

## Grace and Mercy: What do They Mean?

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 16 September 2014 10:02

---

Like so many other words and terms, these two words are used in every church and by every sincere believer. But, what do they mean by them? Do they use the words at the right time and for the right reason? Sadly, with repeated use, much of what we say is blasé. And when people are so familiar with something the familiarity can sometimes turn to contempt. I am sure that no true believer wishes to end up with this attitude, so let us look at the two words and find out what scripture says.

In the New Testament we can find 'grace' and 'mercy' associated with 'peace', so we will look at those texts. Does this suggest they have the same meaning? Or, is it that the three have a linked purpose in the mind of God? Or, should we be more sparing with our use of all three, so that each word is used only when it is appropriate? Does one precede the other?

It is my view that when we use words of scripture we should always know (to the best of our ability, with reverent openness to knowledge) what they mean, and that the context we use them in is appropriate.

To put it another way, I can understand people making simple mistakes, but to continually misuse scriptural words and ideas is more akin to abuse or laziness than to faith. It is a sign of carelessness with the things of God. Let us all be more accurate and use words of scripture in the way they were intended to be used.

### Main Texts

Paul wrote to Timothy wishing him the grace, mercy and peace of "God the Father and Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Timothy 1:2, 2 Timothy 1:2). Titus received the same wish (Titus 1:4), and a similar sentiment is found in 2 John 1:3. Hebrews 4:16 contains a differently formatted combination of 'grace' and 'mercy', as does the text of Genesis 19:19. We will give a summary of each, beginning with the example in Genesis.

#### Genesis 19:19

"Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die:"

## Grace and Mercy: What do They Mean?

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 16 September 2014 10:02

---

Lot was told to run from Sodom, with his wife and family. But, he was slow to do so, and the angels who visited him at his home urged them onwards, taking them by their hands, such was the urgency. Lot acknowledged the part of the angels in their safety and deliverance from the death soon to rain down on the wicked men and women of Sodom. He said “thy servant hath found grace in thy sight”. That is, in the sight of the angels as servants of God.

Lot “found” grace, *matsa'*... a verb meaning, in this context, to attain to it. It could mean to get a thing that was sought, but Lot did not seek grace – he only acknowledged it after it was given. There are times when, often through our own stupidity, we are harmed by our choices and fail to live up to our holy status, yet God showers us with His grace nevertheless. (This should never be presumed, especially when we sin and do not repent). The grace Lot experienced was in the ‘sight’ *'ayin*, of the angels – that is, obvious to the mind and eyes of the angels.

What Lot was given was “grace”, *chen*. It means a favour, in this case from God. It also means this favour was precious, pleasant, and even the result of pity on God’s part (root, *chanan*

). The word also implies mercy, though, as we have just noted, Lot did not actually call on God for His help in the situation. Therefore, God’s grace was one-way, given solely because He wished to give it.

*Matsa'*

is akin to the Arabic,

*hanna*

– to feel sympathy, compassion (in this text, for Abraham’s sake).

Thus, in this text we see that God can give or show grace either because a man calls upon Him for help, or just because God wishes to show a person favour for His own purposes. It must be repeated, that no person should presume upon God, expecting Him to save them from bad situations when they bring it upon themselves, or do not live lives that honour the Lord. God gives grace because it is part of His will for a person, a gift that is unmerited, though God can also give grace as a reward for faithfulness.

Lot saw that the angels had saved him and his family, and that it was God’s doing: “thou hast magnified thy mercy”. That is, God’s mercy was *gadal* – important, a great thing done. What is meant by “mercy”, *cheched?* It means goodness or kindness, and faithfulness. It can also mean shame or a reproach, but not in this

## Grace and Mercy: What do They Mean?

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 16 September 2014 10:02

---

context. Another meaning is 'favour', and so we see that the words 'grace' and 'mercy' are closely intertwined being used at the same time.

