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# THE DIVINE POWER OF Grace

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**O**f all the attributes of Jesus Christ, perhaps the most significant is that He is “full of grace” (John 1:14). In the scriptures the term *grace* most often refers to the divine disposition and power to bless, bestow gifts, or otherwise act favorably toward man. The Bible Dictionary puts it this way: “The main idea of the word [*grace*] is divine means of help or strength. . . . Grace is an enabling power” (“Grace”). It enables the recipient to do and to be what he or she cannot do and cannot be if left to his or her own means.

All of us need such an enabling power. We are the sons and daughters of God. As such, we have the potential to become like Him.

## Our Incapacity in Spirit and Body

While it may be expected that we achieve the “fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13), we simply cannot do so on our own. Each of us is made up of two things—an eternal spirit and a mortal body (see Abraham 3:18). Our eternal spirit comes into the world a product of choices made in the premortal world. These premortal choices are part of our personality, character, and spiritual intelligence. Significantly, no two spirits are the same (see Abraham 3:19). Each spirit possesses a different degree of spiritual intelligence, or light and truth (see D&C 93:36), according to his or her premortal choices. While each of our spirits may arrive in its mortal body at birth clean and pure, and even noble and great, no one of our spirits is yet perfectly developed unto the fulness of Christ. Perfection of spirit may be pursued

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during the schooling of mortality and the additional experience of the spirit world, but perfection of spirit is not finally accomplished until the Resurrection.

In addition to the current imperfection of our spirits, our mortal bodies are also imperfect. As wondrous as they are, our mortal bodies are subject to decay, deterioration, and

death and to desires, appetites, and passions previously unknown to us. Under such conditions it is enormously difficult to fully subject the body to the will of the spirit. Too often the spirit succumbs to the dictates of the body. Some of the greatest spirits who have come to earth have struggled to subdue their physical bodies. “My heart sorroweth because of my flesh,” cried Nephi. “I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me” (2 Nephi 4:17, 18; see also verse 27).

The war between spirit and body is made all the more difficult by another fact of mortality. Our physical bodies are constructed of the materials of a “fallen” world, which gives Satan a particular “power to captivate” (2 Nephi 2:29). President Brigham Young (1801–77) made the following observation: “Do not suppose that we shall ever in the flesh be free from temptations to sin,” he said. “Some suppose that they can in the flesh be sanctified body and spirit and become so pure that they will never again feel the effects of the power of the adversary of truth. Were it possible for a person to attain to this degree of perfection in the flesh he could not die, neither remain in a world where sin predominates. . . . I think we shall more or less feel the effects of sin so long as we live, and finally have to pass the ordeals of death.”<sup>1</sup>

## The Divine Power of Grace

We need a divine power that can transform our souls with all of our current weaknesses and deficiencies into gods with all of the accompanying strengths, virtues, and capacities. Gratefully, such a divine power exists; it is God’s grace. Only through the endowment of God’s grace are we “added upon” (Abraham 3:26), such that, in time, we attain the fulness of Christ. Indeed, this is exactly how Christ attained His fulness.

As the Lord told Joseph Smith, “He that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day” (D&C 50:24). But if we treat casually, set aside, or even ignore the gracious blessings we receive from the Lord, then “greater



things [are] withheld” from us (3 Nephi 26:10). In such circumstances, we receive the “grace of God in vain” (2 Corinthians 6:1) and eventually “fall from grace” (D&C 20:32) altogether.

All this suggests that we must learn patience with ourselves and others in our current weaknesses and imperfections, and we must learn perseverance in the unavoidably gradual process of growth unto perfection.

### ***Faith in Jesus Christ***

Understanding how grace is granted helps us understand how some principles fully enable grace to fill us. Faith in Jesus Christ is the first principle that welcomes grace (see Romans 5:1–2). Truth, hope, action, and confirming witness are the essential elements of faith and are the pathway to receiving the Lord’s grace.

