

# Relational Grace



# Relational Grace

The Reciprocal and Binding Covenant  
of *Charis*

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BYU Studies  
Provo, Utah

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*Meis patronis*: Jack and Judith



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## Foreword

**T**HIS IS A VERY SIGNIFICANT BOOK ON A VERY IMPORTANT topic. Its powerful scriptural approach invites faithful people to better understand, appreciate, and reciprocate the loving gifts of God. If you have wondered what Paul, Nephi, or any other scriptural authors might mean when they speak of grace, your heart and mind will be nourished by the sound explanations found in this book.

The insightful historical approach that this book skillfully deploys takes the concept of grace back to the beginning. It then offers readers a step-by-step account of the origins, developments, mutations, and transformations of the idea of grace from ancient civilizations down to modern times.

The fascinating linguistic approach utilized here introduces readers to the literary and cultural contexts out of which the crucial Greek word *charis* emerged. *Charis*, though looking a bit like the English word charity, conveys a wider semantic range of meanings, one that especially emphasizes the interpersonal and reciprocal dynamics of an enduring grace relationship.

The meanings and workings of grace are often misunderstood, and for good reason. Many mysteries of God abide in the sublime realm of grace. This book shows that, amazingly, grace is even more than an undeserved gift. Years ago, Hugh Nibley taught us, “Work we must but the lunch is free.” Now in this book, Brent Schmidt teaches us that it

is precisely because the lunch is free that we are obliged to work. By obliging us, our Lord obligates us. And we are much obliged.

While grace is correctly said to be an attribute of God, it is much more than an attribute. Like love, which cannot exist in a solipsistic world—it takes at least two people for love to exist—so grace also is relational. Were it not for the interconnected subjective existences of other people, grace would not and could not exist. Hence, the title of this book leads out with the newly minted phrase “relational grace.” As Brent Schmidt convincingly shows, any relationship infused with grace involves reciprocal relations. Hence, the idea of reciprocity, which is of the essence of the word *charis* and its cognates, heightens one’s awareness of the bilateral nature of grace, especially as grace is found in covenant relationships.

This book argues against any understanding of grace that fails to acknowledge strongly that something is expected in return for the receipt of grace. This book masterfully shows that grace is not a one-way gift. Indeed, there is something hollow about receiving a gift and not being able to respond to the benefactor in the way the benefactor would most like to see. And what does God desire in response to his grace and loving kindness? The time when God’s grace fell upon the crowd on the day of Pentecost is instructive. When those people asked the Apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Peter answered, “Repent, and be baptized, and . . . receive the gift of the Holy Ghost . . . for the promise is unto you, and to your children” (Acts 2:37–39). Thus, faithfully making and loyally keeping covenants with God is responsive to the extension of divine grace by God to his children.

I first became aware of the benefits of understanding *charis* through the paradigm of the classical patronage relationship when I heard an academic paper on this subject at a meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. The presenter was concerned that the Bible has been interpreted wrongly by filtering *charis* through modern theologies of grace, rather than by deriving the understanding of grace through the biblical world’s meaning of *charis*. Shortly afterwards, as Brent Schmidt and I were translating passages in the Greek New Testament, we got talking about the need for a number of rigorous word studies that would better explain the meaning of key Greek words, such as *charis*. Never one to balk in the face of difficult challenges, Brent soon came back with

a first draft of this book, drawing on his extensive previous reflections on this subject.

Brent is well prepared to make this complicated subject plain and precious. He has rendered a great service to all people who seek a gracious guide to help them understand the life of grace. He blesses his readers with the gift of understanding, for which we are all deeply in his debt.

I echo the sentiments expressed by one of the peer reviewers of this book, “There is so much here, and it is so well done. I completely agree with it.” I commend this book to all. I hope it will be read with joy, and that in that joy the relational bonds of the scriptural treasure of grace will grow stronger and radiate ever more abundantly.

John W. Welch  
August 2015



# Acknowledgments

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK MY FRIEND EDWARD C. MILLER AND my father, James E. Schmidt, for their patience in reading through two early drafts of the manuscript of this work. They offered much help, suggestions and encouragement. On later drafts, Elder Bruce C. Hafen and Robert L. Millet made many helpful suggestions. Alison Coutts assisted with formatting. Jennifer Hurlbut assisted with many final edits. I thank Ross D. Baron and many others who helped me obtain permanent employment at BYU–Idaho, which enabled me to continue researching the ancient nuances of charis. I thank the participants of the 2015 Summer Seminar of the BYU New Testament Commentary for their insightful reviews. John W. Welch of Brigham Young University provided helpful comments at every juncture, encouragement, and financial support for general New Testament research for this and other projects which made the publication of this work possible. It is to him and my wife, Judith, my patrons, that I dedicate this work. I accept all shortcomings in the text as my own.



# Introduction

I BECAME INTERESTED IN THE COMPLEX TOPIC OF GRACE several years ago during a graduate seminar on the Peloponnesian War. While reading the speeches of the ancient historian Thucydides, I noted that the Greek word *charis*, which is translated into English as *grace* or *favor*, was used to describe the considerable political obligations incumbent upon the Athenians, the Spartans, and their allies. I found that throughout classical, Hellenistic, early Christian, and late-antique Greek texts, the word *charis* was used in several senses, including giving compliments about a person's gracefulness and beauty, but when used in the sense of giving favor or in any context of a relationship between people or groups of people, the word always has a connotation that the person or group giving favor expected something in return: favors, service, gratitude, honor, obedience, and more. Ancient kings increased their power by creating *charis* relationships. Cities made allies of other cities through *charis*. Kinships and friendships were cemented through *charis*.<sup>1</sup> Ancient *charis* gifts were synonymous with reciprocity in the form of making and keeping covenants.

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1. *Charis* relationships will be thoroughly discussed in chapters below, but for an initial reference, see Hans Van Wees, "Reciprocity in Anthropological Theory," in *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece*, ed. Christopher Gill, Norman Postlethwaite, and Richard Seaford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 41–45.

I knew that the word *charis* appears in many Greek New Testament verses (where it is usually translated as grace) and that certain Christian theologians use these verses to teach that grace is a free, no-strings-attached, one-way gift from God, and that humanity has no other obligation than to initially accept Jesus as their Savior.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, I was stunned that I could not find examples in any ancient Greek texts in which *charis* means this sort of free gift, with nothing expected in return. In fact, I saw how the New Testament verses on *charis* could and should be read to mean that grace relationships are reciprocal. I wondered if perhaps my personal religious biases as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (which teaches that salvation comes through faith in Christ, repentance through his Atonement, and ordinances) might have influenced my reading of these texts. However, I was later astonished to discover that New Testament commentators sometimes offer the subtle disclaimer that classical grace is very different from Pauline grace.<sup>3</sup> My excellent classics instructors, who sometimes doubled as religious leaders in their various faiths, frankly admitted that *charis* always had reciprocal nuances, contradicting the aforementioned notion that grace is a free gift. As I studied this concept of gift-giving in sociology and anthropology, I learned that gift-giving is reciprocal in almost all societies. Subsequently, I learned that certain biblical scholars, mostly in the past decade, have been challenging the notion of free grace in favor of reciprocal grace. All of these points will be discussed in the following chapters.

I wondered if Paul's use of grace was actually different from classical usage. Did Paul in fact use *charis* differently than those around him used it? Was he consciously using a vocabulary that was familiar to and understood by his Gentile convert audience? When he spoke of *charis*,

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2. One of the primary groups that espouses this view is the Grace Evangelical Society (<http://www.faithalone.org/about/beliefs.html>). Other examples will appear throughout this work.

3. For example, David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 96–97; Andrew, "'Grace,' a Mistranslated Word and Misunderstood Concept," at *Theo Geek*, <http://theogeek.blogspot.com/2008/02/grace-mistranslated-word-and.html>; and see the discussion of James Harrison's work in chapter 4 below.



did he intend for his audience to recognize this inherited understanding of the word? If Paul was challenging an understanding of charis as a pact with reciprocal obligation and instead declaring that this term could only mean a freely given gift, why do we not find an argument from Paul that would have teased out this differing interpretation of the word? With this, I began to study the various uses of grace in historical Christian writings. During a seminar on Saint Augustine in graduate school, I noticed, through reading *Confessions* and several of his epistles, how Augustine's articulation of grace appeared to conform to particular philosophical and religious movements of his day. Centuries later, Martin Luther's use of Augustine's articulation of grace significantly deflected attention from the ancient reciprocal meaning of charis.

