

Grasping Hold Of Grace: Repentance

Imagine a man lost the middle of the Atlantic ocean. He doesn't remember how he got there or where he's going, all he knows is this endless swimming in circles. No ships in sight, he's been treading water for hours and now he's beginning to tire. There's a very real danger that he will actually drown – that's if the hypothermia doesn't get to him first. He doesn't realise this, however. He thinks he'll be fine, that there's nothing precarious about his situation. He'll make it to shore.

Suddenly, almost miraculously, a ship appears on the horizon. The man gazes at it in interest. It could be useful to him – the water is becoming colder and he feels very tired. The ship slowly draws closer and the captain appears, signalling from the bow.

“You poor creature! You look like you could do with saving! Luckily for you, I've got everything you need right here on board; food, water, dry clothes, first aid... the only thing you need to do is grasp hold of the life buoy I'm going to throw to you.”

He leans over the side and throws the buoy into the water, where it lands near the man's head.

The man's expression changes and he looks at the buoy disdainfully. “Conditions for rescue? I've never heard of such a thing. I shouldn't have to do anything, I've been swimming for hours. In fact, I was doing fine before you arrived. I really don't need your help. If you want me to get in the boat, you'll have to come down here and get me.”

“Believe me”, the captain replies. “I've thought of everything and this is the only way for you to be saved. I promise the buoy is large and easy to grasp and not heavy at all. You won't have any trouble, you just need need to reach out and

take hold of it.”

The man shakes his head. “Nope. I’m not happy with those conditions. It doesn’t seem fair to me. I don’t see why I should have to do anything. And look, if we’re being honest, I was doing pretty fine on mine own anyway. You can keep going, thanks.”

“Well, look, you really don’t have to do anything, apart from take hold of the buoy”, the captain replied. “I’ve done everything else for you. I’ll pull you in...just grab hold.”

The man shakes his head again, angry now. “I really resent you saying you’ll save me and making me do all the work. I’m supposedly the rescuee – I shouldn’t have to do anything! Nope, I don’t like that at all. And in fact, I don’t need saving anyway. You can take your buoy and get lost.”

The captain shakes his head sadly. “I know you need the buoy. I’m not going anywhere – I’m hoping you’ll see sense and change your mind”. The man turned his back on the buoy and continued treading water...

Needless to say, the man drowned several hours later.

Although this is a somewhat absurd and unlikely story, it’s an apt illustration of how humans often choose to view God’s saving grace.

Grasping Hold Of Grace

God’s [saving grace](#) is a remarkable subject, permeating every aspect of [the Gospel](#), giving it weight and power. The saving acts of God, due to the work of Jesus on the cross and Jesus’ resurrection from the dead bring reconciliation (“atonement”) between people and God. This is why the Gospel is described as a message of hope for the whole world ([Luke 14:15-24](#)).

We see God’s love for humanity demonstrated in His grace – His undeserved favour and kindness, bestowed on the human race. God’s grace was shown in action – in [sending His son](#), to save the world through him. This important work was planned and has

been done, on our behalf, long before we even existed. We had no part in this, nothing we did or didn't do has influenced God's decision or His plan to save humanity, or how He would achieve this. God loves because of **who God is**, not because of who we are.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16, NIV

"He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." – Titus 3:5, NIV

There are no disqualifying factors to who is eligible – it's not offered on the basis of race, gender, age or moral character – God's saving grace is offered to everyone. In spite of racial and ethnic prejudices, Christians in the first century came to understand that no one was to be denied hearing and obeying the message of good news.

"...God shows no partiality. Indeed, whoever fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him in any nation." – Acts 10:34-35, ISV

God wants to save us, He chose to save the world because of **who He is**. His love outweighed our desperate sin and He went to extraordinary lengths to save us.

"The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." – 2 Peter 3:9, NIV

And yet, there is a catch to grace – a condition, if you like. Saving grace exists in the same way that the life buoy floats

on the ocean. Available, accessible, obtainable. We exist in the same way as a man treading water in an endless sea. Hopeless, helpless, dying. God calls to us – *I can save you, I can offer you hope and life – just grab hold.*

Like the drowning man, in the middle of the frigid ocean, we must grab hold of the life buoy if we want to be saved. There is a condition. We must do **something**. The condition to receiving grace is **receiving grace**.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23, ESV

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Ephesians 2:8, NIV

Receiving Grace: Repentance

The Bible calls receiving God’s grace *repentance*. Literally, repentance means to turn back, to change one’s mind. However, the Bible tells us that true repentance is not only a change of mind but is also a change in actions.

*“...but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, **performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.**” – Act 26:20, ESV*

The Acts of the Apostles focuses heavily on the aspect of repentance relating to salvation. It wasn’t a new theme – John himself had preached the baptism of repentance, but now the apostles really seek to impress on believers and non-believers alike the connection between repentance and receiving God’s grace – His saving work through Jesus:

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in

the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” – Acts 2:38, NIV

“Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out.” – Acts 3:19, ESV

“When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.” – Acts 11:18, NIV

Acknowledging our need for God’s grace – changing how we think about sin – and then acting in accordance with that change of mind is the true definition of biblical repentance. It is looking away from our hopeless, ungodly self and looking to God’s grace. It is **believing that we need saving and reaching out to receive it.**

We choose to end one kind of life and begin another and the way of demonstrating that choice is to be baptised ‘for the repentance of our sins’. The Bible compares baptism to burial, dying to our past course of life and beginning a new one as a Christian, dedicated to God and saved through Jesus.

“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” – Romans 6:1-4, NIV

“Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.” – Colossians 2:12, NIV

Baptism and the steps that lead up to it are God's arrangement for a person to gain a clean conscience based on his faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

"This water symbolises baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." – 1 Peter 3:21, NIV

Preaching the [good news](#) of salvation was the great commission given to the apostles by Jesus and baptism formed an essential part of accepting the gospel and receiving God's saving grace.

"And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." – Mark 16:15-16, KJ2000

The truth is, we are all adrift at sea – drowning in our sins. The only way of being saved is to accept that fact and believe that we need saving. Accepting Jesus as the saviour provided by God for the sins of the world and being baptised as an acknowledgement of our belief is true repentance. It is the way home to a [relationship restored](#).

"For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved." – Romans 10:10, NIV