's not like that. It's an encouragement. Grow in the grace of God because his grace is so rich. And share that with other people because they need to know God's richness of grace in their lives too.

[20 : 38] Amen. Amen.