

The Age of Grace

In a true relationship of grace with God, nothing depends upon us

Introduction: Our redemption is entirely God's doing

A true relationship with God does not depend on our belief, our faith, our performance, our obedience or our emotional response. Neither does it depend on regular worship, study - or even our prayer, either.

It depends entirely on God's will and purpose because our redemption, no matter who we are or whatever we believe and do, is all his doing. Along with all humanity and the entire universe we have been purchased by the Eternal God to himself through his redeeming act in Jesus Christ, and we're destined to be part of the New Creation.

And since Jesus Christ is the firstfruit of this New Creation, all those subsequently brought to him by the Father and presently hidden with him in God, will be raised up at the Last Day. Jesus loses no one whom the Father gives him. Redemption, therefore, will be fulfilled and all of us will be made new along with, and part of, the new heavens and new earth. And it's all God's doing, not ours. It depends entirely on him, not on us (**John 6:44, 37-40**).

The Age of Grace

During this "Age of Grace" we are brought into a personal relationship with God, initiated by God the Father, established through God the Son and maintained by God the Holy Spirit, who is actively and continuously at work in those that the Father brings to Christ (**John 14:16-18, 16:13-15**).

At this stage, according to the apostles John and Paul, nothing can change or thwart God's purpose in our lives, just as there was no power in heaven or on earth that could thwart God's redemptive purpose in Jesus Christ (**Romans 8:31-39**).

Satan is a spent force and death has been defeated. The cross dealt its deadly penalty exactly on time, and just as God planned from the beginning, he used the very act of man's ultimate sin in crucifying their Creator to bring about the redemption, and the subsequent offer of individual salvation, to all humanity.

The "Age of Grace" commenced precisely in accordance with God's predetermined purpose and it includes the whole universe and all that it contains (**Ephesians 1:4-14**). "In the dispensation of the fullness of the times all things will be gathered together in Jesus Christ (verse 10)," and nothing can, or will, change that purpose. And thankfully none of it depends on us, either. It is the "zeal of the Lord of hosts that will accomplish this."

Accepting the gift of grace

Meanwhile, each of us wrestles with our daily life, aware of our shortcomings and sin, beset by physical ailments and the anxieties of living in this modern society.

Perhaps, then, it's only occasionally that we grasp the overwhelming reality and joy of what God has actually done for us, continues to do and will finally accomplish in Christ Jesus. Perhaps we think God's astounding gift of grace is simply too good to be true, too. But pride will do that to us. It lurks in the human psyche, telling us that we must contribute in some way, or that we must "pay our dues" to justify and maintain our relationship with God.

So, off we go with the greatest of intentions, determined to pray more, study more, obey more, evangelize more, worship more, praise more, sing more or whatever it is that we think will please God and vindicate us as "Christians." But it's in the very act of

performing these things that we fly in the face of the plain command of our Saviour to “renounce our lives.” It’s not our works, our self-respect or our reputation we’re trying to promote. All God asks us to do is simply accept into our empty hands the gift of grace, and let Jesus Christ accomplish all that we need, and cannot do ourselves, in us.

Responding to the gift of grace

Since everything we need in the Age of Grace is accomplished by Christ, do we sit back and do nothing, then? To even think that, though, would suggest the Father has not yet given us to Jesus Christ because even a tenuous grasp of the reality of grace will evoke an overwhelming response in us.

Our motivation changes, for instance. Instead of wanting to pay for grace, we desire instead, to give of ourselves without conditions or expectations. From this springs love for God and neighbour, heartfelt prayer focused away from the self, and genuine praise and worship. Our hearts are changed and our lives are redirected and lived in a way that God can point to in bringing others into the Body of Christ.

Most amazing of all, we see that even the desire we have and the outflow arising from it is also the personal act of Jesus Christ in our place and on our behalf as he lives in us. It’s not us giving our lives, it’s he who purchased us, and he, therefore, who brings about the death of our pride, the need to justify ourselves before God and the dread that we may not be “doing” enough. It’s just as he promised in **Matthew 11:28**, “Come to me, you who are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” It’s from him that we receive the “peace of God which transcends all understanding,” **Philippians 4:7**.

What is our response, then? It is simply to trust him.

Conclusion

Paul tells us from his own life and in **Romans 6** how God takes our sin-dead lives and makes us alive again in Christ, **verse 11**. It’s all God’s doing. God does it all on his own, without any help from us! He then picks us up and sets us down in the highest heaven in company with Jesus our Messiah.

Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It’s God’s gift from start to finish!

We don’t play a major role. If we did, we’d probably go around bragging about what we’d done. But we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and the saving without help from us. He creates each of us in Christ Jesus to be with him in the work that he does, work that God “prepared in advance for us to do (**Ephesians 2:10**).” This is the new way of life we now live. Enjoy the trip!