I am certainly not the only Latter-day Saint to notice the discrepancy between the ancient understandings of grace, how it is used by certain Christian groups today, and the meanings of grace in LDS scripture.<sup>4</sup> But to date no one has delved into the richness of the range of meanings of charis as used in Greek literature and other ancient contexts, studied how that richness informs scripture, and presented it in an LDS context. This classical context is essential to understanding what the word charis meant when used in the New Testament. I hope this work will be considered not only by Latter-day Saint scholars, but also by general members, scholars of other faiths, and anyone interested in the theological topic of grace.

The present work examines the history of grace in an ancient Mediterranean context by first establishing what grace meant to those living prior to the time of Christ. I will argue that the contemporary understandings of grace as a free, no-obligation gift from God has been largely influenced by Augustine's writings, and that this view differs significantly from the earliest Christian writings. I will then examine the ways in which the concept of grace taught in the Book of Mormon resonates with this classical understanding of grace as a reciprocal covenant. In exploring this particular understanding of grace, each of

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4. For example, John Gee's article entitled "The Grace of Christ," *FARMS Review* 22, no. 1 (2010): 247–59, hints at a few of the basic themes developed in detail in this book. Gee rightly points out that Gospel authors use grace differently than do modern Protestants.

these chapters will build upon one another, and by the end of this study the reader can expect to come away with a fuller and richer understanding of what grace can mean—not only in the scriptures, but also in her or his personal life.

Although my work emphasizes the importance of reciprocal grace in salvation, I recognize that many other Christian principles such as *agapē*—defined as charity or love or concern for others—are also essential principles and doctrines of God’s plan of salvation. Human beings have spiritual needs such as grace, charity, obedience, faith, repentance, opportunities to serve, priesthood ordinances, and the companionship of the Holy Ghost in order to gain the gift of eternal life and exaltation. The relationship between these essential doctrines and charis remains a subject for further study.

A note about Latter-day Saint views of the Bible is needed at this point. Latter-day Saints believe the Bible to be the word of God, while at the same time they believe that there are occasional problems in the translation and transmission of certain biblical verses (A of F 8; 1 Ne. 13:26, 28–29). Because the Bible was transmitted over millennia and translated from one language to several others, it is very probable that certain passages may be missing altogether, and that many verses of the Bible may have not been translated as originally intended by their writers. Bible translations, to some extent, reflect the values of their times. We are fortunate that ancient Greek has been well preserved in many texts, which aids our ability to interpret the New Testament, most of which was originally written in Greek.

My hope for this work is that Latter-day Saints and other Christians will gain a greater appreciation for ancient understandings of grace as a reciprocal covenant in order to properly apply Jesus’ sacrifice in their daily lives. Having come from an LDS religious background, I have found the topic of grace particularly relevant to the modern practicing Mormon. I see myself standing amazed at the grace God offers me, and feel richer because I have dared to ask what he expects in return—the reciprocity of our continued discipleship.

## Gift Exchange and Reciprocity

**R**ECIPROCITY IS A GIFT-GIVING CONVENTION THAT IS USED almost universally by humanity to create social relationships. When these relationships are properly maintained, the usual result is harmonious, stable, and vibrant societies. This chapter will discuss the importance of reciprocity in the stability of society in the ancient world.

Reciprocity was the social glue that connected individuals from the earliest times. Alvin Gouldner describes the ubiquitous nature of the law of reciprocity as a primordial imperative which “pervades every relation of primitive life and is the basis on which the entire social and ethical life of primitive civilizations presumably rests.”<sup>1</sup> Georg Simmel argues that social equilibrium and cohesion could not exist in any society without “the reciprocity of service and return service.”<sup>2</sup> Howard Becker’s study of mankind’s need for reciprocity to survive in society led him to call humans *homo reciprocus*.<sup>3</sup> The institution of gift-giving in each ancient society created necessary obligations for all of its members to serve each other. Stephan Joubert explains the universal nature of

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1. Alvin W. Gouldner, “The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement,” *American Sociological Review* 25 (April 1960): 161–62.

2. Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. and ed. Kurt H. Wolff (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1950), 387.

3. Howard Becker, *Man in Reciprocity* (New York: Prager, 1956), 1.

reciprocity for all human beings: There is “no such thing as a free meal” because one is expected to return a favor as a part of one’s duty.<sup>4</sup> Joubert makes a strong argument that even in the modern world, gifts often are intended to create reciprocal relationships. Gift exchange and reciprocity were the social mechanisms that created relationships and governed the ancient societies of Greece and Rome.

Reciprocal relationships were fundamental in the development of society. Once these societies were established, material objects further supported the formation of communities by creating reciprocal obligations between different social groups. This is the means by which social groups bound themselves together and became societies. Gift exchange discouraged war within these societies while creating a sense of community. Hans Van Wees writes, “In short, reciprocity is the major force for keeping peace within and between communities where there is no effective centralized power to do so. There may be an inverse relation between the level of reciprocity and the state-formation within a society. . . . [Reciprocity] counters the war of all against all with ‘the exchange of everything between everybody.’ Law and order are maintained, not by centrally administered punishment, but by a communal threat of ostracism from all networks of reciprocal relations. Thus there is at least in theory ‘no sacrifice of equality and never of liberty.’”<sup>5</sup>

In early ancient societies that could be plagued by war and disunity, these reciprocal relationships were meant to last long enough to create peace and build positive relationships with potentially rival groups or societies. In studying Melanesian society, Annette Weiner finds that peace is created as objects circulate: “Objects are not just creating reciprocal obligations between two individuals (or groups). Rather, objects . . . may circulate for many years. In the course of circulation, social relations are reproduced, nurtured, and regenerated until finally male valuables [for example, axe blades] and/or female valuables [for example, fibrous skirts] secure the return.”<sup>6</sup>

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4. Stephan J. Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor: Reciprocity, Strategy and Theological Reflection in Paul’s Collection* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 18–19.

5. Van Wees, “Reciprocity in Anthropological Theory,” 29, 41.

6. Annette B. Weiner, “A Replacement for Reciprocity,” *American Ethnologist* 7 (February 1980): 79.

The items typically returned in antiquity were friendship, marriage, protection, security, land, tools, food, and weapons. These became gifts that one received and returned, and then again received and returned, and thus circulated in a reciprocal manner. Prized objects circulated only because of the obligations that were created by gift-giving.

Until the 1960s, the concept of reciprocity was not widely studied in anthropology. Marcel Mauss's influential sociological essay "The Gift" (1924), which became popular only decades later, explained the ubiquitous practice of gift exchange.<sup>7</sup> Mauss argues there are three parts to gift-giving: the obligation to make a gift, the obligation to receive it, and the obligation to repay it;<sup>8</sup> gift-giving creates reciprocal relationships.

Others have expounded on Mauss's work: Mary Douglas explained how a social superior or a master desired to further create or strengthen a relationship because those who have many human relationships feel socially "rich," while to be socially isolated is to be "poor."<sup>9</sup> In a desire to make more relationships, the social superior gave something of value to the social inferior and thus created a vertical "master-servant" relationship. The social inferior, who also needed social relationships, accepted gifts that obligated him or her to pay them back to their social superior, thereby establishing a bond. In usual circumstances, the returned gifts were of much lesser value. But the social inferior was still obligated to receive the gift and then try to repay it in some way.

Reciprocal relationships created through what the Greeks called *charis* were not articulated in anthropology as reciprocity until fairly recently. Today, sociologists and anthropologists have classified different kinds of reciprocity with their accompanying obligations. Carolyn Osiek explains three kinds of reciprocity that are involved in anthropological studies; these may be considered as additional meanings of the aforementioned definition of reciprocity. These include (1) generalized

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7. Marcel Mauss, "Essai sur le don: Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques," *L'Année Sociologique*, n.s., 1 (1923-24): 30-186.

8. Geoffrey MacCormack, "Reciprocity," *Man* 1 (March 1976): 97. Marcel Mauss's popular essay was turned into a work entitled *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New York: Norton Press, 1967).

