

## USES OF THE WORD “GRACE” IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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Introduction: Many do not understand the doctrine of salvation by grace as it is set forth in the Scriptures. An understanding of salvation by grace must begin with an understanding of the meaning of the word “grace.” The Greek word translated “grace” χάρις – *charis* is used in several different ways in the New Testament. This lesson considers the various uses of this word.

### DEFINITIONS OF THE WORD TRANSLATED “GRACE”

#### Lexical Definitions

The Greek word χάρις (pronounced *charis*) is defined: “**1.** prop. that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, *sweetness, charm, loveliness*: grace of speech ... **2.** *good-will, loving-kindness, favor* ... **3.** *what is due to grace*; **a.** *the spiritual condition of one governed by the power of divine grace*, ... **b.** *a token or proof of grace* ... **4.** *thanks* (for benefits, services, favors)” (Thayer, pp. 665-666) “**1.** *graciousness, attractiveness* ... **2.** *favor, grace, gracious care or help, goodwill* –**a** ... act., that which one grants to another ... **b.** pass., that which one experiences fr. another ... **c.** In Christian epistolary lit. fr. the time of Paul. χάρις is found w. the sense (divine) *grace* or *favor* in fixed formulas at the beginning and end of letters ... **3.** *practical application of goodwill, a (sign of) favor, gracious deed or gift, benefaction* –**a.** on the part of men ... **b.** on the part of God and Christ the context will show whether the emphasis is upon the *possession of divine grace* as a source of blessings for the believer, or upon a *store of grace* that is dispensed, or a *state of grace* (i. e. standing in God’s favor) that is brought about, or a *deed of grace* wrought by God in Christ, or a *work of grace* that grows fr. more to more. ... **4.** of exceptional effects produced by divine grace, above and beyond those usu. experienced by Christians... Paul knows that through the χάρις of God he has been called to be an apostle, and that he has been fitted w., the powers and capabilities requisite for this office fr. the same source: ... The χάρις of God manifests itself in various *χαρίσματα*... **5.** *thanks, gratitude* ...” (BAG, pp. 885-886) “CHARIS (χάρις) has various uses, (a) objective, that which bestows or occasions pleasure, delight, or causes favourable regard; it is applied, e.g., to beauty, or gracefulness of person ...or speech, ... (b) subjective, (1) on the part of the bestower, the friendly disposition from which the kindly act proceeds, graciousness, lovingkindness, goodwill generally ... (2) in the part of the receiver, a sense of the favour bestowed, a feeling of gratitude ... it sometimes signifies to be thankful ... (c) in another objective sense, the effect of grace, the spiritual state of those who have experienced its exercise, whether (1) a state of grace ... or (2) a proof thereof in practical effects, deeds of grace ...” (Vine, pp. 509-510)

#### Definitions From Usage in the New Testament

The word χάρις is found in 147 verses of the Greek New Testament (it is found more than one time in five of these verses). In the KJV, this word is translated: *Favour* in six different

verses, *liberality* in 1 verse, *thanks* in 5 verses, *thank* in 6 verses, *thanked* in 1 verse, *thankworthy* in 1 verse, *pleasure* in 2 verses, *gracious* in 1 verse, *joy* in 1 verse, and *acceptable* in 1 verse. The word *χάρις* is also translated “grace” in 121 verses.

### Usages in Secular Greek and the Scriptures

“We have often noted how frequently Greek words are glorified and transformed when adopted for Christian use. These words seem to have waited for this adoption to reveal all the rich, deep meanings they contained or might be made to contain. *Charis* is such a word, and because it refers to the heart or essence of the Greek mind, it will be beneficial to sketch the history of its development. *Charis* is first of all that property that produces joy in its hearers or beholders.” (Trench, p. 181)

“*Charis* also referred to the presence of grace or beauty, which were the most joy-inspiring of all qualities for the Greek. *Charis* often is used this way in the Septuagint (Ps. 45:2; Prov. 10:32), Apocrypha (Ecclus. 24:16; 40:22, “charm [*charis*] and beauty”), and New Testament (Luke 4:22; and perhaps Eph. 4:29).” (Trench, p. 181)

“Over a period of time, *charis* ceased to refer to grace and beauty as qualities and came to refer to gracious or beautiful things, acts, thoughts, speech, or persons. It came to refer to grace that embodied and expressed itself in gracious actions toward objects, not to ‘favor’ in the sense of beauty. ... In classical Greek and in the Septuagint (Esther 5:3), *charin* often was used to mean ‘to seek, receive, and give favor.’ *Charis* also is used in the New Testament to refer to a merely human grace and favor (thus Acts 2:47; 25:3; 2 Cor.9:19), ...” (Trench, p. 182)

“*Charis* received its highest consecration in the New Testament, where its meaning was not changed but ennobled and glorified. *Charis* was lifted from referring to an earthly benefit to referring to a heavenly one, from signifying the favor, grace, and goodness of man to man, signifying the favor, grace, and goodness of God to man.” (Trench, p. 182)

“Moreover, the word *χάρις* contains the idea of *kindness which bestows upon one what he has not deserved.*” (Thayer, p. 666) One must not confuse the fact that no one deserves the grace of God with the false claim that grace is received unconditionally. This is a serious mistake. Note the form of this argument.

