

INTRODUCTION

We’re continuing our verse by verse study of 2 Corinthians called “Hope for Cracked Pots.” Today I’m going to talk to you about “God’s Expanding Grace.” What are some of the adjectives that you have heard for God’s grace? Amazing. Rich. Free. Matchless. Marvelous. But have you ever heard the term “God’s Expanding Grace?” I hope that’s a new term for you. It is for me. In fact when I Googled “God’s Expanding Grace” I only got one hit, and it was a German writer comparing God’s grace to expanding cracks in a mirror. I’m talking about something much bigger than that!

The Hubble telescope was named for Edwin Hubble a leading astronomer. In 1929 Hubble made an amazing discovery about our universe that has formed the basis of modern astronomy, cosmology, and physics. “Working at Carnegie Observatories in Pasadena, California, Hubble measured the redshifts of a number of distant galaxies. He also measured their relative distances by measuring the apparent brightness of a class of variable stars called Cepheids in each galaxy. When he plotted redshift against relative distance, he found that the redshift of distant galaxies increased as a linear function of their distance. The only explanation for this observation is that the universe was expanding.” (from <http://cas.sdss.org/dr6/en/astro/universe/universe.asp>)

Because the universe is expanding, it’s impossible to answer the question, “How big is the Universe?” The Universe was created by God and the Bible says He measures the heavens with the span of His hand. Like the Universe around us, God’s grace can’t be measured either. It isn’t static: It is ever-expanding. I hope after this message you’ll have a new appreciation for God’s Expanding Grace. Maybe one of you can write a new song, “Expanding Grace how Full and Free, that comes to you and me...”

Here’s what Paul had to say about God’s grace in 2 Corinthians 4:13-15:

“It is written: ‘I believed; therefore I have spoken [Psalm 116:10].’ With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.”

When Paul wrote these words the estimated world population was 300 million, about the number of people in America today. But there was enough of God’s grace for 300 million people. God’s grace has continued to expand for more and more people. Today, there are 6 billion people on the planet and there’s still enough of God’s grace for everyone. In addition to God’s grace expanding to more and more people, we’re going to learn that, like the Universe, God’s grace is continuing to expand for each of us as well.

I like the way Eugene Peterson paraphrases the verse about God’s expanding grace: “What we believe is that the One who raised up the Master Jesus will just as certainly raise us up with you, alive. Every detail works to your advantage and to God’s glory: more and more grace, more and more people, more and more praise!” (2 Corinthians 4:15 *The Message*)

This is going to be a different message in several respects. First, I’m going to talk to you about something that I suspect most of you have never considered before. Second, although the message has three main points, I’m only going to spend a couple of minutes on the first two so we can devote most of our time to the third point. I want to talk to you about God’s grace in three tenses: Past, present, and future.

1. I HAVE BEEN SET FREE BY PAST GRACE!

Now you shouldn’t have any trouble understanding past grace, because when most people think about grace they think about what God has done for us in the past. We think about how we were saved (past tense) by grace. Here are some verses that highlight past grace. “God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.” (Ephesians 2:4-5) If you know anything about grace, you know that it is totally undeserved. We don’t *earn* grace; it is a gift God gives us.

“He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.” (2 Timothy 1:9) Grace didn’t just start on the cross. God enacted grace for you even before the beginning of time. Before you were saved by God’s grace, you were in bondage to sin and death. But by receiving the free gift of eternal life, you have been liberated from the penalty of sin. Praise God for His past grace!

2. I NOW STAND FIRM IN PRESENT GRACE!

Past grace touched your life when Jesus died on the cross. It changed your life when you were saved. But God’s grace doesn’t end when you were saved. His grace continues to have an effect on your life. If you are saved, then God’s grace is still saving you at this very moment. The Bible says that we stand in this grace. “We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.” (Romans 5:1-2)

God’s grace is operating right now. You needed God’s grace back then when you accepted Christ, but you need it just as much at this second as well. The only person who doesn’t need God’s grace at this second is the person who never sins. Does anyone here qualify?