9. Mary Douglas, *The World of Goods* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 118.

reciprocity, in which the interests of the other are primary, with undefined expectations of unspecified reciprocity; (2) balanced reciprocity, in which the mutual interests of both parties are taken into account, with an expectation of fairly even exchange; (3) negative reciprocity, in which self-interest is dominant and a person attempts to obtain a favor, gift, or money in exchange for little or nothing.<sup>10</sup>

Exchange theory is a sociological paradigm that begins with assumptions consistent with the law of reciprocity. In exchange theory, individuals and groups weigh the costs and benefits of their social actions in an attempt to maximize their own benefit and minimize their cost. With a description parallel to Osiek's, Alan Kirk argues that exchange theory's most common form in all societies is (1) generalized reciprocity, generous giving with an expectation that something will be given in return, which is a "characteristic of the intimate relationships of kinship and friendship." In addition to generalized reciprocity, modern individuals sometimes seek forms of (2) balanced reciprocity and (3) negative reciprocity in their social interactions. Leaders of ancient societies relied on generalized reciprocity to form and maintain necessary social relationships. Generalized reciprocity results in generous sharing that often cannot be repaid in full and results in gratitude and an undefined obligation to make a return.<sup>11</sup>

Rodney Stark, arguably the leading scholar of the subfield of sociology of religion, defines religion itself as an exchange: "Religion consists of very general explanations of existence, including the terms of exchange with a god or gods. . . . Terms of exchange with the gods provide the foundation for much religious thought, but as the words 'explanations of existence' indicate, there will be an extensive collection of ideas, principles, myths, symbols, images, and other elements of religious culture built upon this base."<sup>12</sup> Stark outlines general propositions that explain why covenants, obligations, and reciprocity become

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10. Carolyn Osiek, "The Politics of Patronage and the Politics of Kinship: The Meeting of the Ways," *Biblical Theology Bulletin: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 39 (2009): 144.

11. Alan Kirk, "Karl Polanyi, Marshall Sahlins, and the Study of Ancient Social Relations," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126 (Spring 2007): 182.

12. Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 91.

core elements of his theory of religion. One of Stark's propositions regarding the foundations of religion states:

In exchanging with the gods, humans will pay higher prices to the extent that the gods are believed to be more responsive. Responsive means the gods are concerned about, are informed about, and act on behalf of humans. We have selected "responsive" as the most appropriate term to sum up many similar attributes ascribed to the gods, including "personal" (impersonal), "caring," "loving," "merciful," "close," and "accessible," all of which can be summed up as the belief that "there is somebody up there who cares." The Nuer often refer to God as their father and themselves as "gaatku, thy children," not meaning these terms literally, but to indicate a relationship that involves "the sense of care and protection parents give to a child," and they commonly acknowledge God's care with the remark "God is present." This same sense of divine responsiveness is found in the orthodox conception of God presented by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Such a God makes an extremely attractive exchange partner, who can be counted on to maximize human benefits.<sup>13</sup>

Another point he makes is that "in exchanging with the gods, humans will pay higher prices to the extent that the gods are believed to be of greater scope." Stark further argues that "in pursuit of otherworldly rewards, humans will accept an extended exchange relationship." Stark defines an extended exchange relationship as "one in which the human makes periodic payments over a substantial length of time, often until death."<sup>14</sup> These extended exchange relationships, promises between man and God, might be termed *covenants* and are based on reciprocity and obligations.

Anthropological theory suggests that these general notions of reciprocity in the ancient world became formalized and were enforced by societies as a ritual to make individuals comfortable during social interactions.<sup>15</sup> For example, in many cultures the simple ritual of shaking someone's hand accompanied by formal greetings makes introductions and the general process of getting to know others easier. Similarly, the

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13. Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 98. They quote E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), 8–9, regarding the Nuer people.

14. Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 99.

15. See generally Van Wees, "Reciprocity in Anthropological Theory," 25–33.

rituals of gift-giving and reciprocity in ancient times provided the steps to help individuals and clans comfortably create new relationships.

For the purposes of this work, I want to focus on ancient Mediterranean practice in order to analyze *charis* or grace in the context of the New Testament world. The law of generalized reciprocity structured social relationships throughout the ancient Mediterranean world. In subsequent chapters I will develop how the ancient Greek-speaking groups, including Christians and non-Christians in the Mediterranean, used *charis* to describe, initiate, and encourage societal norms of generalized reciprocity.

Sociologists and anthropologists are in general agreement that reciprocal gift-giving, the basis of exchange theory, creates and strengthens the bonds of religious and social relationships. These relationships usually led to prosperous and peaceful ancient communities. The generalized reciprocal relationships that *charis* created in the ancient world are described in many dozens of ancient texts and inscriptions. I will later show how generalized reciprocity, in terms of the gifts, covenants, commandments, and other obligations, is found in Jewish literature, classical literature, and the scriptures. The Mediterranean practice of generalized reciprocity should naturally inform the nuances of *charis* as it appears in the New Testament. Furthermore, I will argue that the ancients who wrote in Greek, including apostles, understood and intended these reciprocal nuances when they used the term *charis*.



## Archaic and Classical Greek Uses of Charis

AS ANCIENT SOCIETIES DEVELOPED PRACTICES OF GIFT-giving with reciprocal connotations, their cultural norms and literature reflected that practice. This chapter examines the social construct of reciprocal gift-giving (charis) as it existed in Greece during the archaic and classical eras.<sup>1</sup> Entire volumes have been written about the topic, for example, the compilation *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece* and Bonnie MacLachlan's *The Age of Grace: Charis in Early Greek Poetry*.<sup>2</sup> But for our goal of understanding what charis meant and how it was practiced, an overview will have to suffice.

A good place to begin a study of the use of a word in ancient Greek is a lexicon developed in the nineteenth century by Liddell, Scott, and Jones and updated often since then. It cites more than two hundred uses of the word charis (and its derivations) in Greek literature and sorts those uses into these meanings:

- Outward grace or favor, beauty
- Grace or favor felt, whether on the part of the doer or the receiver

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1. I acknowledge that the word charis includes meanings such as favor, beauty, and goodness, but in this work I am focusing specifically on its meaning as reciprocal giving as discussed in chapter 1.

2. *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece*, ed. Christopher Gill, Norman Postlethwaite, and Richard Seaford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Bonnie MacLachlan, *The Age of Grace* (Princeton University Press, 1993).

- On the part of the receiver, a sense of favor received, thankfulness, gratitude
- Favor, influence
- A love-charm, potion
- A favor done or returned, boon; confer a favor on one, do a thing to oblige him, return a favor
- Gratification, delight
- Homage due to someone, worship, majesty.

Phrases involving *charis* include *charin apaitein*, “to ask the repayment of a boon,” and *charin pherein tini*, “to confer a favour on one, do a thing to oblige him,” and antonyms include *acharis*, “a thankless favour; one which receives, or deserves, no thanks”; and *charin aposterein*, “to withhold a return for what one has received.”<sup>3</sup>

One can see that the word *charis* means not only beauty and delight (as one might think of one common meaning of grace today), but also giving and returning favors, thankfulness, gratitude, influence, and honor. To Greeks, reciprocity was associated with goodness and beauty; a gift was by definition good, and good acts should be repaid. Reading beyond definitions into the culture, classicist Simon Pulleyn wrote, “Charis is often translated ‘grace’ or ‘favor.’ In fact, though, *charis* refers to a whole nexus of related ideas that we call reciprocity. When one gives something to a god, one is giving *charis* in the sense that the offering is pleasing; but equally one is storing up for oneself a feeling of gratitude on the part of the god, which is also *charis*. This two-way relationship is called *charis*.”<sup>4</sup> Greeks sought to maintain and strengthen relationships through reciprocating in a cycle of grace.

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3. This list is taken from more than one edition of this lexicon. For the quotations, see *The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*, directed by Maria Pantelia, s.v. “χάρις,” at <http://www.tlg.uci.edu/ljs/#eid=1&context=ljs>.

4. Simon Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 4; quoted in M. P. Knowles, “Reciprocity and ‘Favour’ in the Parable of the Undeserving Servant (Luke 17.7–10),” *New Testament Studies* 49, no. 2 (2003): 256.

Examples in this chapter and the following two chapters will show that grace in the ancient Mediterranean world was a fundamental part of how society functioned. Charis could be between those of equal or unequal social status and could be between parent and child or man and god. Charis included giving honor and gratitude, giving gifts and doing favors that were expected to be repaid or at least recognized, and entering into political alliances. Charis was accompanied not only by generosity, friendship, and true devotion but also by duty and the rules of propriety.

Etymologically, the word charis is associated with “having and receiving.” Ancient Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit are derived from an earlier ancient language spoken about four thousand years ago and commonly called Proto-Indo-European. “The Indo-European root *\*gher-* (‘pleasure’) is parent of charis,” but “‘pleasure’ is insufficient as a definition of the word,”<sup>5</sup> because *\*gher-* was used in contexts of public relationships, honor, and obligation.<sup>6</sup> Some Sanskrit words that are etymologically related to charis expressed very old notions of reciprocity.<sup>7</sup> In these early Indo-European cultures, an obligation of reciprocity was established when individuals received a gift of kindness from the gods or others. Thus, the word charis is associated with the act of receiving, the forming of relationships, and reciprocal obligation because of the beauty of the gift, the joy of receiving the gift, or the gift’s usefulness.