First Premise: If no one deserves the grace of God, then the grace of God is unconditionally received.

Second Premise: No one deserves the grace of God.

Conclusion: The grace of God is unconditionally received.

This argument assumes that all conditions for the reception of the grace of God are conditions that are meritorious. (This “begs the question” [assumes that the Calvinist is trying to prove].) This means that the argument proves “absolutely nothing!”

THE MEANING OF THE USAGE AND NON-USAGE  
OF THE GREEK DEFINITE ARTICLE

Robertson states: “The anarthrous<sup>1</sup> noun may per se be either definite or indefinite.” (p. 796) “When there is only one such object, it is definite without the article ... Some words are definite from the nature of the case like home, husband, wife, father, mother ... Prepositions often help to make a word definite.” (Robertson and Davis, pp. 282-283) “the Greek often omits the article between a preposition and a noun.” (Roberts, p. 8)

“The articular construction emphasizes *identity*; the anarthrous construction emphasizes *character*.” (Dana and Mantey, p. 140) “The Greek article is used to point out particular *identity*. This is called the ‘articular’ use of the noun or other substantive. When no definite article is used with the noun (or other substantive), it is called the ‘anarthrous’ use. The anarthrous construction is used to indicate quality or characteristics.” (Summers, p. 16) “*To Denote Previous Reference*. The article may be used to point out an object the identity of which is defined by some previous reference made to it in the context.” (Dana and Mantey, p. 141) One would have to go to the context to determine what the writer was referring to. The definite article was discussed in Fox Vol. I (pp. 33, 49, 51-52, 77-78, 133, 151, 157, 185, and 257). In discussing the Greek definite article Nunn says: “The student must therefore pay most careful attention to its use; he must not think that it is used arbitrarily or without reason, because he finds it difficult to express its force in English.” (p. 56) Robertson and Davis state that: “The Greek article is not used when it has no meaning.” (p. 275)

Dana and Mantey write:

vii. The articular construction emphasizes *identity*; the anarthrous construction emphasizes *character*. If the student will turn to Rom. 8:1ff. and apply this principle, he will find how illuminating it becomes in actual interpretation. It is certain that one engaged in exegesis cannot afford to disregard the article. The New Testament justifies the observation of Buttman that “the use of the article has everywhere its positive reason” (p. 140)

Dana and Mantey also wrote:

(3) *With Abstract Nouns*. Abstract nouns are ordinarily general in their character and application, and therefore indefinite. But in Greek, when it is desired to apply the sense of an abstract noun in some special and distinct way the article accompanies it. Thus ἀλήθεια, *truth*, means anything in general which presents a character of reality and genuineness, but ἡ ἀλήθεια as used in the New Testament means that which may be relied upon as really in accord with God’s revelation in Christ. The general sense of the abstract noun is restricted, and given a particular application: the particular truth which is revealed in Christ.

τῆ γὰρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι.  
For by grace are ye saved. Eph. 2:8

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<sup>1</sup> The word “anarthrous” means: “without the article.”

That is, grace in its particular application in securing man's salvation. It is not grace as an abstract attitude, nor yet the gracious attitude of God in general; but "*the* grace" of God which operated through the atonement in providing human redemption. Grace is a quality which may characterize various objects; but here it is particularized as an attribute of God, exercised in a particular realm. (pp. 141-142)

## VARIOUS USAGES OF THE GREEK WORD *χάρις* IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

### Literal Usages of the Word "Grace"

The word "grace" (without the definite article) refers to the favor of God in providing man with salvation from sin. This is the import of this word in Rom. 1:5, 4:4, 16, Eph. 2:5-10, etc. This grace cannot be separated from the word of God.

The word "grace" (with the definite article) refers to the system by which the favor of God provides man with salvation from sin. This is the import of this word in John 1:17, Acts 13:43, 14:3, 15:11, 40, 18:27, 20:24, 32, Rom. 3:24, 1 Pet. 4:10, and Jude 4. Luke uses the word *charis* (grace) to refer to the salvation (by synecdoche) in Acts 11:23. This system of grace teaches us (Tit. 2:11-12).

### Figurative Uses of the Word "Grace" in the New Testament

Sometimes the word *charis* (grace) refers to a miraculous gift. This is the import of this word in Rom. 12:3, 6, 15:15-16, 1 Cor. 1:4-5, 3:10, Eph. 4:7, etc. It refers to Paul's gift of apostleship (Gal. 2:9, Eph. 3:2, 7-8, etc.)

Sometimes the word *charis* (grace) refers to the collection for the saints in Judea. The word *charis* is translated "bounty-ASV" or "liberality - KJV" in 1 Cor. 16:3. The word *χάρις* is also found in: 2 Cor. 8:1, 4, 6, 7, 19, 9:8, and 14. All of these passages refer to the contribution that was made for the churches in Judea. Paul may also be referring to this contribution, in 2 Cor. 1:15.