One of my exercise songs on my iPod shuffle is an old song by DC Talk. The lyrics say, “The disease of self runs through my blood; it’s a cancer fatal to my soul; every attempt on my behalf has failed to bring this sickness under control; Tell me, what’s going on inside of me? I despise my own behavior; this only confirms my suspicions; that I’m still a man in need of a Savior.” I need a Savior right now just as much as I did when I was 11 years old. That’s present grace.

3. I LIVE BY FAITH IN FUTURE GRACE!

I’m curious; how many of you have ever heard the term “future grace?” Wonderful! Because many times when you come to church you hear the same old stuff over and over. I’m excited to

be able to teach you something new. I hadn’t ever considered “future grace” myself until someone gave me a book by John Piper a few weeks ago.

John Piper is a prolific writer and the Pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis. He defines future grace this way: “What is future grace? It is all that God promises to be for us from this second on. Saving faith means being confident and satisfied in this ever-arriving future grace. Gratitude for past grace was never meant to empower future obedience. Tomorrow’s crisis demands tomorrow’s grace. And faith that future grace will be there is the victory that overcomes the world.” (*Future Grace*)

So you may wonder what the importance of understanding future grace is. Let me answer that by sharing a true story with you. In his book, *To End all Wars*, Ernest Gordon writes about a group of Allied POWs in World War II who were being forced by the Japanese to build the Burma Railway. This scene is unforgettable because of the movie by the same name.

The day’s work had ended; the tools were being counted, as usual. As the party was about to be dismissed, the Japanese guard shouted that a shovel was missing. He insisted that someone had stolen it to sell to the Thais. Striding up and down before the men, he ranted and denounced them for their wickedness, and most unforgivable of all their ingratitude to the Emperor. As he raved, he worked himself up into a paranoid fury. Screaming in broken English, he demanded that the guilty one step forward to take his punishment. No one moved; the guard’s rage reached new heights of violence. “All die! All die!” he shrieked.

To show that he meant what he said, he cocked his rifle, put it to his shoulder and looked down the sights, ready to fire at the first man in the line. At that moment the Argyll (Highlander) stepped forward, stood stiffly to attention, and said calmly, “I did it.”

The guard unleashed all this whipped-up hate; he kicked the helpless prisoner and beat him with his fists. Still the Argyll stood rigidly at attention, with the blood streaming down his face. His silence goaded the guard to an excessive rage. Seizing his rifle by the barrel, he lifted it high over his head and with a final howl, brought it down on the skull of the Argyll, who sank limply to the ground and did not move. Although it was perfectly clear he was dead, the guard continued to beat him and stopped only when exhausted.

The men of the detail picked up their comrade’s body, shouldered their tools and marched back to camp. When the tools were counted again at the guard house, no shovel was missing. (pp. 102-103)

This brave soldier had obviously given his life for his friends. He took a punishment he didn’t deserve so that his fellow soldiers could live. We honor that kind of unselfish sacrifice.

But the question I want you to consider is this: What motivated him to that act of sacrifice? Some would say it was his absolute devotion to duty. But others would say, and I would agree, that this is the kind of love that faith in future grace releases.

We won’t know what motivated him until we get to ask him in heaven, but this illustrates what I hope to teach you about the value of future grace. What is your motivation to serve God? Do you serve God out of a sense of duty; duty because of the past grace that you have received? Or do you serve God out of a sense of love, because of your faith in His future grace? I believe most Christians are serving God out of a sense of obligation rather than out of a sense of love.

Here’s a statement that expresses what I believe is the wrong motivation for serving God: “Because of God’s grace, I must do everything I can to pay Him back.”

Salvation by grace is a gift. In our modern culture, we have destroyed the true nature of gift-giving because of something we call reciprocity. If someone gives you a birthday gift, you feel obligated to give them a gift on their birthday—not only that, but you’re going to evaluate the approximate *cost* of the gift you were given and purchase one for them that costs about the same. It works in reverse as well. When we give someone a birthday present, we almost expect them to give us one as well. If we don’t get one from them we think, “Huh! That’s the last time I’m giving them a birthday present!” I don’t know what you call all that, but it totally corrupts the true meaning of a GIFT. We do the same thing with hospitality. Jim and Joan invited us over to their house, so we’ve got to invite them to have dinner with us. You do that a few times, and you find yourself asking, “Let’s see, whose turn is it now?” True hospitality invites guests with no thought of whether or not you’ll be invited in return.

