

PLAIN TRUTH®

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®

Gift After Gift After Gift



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We all live off his generous bounty, gift after gift after gift (John 1:16, MSG, The Message Bible)

Out of his full store we have all received grace upon grace (John 1:16, NEB, The New English Bible)

The first chapter of the Gospel of John presents an unequalled, beautiful and profound exploration of what, to the human mind, is “the genesis of God the Word,” made flesh in Jesus of Nazareth. Of course, God has no actual beginning, but the eternal One concedes to speak to the limitations of our human perspective and language.

John draws a parallel in his New Testament genesis to the first chapter of the Old Testament Genesis, emphasizing the Word

who was God and with God in the very beginning (or literally, “at the foundation of the cosmos”). In this grand revelation of the beginning, John speaks from the perspective of the Trinitarian God, one in harmony and unity, coequal and coeternal, three Persons in one essence.

Upon this Trinitarian foundation, John builds his glorious and majestic story of Jesus, the eternal Word, God the Son, God in the flesh, full of grace and truth:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

“Full of Grace and Truth”

This brief phrase—*full of grace and truth*—speaks of the grace of God

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we receive from the fulness of the Son, which is *gift after gift after gift* (MSG) and *grace upon grace* (NEB). Lyrics in the soaring hymn “Great is Thy Faithfulness” echo Lamentations 3:22-23, “*The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning, great is thy faithfulness*” (RSV, Revised Standard Version).

Grace is always new, always fresh and refreshed, forever vital, never ending, an inexhaustible and eternal spring that flows from the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

How do we fathom this magnificent *gift after gift after gift* called grace? First, it is a gift that opens our eyes, leads us, draws us and fills us with the oh-so-beyond-human positive response to God. This *grace upon grace* presents us with the opportunity to overcome the human tendency to reject God, his love, mercy and grace, and opens the door for us to respond in gratitude.

Grace frees us to offer an uncoerced response to God, our relational YES to love, for as John explains in his first epistle, “*We love because he loved us first*” (1 John 4:19).

In John’s prologue to his Gospel—a New Testament perspective on the genesis of all things—we are taken to new depths of insight about creation and its/our Creator. “*Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made*” (John 1:3).

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The grace of God the Son, the true light-creating Light, shines into all of creation and “gives light to everyone was coming into the world” (John 1:9). Out of his full store Christ the *Light of the world* opens our eyes (Matthew 12:35; 2 Corinthians 4:6) and “brings us to our senses” as did the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:17). Our spiritual eyes are not opened by anything we accomplish or anything we can attribute to ourselves. The eyes of our heart are opened by grace, “not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:9).

The grace of God, in *gift after gift after gift*, generates the righteousness of the risen Christ in our lives: “But now apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in [or, through the faithfulness of] Jesus Christ to all who believe” (Romans 3:21-22).

Repentance, faith and belief are themselves gifts of God, by his grace, *gift after gift after gift*. Grace is somewhat like the unending waves of the ocean, rolling in, crashing on the shore, an inexhaustible experience of wonder and awe.

Relational Metaphors of God’s Love

This wondrous grace of God is the dynamic of divine love that reaches out to us as an authentic relationship. Scripture continually speaks of God’s invitation to us in terms of his house and his table. We read of a Servant-King and his subjects—unlike any king the world has ever seen. We read of the Good Shepherd and his sheep. We read of Bride-Groom intimacy, of Husband-Wife faithfulness, of our heavenly Father and of us as his reborn children, heirs of all he has.

We read of prodigal children, leaving their Father’s house to seek their own way, each slaving in their self-imposed fields of hedonism or religiosity. They are still God’s children and all he has remains theirs, but there’s a call home to

enjoy his household of grace and to know their Father’s kindness.

Notice how these metaphors are all relational. The inheritance motif involves a Father-child relationship. So too the covenant-relationship of the Husband-wife we see in Ezekiel, in Hosea, in Song of Songs and in the Bride-Groom relationship of the Gospels and Revelation. None of these metaphors are transactional, mechanical or contractual. Nor are they simply unilateral. In every case, they are utterly relational and reciprocal.

“Our Part” in God’s Relationship With Us

Thus, the work of God’s love, mercy and grace is not automatic, forced, coerced or compelled. We “have our part”—however, “our part” is obviously not in doing, producing, performing, or earning something:

- *Our part* is not in making a downpayment.
- *Our part* is far more difficult than making payments or fulfilling rituals or accomplishing deeds.
- *Our part* is to freely and willingly accept, respond and receive the grace of God
- *Our part* is to come home on God’s terms (not our own) and to fall into his loving arms.

OR not. This terrifying freedom is the risk that love takes. BUT never underestimate the wonders of divine Love. This Love that generated the universe can regenerate a heart of stone. This divine Love raised the dead, granted sight to the blind and set free the prisoners. And that same grace, that same gospel, that same



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gift after gift after gift continues in relentless pursuit of lost coins, lost sheep, lost sons.

The eternal offer of God is his passionate love affair with and pursuit of us, a divine invitation to marry the Son and live in the Father’s house forever. It’s relational. It’s personal. It’s intimate. It’s real. The Father’s house and the Father’s table—an always and forever invitation to live with and dine with God.

Some might suggest an analogy, proposing that God’s invitation is like telling us we have won a fortune in some lottery, but we need to claim it to cash in. But metaphors involving sweepstakes or a lottery stretch the biblical metaphors because they miss the relational key.

It’s always the *Father’s* house, the *King’s* table, the *Husband’s* wealth. The offer is eternal and forever, free room and board. He is the owner whose lavish hospitality we enjoy.

More Than Eternal Room & Board

But a relationship is the key. We don’t just want his “stuff,” do we? Grace makes a way to know HIM. Love makes a way to love HIM. The table and the house and the wealth... they are worthless without HIM. Eternal life is NOT *getting* our inheritance. Jesus says it is *knowing* the Father, the Son

whom he sent (John 17:3) and Spirit they have given.

If we must think of “currency” in the kingdom, we think of grace—that’s God’s economy. Religious currency does not buy our way into a relationship. The currency in the kingdom of heaven is what God creates in us and of us—lost coins, buried pearls, tarnished gold—now found, revealed and purified by his love. We are his new creation.

It is also a bit trite to reduce God’s offer to room and board forever. In fact, the Bible speaks of our inheritance as his children. But contrary to human inheritances, our Father never dies or leaves. We’re more than grateful renters or lucky beneficiaries. We are co-owners, in his house and at his table forever, privileged to dine in his presence as his family.

Reflecting on this *gift after gift after gift* empowers and predisposes us to give fair consideration to God’s invitation. It can be a difficult choice when accepting God’s grace means letting go of self-will and surrendering our lives to his care. It is not at all easy or natural for those used to living their own way.

Our decision to accept means surrendering our self-centered desires, yielding to the Lord and following him (rather than “letting” him tag along with our agendas).

For that reason, many who deride grace as lazy, too easy, or meant for losers (of course it is!) find that grace is the hardest decision any human can make. Why? It means death to the demands of our egos and the way we prefer to live. It’s the end of any pretentious idea that God owes us and that we deserve God’s favor.

Thus, when it comes to “our part” grace is anything but easy. Christ calls it a “cross.” And on the other hand, he also dares to call it grace, good news and a light yoke. A contradiction?

Not really. Opening our tight fists to let go of our willful ways and grandiose schemes IS hard (as hard as we make it). But once opened and turned heavenward to receive what’s already flowing—oh the riches of grace that fill our waiting hands. *Gift after gift after gift.* □

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from Christless
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