## APPLICATIONS TO VARIOUS VERSES THAT ARE MISUNDERSTOOD BY SOME BRETHREN

### Commentary on 2 Timothy 2:1

In 2 Timothy 1 Paul has discussed some that were strong in the faith and some that were not strong in the faith. The weak ones had turned from the faith to error.

**Thou therefore**, (σὺ οὖν "inferential ... transitional, or continuative ... responsive" [Dana and Mantey, pp. 252-255] This links chapter two with the thoughts of chapter one. Paul gives instructions to Timothy after giving the examples of chapter 1 [*both good and bad examples*]). **my child** (τέκνον μου, τέκνον "*offspring*"; plur. *children*; ... univ. and without regard to sex, *child* ... τέκνον, υἱός while concurring in pointing to parentage, differ in that

τέκνον gives prominence to the physical and outward aspects, υἱός to the inward, ethical, legal” [Thayer, pp. 617-618] Paul the older Christian who had taught the younger Timothy appealed to the respect Timothy would have for him to exhort him to continue to serve the Lord. Timothy was Paul’s child in a spiritual sense. Timothy was not Paul’s legal child but his child in the gospel.) **be strengthened** (ἐνδυναμοῦ -2<sup>nd</sup> pers. sing. pres. imper. mid. of ἐνδυναμόω from ἐν and δύναμις “to make strong, endue with strength, strengthen” [Thayer, p. 214] δύναμις “power, natural ability, general and inherent” [Thayer, p. 160] Timothy was strengthening himself [implied by the *middle voice*] by his study of the Scriptures. “The only difference between the active and middle voices is that the middle calls especial attention to the subject. In the active voice the subject is merely acting; in the middle the subject is acting in relation to himself somehow.” [Robertson, p. 804]<sup>2</sup>) **in the grace** (ἐν τῇ χάριτι “This will indicate that *form* is a matter of *inflection* while *case* is a matter of *function*. ... The *dative* is the case of *interest*. Its most frequent usage, though by no means its only one, is to express the indirect object of a verb. ... The *locative* case is the case of *location* or *position*. It uses the same form as the dative. ... The *instrumental case*, which also uses the third inflected form, is the case which expresses *means*.” [Summers, pp. 17-18] If this is translated as the instrumental case it tells us how we are strengthened [*by the grace = by the word of God*]. No doubt this refers to the New Testament as the instrument by which we are strengthened [*we strengthen ourselves by our study and application of the Scriptures - middle voice*]. If this is translated as the locative case it would be in the sphere or domain of the grace system. This is probably saying that he is to strengthen himself by “the grace” system or by the New Testament. The grace system teaches us [Tit. 2:11-12]. The usage of the Greek definite article in this verse no doubt demonstrates that he is referring to the grace system. “The student must therefore pay most careful attention to its use; he must not think that it is used arbitrarily or without reason, because he finds it difficult to express its force in English.” [Nunn, p. 56] Robertson and Davis state that “The Greek article is not used when it has no meaning.” [p. 275] “The Greek article is used to point out particular *identity*. This is called the ‘articular’ use of the noun or other substantive. When no definite article is used with the noun (or other substantive), it is called the ‘anarthrous’ use. The anarthrous construction is used to indicate quality or characteristics.” [Summers, p. 16]).

Some translations mistranslate the Greek middle voice verb as a passive voice verb. The ASV reads “be strengthened,” the KJV reads “be strong,” the NKJV reads “be strong,” the NASB reads “be strong,” the NIV reads “be strong,” and the NRSV reads “be strong.” Note that this is in the imperative mood. How does one obey this commandment? Is it commanding one who is “totally depraved” (doctrine of Calvinism) to somehow submit to the will of God? Calvinism claims that one who is totally depraved is totally unable to do anything good.

#### Fox’s Translation of 2 Timothy 2:1

2 Tim. 2:1 You therefore, my child, strengthen yourself by the grace, the in Christ Jesus *grace*.

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<sup>2</sup> The middle voice is discussed more fully in Fox, 2005, Appendix C.

### Commentary on John 1:17

The Calvinist and semi-Calvinist will often try to say that the Old Testament is purely legal (all law) and the New Testament is purely grace (all grace). The usual proof text is Jn. 1:17. Jn. 1:17 says: **For the law** (The Law of Moses or the Old Testament) **was given through Moses; grace** (literally-the grace; hence, the system of grace or the New Testament) **and truth** (literally “the truth;” hence the system of truth or New Testament) **came through Jesus Christ.**

The Greek article is not translated in this passage even though it is present with the words “grace” and “truth.” If grace did not exist prior to the coming of Jesus Christ, then truth did not exist prior to that time either. But grace did exist in the Old Testament, so did truth. **Noah found favor** (ASV) or **grace** (KJV) **in the eyes of the Lord** (Gen. 6:8). The writer of Hebrews contrasts the Old and New Testaments in Heb. 1:1-2. (Fox, 2003, p. 90-91)

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