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5. MacLachlan, *Age of Grace*, 4.

6. Further, in Proto-Indo-European, the ending (a stem or a suffix) *-went* (or *-vant* or *-ent*) means “to have” or “to have received” something. For example, in Sanskrit, the ending was added to *putra-* (son) and became *putravant*, “having sons.” This ending was added to the Greek word *chari-* (lovely), and it became *charient*, meaning “having or receiving grace.” The word stem *-went* includes the meaning of individuals receiving something, such as a lovely gift, deed, action, or relationship. Don Ringe, *From Proto-Indo-European to Proto-Germanic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 63.

7. Sabapathy Kulandran, *Grace: A Comparative Study of the Doctrine in Christianity and Hinduism* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1964), 27–28, pointing to the Sanskrit word *Prasada*, meaning “being clear,” “being glad” or “favorable.” Kulandran uses etymology to conclude that “grace cannot depend on merit,” but fails to acknowledge the rich history of the related word in the Greek world.

## The Cultural Norms of Reciprocity

Early Greek prose and poetry using the word *charis* tell of gift exchanges and the relationship of reciprocity entered into by givers and recipients. In archaic times (before 625 BC), interpersonal relationships were generally formed by reciprocal gift exchange, and the bonds of personal acquaintance were thereby strengthened. Even after standardized coinage and money exchange was invented, Athens of the fifth and fourth century BC “was a city in which borrowing was very common. Ready use of credit is often seen as an indication of a highly developed capitalist economy, but in many societies, and in particular at Athens, it seems to have more in common with pre-money economies based on gift-exchange, a transaction which shifts the burden of trust away from the quality of the coinage and back to personal acquaintance.”<sup>8</sup>

Reciprocal gift exchanging had three socially necessary steps: the need of a person of means or status to give a generous gift or supply a favor, the need of the receiver to accept it, and the need of the receiver to repay it.<sup>9</sup> The exchange could continue back and forth indefinitely. A repayment was generally of a lesser value than the gift in exchanges between rich and poor, but as for favors among allies or equals, the repayment had to be of value. “Reciprocal favors initiated a sequence of exchanged kindnesses. . . . [*Charis*] was a recognized *collective* convention that . . . acted as a social, not private (self-interested), check on behavior.”<sup>10</sup> Marriage also created reciprocal relationships between the spouses and their families.<sup>11</sup> Some *charis* relationships were defined

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8. James N. Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 60.

9. This discussion of repayment of favors may bring to mind the notion of “paying it forward.” The concept of responding to a favor by giving favors to others in turn is certainly part of social reciprocity, and *charis* spread through communities in just this fashion. But *charis* primarily requires giving thanks to the benefactor; sharing with others is secondary. Giving something with absolutely no obligation or thanks expected in return is mostly a modern concept. One ancient exception is Menander's *Dyskolos*.

10. MacLachlan, *Age of Grace*, 22, 22 n. 16, italics in original; see, for example, Homer, *Odyssey* 24.283-6.

11. Elizabeth Belfiore, “Problematic Reciprocity in Greek Tragedy,” in Gill, Postlethwaite, and Seaford, *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece*, 145.

through obligations, not the financial value of the gift.<sup>12</sup> Charis giving, according to the Greek poet Theognis, “is no use at all for the man who does the favour if it is a worthless man who has benefitted. A *deilos* [“worthless man”] would lack the resources or the inclination to return the favour.”<sup>13</sup> Lisa Wilkinson writes that charis begins with a need and “starts from a position of mutual loss, that is, ‘disarming,’ and proceeds to a relationship of ‘equality and reciprocity’ by mutual willingness and action.”<sup>14</sup>

### Themes Regarding Charis in Archaic and Classical Greek Literature

A few specific examples of the use of the word charis in the archaic and classical eras will show the range of the word’s various meanings. These examples are grouped by broad topic in rough chronological order. This list shows that meanings of charis included pleasingness, propriety, gratitude, duty, and obligation. The word charis is used in contexts ranging from love poems to war chronicles and in relationships ranging from simple to powerful.

*Charis includes a sense of joy and beauty.* In Homer’s *Iliad*, from the archaic Greek period, Argeiphontes became handsome when he transformed himself into the likeness of a young man to “whom the charm [charis] of youth is fairest.”<sup>15</sup> In the words of the poet Pindar (522–443 BC): “And Grace, who fashions all gentle things for men, confers esteem and often contrives to make believable the unbelievable.”<sup>16</sup>

*Good deeds must be recognized with gratitude and not forgotten.* Homer’s *Iliad* uses the phrase *charin oida*, meaning “I recognize the favor,” and this recognition has tangible, active force; it is not a mere passive feeling of appreciation.<sup>17</sup> In the *Iliad*, nuances of charis bound

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12. Hesiod, *Theogony* 957–58; regarding money, see Stobaeus, 10.38; MacLachlan, *Age of Grace*, 27, 69, 72, 84–85.

13. Mary Scott, “Charis from Hesiod to Pindar,” *Acta Classica* 27 (1984): 2.

14. Lisa Wilkinson, *Socratic Charis: Philosophy without the Agon* (Plymouth, U.K.: Lexington, 2013), 154.

15. Homer, *Iliad* 24.348; Anacreon fr., 395.3, my translation.

16. Pindar, *Olympian Ode* 1.30–35.

17. MacLachlan, *Age of Grace*, 5, 6.

ancient people together by instilling in the recipient some sense of favor that was expected to be returned.<sup>18</sup> A key element of strife in the *Iliad* is that the warrior Achilles performed labor for King Agamemnon, and Agamemnon failed to return favors (*charis*) to Achilles. Agamemnon's failure to provide obligatory *charis* for Achilles' bellicose labors, his leadership, and his loyalty provokes Achilles, and Achilles withdraws from the battlefield (*Iliad* 9.316), with serious consequences for everyone. Achilles is wrathful not only because of the gain he does not receive but because Agamemnon's failure to reciprocate was an insult to Achilles' honor. The social norm, reciprocity, was that a man should receive honor for service to one's king and in assisting one's companions in war.<sup>19</sup>

In *Olympian Ode* 8, Pindar remarked, "Accomplishment is granted to the prayers of men in gratitude (*charis*) for their piety." The gods are pleased with athletes who pray to them with gratitude, and the gods grant victory and honor as a reward.<sup>20</sup> Archilochus wrote that in a desire for joy, townspeople sought for *charis* relationships.<sup>21</sup> Pindar notes that one should show "reverent gratitude as a recompense for friendly deeds."<sup>22</sup> Hesiod stressed that one was always expected to "remember good deeds."<sup>23</sup> In Homer's *Iliad*, the wise Nestor stated, "For this gift, I receive it with gladness, and my heart rejoiceth that thou rememberest me, thy friend, neither am I forgotten of thee, and

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18. Homer, *Iliad* 14.233–35. For the layperson: *charin* and *charis* are different forms of the same word: *charin* is in a form called the accusative that declines or changes its ending to a *n* or *nu*. The nouns and adjectives in Greek and many other Indo-European languages are inflected, which means they "bend" or change depending on what part of speech they play in a sentence. Other forms that begin with *char-* that are used throughout this work are derived from *charis*.

19. Homer, *Iliad* 4.95; 5.211; 9. 613; 15.449; 17.291. See also MacLachlan, *Age of Grace*, 15.

20. Pindar, *Olympian Ode* 8, trans. Diane Arnson Svarlien, available at *Perseus Digital Library*, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0162%3Abook%3DO.%3Apoem%3D8>; Pindar, *Olympian Ode* 8.7–8, in MacLachlan, *Age of Grace*, 109.

21. Archilochus fragment, 733.

22. Pindar, *Pythian Odes* 2.17.

23. Hesiod, *Theogony* 503–5.

the honour wherewith it beseemeth that I be honoured among the Achaeans. And to thee may the gods in requital thereof grant grace to satisfy thy heart,” demonstrating the importance of receiving and returning gifts.<sup>24</sup> In commenting on this passage, Joseph Hewitt notes that gratitude is implied rather than expressed in the vocabulary of Homer, stressing the importance of good deeds.<sup>25</sup> The Liddell-Scott-Jones lexicon cites many more examples showing the notion that a favor must be returned.<sup>26</sup>

*Only proper reciprocal relationships were recognized with festivities.* Homeric heroes participated in feasts as a sign of a just society. Odysseus expresses that in being obligated to repay their benefactors, individuals felt a sense of harmony, love, and joy that is portrayed with music, feasting, and relaxation.<sup>27</sup> But Achilles did not attend a feast (*Iliad* book 19) because Patroclus’ death had upset the balance in the universe that had to be normalized by Achilles’ return to fighting.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Achilles (*Iliad* book 9) was told that he could partake of a splendid feast in Agamemnon’s tent. According to Homer’s epic, this feast could not be appropriate because of Agamemnon’s earlier error of not granting obligatory *charis*, even after Agamemnon made an offer to multiply gifts as an indemnity.<sup>29</sup> In this instance when *charis* was not properly completed in the cycle of reciprocity, Achilles’ anger, strife, and many years of warfare ensued. From the first great epic in Greek literature, disaster ensues when people do not keep their obligations

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24. Homer, *Iliad* 23.647–650, trans. A. T. Murray, available at *Perseus Digital Library*, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Hom.+Il.+23.650&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0135>.

