

“Grace” as a Technical Term

Introduction

Grace is a term used for God’s unmerited favor to man throughout the Scriptures. God’s grace was evident in his dealings with man throughout the Old Testament and in the Gospels. But when we come to the Apostle Paul the concept of grace explodes. Paul used the term χάρις in a technical sense to describe God’s salvation by faith apart from works, the Christian’s freedom from the Mosaic Law, his own unique ministry, and in his greetings, farewell, and thankfulness. This article will explore Paul’s employment of grace as a fundamental concept of the Christian life.

Old Testament Witness of Grace

In the Old Testament, the verb רָחַם is used 78 times and its related noun רָחֻם is found 69 times (Genesis 6.8, 18.3, 19.19, 30.27, 32.5, 33.8, 10, 15, 34.11, 39.4, 21, 47.25, 29, 50.4; Exodus 3.21, 11.3, 12.36, 33.12, 13, 16, 17, 34.9; Numbers 11.11, 15, 32.5; Deuteronomy 24.1; Judges 6.17; Ruth 2.2, 10, 13; 1 Samuel 1.18, 16.22, 20.3, 29, 25.8, 27.5; 2 Samuel 14.22, 15.25, 16.4; 1 Kings 11.19; Esther 2.15, 17, 5.2, 8, 7.3, 8.5; Psalms 45.2, 84.11; Proverbs 1.9, 3.4, 22, 34, 4.9, 5.19, 11.16, 13.15, 17.8, 22.1, 11, 28.23, 31.30; Ecclesiastes 9.11, 10.12; Jeremiah 31.2; Nahum 3.4; Zechariah 4.7, 12.10). These terms are used for grace, favor, or goodwill.

Another Hebrew word רָחַם is used 25 times (Joshua 11.20; 1 Kings 8.28, 30, 38, 45, 49, 52, 54, 9.3; 2 Chronicles 6.19, 29, 35, 39, 33.13; Ezra 9.8; Psalms 6.9, 55.1, 119.170; Jeremiah 36.7, 37.20, 38.26, 42.2, 9; Daniel 9.20) of grace. Therefore, in the Old Testament, these terms demonstrate a usage of 172 times for grace, mercy, or supplication. Most of the uses involve relationships between individuals. However, in the case of Moses and the nation of Israel, it is

frequently used of God's attitude (Exodus 3.21, 11.3, 12.36, 33.12, 13, 16-17, 34.9; Numbers 11.11, 15, 32.5).

The New Testament Witness of Grace

The primary word for grace in the New Testament is [χάρις](#). It occurs 156 times in 148 verses. Below is the distribution breakdown:

Sources	Passages	Frequency
Gospels		
Luke	Luke 1.30, 2.40, 52, 4.22, 6.32, 33, 6.34, 17.9	8x
John	John 1.14, 16, 17	4x
Acts	Acts 2.47, 4.33, 6.8, 7.10, 46, 11.23, 13.43, 14.3, 26, 15.11, 40, 18.27, 20.24, 32, 24.27, 25.3, 9	17x
Epistles		
Paul	Romans 1.5, 7, 3.24, 4.4, 16, 5.2, 15, 17, 20, 21, 6.1, 14, 15, 17, 7.25, 11.5, 6, 12.3, 12.6, 15.15, 16.20, 24	24x
	1 Corinthians 1:3, 4, 3:10, 10:30, 15:10, 57, 16:3, 23	10x
	2 Corinthians 1:2, 12, 15, 2:14, 4:15, 6:1, 8:1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 16, 19, 9:8, 14, 15, 12:9, 13:14;	19x
	Galatians 1:3, 6, 15, 2:9, 21, 5:4, 6:18	7x
	Ephesians 1:2, 6, 7, 2:5, 7, 8, 3:2, 7, 8, 4:7, 29, 6:24	12x
	Philippians 1:2, 7, 4:23	3x
	Colossians 1:2, 6, 3:16, 4:6, 18	5x
	1 Thessalonians 1:1, 5:28	2x
	2 Thessalonians 1:2, 12, 2:16, 3:18	4x