Consider, for example, Peter’s experience of walking on the water to the Lord. Like

us at times, Peter and the disciples were in the midst of a tempestuous sea. Jesus came to them, walking on the water and bidding them to come to Him. With hope, Peter came down out of the boat into the boisterous sea and walked toward the Lord. His hope in Christ, coupled with determined action, permitted him to receive the power of walking on the water. But, looking at the storm around him, Peter doubted and began to sink. “Lord, save me,” he cried. In response, the scripture records that “immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him” (Matthew 14:30–31). When Peter fixed his eyes on the Lord and acted in faith, he had power to do what he could not do on his own—walk on the water.

When Peter took his eyes off of the Lord and doubted, Peter severed himself from that power, was left to his own, and began to

sink. Note well the response of the Lord to Peter's cry for help. "Immediately" did the Lord extend His hand to save him. Such is the availability of the Lord's grace in our time of need.

### **Repentance**

Repentance is the second principle that enables grace to fill us. Mormon taught: "Blessed are they who will repent and hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God; for these are they that shall be saved. And may God grant . . . that men might be brought unto repentance and good works, that they might be restored unto grace for grace, according to their works" (Helaman 12:23–24). From this

sins and iniquities of his life. In that moment he became "racked with eternal torment" (Alma 36:12). "The very thought of coming into the presence of my God," he said, "did rack my soul with inexpressible horror" (Alma 36:14). But Alma remembered that his father had spoken concerning the coming of Jesus Christ to atone for the sins of the world. This recollection moved him to cry out in his heart, "O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me" (Alma 36:18). Immediately, he "could remember [his] pains no more" and "was harrowed up by the memory of [his] sins no more" (Alma 36:19).

Alma's soul-wrenching repentance welcomed a power that cleansed and transformed him into a new creature. No longer did he seek to destroy the Church of God. Rather, for the balance of his life, Alma labored to build up the Church by working to help others repent and receive the Holy Ghost. Alma the Younger's conversion from the vilest of sinners to prophet of God is a dramatic example of the power of the Lord's grace to both justify and sanctify every one of us.

### **Humility**

The third principle is humility. The Lord taught Moroni, "My grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them" (Ether 12:27). Making weak things become strong is the work of grace.

If humility is necessary, we might well ask what humility is. Briefly stated, humility is the submission of one's own will to the will of God and giving Him the honor for what is accomplished. In this regard, Jesus Christ

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scripture, it is clear that a repentant heart and good works are in harmony with grace.

Consider the example of Alma the Younger. He, along with the sons of Mosiah, "were the very vilest of sinners" (Mosiah 28:4). When the angel of the Lord appeared unto Alma, he was confronted with all the



is our greatest example. His humility and submissiveness were perfectly manifested during His atoning sacrifice. “O my Father,” Jesus prayed, “if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39). The fulness of God’s grace flooded Christ on this occasion.

### **Diligence**

The fourth principle is diligence. As Nephi taught his people, “It is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23). Some may read this scripture to mean that God’s grace is withheld until we have given our best efforts. I do not read it this way. There are simply too many examples of God’s grace being extended to man without him doing anything. The power of the Resurrection, for example, is given to all by the grace of God, irrespective of individual effort. I understand Nephi’s “all we can do” language to mean that God’s grace is extended to us when we are diligent. As Elder Bruce C. Hafen, former member of the Seventy, has written, “The Savior’s gift of grace to us is not necessarily limited in time to ‘after’ all we can do. We may receive his grace before, during, and after the time when we expend our own efforts.”<sup>2</sup>

Consider the example of the brother of Jared. He was instructed to build barges and use them to cross the ocean. Step by step, the brother of Jared was diligent in following the Lord’s instructions. As he completed the barges, the brother of Jared became concerned about the darkness in the barges and asked the Lord to provide light. While the Lord could have readily provided the brother of Jared with a solution, He asked instead, “What will ye that I should do that



DETAIL FROM ALMA, ARISE, BY WALTER RANE





ye may have light in your vessels?” (Ether 2:23). In response, the brother of Jared diligently prepared 16 stones, presented them to the Lord, and asked that He touch them so “that they may shine forth in darkness” (see Ether 3:1–4).