25. Joseph William Hewitt, “The Terminology of ‘Gratitude’ in Greek,” *Classical Philology* 22 (April 1927): 143.

26. *Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. “χάρις,” <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/lsg/#eid=108&context=search>, citing Euripides, *Or.* 239; *And.* 2.4; *Ion* 36.896; Aeschylus, *Prometheus Vincetus* 782; Thucydides 3.54; Plato, *Gorgias* 520c; *Lysias* 2.23; Isocrates 4.175; Xenophon, *Cyr.* 1.6.11; 3.2.30; Charito 3.4; Julianus Imperator, *Orationes* 8.246c; Sophocles, *Antigone* 33.

27. Homer, *Odyssey* 9.5-6, 11.

28. See also MacLachlan, *Age of Grace*, 18–20, for more detailed information on these topics.

29. Homer, *Iliad* 9.266, 385; MacLachlan, *Age of Grace*, 20.

based on the reciprocal nature of grace. Only after Agamemnon had suffered enough did Achilles feel a reciprocal sense of *charis* through revenge.

***Reciprocal charis implied communal and divine harmony.*** Hesiod instructs that one should never do wrong to a friend, and never lie to please (or give grace to) the tongue.<sup>30</sup> The archaic principle of pleasing the gods through gift-giving was a cause for them to grant human wishes to bless a particular human community while cursing another. For example, in the *Iliad*, Chryses reminds Apollo that he has paid Apollo grace through sacrifices at shrines, and calls upon Apollo to destroy the Danaans, which Apollo does.<sup>31</sup> Pindar's songs praised the victor in a gentle social community with justice and harmony. Civilization and *charis* became the universal ameliorating force that linked together many ideals, thus maintaining a sense of harmony among all members of traditional Greek society. In many odes, Pindar depicted the harmony that existed between the victor, the state, the poet, and the immortal gods, and by the power of this harmony he was able to give his listeners pleasure.

***Alliances were charis relationships.*** These alliances were sometimes contracted with the gods or between city-states or individuals. In Homer's works, heroes performed actions to win the favor of others and become allied with them.<sup>32</sup> Ares complained to Zeus that the gods brought *charis* to mortals and thereby seem to have created a relationship with them in contrast to the fact that the gods were no longer allied to each other through *charis* relationships and were continually fighting.<sup>33</sup> The object of *charis* was to bring together the gods and mankind through reciprocity.

***Charis was the opposite of hubris or prideful arrogance.*** *Charis* is contrasted with *Hubris* in Pindar's ode to Hesychia (Tranquility), who is the daughter of Dika (*dikē*, Justice). In fact, in Hesiod's *Theogony*, the goddesses *Charis* and *Dika* are both daughters of Zeus, showing the

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30. Hesiod, *Works and Days* 709–23; MacLachlan, *Age of Grace*, 25.

31. Homer, *Iliad* 1.39–50; 8.204.

32. See especially Homer, *Iliad* 20.297–99; *Odyssey* 1.60–62.

33. Homer, *Iliad* 5.873–75.



close relationship between them. When Apollo carried the lyre, which was a “possession operating according to *dikē*” (justice), he defeated the giants along with their *hubris* (pride).<sup>34</sup>

**Charis was used in power brokering.** Herodotus (484–425 BC), often known as the father of history, portrays the reciprocal ideal of *charis* throughout his lively stories about the Mediterranean world and beyond. In his *Histories*, kings make powerful alliances by means of the reciprocal relationships of *charis*. In *Histories* book 3, Polycrates exiles his brother Syloson. However, through a later deed of *charis*, Syloson subsequently wins a recovery of his homeland, power, and wealth by an act of his own generosity.<sup>35</sup> In Herodotus’ *Histories* book 6, *charis* is the method by which men consider how to do others the greatest service.<sup>36</sup> In *Histories* book 9, the Athenians request archers, a service or favor that they must try to return.<sup>37</sup> By doing a favor to Masistes and Xerxes in saving the king’s brother, Xenagoras is made ruler of all Cilicia by means of a reciprocal gift of the king.<sup>38</sup> J. Enoch Powell uses these three examples in his lexicon of Herodotus to demonstrate favors that become obligatory gifts.<sup>39</sup>

**Simple, unexpected gifts could result in rich rewards.** Another section of Herodotus’ work reports that the ruler Polycrates was pleased with a fisherman’s gift and thus became doubly indebted: The fisherman said, “O King, when I caught this fish, I thought best not to take it to market, although I am a man who lives by his hands, but it seemed to me worthy of you and your greatness; and so I bring and offer it to you.” Polycrates was pleased: “You have done very well,” he answered, “and I give you double thanks [*charis*], for your words and for the gift; and I

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34. Pindar, *Pythian Odes* 1.2; 8.11–12, 17–18. MacLachlan, *Age of Grace*, 118.

35. Nick Fisher, “Popular Morality in Herodotus,” in *Brill’s Companion to Herodotus* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 213.

36. Herodotus, 6.41.3; “*dokeontes charita megalēn katathēsesthai*.”

37. Herodotus, 9.60.3: “*humeis d’ hēmin tous toxotas apopempsantes charin thesthe*.”

38. Herodotus, 9.107.3.

39. J. Enoch Powell, *A Lexicon to Herodotus* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1960), 378.

invite you to dine with me.”<sup>40</sup> Polycrates’ lavish and splendid court was portrayed as that of a generous ruler who knew the etiquette of reciprocity.<sup>41</sup> Although this exchange involved very different amounts (a fish versus dinner with a ruler), Polycrates acknowledged that small gifts deserved as much of his gratitude as the most splendid gifts.<sup>42</sup> Other passages about Polycrates likewise demonstrate reciprocity in the form of alliances. While in power, Polycrates balanced guest-friendships alliances with lavish, reciprocal gifts between himself and Amasis, king of Egypt.<sup>43</sup>

*Charis could lead to dangerous alliances.* In his early history of the Peloponnesian war, a disastrous thirty-year war between Athens and Sparta and allies on both sides, Thucydides notes how the citizens of Corcyra, a Greek island city-state, carefully appealed to notions of reciprocal *charis* in requesting military aid from the Athenians for help against their former allies the Corinthians. Both the Corcyraeans and the Corinthians were formally allies of Sparta and enemies of Athens before the war officially began. The Corcyraeans argued in a notable speech that the Corinthians were required to satisfy certain preliminary conditions of *charis*, namely that Corinth should indeed retain a lasting sense of firm obligatory gratitude (*charis*) but which the Corcyraeans claimed Corinth would never do.<sup>44</sup> Corinth no longer was a worthy ally to Corcyra because Corinth did not honor her *charis* relationships. Thus Corcyra repudiated Corinth. The Corcyraeans were then forced to create a relationship with a formerly rival city-state and did so according to the conventions of *charis*. According to Thucydides’ portrayal of this speech, the Corcyraeans argued that by assisting Corcyra in her hour of greatest need, Athens would gain an

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40. Herodotus, 3.42.2; “*charis diplē*,” trans. A. D. Godley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), available at *Perseus Digital Library*, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0126%3Abook%3D3%3Achapter%3D42%3Asection%3D2>.

