

2 Complete Grace

Grace, God's undeserved kindness of salvation, is something every Christian loves dearly. Think of the characters of the Bible—Mary and Joseph, Abraham and Sarah, Jacob, Joseph, Ruth, David, Daniel, Peter, John, Paul. All received the grace of God. But some Christians struggle with their own end of the deal. Faith and Trust are the same words in Greek and Hebrew. What if I'm not too trusting? Deep down they hope God is not just some kind of made-up figure that naïve people believe in. Maybe He exists and maybe he is Lord of all, but does he care about me? Why am I the only one of my age who isn't married yet? How come I got laid off? Why did my health go bad? Why did my kids abandon the faith? I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Phil.4:13) but sometimes I wonder what He can do with me. Perhaps many regular church attenders have doubts like this too.

You're not alone in agonizing with God. David in the Psalms wrote about it, "*How long, Lord, how long? I am worn out from my groaning. All night I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears.*" Psalm 6:3,6 Habakkuk said it too, "*How long, Lord must I call for help, but you do not listen?...Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?*" Habbakuk 1:2,3.

Mercy is not getting what you deserve. Grace is getting what you don't deserve, including God's salvation. But what we really struggle with is God's Love. Does He consider me? "*But Zion [Israel] said, 'God has forgotten me.' Can a woman forget her nursing child that she have no compassion on the firstborn son of her womb? Even these may forget but I will not forget you. See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.*" Is. 49:14-16. (Have Jesus show you His hands some day in heaven.) "*Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you.*" Jer.1:5. Yet how can He love someone as messed up as me? Simple answer: Because He is God. We must get away from thinking any of this is our own doing. It's not about you; it's about Him. Should He suddenly appear to Saul of Tarsus amidst seething hate, intent on killing Christians, He can and did. "Love that found me, wondrous thought! Found me when I sought Him not,"

God loves you from before time began. He sent His only Son to die for you and pay for your sins. He gives you faith to believe as a free gift. His Spirit indwells you, quite stunningly in a relationship with Himself. He adopts you as His own child, seals you with His Spirit, and will take you home. This is what Lutherans believe and it gives one a peace that passes all understanding. But does God really say this? In Ephesians 2:8,9, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that, not your own doing; it is the gift of God.*" The Greek word *that* refers to all the previous nouns—the grace, the saving, the faith. Everything was a gift from God. It doesn't go away. "*In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation and believed in Him were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,*" Eph. 1:13. God has done it all.

Yeah, but what if I screw it up? Consult the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32).

What's this like? Luther had a story. Imagine you are a child and you pushed your brother down the stairs and he broke his neck. You are mortified over this. What will your father say? Will he say, 'Get out of my life. I never want to see you again—you killed my son!?' Apprehensively you go in to see your father and just as you open your mouth to try to explain, in bounds your brother. He's perfectly okay! And he takes over pleading for you with Dad. You had nothing to do with your salvation! So encourage your fellow Christians by asking them, "When you came to faith, who gave it to you, and the faith to believe?" It's God, is it not! Luther concluded, "*If you believe it, you've got it.*"

This is enormously assuring. Don't worry about what you have done. You did nothing! Don't worry about the sincerity of some prayer done long ago when you first believed. Or how well you understood. He's been there beside you from before you were a twinkle in your dad's eye or when your mom started her hope chest at age 5. Faced with COVID or some other terminal thing,

talk it over with Him, “Lord, my life is in your hands. If I have done enough, beam me up! If I have work to do, let’s get cracking!” Lutherans call this Complete Grace.

Faith is a living, daring confidence in God’s Grace, so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times.—Luther