The brother of Jared had not completed all that the Lord had given him to do, but the Lord extended His power nonetheless in behalf of the brother of Jared, touching each of the stones and causing them to produce the light needed for the anticipated voyage. In so doing, the Lord showed His willingness and readiness to extend His divine powers to us as we diligently do the best we can.

#### **Obedience**

The fifth principle is obedience. “If you keep my commandments,” said the Lord, “you shall receive grace for grace” (D&C 93:20).

Moroni puts it this way: “If ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ” (Moroni 10:32).

Without diminishing the Lord’s injunction to keep the commandments or Moroni’s injunction to deny ourselves of all ungodliness, we should understand that grace is not dependent on our perfect compliance. If grace were dependent on our perfectly keeping the commandments or perfectly denying ourselves of all ungodliness, our persistent imperfection in mortality would forever preclude us from acquiring grace. Grace is intended, after all, to enable us to more perfectly keep the commandments and pursue a godlier walk, until we attain the full stature of Christ.

The Lord's injunction to keep the commandments and Moroni's injunction to deny ourselves of all ungodliness must be understood as doing these things the best we can. While our actions are important, more important are the intentions of our hearts.

### ***Receiving the Holy Ghost and Seeking the Gifts of the Spirit***

The final principle is to receive the Holy Ghost and seek the gifts of the Spirit (see Mosiah 18:16). Indeed, we are filled with the grace of God when we receive the Holy Ghost, for it is the Holy Ghost who distributes and delivers to us God's sanctifying, enabling, and perfecting powers.

In this regard, Elder Parley P. Pratt (1807–57) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught the following: "The gift of the Holy Ghost . . . quickens all the intellectual faculties, increases, enlarges, expands, and purifies all the natural passions and affections, and adapts them, by the gift of wisdom, to their lawful use. It inspires, develops, cultivates, and matures all the fine-toned sympathies, joys, tastes, kindred feelings, and affections of our nature. It inspires virtue, kindness, goodness, tenderness, gentleness, and charity. It develops beauty of person, form, and features. It tends to health, vigor, animation, and social feeling. It invigorates all the faculties of the physical and intellectual man. It strengthens and gives tone to the nerves. In short, it is, as it were, marrow to the bone, joy to the heart, light to the eyes, music to the ears, and life to the whole being."<sup>3</sup>

Such blessings come to us as we receive the Holy Ghost following our baptism and confirmation. Elder Orson Pratt (1811–81) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that "whenever the Holy Ghost takes up its residence in a person, it not only cleanses, sanctifies, and purifies him, in proportion as he yields himself to its influence, but also imparts to him some gift, intended for the benefit of himself and others. . . . These spiritual gifts are distributed among the members of the Church, according to their faithfulness, circumstances, natural abilities, duties, and callings; that the whole may be properly instructed, confirmed, perfected, and saved."<sup>4</sup>

### **The Sufficiency of God's Grace**

Jesus Christ is full of grace. Christ acquired the riches of His grace from His Father and did so "grace for grace" (D&C 93:12). In like manner we receive grace for grace. We will be endowed with every attribute and characteristic of God. Finally, this enabling and perfecting power of grace is available through the principles of faith, repentance, humility, diligence, obedience, and seeking the Spirit and its gifts.

The Lord's grace is sufficient to lift you from death and sin and to endow you with eternal life. It is sufficient to change you, transform you, and perfect you. It is sufficient to enable you to fully realize your divine potential as a son or daughter of God. ■

*From a Church Educational Devotional address, "His Grace Is Sufficient for You," delivered at Brigham Young University–Hawaii on June 3, 2014. For the full address, go to [devotional.byuh.edu](http://devotional.byuh.edu).*

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#### **NOTES**

1. Brigham Young, in *Deseret News*, June 3, 1863.
2. Bruce C. Hafen, *The Broken Heart: Applying the Atonement to Life's Experiences* (1989), 155–56.
3. Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology: A Voice of Warning* (1978), 61.
4. Orson Pratt, in *Masterful Discourses and Writings of Orson Pratt*, comp. N. Lundwall (1962), 570, 571.