41. Herodotus, 3.45, 121; Fisher, “Popular Morality in Herodotus,” 212–13.

42. Herodotus, 3.140.4; “*ei kai smikra all’ ōn isē ge hē charis homoiōs hōs ei nun kothen ti mega laboimi.*”

43. Herodotus, 2.182. See also Fisher, “Popular Morality in Herodotus,” 211–12.

44. Thucydides, 1.32.1: “*epeita de hōs kai tēn charin bebaion hexousin.*”

obligatory relationship through a deed of service.<sup>45</sup> Athens eventually agreed to accept Corcyra as an ally, and Corcyra was now obliged to use its large navy in the service of Athens and her allies.<sup>46</sup> Corcyra further exacerbated tensions between the Greeks that later resulted in the Peloponnesian War. Anna Missiou writes that “the speeches delivered by the Corinthian and Corcyraean envoys both express the principle that generosity demands reciprocity.”<sup>47</sup> Missiou also notes that Thucydides’ “2.40.4–5 is full of the vocabulary of reciprocal generosity, such as the nouns ‘favour,’ ‘goodwill,’ and ‘debt,’ or the verbs ‘give back’ and ‘owe.’”<sup>48</sup>

*Charis could be bestowed by a mediator or broker who represented a superior.* In Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* (about 429 BC), Creon defended himself with these words against Oedipus’ charge of conspiracy to usurp the kingship: “I am welcome everywhere; every man salutes me, and those who want your favor [charis] seek my ear, since I know how to manage what they ask.”<sup>49</sup>

*Injustice and ingratitude were incompatible with charis.* Paul Millett comments that “Demosthenes closes his Second Speech *Against Aphobos* (29.24) with an . . . appeal for restitution to correct an injustice committed against him: how the rightful restoration of his property will result in charis for the people. In this way, the cycle of reciprocity between litigant and the people is conceived as extending into the future, without the precise balance being struck that might signal reciprocal relations were at an end.”<sup>50</sup> Demosthenes chides his audience in

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45. Thucydides, 1.33.1: “*epeita peri tōn megistōn minduneuontas dexamenoī hōs an malista met’ aieimnēstou marturiou tēn charin katathēsesthe.*”

46. See J. T. Hooker, “‘Charis’ and ‘Aretē’ in Thucydides,” *Hermes* 102 (1974): 168, which also includes generosity as a component of charis.

47. Anna Missiou, “Foreign Affairs of Fifth-Century Athens and Sparta,” in Gill, Postlethwaite, and Seaford, *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece*, 184. I changed her traditional Greek spelling of “Korinthian” and “Kerkyraian” to the more conventional Corinthian and Corcyraean to avoid confusing the reader.

48. Missiou, “Foreign Affairs,” 190.

49. Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 771–74; translation in deSilva, *Honor, Patronage*, 97.

50. Paul Millett, “The Rhetoric of Reciprocity in Classical Athens,” in Gill, Postlethwaite, and Seaford, *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece*, 233.

court for being ungrateful: “But you are so ungrateful (*acharistosi*) and wicked by nature that, having been made free out of slavery and wealthy out of poverty by these people you do not show gratitude (*charin*) toward them but rather enriched yourself by taking action against them.”<sup>51</sup>

*Tragedy arises when charis is not respected.* Greek tragedies, such as those by Aeschylus (c. 525–455 BC), assume reciprocal forms of *charis* regarding interaction between the gods and the natural world. For Aeschylus, *charis* became an obligation to the receiver to reciprocate through mighty deeds.<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth Belfiore explains, “Reciprocity plays a crucial role in all of these relationships [found in Greek tragedies]. . . . The norm is that ‘favour always produces favour’ [citing Sophocles, *Ajax* 522]. What tragedy emphasizes, however, is the portrayal not of this norm, but of its violation. . . . Marriage, *xenia* [guest friendship or hospitality], and suppliance are all formal relationships involving reciprocal rights and obligations, and are in many ways similar to blood kinship. In all of these relationships, outsiders are brought into a *philia* [loving] relationship by means of formal acts of reciprocity. To include reciprocal relationships as well as biological kinship is not only useful for a study of Greek tragedy, it is also consistent with Greek ideas about *philia*.” Knowing this meaning of *charis* helps modern readers understand the concept of obligation inherent in kinship and friendship.<sup>53</sup>

*Charis could be taken to extremes.* Aristophanes’ comedy *Wealth* (c. 388 BC) contrasted excessive commodity exchange versus normal Greek gift exchange.<sup>54</sup> It was intrinsically difficult to measure the exact value of exchanged gifts in ancient Greece, and Aristophanes made

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51. Demosthenes, *De Corona* 131; deSilva, *Honor, Patronage*, 105.

52. Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 369-72, 1542-45; See MacLachlan, *Age of Grace*, 129, 136.

53. Elizabeth Belfiore, “Problematic Reciprocity in Greek Tragedy,” 140, 144.

54. Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes*, 109. In *The Birds*, Aristophanes used the term *charitos heneka* meaning “on account of grace” to express reciprocal gratitude. Aristophanes, *Birds* 855. See a good discussion in Hewitt, “Terminology of ‘Gratitude’ in Greek,” 159.

comic statements about Greek morality that spurned the excessive nature of these gifts.

*Charis could be transferred.* According to Millet, the orator Lycurgus emphasized that “charis in return for public service could be a transferable commodity even between those who were not related by birth or marriage.” Apparently, in the legal case he discussed, witnesses used their own charis relationships on behalf of a defendant.<sup>55</sup>

*Charis could be used to attempt to gain status.* In his works, Xenophon (c. 430–354 BC) wrote that Socrates warned a man against giving charis gifts beyond his means in order to gain status: “You perceive yourself to be rich. . . . If I lacked anything, I know my friends would all contribute to fill my cup to overflowing. But your friends, even though they are better supplied than you, look to receive gifts from you.”<sup>56</sup>

*Relationships with kings and gods involved charis.* In Xenophon’s *Anabasis* (1.4.15), Menon, a general of the Greeks, persuaded his soldiers to act based on charis because, he argued, they would receive reciprocal favors in the future from properly serving Cyrus, the Persian king. Menon reasoned that “Cyrus will not only feel grateful to you, regarding you as the most zealous in his cause, but he will return the favor (*charin*)—and he knows how to do that if any man does.” In another book, Xenophon introduces a speaker who despairs of the possibility of any human repaying the benefits of the gods through adequate returns of gifts: “Socrates,” replied Euthydemus, “that I will in no wise be heedless of the godhead I know of a surety. But my heart fails me when I think that no man can ever render due thanks to the gods for their benefits.” All good Greeks were expected to return favors to the gods, even though their efforts might be miniscule in comparison to the gifts of the gods.<sup>57</sup>

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55. Lykourgos, *Against Leokrates* (135–39), cited in Millet, “Rhetoric of Reciprocity,” 240. See also Andokides, *Lys.* 14.24, 30.1, on ancestors’ charis relationships passing to descendants; cited in Millet, “Rhetoric of Reciprocity,” 240.

56. Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 2.8 (my translation).

57. Xenophon *Mem.* 4.3.15 at [perseus.tufts.edu](http://perseus.tufts.edu); Robert Parker, “Pleasing Thighs: Reciprocity in Greek Religion,” in Gill, Postlethwaite, and Seaford, *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece*, 112–13, 122.

*Plato sought a higher way than reciprocal charis.* In contrast to the many classical writers mentioned above, Plato (428–347 BC) stressed the importance of striving for the good and sometimes questioned reciprocity. From his understanding of how deeply reciprocity permeated Greek religion and philosophy,<sup>58</sup> he questioned notions of reciprocity with the gods. In the *Seventh Letter* (sections 325d and 332–34) and the *Republic* (332c) Plato eschewed both positive (constructive) and negative (vengeful) reciprocity.<sup>59</sup> While Plato argued that the philosopher/rulers needed to try to repay the gifts they had received from the state,<sup>60</sup> they should repay what they have received because of their love for the state, not just because of reciprocity.<sup>61</sup> This way of thinking later had a profound effect on later neo-Platonic philosophers such as Plotinus as well as Augustine and Luther.

*Aristotle and Isocrates supported charis as a social good.* In many ways Aristotle (384–322 BC) best summarizes classical Greek notions of charis. Aristotle emphasizes social reciprocity, which was neither private nor without obligation. He speaks of a brokerage type of friendship when he says that since charis usually operated between people of unequal or asymmetrical status, the person of higher status receives a greater share of honor and acclamation while the other receives a

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58. Robert M. Berchman, “The Golden Rule in Greco-Roman Religion and Philosophy,” in *The Golden Rule: The Ethics of Reciprocity in World Religions*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Bruce Chilton (New York: Continuum, 2008), 45.

59. Introduction, in Gill, Postlethwaite, and Seaford, *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece*, 8; Richard Seaford explains, “Further light on the problematization of reciprocity in the classical *polis* can be provided by a brief excursus on Plato. The *Seventh Letter* eschews both negative and positive reciprocity. The evils of civil war will never cease while people take revenge (*timōria*) on their enemies (336e). And it emerges from the failures of the elder Dionysos and of Dion that doing favours is not a firm basis for friendship (332a4, 333e; cf. 325d), the only such basis being association in liberal studies (i.e. philosophy, 334b). In Plato’s *Republic* Sokrates rejects reciprocity (‘doing good to friends and harm to enemies’ 332c) as a definition of justice, and is then invited to show why one should act justly if one can instead manage to act selfishly without suffering adverse consequences.”

