

Future Grace

In the New Testament, grace is usually mentioned as something in the past for those who have been saved through faith, or something that can be appropriated in the present for Christian living. However, there are some passages that state or imply a future experience of God's grace. What does this mean for those of us who have believed?

The scope of God's grace

God's grace initiated our salvation before time (Eph. 1:4-6). His grace brought us salvation when we believed in Jesus Christ as Savior (Eph. 2:8-9). His grace also helps us grow in our relationship to God (Acts 20:23). But the Bible says that grace is also a part of our future experience. God's grace is so great, so pervasive, that it encompasses all of the Christian's experience from beginning to end.

The fact of future grace

First Peter 1:13 speaks of grace that awaits the Christian in the future: *"Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."* Several things emerge from this verse. First, there will be a future experience of grace. Second, grace will be experienced at the revelation of Jesus Christ, which speaks of the time He will return for His church. Third, this future grace is a basis for hope and encouragement.

Another passage that speaks of future grace is Ephesians 2:7. We have God's promise *"that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."*

The need for future grace

Why would a believer need grace in the future? We believe God's grace is important in our past to justify us, and in the present to sanctify us, but why is it needed in the future since an eternity with God is guaranteed (Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30)?

A likely need in the future will be for a measure of God's forgiving grace and mercy at or after the judgment seat of Christ. The judgment seat of Christ is a doctrine that pervades the teaching of the New Testament. At the judgment seat of Christ believers will give an account for the things they have done in this present life. Some passages promise rewards for faithfulness and good works, but some passages indicate at least a loss of rewards for unfaithfulness or misconduct (e.g. Matt. 12:36; 16:27; Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 4:3-5; 2 Cor. 5:10-11; James 2:13; 3:1; 2 Tim. 4:8). We could all certainly use more grace in the future when we account for our lives.

The application of future grace

It is clear that the believer's conduct, whether good or bad, has future consequences at the judgment seat of Christ. But how does each believer's judgment balance out since virtually everyone has done

both good and bad things? Does one sin (or two, or three . . .) however large cancel out the rewards for all the good done? Most believers could cite things from their lives that deserve rewards, but also things that would negate rewards. Only God can and will make the final judgment. The apostle Paul did not trust his own assessment of his motives, much less that of others. He was willing to leave the final assessment to Christ at His judgment seat:

But it is with me a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact I do not even judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God. (1 Cor. 4:3-5)

There are certainly many warnings of negative judgment that should cause Christians to be concerned. While it might be a fearful thing to think of eternal consequences for our times of unfaithfulness (2 Cor. 5:11), in the end, our Judge is the same “God of all Grace” (1 Pet. 5:10) who saved us in the first place. We have not exhausted His grace, because where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more (Rom. 5:20). Forgiveness for our sins is “according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7). Who can measure how much God’s grace abounds or how rich it is?

Conclusion

While a future accounting for our lives at the judgment seat of Christ is a clear biblical teaching, it is less clear exactly how the good and bad that we have done will be assessed and recompensed. There is comfort in the fact that there will be much needed grace for us in the future. In spite of our sin, unfaithfulness, and misconduct, “each one’s praise will come from God” (1 Cor. 4:5). This is not an excuse to sin, but a reason to worship!