

Do Not Receive God's Grace in Vain

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Grace / 2 Corinthians 6:1–2

Ever stopped to wonder how God truly sees you? The infinite God who spoke this vast and complex universe into existence ([Genesis 1:1](#)) could look upon humanity as nothing more than tiny specks—like dust carried by the wind or ants hurrying along their path, busy yet seemingly insignificant. And yet, Scripture reveals something far greater. Though we are “jars of clay”—fragile, ordinary, and easily broken ([2 Corinthians 4:7](#)), and though we have all fallen short of His glory ([Romans 3:23](#)), our value in His sight is not diminished—it is astonishing. The Bible declares that God is the Potter and we are the clay—the work of His very hands ([Isaiah 64:8](#)). From the moment He said, “Let us make man in our image” ([Genesis 1:26](#)), humanity has carried a divine imprint, able to say with awe, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made” ([Psalm 139:13–14](#)). Though made “a little lower than the angels,” we have been “crowned with glory and honour” ([Psalm 8:4–5](#)). And this is the wonder of it all: God did not create us because He needed anything from us—for He is self-sufficient ([Acts 17:24–25](#))—but out of His own love and for His glory ([Isaiah 43:7](#); [John 3:16](#)).

And yet, while His love for us is infinite and undeniable, we cannot ignore the grief our sin brings to a holy God. Scripture calls us, “just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do” ([1 Peter 1:15–16](#)), and when we measure our lives against that standard, we quickly see how far we fall short. God’s ways are higher than our ways ([Isaiah 55:8–9](#)), and at first glance, His call to walk as Jesus Christ walked ([1 John 2:6](#)) can seem beyond reach. Though we are made in His image and, through His promises, “participate in the divine nature” ([2 Peter 1:3–4](#)), we drift into the very condition Christ warned about—lukewarm, comfortable, and spiritually dull ([Revelation 3:15–16](#)). Like apostle Paul, we feel the tension within: “For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it

out... For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing” ([Romans 7:18–20](#)). And when we remember that “the wages of sin is death,” the weight of our condition becomes undeniable ([Romans 6:23](#)), our hearts echo Paul’s cry, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?” ([Romans 7:24](#)). But this is where grace shines most brilliantly. Christ “died once for all” ([Hebrews 10:10](#)), breaking the power of sin and opening the way for us to draw near. Because of Him, we can “approach God’s throne of grace with confidence” ([Hebrews 4:15–16](#)), knowing we are not merely forgiven, but welcomed—adopted into God’s family and made heirs with Him ([Romans 8:15–17](#)).

Most believers, when they hear the word grace, immediately think of forgiveness—being rescued from judgment, adopted into God’s family, and sealed as His own, for He “anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit” ([2 Corinthians 1:21–22](#)). And rightly so—this is the glorious foundation of our salvation. But if grace is understood only as pardon, then we have only understood half of it. Apostle Paul writes to believers, “As God’s co-workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain” ([2 Corinthians 6:1](#)), making it clear that grace is not merely something we receive at conversion, but something meant to continue working in us. If Christ has taken the wrath we deserved and reconciled us to God, then grace should do more than rescue us—it should transform us. It should stir within us a desire to walk daily in step with the Spirit ([Galatians 5:25](#)), not out of obligation, but out of gratitude and dependence. Grace not only saves the sinner—it transforms the believer. Because of Christ’s atoning work, we are no longer slaves to sin—we are empowered to say “no” to ungodliness and to live for His glory. To ignore the transforming power of grace is not just a mistake—it is to receive the grace of God in vain.

Grace Cannot Be Earned - Only Received

Grace is not a reward for the worthy; it is God's favor for the undeserving. The prophet Jeremiah reminds us that "the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure" ([Jeremiah 17:9](#)). And yet, in every generation, there is a persistent temptation to believe that we can somehow be "good enough" to enter the kingdom of God [1]. Many place their confidence in religious activity—attending church, reading the Bible, praying, giving to the poor, or living a moral life—as though these could secure a right standing before their Creator. But how can anyone stand before a holy God and offer Him anything but "filthy rags" ([Isaiah 64:6](#))?