The Bible says, “The wages of sin is death, but the GIFT of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 6:23) Just as there’s nothing you can do for God to earn the gift, there’s nothing you can do for God to repay the gift. There’s a word for trying to impress God by what you do; it’s call legalism.

Where did we get this faulty idea that I must repay God? Well, some of it comes from bad songs. Don’t misunderstand me, I love the old hymns. But when we talk about the “great old hymns” not all of them were all that great, theologically. Of course, the same could be said of some of the new choruses, just because a song is pretty and mentions God doesn’t mean it’s theologically correct.

For instance consider some of the old songs that support this “payback” performance attitude. Robert Robinson wrote a song, “Come Thou Fount.” One of the verses says, “O to grace how great a debtor/ daily I’m constrained to be.” A debtor is someone who owes someone and is obligated to pay them back. Do you ever feel constrained to pay God back for His grace?

Another old song was written by Frances Havergill, has Jesus saying, “I gave, I gave my life for thee; what hast thou given for me?...I bring, I bring rich gifts to thee; what has thou given to me?” Frankly, whenever I sang those words, I felt that I was definitely lagging behind on my end of the deal.

But that’s just it—it isn’t a deal. God doesn’t say, “I’ll give you this grace, if you’ll do this for me.” God offers us His grace because that is His nature. Perhaps this additional quote from Piper’s book, *Future Grace*, will help you understand what I’m trying to communicate: “We are spring-loaded to conceive of our relationship to God in terms that focus on what He has done for

us in the past and what we must now do for Him in the future by way of repayment. The effort to repay God, in the ordinary way we pay creditors, would nullify grace and turn it into a business transaction. If we see acts of obedience as installment payments, we make grace into a mortgage ... Let us not say that grace creates debts; let us say that grace pays debts. Past grace is glorified by intense and joyful gratitude. Future grace is glorified by intense and joyful confidence."
(*Future Grace*)

Serving God out of sense of personal obligation highlights the power of your own resolve. But serving God out of a pure sense of love for Him highlights God's glory. God always honors the pathway that brings Him the greatest glory!

Now, that's *what* future grace is. Now I want to show you how God's promises are activated by faith in future grace. Think of faith in future grace as a PIN number. When you use an ATM you are asked to give your PIN, personal identification number. You may have money in your account, but you can't access it unless you program in your PIN. The multiple promises of God are available to you, but you can't access them until you activate faith in future grace. There are over 4,000 promises God has made in His Word, so let me illustrate future grace by talking about just three promises.

(1) The promise of God's presence overcomes my weakness

Paul struggled with something he called a "thorn in the flesh." We don't know what it was, but it was something painful in his life that weakened him. He asked God to take it away three times, and God didn't remove the thorn, instead God said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9). This is a perfect example of future grace. When you are hurting and struggling, you have to decide what to do in the face of your weakness. Will you give in to the temptation to sit down and quit, or sit it out and watch? Or do you truly believe God's grace IS sufficient for this second...and this next minute...and this next day—so you get up and keep on serving God in spite of your weakness?

This may sound a little harsh, so prepare to be stretched a little. The opposite of future grace is unbelief. If you say, "I know you SAY your grace is sufficient God, but you don't know my problems." Oh yes He *does* know your problems. Rejection of future grace is unbelief that says, "I just don't BELIEVE your grace is sufficient!"

(2) The promise of God's supply calms my anxiety

God has clearly commanded us NOT to worry or be anxious because He has promised to meet our needs now and in the future. Jesus said, "Do not worry saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them." Paul wrote, "For my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus." (Matthew 6:31; Philippians 4:19)

Worry, or anxiety, is the root sin that feeds the fruit of other sins. Fear is the open fruit of unbelief that stems from the worry that God can't be trusted to take care of me. Greed is the open sin of unbelief that stems from the anxiety that God really won't meet my needs, so I must hoard

as much as I can for the rainy days ahead. I remember Jack Taylor saying one time, "If you're the kind who hoards and saves for a rainy day, God just might see that you have one!"

