

# GOD'S ACTIVE GRACE

BY CARL MCMURRAY

Grace can be defined in a variety of ways. It is being given what one does not deserve. It is a gift. When it comes to God, it is both these things summed up as God's favor. The scripture is very clear that this gift is not earned, such as in the following passage, *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* (Ephesians 2:8-9 ESV) While it cannot be earned however, there is a proper way to respond to it, so as to receive it fully. Even a gift can be refused, whether by outright rejection or by ignorance. Thus it behooves us to know how to properly receive God's favor, His gift, so that we might prosper thereby.

**One way to receive the grace of God properly is to show it in our lives.** This is demonstrated on the occasion of Barnabus being sent to check out reports of a new congregation growing in Antioch. *When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose,* (Acts 11:23 ESV) Whatever Barnabus saw in the worship, teaching, joy, and practices of the church in Antioch 1) caused him to be glad, and 2) is described as the grace of God. Grace was observable. God's grace should be observable in our life as well. If people are around us for any length of time without coming to notice some grand difference between us and the rest of the world, perhaps we had better stop and check ourselves to see whether we have indeed accepted the grace of God ourselves.

Another fact about receiving the grace of God is that **it must be continued in.** We see this in Acts 14. *And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.* (Acts 13:43 ESV) Here, the grace of God was a learning process that needed to be continued in. It is not simply being baptized and then going on with our lives. The child of God who wishes to remain in God's favor must continue and be faithful. Is it any wonder that the Lord said, *Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not what I say?* It is not enough to call God our Father, we must continue to seek His desire for our lives.

Thirdly, Peter indicates that **we must grow in grace,** according to 2 Peter 3. *But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity.* (2 Peter 3:18 ESV) Just like Jesus, as a young boy, grew in favor with God and man, so we too can grow in the favor of God. We grow in grace as we grow in knowledge. As we learn more about the Lord's will and our own human nature and the struggle between the two we are able to grow in God's favor by overcoming sin more and more. We are more able to be conformed to the image of Jesus and show him in our lives.

Let's not overlook however, that **we CAN receive the grace of God in vain.** 2 Cor. 6:1. When we become guilty of ... *quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder* (2 Corinthians 12:20 ESV) then our behaviour become inappropriate for a child of God who walks in grace. We have

received the favor of God to no good end, no lasting change in our life, attitude, practices, or worship. Indeed, we have received it in “vain”, that is, to no account, no effect, in an empty way, or to no good use. Grace then becomes a new car with no key to make it run. It is a million dollar gift certificate that cannot be cashed.

Grace is also something that **once received, can be fallen away from**. The Christians in the Galatians churches were seeking to turn back to Moses and the Old Law with its practices. Paul told them, *You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.* (Galatians 5:4 ESV) Although many today would deny that one can truly fall from grace, the apostle definitely states that possibility. Among most of us today there is little danger of one turning back to the Old Law and falling from grace that way, however there is a great temptation that often comes to us to turn back to the world, the old practices, the traditions we were raised in. We need to remember that when we accept grace we have accepted Jesus as our Lord and Master, and when we turn in any direction from Him we have fallen from grace, fallen from God’s favor.

Titus 2:11-12 teaches us, *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,* As we receive the grace of God in the gospel of Christ through repentance and obedient baptism let us be determined that this is not our final step, but our first one to learning about God’s will for our lives. Let us determine that we will continue in it, to grow in it, and develop ourselves as servants of the Master. Make sure that we have not received the grace of God in vain by our faithfulness to His word and determine that we will NOT fall away by turning back, but will keep our eyes on the goal before us, Jesus Christ the righteous one. In so doing, the grace of God becomes truly the favor of God and an eternal reward is assured us.