The reality is sobering; we are far more sinful than we realize and far more helpless than we would like to admit. As James Montgomery Boice rightly observed, "we are so helplessly lost in our sin that there is nothing we can do to save ourselves or even to make ourselves better" [2]. That is why salvation must come from outside of us. The apostle Paul declares:

Ephesians 2:8–9 NIV

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

Unlike every other system of belief that depends on human effort—working toward God, striving to earn favor, or attempting to appease divine justice—Christianity stands alone [3]. Grace is received in vain when salvation does not lead to transformation—when the clay resists the hands of the Potter. It is not about what we do for God, but what God has done for us. In His grace, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to live the sinless life we could not live, to die the death we deserved, and to rise again on our behalf [4]. Our acceptance before a holy God is not based on our performance, but on Christ's perfect atonement. Through His sacrifice, we are not only forgiven—we are made new. We are born again, not merely of the flesh, but of the Spirit ([John 3:5–7](#)). And God confirms this work by placing His Spirit within us as a seal, "a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance"

([Ephesians 1:13–14](#)). This is not earned. This is not deserved. This is grace—pure, unmerited, life-giving grace.

Don't Let Grace Go to Waste

But even when one receives God's gracious gift of salvation, this does not bring an end to one's responsibility before the Lord. To hear the gospel without surrender, to profess Christ without holiness, to claim grace while resisting obedience—this is to receive the grace of God in vain ([2 Corinthians 6:1](#)). The God who gives grace also calls His people to respond to it. Those who have passed from death to life and are born “of water and the Spirit” ([John 3:5](#), NIV) are now called to pursue a transformed life. First, “grace makes ethical demands of Christians consistent with God's nature” [5]. Because Christ has broken the power of sin, believers are urged to “purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” ([2 Corinthians 7:1](#), NIV). As Christ's ambassadors and royal priests ([2 Corinthians 5:20](#); [1 Peter 2:9](#)), in our “total personality, outwardly and inwardly” [6], we are to fix our minds on “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable” ([Philippians 4:8](#), NIV), rather than returning to the pursuits of the world—“debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry” ([1 Peter 4:3](#), NIV).

Second, grace produces fruit in the life of the believer. The apostle James makes this unmistakably clear: “faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” ([James 2:17](#), NIV). While it is by grace through faith—and not by works—that we receive the gift of salvation ([Ephesians 2:8–9](#)), “works without faith is no faith at all” [6], any more than a lifeless body represents a living person. When someone is truly born again, a radical transformation begins—the old has gone, the new has come ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)). God gives new desires, spiritual gifts, and divine enablement to bear fruit for His glory. If the evidence of a transformed life is absent, it raises serious questions about the genuineness of one's faith [7].

Grace is received in vain when salvation does not lead to ongoing transformation—when the clay resists the shaping hands of the Potter.

Grace Empowers the Life God Commands

But is it possible for a born-again believer to live a life worthy of the gospel? If we are honest, we often feel the same tension the apostle Paul described. The very things we know we ought to do, we struggle to carry out. And the things we know we ought not to do—those very things we often find ourselves drawn toward. This inner conflict is not unusual; it is the reality of the Christian life. Paul explains it clearly:

Galatians 5:17 NIV

For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

If that is true, then the answer to holy living is not found in trying harder—it must be found elsewhere. Paul points us to that solution:

Romans 6:6–7 NIV

For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

The old self—once enslaved to sin—has been crucified with Christ [8]. Sin no longer has mastery over the believer. Yet even though we are grafted into the Vine, this does not mean we can simply say “no” to sin in our own strength. Victory does not come through self-effort—it comes through surrender. Peter reminds us that “grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord” ([2 Peter 1:2](#), NIV). In a world where truth shifts with culture, believers must be anchored in something unchanging. That anchor

is the knowledge of God—not merely intellectual, but experiential—a living, growing relationship with Jesus Christ [9].