So, God can show His goodness and kindness to any man or woman, in order to give them a favour. This is entirely in His hands and heart and should never be assumed to be a 'right'. Many today presume upon the Lord because they think they have a 'right' to expect Him to show them favour. God need not show favour to anyone. If He does so it is because of His faithfulness toward us, and His mercy... mercy being an unmerited gift from God, which is what a 'favour' is.

The grace or favour shown by God toward Lot and his family was a heartfelt divine response to a very urgent need (the verb, *hānan*), even though the one being given the favour (an inferior) has no real claim to it. However, different stems of the word have slightly different interpretations, including supplication, though this does not apply in the Lot case, because he did not make supplication. (Note that the verb *hānan* and its derivatives are components of fifty one persons, just as the female name, Hanna, gives us Anna, Ann, Nan, etc. as derivatives).

Mercy is associated with loving-kindness (of God), and theologian Nelson Glueck believed that God's mercy was part of the treaty between himself and Israel. Thus, he said that when God showed mercy it was not mercy in our usual sense of the word, but loyalty based on what He saw as His obligation belonging to His treaty of care towards Israel. Others disagree, however, as do I, for the saving of Lot appears more to do with God's loving-kindness and faithfulness than to do with mere legality. That is, the show of kindness by God was one expression of His holy character. Though it is not particularly evident in the text, this action by God is usually shown towards those who love Him. (There is a great deal more to 'mercy', but the above gives an adequate gist in this general article).

### 1 Timothy 1:2

"Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord."

Christians greet each other well, but do they always mean what they say? Paul did. Paul qualifies Timothy by calling him his "own son in the faith". That is, Timothy was, if you wish, a fellow believer with the same spiritual DNA, hence a 'son' of Paul, brought up in the same beliefs and condition. Paul knew Timothy's spiritual state, and could therefore vouch for him

## Grace and Mercy: What do They Mean?

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 16 September 2014 10:02

---

personally. Can you vouch for all those Christians to whom you offer good wishes? Or, are your good wishes just the 'done thing'? I suspect the latter. Do you qualify those you support or commend, or is it social nicety, because it is expected??

Paul knew the spiritual state of Timothy, so when he commended him to receive "Grace, mercy and peace" it was properly applied. It had to be, because what Paul was wishing Timothy was direct from "God our Father and His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord". Paul, like the Lord, never wasted His words, nor did he commend those who were not worthy to be commended. Does your own commendation or greeting of fellow believers seem trite and superficial by comparison? Probably.

In the text 'grace', *charis*, means a number of things: the merciful kindness of God (note again the close connection between 'grace' and 'mercy'); favour, God's influence on the soul causing it to continually veer towards Christ, strengthening and increasing faith. This leads a person to search after true knowledge, genuine thoughts after God, and the desire to exercise all the virtues he or she should present to God. In turn, these attributes lead to sheer pleasure and delight in God and His things. Do you experience this pleasure and excitement when studying God's word? You should!

The character will become sweet and charming, and show a lovely disposition, including graceful speech... something many Christians need to display in a day when others speak like gutter-snipes, or adopt the language and terms used in questionable TV soaps. The meanings, then, are basically the same as for the Old Testament usage, but expand upon it.

*Charis* is a gift from God, and cannot be demanded (as charismatics tend to do); it is a benefit to those who receive it, and must be used wisely. Sometimes it is a reward for faithfulness, but always it is a gift. This is why the root verb, *chairō*, speaks of rejoicing greatly, and the thriving of the soul. So, while Paul's words certainly are a salutation, it is packed with deep spiritual meaning.

We can see that the Christians who are shown grace by God will not just receive blessings of many kinds; they will also produce in the character and personality evidence of that grace. If they do not, then we should question any claim to receiving grace! This is reasonable (and required).