60. Especially *Republic* 520a–521a and *Laws* 731d–732a.

61. Graham Zanker, “Beyond Reciprocity: The Akhilleus-Priam Scene in *Illiad* 24,” in Gill, Postlethwaite, and Seaford, *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece*, 78. Zanker calls this love altruism.

larger share of material assistance.<sup>62</sup> He advocated the repaying of debts of *charis*.<sup>63</sup> A letter attributed to Aristotle declares that “giving and returning is that which binds men together in their living, as some give, others receive while others again make a return gift for what they have received.”<sup>64</sup> According to Aristotle, the great-souled man will return a service done to him with interest, since this will reverse the obligation and put the original benefactor in debt to him.<sup>65</sup> He advised the erection of a temple to the three *Charites* (or Graces) in a prominent place in the city to encourage reciprocal giving, which he believed was the distinguishing feature of *charis*.<sup>66</sup> Aristotle states that the mark of a noble man was not just generosity in using wealth for the public good, but also in his participation in gift-exchange that subsequently influenced the notion of philanthropy and charity.<sup>67</sup>

Like Aristotle, Isocrates (436–338 BC) in his *Areopagiticus* praises patronage of *charis* relationships as harking back to the “good old days” that were still considered a model of ideal public and private bonds within the city.<sup>68</sup> Isocrates describes positively the utopian notions of proper *charis*, a central institution that bound all Athenians through ties of reciprocity, insuring the ideal that all had their basic needs met.

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62. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1163 b1–5, 12–18; paraphrased from deSilva, *Honor, Patronage*, 103.

63. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1163 b12–15; deSilva, *Honor, Patronage*, 109–10 n. 36.

64. Aristotle, ep. 3; A. R. Hands, *Charities and Social Aid in Greece and Rome* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), 32.

65. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.3.24; Pseudo-Phocylides, 80; Gerald W. Peterman, *Paul's Gift from Philippi: Conventions of Gift-Exchange and Christian Giving* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 72.

66. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 5.1133a; see also MacLachlan, *Age of Grace*, 5. The connection between the three Graces and gentile temple religious rituals is interesting for Latter-day Saints and one which merits further study. However, a study of the Graces or *Charites* is outside the scope of this work but is one the author has been researching and plans to explore in detail in the near future.

67. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.1123a 4–5; See also MacLachlan, *Age of Grace*, 9.

68. Isocrates, *Areopagiticus* 32–35, translation in Paul Millett, “Patronage and Its Avoidance in Classical Athens,” in *Patronage in Ancient Society*, ed. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (New York: Routledge, 1989), 26–27.

## **Summing up the Meaning of Charis in Ancient Greece**

This chapter has been only a brief recapitulation of the use of charis in the archaic and classical eras. Centuries of Greek legal writings, literature, and histories attest to the meaning and understanding of charis as giving and returning that binds people together. Charis was offered, received, and returned; it implied obligation and commitment. Later, during the Hellenistic (“Greek-like”) age, Greeks and Romans built on this institution of reciprocal patronage, in the spirit of charis which became the foundation of the meaning of charis in New Testament times.



### *Chapter Three*

## **Middle Hellenistic Uses of Charis in the Eastern Mediterranean**

**M**EDITERRANEAN GREEK TEXTS FROM 300 BC TO AD 150, preceding and during the New Testament era, reveal the nuances and connotations of the Greek word *charis* and the concept of reciprocity. Reciprocity was the norm in this time for creating and maintaining social and political relationships. This chapter gives representative examples beginning with Jewish uses of the word *charis* during this time, followed by uses in Hellenistic (“Greek-like”) literature, and finally use of *charis* in Greek inscriptions and papyri. Through a study of the language of these ancient texts, one can get a sense of how the earliest Christians understood the word *charis*, what it meant in the New Testament, and how the word *grace* should be understood. For Hellenistic Mediterranean peoples several centuries after the classical period (500–300 BC), the meaning of *charis* continued to include reciprocal, obligatory gifts as well as beauty and kindness. These examples include language that may not use the word *charis* but are good illustrations of the concept of *charis* and how reciprocity permeated society.

### **Charis and Reciprocity in the Septuagint**

At the end of the third century BC, most Jews in Alexandria were more fluent in Greek than Hebrew and wanted to read their scriptures in Greek. According to tradition, seventy-two Jewish scholars

made a Greek translation of the Torah and other scripture that became known as “the translation of the seventy,” or the Septuagint (LXX). The Hebrew word *hen* (derived from *hanan*) in the Torah is translated into the Greek word *charis* in the LXX. Meanings of *hen* include favor, graciousness, beauty, and goodwill, which is similar to the meanings of *charis* in Greek.<sup>1</sup> But the Hebrew word that better connotes the reciprocal relationship between God and people is *hesed*. *Hesed* means faithful love, enduring lovingkindness, and persistent mercy. *Hesed*, more than *hen*, implies an extended, covenantal relationship, as does *charis*.

*Hesed* is a Hebrew term that has reference to the obligations that are incumbent upon parties in a relationship. The core meaning is “joint obligation.”<sup>2</sup> In the King James, it is translated variously as “lovingkindness,” “kindness,” “mercy,” and “loyalty.”<sup>3</sup> This is a word that resists simple correlative translation.<sup>4</sup> It represents a deep notion of the covenant relationship in ancient Israel and the requirements which were incumbent upon those who were part of these kinds of relationships.<sup>5</sup>

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1. G. Abbott Smith, *Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1981), 479. See Hermann Cremer, *Biblico-theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek*, 4th ed., trans. William Urwick (Edinburgh: T & T Clark; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1895), 573. Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. and ed. M. E. J. Richardson, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2001), uses *hen* in 68 verses of the Masoretic text and *charis* is found in 59 of the corresponding verses. But see also W. F. Lofthouse, “Ḥen and Ḥesed in the Old Testament,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* (1933): 29–35, who cautions that “the LXX *Charis* is not necessarily either the classical Greek *charis* or the *charis* of the NT or the Papyri.”

2. Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, entry 336. I express appreciation to Avram Shannon for insights about *hesed*.

3. Strong’s Concordance, online. Among the approximately 247 occurrences of *hesed* in the Old Testament, in two verses *hesed* is translated as “disgrace” or “reproach,” Leviticus 20:17 and Proverbs 14:34. The King James generally translates *hesed* as “mercy”; many other versions use “lovingkindness.”

4. Yehoshua Gitay notes that *hesed* is “not an easily defined concept.” “Review of Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Ḥesed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry*,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 (December 1979): 583–84.

5. There have been several book length treatments of this subject. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Ḥesed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry*

Generally speaking in the Hebrew Bible, if God is one of the parties to a covenant, he gives *hesed* to his human partners, but he does not receive it from them. Indeed, the overabundance of God's *hesed* is one of his characteristics in the Hebrew Bible. This is most clearly illustrated in the Torah's formulation of the nature of God. The commandment to worship only God is seen in the Ten Commandments as stemming from God's overabundance of covenant obligation: "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy [*hesed*] unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments" (Ex. 20:5–6). God's *hesed* is often associated with his justice, since fair judgment was one of things which could be expected in a covenant relationship. For example, Psalm 33:5 reads, "He [God] is the lover of justice and judgment; the earth is full of the goodness [*hesed*] of the Lord."

Although humans do not usually give *hesed* to God in the Hebrew Bible, humans are often described by the adjectival form *hasid*, which derives from the same root as the core noun of *hesed*. *Hasid* is often given a sense of holiness or piety in the KJV, for example in Psalm 16:10: "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One [*Hasid*, indicating that the Psalmist sees himself as a holy follower of God] to see corruption." A human who is *hasid* is pious because that is the kind of behavior entailed in keeping his side of the relationship, while when God shows *hesed* it is lovingkindness, because that is God's side of the relationship.

The process of creating relationships governed through *hesed* between parties is often facilitated by covenant. Deuteronomy 7:12 outlines God's terms: "If ye hearken to these judgments, and keep,

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(Missoula: Scholar's Press, 1978); Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible* (New York: KTAV, 1968); Gordon R. Clark, *The Word "Hesed" in the Hebrew Bible* (London: Bloombury, 1993).

On understanding the ties between covenant and kinship and that covenant was more vital in ancient Israel than codified law, see Frank Moore Cross, *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Johns Hopkins, 2000); and Scott Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfilment of God's Saving Promises* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

and do them, that the Lord thy God, shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy (hesed) which he sware unto thy fathers.” In this verse, God’s hesed and his covenant are explicitly connected together and they are incumbent upon Israel hearkening, observing, and performing the judgments of God. Not all relationships termed as hesed were covenant relationships, but many of them were, and so hesed in these environments was an important part of covenants throughout the history of ancient Israel.