A person stops taking God’s grace in vain the moment they stop striving and start surrendering. This is the grace that has the power to “do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” ([Ephesians 3:20](#), NIV). Paul reminds the church in Philippi, “for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” ([Philippians 2:13](#), NIV). The psalmist echoes the same truth: “Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain” ([Psalm 127:1](#), NIV). The law reveals what is right, but it is powerless to produce it because of our sinful nature ([Romans 8:3](#), NIV). But praise be to God—we are not left to obey in our own strength. Through the Holy Spirit, God both gives us the desire and supplies the power to live in a way that honors Him [10].

Let me illustrate this. A son and his wife were considering purchasing a home. It seemed perfect—until they noticed cracks in the foundation. Concerned, they asked the father, a skilled carpenter, to inspect it. After carefully examining the house, he said:

“Please don’t write the house off because of these cracks. A foundation settles as it adjusts to the ground beneath it. These are not new cracks—they are old ones. As a house settles, you may see signs above the surface, but those signs are not weakness; they are evidence that the foundation has become secure. What looks like weakness is actually proof of strength.” [11]

In the same way, there may be cracks in your life—but those cracks do not mean Christ has failed; they may be evidence that the foundation is holding. They may be evidence that God is at work, shaping and settling your life upon Him. As you yield to Him as the Potter, His grace continues to mold and refine you. He does not abandon the clay—He transforms it. To not receive God’s grace in vain is not about trying harder—it is about surrendering deeper. It is allowing God, through His grace, to continually shape you into the image of Christ, replacing what is broken with what is holy, pure, and pleasing in His sight.

Grace Calls Us Out of Compromise Into Holiness

Believers receive God's grace in vain when they live as though nothing has changed. When grace is truly received, it produces separation from sin and deeper fellowship with God. Though much of the Corinthian church had shown encouraging signs of repentance, Paul still feared that upon his return he might find some clinging to "discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder" ([2 Corinthians 12:20-21](#)). These were not merely outward behaviors—they were evidence of hearts still entangled with the world. Earlier in his letter, Paul gave a clear and sobering command: "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common?" ([2 Corinthians 6:14](#)). He was not forbidding relationships with unbelievers—we are called to reach the lost—but warning against any binding alliances or patterns of life that compromise our devotion to God. As God's people, we are "not to enter any syncretistic or compromising relationship" [12] or form alliances "with the world that would be unworthy of a community which understands itself as the temple of the living God" [13].

To receive God's grace rightly is to live differently. We remain in the world, but we no longer belong to it. "For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come" ([Hebrews 13:14](#)). Our lives are meant to stand in contrast—like light in darkness. Jesus Himself declared, "You are the light of the world... let your light shine before others" ([Matthew 5:14-16](#)). Grace does not call us to blend in—it calls us to stand apart—separate from the world's values, its idols, and its impurities. This transformation begins in the heart. Paul writes, "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good" ([Romans 12:9](#)). Grace not only changes our standing before God—it changes our desires. What we once tolerated, we now resist. What we once pursued, we now turn from. To receive God's grace in vain is to make peace with the very sin Christ died to destroy. But to receive it rightly is to walk in holiness, growing in purity, and

reflecting the character of the One who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light.

Grace Demands a Response - Today

Apostle Paul's call is urgent—it is a divine wake-up call. It is a wake-up call to all professing believers not to delay repentance, obedience, surrender, or reconciliation. To stir this response, Paul declares, “I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation” ([2 Corinthians 6:2](#)). This promised “day of salvation” is not merely a future hope—it is a present reality through Christ. In a world marked by wars, financial instability, health struggles, and fractured relationships, peace often feels elusive. Many chase stability through relationships, money, or power, yet in a chaotic world we cannot escape the truth that time and chance happen to them all [14]. True security—security that rises above our bondage to decay ([Romans 8:21](#))—is found only in a right relationship with our Creator [15]. And we must not forget we will all stand before Christ. Scripture reminds us that we must “appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” ([2 Corinthians 5:10](#)). This reality should not produce fear in the believer, but holy urgency—a compelling motivation to live lives shaped and transformed by God's grace and power.

