

Theology 101 — Grace
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St. Mark's Episcopal Church
The Reverend Beth Knowlton

From the Catechism

Q	What is grace?
A	Grace is God's favor towards us, unearned and undeserved; by grace God forgives our sins, enlightens our minds, stirs our hearts, and strengthens our wills.

Scriptural Understandings

Hebrew Scriptures

- The *hesed* of Yahweh
- Activity of love towards humanity
 - Action rather than thought or psychological state
 - Often involves deliverance or protection
 - Performed within an existing relationship (covenant)
 - Requested or expected of someone superior
 - Cannot be compelled
 - Fulfills an essential need that the person in need cannot meet and for which there is no alternative source of assistance
 - Integral part of Israel's understanding of itself in covenantal relationship
 - In ruptured relationships it is God's gracious and unexpected decision to restore and repair the relationship
 - Divine mercy or compassion is an appropriate part of relationship thought of as grace

New Testament

- Love demonstrated by giving, unmerited divine favor, bestowed on people by God
- Shows up most often in Acts and the Epistles
- It's a central concept in Pauline soteriology

Grace as Divine Help and Empowerment

- Loving help to a person or a people
- God's general blessing towards people
- Comes to those who are in need and humbly approach God for help

Grace as God's Saving Benevolence in Christ

- God's giving of Godself in Christ to effect salvation
- Can also be understood as the act of salvation
- Right relationship with God is wholly due to grace
- Justified by grace as a gift

- Paul was deeply concerned with salvation by God's grace as opposed to works

Grace As Special Endowment for Ministry

- Charis and Charisma to do ministry on God's behalf
- Often used in valuations and benedictions in the early church

Doctrines and Church History

- First attempt to develop a doctrine was Tertullian (160-225)
- Idea of grace as divine energy working in the soul
- Theology of grace developed between controversy between Augustine and Pelagius in West
 - Augustine: Prevenient grace antecedent to conversion, Free gift, subsequent grace
 - Pelagius Grace is not necessary for good action, but assists in performance of God's will
- In Eastern tradition no need to differentiate between free will and grace. Thought both were necessary
- Protestant reformation firmly in the Augustinian camp
- Church of England (39 articles) and Council of Trent was Augustinian, but with modifications
 - Prevenient grace necessary because of fall
 - Cooperation still required and necessary
- Relationship between Grace and the sacraments
 - Allow person to experience grace
 - God's instruments to convey grace
 - Church is the repository of grace and through prayer confers it
- Role of experience of God

“What is grace?” I asked God.

And He said, “All that happens.”

Then He added, when I Looked perplexed,

“Could not lovers Say that every moment in Their Beloved's arms Was grace?

Existence is my arms,

Though I well understand how One can turn Away from Me

Until the heart has wisdom.”

St. John of the Cross (1542-1591)

The Peace of Wild Things

Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.