	1 Timothy 1:2, 12, 14, 6:21	4x
	2 Timothy 1:2, 3, 9, 2:1, 4:22	5x
	Titus 1:4, 2:11, 3:7, 15	4x
	Philemon 1:3, 25	2x
Hebrews	Hebrews 2:9, 4:16, 10:29, 12:15, 12:28, 13:9, 25	8x
James	James 4:6	2x
Peter	1 Peter 1:2, 10, 13, 2:19, 20, 3:7, 4:10, 5:5, 10, 12; 2 Peter 1.2, 3.18	12x
John	2 John 1:3; Revelation 1.4, 22.21	3x
Jude	Jude 1:4	1x

These statistics are remarkable. Paul used the term χάρις 101 times (109 times) if we include Hebrews out of a total usage of 156 times in the New Testament. Matthew and Mark do not include the word χάρις once. And John only used it 4x. Luke used the term 8x in his gospel and 19 times in Acts. Why the heavy use in Luke and not the other gospels? The answer is because Luke was a constant companion of Paul and was influenced by Paul's thinking and vocabulary. Thus, χάρις is used only 22 times (14%) in the New Testament in a non-Pauline association. As in the Old Testament, most of the usages of "grace" relate to the general favor of God or man. When we come to Paul, however, the meaning of "grace" assumes a greater dimension.

Paul's Use of Grace (χάρις)

1. Paul used the word χάρις to emphasize God's unmerited favor toward man particularly in respect to salvation. In the gospel of the grace of God salvation is obtained by faith apart from any works. It is faith + 0. One need only trust in the finished work of Christ (1 Corinthians 15.1-4). In addition and concomitant the gospel of grace, the Lord also revealed to Paul that believers of Paul's gospel were not under the dominion of the Mosaic Law. The Law was over and Christians

were under grace (Romans 6.14 cf. Galatians 1.6-7, 2.16, 3.11, 24-26, 4.30-31, 5.1, 18). Paul's specialized usage of the word in this way made his usage of the word technical and unique. For Paul, grace was the realm in which salvation of faith without works or faith + 0 operated. We do not find such language or usage by anyone else.

2. Grace was such an essential concept of Paul's thinking that he began all his letters with a grace statement as a greeting and ended all his letters with a grace farewell. It was his identifying escutcheon.

Greeting	Farewell
Romans 1.7	Romans 16.20, 24
1 Corinthians 1.3-4	1 Corinthians 16.23
2 Corinthians 1.2	2 Corinthians 12.14
Galatians 1.3	Galatians 6.18
Ephesians 1.2	Ephesians 6.24
Philippians 1.2	Philippians 4.23
Colossians 1.2	Colossians 4.18
1 Thessalonians 1.1	1 Thessalonians 5.28
2 Thessalonians 1.2	2 Thessalonians 3.18
1 Timothy 1.2	1 Timothy 6.21
2 Timothy 1.2	2 Timothy 4.22
Titus 1.4	Titus 3.15
Philemon 1.3	Philemon 1.25

3. Paul used χάρις as the term to identify and embrace his unique ministry (Romans 1.5, 15.15; 1 Corinthians 3.10, 15.10; Galatians 1.15, 2.9; Ephesians 3.2, 7-8; 1 Timothy 1.11) which he received from the risen, ascended Lord to be the apostle of the Gentiles (Romans 11.13) for the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20.24). Paul made it clear that his ministry was completely different from the ministry of the Twelve. He, like an architect, had laid a new foundation (1 Corinthians 3.10)

and declared he was the first ([πρῶτος](#), i.e., the prototype) and the pattern ([ὑποτύπωσις](#)) of a new message and ministry (1 Timothy 1.15-16). Paul's technical term for the revelations the risen Lord gave to him alone was [μυστήριον](#) "secret."

4. Lastly, Paul employed χάρις as a term of thanksgiving (1 Corinthians 10.30; 2 Corinthians 9.15; Colossians 3.16; 1 Timothy 1.12; 2 Timothy 1.3).

Conclusion

No other biblical writer used χάρις (grace) the way Paul did. If one understands how and why Paul used grace the way he did one will grasp the basic concepts of Paul's unique ministry and the message of Christianity. Without such understanding, one will flounder with confusion concerning the fundamental concepts as salvation by faith alone, i.e., *sola fides*, that the believer is not under Law, the "secrets" revealed by the risen Lord to Paul, and Paul's unique apostleship. If one understands how Paul used "grace" these concepts will come to light.

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