If we are to “not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of [our] mind” ([Romans 12:2](#)), then we must actively engage in the life God has called us to. We must put on the full armor of God ([Ephesians 6:10–16](#)), clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ ([Romans 13:14](#)), and keep in step with the Spirit ([Galatians 5:25](#)). This is not passive Christianity—this is intentional, daily surrender. Sin is deceitful. It hardens the heart and lures us with empty promises of self-pleasure ([Hebrews 3:13–15](#)). Therefore, our response must be immediate and ongoing: repent quickly, walk humbly, and

stand together. We are called to encourage one another daily, locking arms in love and truth, as the body of Christ under our Head—Christ Himself.

Grace is not only a gift to receive—it is a call to respond.

And that response is not tomorrow—it is today.

Christ is the Place Where Grace is Rightly Received

As we come to the end of this message, we must see clearly that grace is not something to admire from a distance—it is something to respond to. Paul has warned us not to receive the grace of God in vain. He has called us to urgency, reminding us that now is the day of salvation. He has pointed us to the reality that we will stand before Christ and give an account. And he has urged us to live transformed lives—clothed in Christ and walking in step with the Spirit. But all of this leads us to one central truth: grace is not just a principle—it is found in a Person. The grace Paul speaks of is rooted in the crucified and risen Christ—the true Servant who seemed to labor in vain yet was vindicated by God. We do not merely imitate grace; we come to Christ, in whom grace has fully appeared. Scripture tells us, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#), NIV). The sinless One took on our sin. The righteous One bore our guilt. The Holy One endured our judgment so that we might stand before God not condemned but clothed in His righteousness.

Because of Him, the promise of the “day of salvation” has dawned—not as a distant hope, but as a present reality. In Jesus, grace has come in its fullness. “Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” ([John 1:16–17](#)). This means grace is not limited, not exhausted, and not theoretical. It is full, ongoing, and available right now to all who will come. And this same Christ is our great High Priest, who invites us to draw near. “Let us

then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” ([Hebrews 4:16](#), NIV). We do not stand at a distance. We are invited into His presence—to receive mercy for our failures and grace for our daily walk.

So what is the only right response? Do not treat grace lightly. Do not delay it. Do not resist it. Do not wear the label of Christianity without the life of Christ within you. Come to Christ—not later, not someday—come to Christ today. Receive His grace fully. Rely on His power daily. Walk in holiness urgently. Because one day, we will stand before Him. And on that day, the question will not be whether we understood grace—but whether grace truly transformed our lives. Do not turn grace into a beautiful idea that never changes you. The greatest tragedy is not rejecting grace—it is receiving it in vain. Receive it, rely on it, and let it transform you—today.

Footnotes

[1] Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 84.

[2] James Montgomery Boice, *Romans: God and History*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991–), 1308.

- [3] Tony Evans, “Grace: The Gift of Salvation,” in *Tony Evans Sermon Archive* (Tony Evans, 2015).
- [4] Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014), 51.
- [5] D. Edmond Hiebert, “Titus,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 440.
- [6] James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 124.
- [7] George M. Stulac, *James, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1993)
- [8] Frank Thielman, *Romans*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 306.
- [9] James Shaddix and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in 2 Peter, Jude* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2018), 2 Pe 1:2
- [10] F. F. Bruce, *Philippians, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series* (Peabody, MA: Baker Books, 2011), 82.
- [11] Eric Mason, *Exalting Jesus in 2 Corinthians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2024), 247–248.
- [12] Murray J. Harris, “2 Corinthians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 360.
- [13] Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 290.

[14] Thabiti Anyabwile, *Exalting Jesus in Luke, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2018), 290.

[15] Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 3, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 297.