## Grace and Mercy: What do They Mean?

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 16 September 2014 10:02

---

What of the 'mercy, Paul refers to? Also based on the Old Testament word, *e/leos* expands on it: it means for someone to see the condition of another and to show kindness or good towards him because he is miserable and afflicted. This is general providence, which means God can also show mercy towards the unsaved, for His own reasons. Even allowing them to live is itself a mercy towards unbelievers who might reject the Gospel. This mercy, though, will end at the last day, when such men will be judged and sent to hell, whereas those who are saved will have the 'final mercy' in being given a place in Heaven, a place already assured them by their salvation and relationship with Christ.

Mercy from God is the "outward manifestation of pity" (Vine) shown to those who are in need and who acknowledge it. This is why God showing mercy to an unsaved man is never wasted nor without reason, and is rare. Perhaps the mercy is because a man will come to Christ in the future, or because God wishes that man to have a part in His grace towards a man who accepts Him as Lord. Mercy, then, is a very deep and astonishing gift from God.

Paul adds 'peace' to his salutation. Peace, *eirēnē*, can have a number of meanings, some of which do not apply to an individual, e.g. national tranquillity (which CAN apply to an individual Christian, when a nation follows the Lord and has His laws as its foundation; the nation that strays from God will not know this peace).

In this text 'peace' points to harmony and agreement between individuals: true unity. It is a fact that all believers should have agreement on the things of God, with only slight deviations that do not affect the core meaning. Such harmony means people will live together without discord, and so know a level of security and prosperity. These gifts depend on people being saved (the Messiah's peace); salvation itself lends peace to the soul and contentment with what one has on this earth. This peace extends itself beyond death to Heaven.

The salutation in 2 Timothy 1:2 is a repeat of this original one, so meanings are the same. We can say the same for the entry in Titus 1:4. The text of 2 John 1:3 is the same sentiment with an added "in truth and love", where the preposition 'in' can easily be taken to be 'with' or 'by' etc. That is, the grace, mercy and peace from God are rooted in truth and love. Because of this it will also be exerted by the one receiving these gifts from God: God never gives His gifts emptily or without purpose – they must be used and shown publicly in one's character and actions, which must reflect 'truth and love'... rare attributes amongst Christians today, who are good at saying the right things, but empty when it comes to genuine faith.

## Grace and Mercy: What do They Mean?

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 16 September 2014 10:02

---

The 'truth' Paul speaks of *must be seen* in the brethren. Without this congruence there can be no real fellowship, only a fake, superficial association, which we see much of today.

Truth, *alētheia*, is something rarely found even amongst Christians. This truth is firstly objective, not a mere fantasy or figment of the imagination or emotion. It refers to whatever is true (even if we do not like it); it is reality, a fact, a certainty. Everything said by God is a fact, and whatever He demands or says.

Much of God's truth can be ascertained by human reason and logic. However, unsaved men have an inner hatred for the things of God, so they tend to reject what is patently obvious and true, thereby becoming stupid. True atheists (called 'fools' in scripture) are of this kind, because they reject their own reasoning powers in order to replace truth with a lie, and with their own illusions concerning God.

The truth is everything God says throughout His word\*, which has an unanimous interpretation; there cannot be widely disparate interpretations amongst genuine believers, because every word has a specific meaning. It stands to reason that if 'A' is true, then 'B' is a lie! Sadly, the churches contain many who think they can freely interpret, even though such 'interpretation' is not founded on the word, but on sinful human ideas about the word. (\* See article: '[Doctrine](#)', [A-001](#) ).

Though truth is objective it has a subjective effect on the mind and emotions, by disallowing deceit and lies and embracing what is good, sound and wonderful. Thus, the one who has this truth also *loves* the truth and is always truthful with himself and with others (primary root adjective, *alēthēs*). The second root, *lanthanō*, which is coupled with *alpha*, tells us that the source of truth is God and is hidden to those without Christ. This is why the unsaved who hate God can blatantly object to truth in any subject and use illogic and deceit to get their own ideas across, even when what they say is ridiculous.