Weak faith sees the resources of God as a pond that is depleted whenever we take a drink out of it. Faith in future grace sees God's promises as a mighty river that is going to never dry up.

(3) The promise of God's goodness secures my future

"Surely, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (Psalm 23:6) We live in a time when there is a tremendous emphasis on security. Because of crime, there are more security guards, and home security companies than ever. Because of the presence of terrorism, we have a huge government agency called the Department of Homeland Security. We have more security measures than ever before, yet people feel less secure than ever before. The only true security you'll ever find is in the goodness and mercy of God. I know it sounds cheesy, but it's true. I don't have to know what the future holds, because I really do know Who holds the future. I've read the final chapter and we win!

Pastor Jack Hyles used to tell story about a woman who attended their church who often came up to him with a frightened look on her face and said, "Pastor, there are two strange men who followed me to church and they're in the back now waiting for me. When I walk home they follow me home. I'm terribly frightened!" Pastor Hyles said for the first few times she mentioned the two men, he looked and couldn't see them, and even asked the woman to point them out, but she was afraid to look for them." She continued to complain to him about the two men following her. Finally Dr. Hyles said he realized it wasn't that there were men there, it was that the woman "was not all there" herself. There weren't two men following her, but she truly believed they were there, so she was afraid. So Dr. Hyles said, "Oh, you mean, THOSE men? I know who they are. One of them is named "goodness" and the other one is "mercy." Let's look here in your Bible at Psalm 23:6. It says, "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life." So you don't have to be afraid of them. The woman smiled and never bothered Dr. Hyles again with her complaint!

She saw something that wasn't there. Isn't that faith? "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." (Hebrews 11:1) You can't see it with these eyes, but you should see them with eyes of faith; God's goodness and mercy are with you all the days of your life! And when this life is over, you'll dwell in the house of the Lord forever. That's future grace.

CONCLUSION

Are you still scratching your head trying to figure out the difference between past, present, and future grace? Let me simplify it with one of the old hymns that does qualify as one of the great ones. Maybe you've heard of it. Past grace is expressed in these words: Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me...How precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believed. Present grace is expressed in these words: Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; 'tis grace hath brought me safe thus far. Now, here's future grace: And grace will lead me home!

So how many of you now have heard about future grace? Jesus said when you pour new wine (truth) into old wine skins, you usually have quite a bit of spillage. Man, I can just hear wine skins stretching, popping, and groaning all over this room! I know this may be a new concept for you, but don't let your hard, old wineskin keep you from accepting it! Keep your mind open, supple, and fillable. In other words, maintain a teachable spirit. God's grace is too big to be confined to the past and the present. There's *more* of His grace yet to come than we can imagine.

Whenever you are confronted with a promise of God, you are faced with the choice of unbelief or putting your faith in future grace. Do you know why you can never repay God for His grace? Because you haven't received all of His grace yet! That's why I entitled this message God's expanding grace. Not only is God's grace expanding all over the world, God's grace continues to expand to you and to me. Don't think of God's grace as some kind of a water fountain that you sip from sparingly. Instead think of God's grace as a Niagara Falls of more and more grace cascading continually into your life. That's future grace!

You may choose to stand over on the shore of unbelief and be sprinkled with an occasional stray drop of grace and wait until the final flow of grace that takes you to heaven. Or you can choose to stand under the continual waterfall of God's amazing, expanding grace! I know where I'm going to stand!

OUTLINE

1. I HAVE BEEN SET FREE BY PAST GRACE!

“God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.” *Ephesians 2:4-5*

“He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.” *2 Timothy 1:9*

2. I NOW STAND FIRM IN PRESENT GRACE!

“We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.” *Romans 5:1-2*

3. I LIVE BY FAITH IN FUTURE GRACE!

“What is future grace? It is all that God promises to be for us from this second on. Saving faith means being confident and satisfied in this ever-arriving future grace. Gratitude for past grace was never meant to empower future obedience. Tomorrow’s crisis demands tomorrow’s grace. And faith that future grace will be there is the victory that overcomes the world.” (John Piper, *Future Grace*)

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(3) goodness secures my future

“Surely, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” *Psalms 23:6*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes