

Mod 1: If Grace isn't fair – Is that Good?

“If God were to ask you, ‘Why should I let you into my heaven?’ What would you say?” Do you have an answer prepared, in case such a question is asked? What kind of answer would be acceptable to God?

This course is designed to sharpen your understanding of the nature of salvation. Specifically it asks the question, "What does it mean to be saved by grace?"

The goal of the course is to explore the *Biblical* teaching about grace and how it relates to subjects such as law, works, the cross, faith, baptism, justification, and assurance. This is not a study of theologians' views of grace or of the history of the doctrine.

This is a class that will require you to read passages from scripture and form an opinion based on what you've read. The course as a whole will emphasize the theme that the heart of grace is justification by the blood of Christ through faith, a proper understanding of which is the key to assurance of salvation. Since this is in effect the fundamental element of the Christian gospel, a proper grasp of these concepts is necessary for a satisfying personal faith and for an adequate presentation of the gospel in evangelistic or witnessing situations. Thus this course is foundational in terms of our mission to train Christian workers for all aspects of service in the church.

My job is to guide you in seeking the truth. What I think is not as important as what you draw out from within yourself. (The true meaning of education) There are 14 modules that we will explore about grace. Seven modules each six weeks.

Each week you will receive a page or pages like this. We will also post the module on the web site. Prepare your response for each class on a single page. That will be the basis for our discussions. You will be asked each week to complete a story or answer a question. Each assignment will reference a passage or passages in scripture that are meant to start you thinking about the topic. We will discuss what you have discovered and look at how that is backed up by scripture. Many Christians believe things about their faith that cannot be backed up by scripture. Our job will be to examine which is opinion only and which is truth based on scripture. (Not just one sentence – but passages that are consistent across scripture). We will ask the question – Is this consistent with “What we believe”?

The topics are derived from the writings of Dr. Jack Cottrell and the Doctrine of Grace class that he created at Cincinnati Christian University.

People in general, including many Christians, assume that we will go to heaven if we are good enough. If we live a good life, do all of the right things, and avoid sinning, we have a good chance of being allowed into heaven. The problem is that one can never be sure that he or she is “good enough” to make the cut.

One George Barna poll found that 63 percent of the U.S. population thinks that if a person is good enough, he can earn his way to heaven. Even a third of those identifying themselves as born-again Christians said the same thing! USA Weekend (Dec. 19–21, 1986), included a cover article on the subject, “What are your chances of going to heaven?” These words appeared in big letters on the cover, along with pictures of three individuals and their brief answers to the question. A middle-aged fellow from Illinois said his chances were “50–50. The older I get, the more I think my chances will improve.” A rather young matron from Indiana said, “My chances are kind of slim—maybe 50–50. You have to be more than a nice person. But I’m still in the running.” A Florida man was pretty laid back about it: “Eighty-five percent. I don’t think the entrance exam will be that tough.” As I reflect on these answers, it seems clear that these folks (at least the first two) are measuring their chances of going to heaven in terms of how good they perceive themselves to be. You can almost see them picturing God holding up a balance scale, with their sins on one side and their good deeds on the other. In fact, they seem to fear that even 51% good would not be “good enough.” (Cottrell, J. 2009)

Commenting on a Gallup poll, an article in a periodical called *Emerging Trends* (January 1998, 1) says, “A majority of Americans (56%), with most describing themselves as Christians, say that when they think about their death, they worry ‘a great deal’ or ‘somewhat’ that they will ‘not be forgiven by God.’ Half of all interviewees (51%) worry about dying when they are removed or cut off from God or a higher power.” The article draws this conclusion: “Such findings ... raise the question of whether Christians in the U.S. have an understanding of the Christian meaning of ‘grace’, and suggest the need for more effective biblical teaching in Christian churches in this country.”

Almost everyone develops a “fairness mentality” to some degree. We are conditioned from childhood to respect and seek fairness, otherwise known as justice. We know what it means to deserve (or not deserve) something. Very early in life, kids learn to say, “That’s not fair!”

Most of the world, including many groups and individuals within Christendom, try to apply the fairness mentality to salvation itself. The assumption is that only those who are “good enough” go to heaven. Long ago I saw the results of some random answers to the question, “What are your chances of going to heaven?” One person said, “50-50. The older I get, the more I think my chances will improve.” Another said, “My chances are kinda slim, maybe 50-50. You have to be more than a nice person. But I’m still in the running.” An optimist said, “85%! I don’t think the entrance exam will be that tough.”

Like many others, all of these folks were obviously assuming that Judgment Day will involve something like a balance scale, where sins are on one side of the scale and good deeds on the other. One’s good deeds must outweigh the bad, perhaps significantly. Only then will we deserve heaven.

Assignment: Grace Module 1

Read: Luke 18: 9-14 -

Close your eyes and formulate in your mind an honest answer: “If you were to die (or Christ should come) at this very moment, would you be saved or lost?” [STOP AND THINK ABOUT IT.] Now, for our purposes what matters is not whether you answered yes or no, but what first came into your mind as you began to formulate your answer.

Do you have an answer prepared, in case such a question is asked? What kind of answer would be acceptable to God? In one page share your answer.