Truth is also linked to 'love', which is *agapē* in this text (do not assume that 'love' is always *agapē* — there are many biblical words that refer to 'love'). It is a sad reflection on modern Christians that they simply want 'union' with everyone, regardless of their beliefs or genuineness. This is not how scripture speaks of unity of brethren! To have true union brethren *must* believe the same things, know the truth (not personalised interpretations of truth), and love each

## Grace and Mercy: What do They Mean?

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 16 September 2014 10:02

---

other. Without all three there can be no genuine union, not even with those who claim to be brethren. There are distinct times when one Christian must part from another, or even shun him, on the basis of truth, or bad behaviour, etc.

*Agapē* means to have affection for the brethren, to wish them good-will and to show them kindness... 'brotherly love'. How many brethren display these characteristics? Not many. There is only a superficial skin-deep regard for the sake of false 'unity'. Of course, one can show *agapē*

for the unsaved, too, so it is not an exclusive form of love. And, frankly, one cannot really tell the difference between them in the lives of most Christians, because of their refusal to obey God's commands and to understand what genuine Christian love is. The love in this text refers to God's affection for His chosen people, the elect. It is the same affection we should show to all brethren.

It is an error to refer to this kind of love as 'unconditional' though such a meaning is often applied by those with limited or tainted biblical understanding. The only love that is unconditional, from God to man, is salvation. Every other form of love, including *agapē*, is conditional (on obedience, etc). The word itself is not specifically one of biblical application, for it can be used in many situations. However, it has been taken for Christian use for two millennia. Nor is *agapē* the deepest form of love, hence 'brotherly love'.

A verb (*agapaō*) in the past tense is used in John 3:16. It is past tense because it has always been the case, being ordained by God in eternity. Though it can mean to 'love dearly' (the elect), it is also used in a general way to describe a friendship. While CS Lewis (and others) say that *agapē* is the highest form of love, this does not appear to be the case in every text where it is used... which mainly suggest Christian friendship. Unfortunately, many Christians follow fashion and use words that are not appropriate in every (or any) situation, such as 'shalom'.

It is fashionable to use the word *agapē*, when referring to love, but it is only one of many words used for that purpose in scripture, so it is used out of ignorance as an 'umbrella' term. This is rather like spelling 'word' as 'Word' (capital W) when its use is clearly wrong. Using the capital is very specific – it is used ONLY for Christ, not for what God says ('word' with a lower-case 'w'), etc. In the same way *agapē* is used in what I call a 'twee' way, by those who pick up on its use without knowing its meaning or application... a verbal fashion accessory! And few realise that the same word is rendered 'charity' in certain

## Grace and Mercy: What do They Mean?

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 16 September 2014 10:02

---

verses.

### More on 'Grace'

'Grace' is not always a benefit given by God to men. It is also used for interaction between human beings. Throughout Genesis, for example, all the uses of 'grace' (*chen*) refer to an human being finding favour with another human being. Except for the very first instance, when it is used to describe Noah finding favour in God's eyes, and the second, where Lot was thankful to the angel (Genesis 19:19).

In the whole of the Old Testament 'grace' is all about *either* an human being finding favour (a good report) with another human being, or with God. This is therefore a clue as to its use today – human beings finding favour with God because they are faithful and obedient.

In Ezra 9:8, 'grace' is not *chen*, but the noun, *tēchinnah*. Even so, it means either to plead for a favour or to have a favour. In the verse it is akin to having mercy from God, who helped the people to escape an enemy. In Psalm 84:11 'grace' or God's favour, is shown to all who "walk uprightly" before Him. When they do that God will heap favours or benefits upon them with overflowing quality, and show them "glory",  
*kabowd*  
: honour, abundance (even riches), with a good reputation.

In the New Testament most uses of 'grace' are *charis*. James 1:11 uses *euprepeia*, meaning to be comely, to have beauty, or to have a good appearance. In this context James talks of the way earthly beauty soon fades and withers (which should advise readers not to assume that the same word in English is necessarily the same word in Greek/Hebrew, and may not always have the same meaning).

The Christian reader should also be aware that though 'grace'; is used plentifully, it is not always used for the same kind of text. For example, the word 'favour' in the Old Testament may be used instead. It is the same word, *chen*, but used variously. Even after saying this, in Job 10:12, the word 'favour' is *cheched*, while in the Psalms frequent use is made of *ratsown*, though *chaphets, paniym*, and

## Grace and Mercy: What do They Mean?

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 16 September 2014 10:02

---

*chanan*

are also used for the English transliteration, 'favour'.

Proverbs, too, uses several Hebrew words for 'favour'. The point is that 'grace' is not always shown as 'grace' in the English transliteration of your Bible – a number of words can be used in Hebrew, but they all can be shown as 'grace'. The same applies to the word 'mercy'.

### Conclusion

This paper is just a broad sweep of the scriptural uses of 'grace', 'mercy' and 'peace'. As you can see, though these three words are used in translation, they are not the only words in the original languages that mean the same thing.

While 'grace' and 'mercy' can be shown between human being and human being, for Christians the best-known use is between God and man. More precisely, it is **from** God **to** man. Both grace and mercy are linked terms with similar attributes and, from God to man, they are always gifts given without merit, even when they are given as a reward for faithfulness and holiness. God promises rewards to those who are His when they obey Him and live godly lives, but such rewards are not 'earned' in the earthly wages sense (which is payment for works done). Rather, they are gifts from God, though He need not reward us at all for anything! So, even a 'reward' or 'wage' is a gift. (Otherwise we end up with an Arminian idea).

Am I saying that God never rewards us? No, I am not, for scripture clearly speaks of God rewarding us – and 'reward' is equal to a wage. What I am saying is that any reward is for faithfulness rather than for any work we might do, making such wage a gift. To put it another way, God need not 'pay' us for anything we do; He pays us because of His grace and not out of obligation based on works done by us. Can you see what I mean? We are, after all, unworthy servants.

Though we are unworthy, He is our shield and "exceeding great reward" (Genesis 15:1); *God* is our reward, not money or any other wage. In Deuteronomy 32:41 we see a rather different 'reward' given by God to His enemies... vengeance! In this case God wreaks punishment on them, as in, say, 2 Samuel 3:39. This is in stark contrast to the "full reward" given to the Hebrews when they trust in the Lord (Ruth 2:12). Thus, a 'reward' can be of various meanings.

## Grace and Mercy: What do They Mean?

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 16 September 2014 10:02

---

The 'reward' for our righteousness is a gift from God. Yes, it is called a 'wage', but it is a wage earned not by us but by our Saviour, Jesus Christ, for *His* righteousness, not for our own; our righteousness is as nothing and has meaning only in Him. Therefore, any reward given to us by God is really earned by the Saviour, Whose character and spirit we reflect.

On many occasions rewards will be known when we reach Heaven (Matthew 5:12)... but note what the wages are given for – can you say you have earned such a wage? And, if you do good for someone, do you tell others of it? If you do, God will revoke any reward you might have had ((Matthew 6:1); God loves us to do good, but does not wish us to boast of them. (Note again that there are a variety of words in the Bible to denote 'reward').

God does, then, reward us for good works and righteous living, even though these are expected of us. If, then, we do these things without expecting recompense for anything good in us, God will reward us with His grace and mercy because what we do is through and in His Son, Jesus Christ. It has to be this way, for an expected reward or wage for what we do of our own mind and volition is of our own sinful selves (an Arminian concept): *"Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt."*

(Romans 4:4). We must do what we do for the Lord willingly with no thought of gain (1 Corinthians 9:17)... only then will God give us a reward or wage. For Paul his reward was the honour of preaching the Gospel (verse 18).

The grace and mercy of God are given as gifts. They are rewards for holiness and obedience. Yet, because He is Almighty, God can also show grace and mercy towards those who err, such as He did with Lot, who neither sought God's help nor expected it. This is true mercy.

I hope you now have a better understanding of what is meant by grace and mercy, though the paper is but a brief introduction.

© August 2014

---oOo---

{loadposition btm\_address}