Hesed applies not only to relationships between God and humanity but also can be found in caring relationships between humans. The histories of David and Jonathan (as in 1 Sam. 20:8) and Abraham and Abimelech (Gen. 21) clearly show that the notion of covenant relationships. The obligations associated with those covenants were an important part of not just human-divine relationships, but also human-human relationships, especially as covenant people strove to conform their actions to be like God’s.

Since both *hen* and *hesed* are so closely related to *charis*, it will be useful to have a few examples of their use, especially as they work together to explain God’s mercy.

*Lot.* When Lot’s life is preserved, he says, “Behold, your servant has found favor [*hen*] in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness [*hesed*] in saving my life” (Gen. 19:19).

*Joseph.* Scholars have long noted that the portrayal of Joseph’s life in Genesis is one of reciprocal grace.<sup>6</sup> Joseph strengthened his relationship with God by keeping his commandments throughout his life. As Jacob neared death, he asked Joseph, “If I have found grace [*hen*] in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly [*hesed*] and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt” (Gen. 47:29). Joseph then appealed to Pharaoh, asking, “If now I have found grace [*hen*] in your eyes,” and asked for permission to bury his father (Gen. 50:4). Both of these requests draw on the norm of covenantal

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6. For more analysis on the reciprocity in this passage, see William L. Reed, “Some Implications of *Hēn* for Old Testament Religion,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 73 (March 1954): 36–41.

reciprocity: because of the bond between these people, they could ask for favors, which were granted with mercy.

*Moses' Intercession for Israel.* After demonstrating strict obedience on dozens of previous occasions, in Exodus 34 Moses made intercession through a charis relationship for wicked Israelites who had sinfully worshipped a golden calf. In order to save his people from being destroyed, Moses attempted to intercede for them and eventually found grace (*hen*) in the Lord's sight (Ex. 33:12; 34:9). The Lord granted mercy (*hesed*, Ex. 34:6, 7), renewed his covenant with Israel, and promised to do marvels (34:10) as well as drive out other Canaanite peoples (34:11) and enlarge Israel's borders (34:24). In return, Israel was obligated to the Lord to not make covenants with these Canaanite inhabitants (34:12, 15), destroy these inhabitants' religious objects and places of worship (34:13), worship no other gods (34:14), make no more molten gods (34:17), keep the feast of unleavened bread (34:18), give and redeem animals (especially male ones) to the Lord (34:19–20), observe the Sabbath day (34:21), observe three annual feasts (34:22), and present all the males to the Lord (34:23) and finally perform very specific sacrifices (34:25–26). Moses then officially wrote down the charis covenant (34:27) with all of its obligations, sacrifices, and conditions between Israel and the Lord.

*Children of Reuben.* In Numbers 32, the children of Reuben who had numerous herds of cattle wanted a favor (Hebrew *hen*; LXX *charin*) from Moses. They wanted to inherit the land of Gilead, a land to the east of the Jordan, because this was a land more suitable for their cattle (32:1–5). However, most of the Israelites were planning on going to war with the enemies of Israel on the west side of the Jordan. Moses asked the Reubenites and Gadites if it was right for their brethren to go to war on the west side of the Jordan while they settled on the east in the land of Gilead. In response to Moses' question, the sons of Reuben and Gad offered to go to war if at the end of the war, they would receive Gilead for their inheritance (32:16–19). Moses promised to give them this land if they would go to war (32:20–29). The children of Gad and Reuben employed the notion of charis to make a covenant with the servant of the Lord (32:31). Because they kept the covenant with the Lord through his servant Moses, they eventually inherited the land of Gilead.

**David.** David sought to perform his obligation of *hesed*: “Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness [*hesed*] for Jonathan’s sake?” David remembered Jonathan and greatly honored his son (2 Sam. 9).

**Esther.** Esther rose to prominence not only in favor but also in the king’s mercy: “The king loved Esther more than all the other women; of all the virgins she won his favor [*hen*] and devotion [*hesed*], so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti” (Esth. 2:17, NRSV).

**Jonah.** In his anger that the people of Ninevah had repented, Jonah “prayed unto the Lord, and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious [*hen*] God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness [*hesed*], and repentest thee of the evil” (Jonah 4:2). Perhaps Jonah feared from the beginning that the Ninevites would become more righteous than Israel, and Israel’s place as the favored, protected people would be lost. Now that fear was realized. But Jonah did not yet understand that God’s mercy and favor could extend to all people.

## Charis in Nonbiblical Ancient Jewish Sources

Jewish extrabiblical sources of the later Hellenistic period also give insight into *charis* and reciprocity.

**Josephus.** Josephus (AD 37–100), a Jewish general who eventually carried favor with the Romans after his surrender during the Jewish Wars, notes that Elijah had benefited from the people of Jericho’s hospitality and so requited the land by conferring an everlasting blessing of grace—drinkable water—which remained in force with his successor Elisha.<sup>7</sup> Josephus also mentions the reciprocal relationship between Hiram, king of Tyre, and Solomon, king of Israel. Solomon inherited this guest-friendship of grace with Hiram from his father.<sup>8</sup> This relationship became further cemented through the gifts they exchanged. Hiram provided Solomon with 120 talents of gold and large quantities of

7. Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 4.461 [4.8.3]: “*ameibetai kai ten chōran aiōniō chariti.*”

8. Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.110.

timber as a gift to build the temple. Then in return, not as a payment but as a reciprocal gift, Solomon blessed Hiram by giving him many other gifts.<sup>9</sup> Josephus also taught that it was right to repay gifts to others by citing the fifth commandment, which legislates honoring parents. “If a son does not repay his parents, the Law hands him over to be stoned.”<sup>10</sup> That giving and returning gifts was an expected social convention is reflected in Josephus’s writings.

**Philo.** Philo of Alexandria (20 BC–AD 50), a learned Hellenized Jew who wrote in Greek, asserted the importance of living up to one’s obligations toward benefactors. According to Philo, one gave thanks to God as a means of securing new divine benefits: “One is either giving thanks for benefits previously received; or as security for those which are present; or to request acquisition of good things in the future; or removal of present or anticipated evils.”<sup>11</sup> Only the worst and most perverse individuals “fail to demonstrate this affection by requiting their benefactors.”<sup>12</sup> He criticized the growing commercialization of the bond of *charis* in the first century AD: those who bestowed benefits actually sold rather than gave, and those who benefited were buyers. The givers expected repayment of their benefits, and the receivers were expected to return their gifts. Thus by the first century AD, *charis* was devolving into merely a common sale, a commercial use that Philo rejected.<sup>13</sup> Philo not only believed that individual acts of kindness should be considered as sacrifices to God, but he argued that the entire person should be dedicated to God.<sup>14</sup>

**Qumran.** For those who dwelt at Qumran beginning in the second century BC,<sup>15</sup> *hen* and reciprocity were associated with the granting

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9. Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.110–11.

10. Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.206. Josephus may here be drawing on Deuteronomy 21:18. See Peterman, *Paul’s Gift*, 45 n. 111.

11. Philo, *Spec. leg.* 1.283, quoted in Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor*, 138.

12. Philo, *Leg. ad Gaium*, 60; Peterman, *Paul’s Gift*, 46.

13. Philo, *Cher.* 122–3; Peterman, *Paul’s Gift*, 48.

14. Philo, *De decalogo* 108; *De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini* 109, quoted in Pao, *Thanksgiving*, 100.

15. The group at Qumran is probably part of those that Josephus and Philo called Essenes. See for example, Frank Moore Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2000).

of insight and purification from sin (CD 3:13f; 4:24; 1QH 4:29–33; 1QS 3:6–12). Certainly the community’s times of worship, teaching, and rites of initiation and cleansing could legitimately be called occasions of grace because they granted gifts to members of this utopian-oriented community. Furthermore, while those at Qumran had to strictly follow the community’s rules, they believed that their community came into existence by means of God’s grace.<sup>16</sup> E. P. Sanders rightly called attention to the “initiating grace of God” found among those who inhabited Qumran.<sup>17</sup>

**Ben Sira.** Ben Sira, a scholar and scribe well versed in the Torah, commented on gifts in a Jewish context. He counseled that some gifts should be received only after wise deliberation: “Some gifts do no one any good, and some must be paid back double,” implying that reciprocity was the norm among the Jews of the Hellenistic period.<sup>18</sup> He counseled, “A fool’s gift will profit you nothing, for he looks for recompense sevenfold. He gives little and upbraids much; he opens his mouth like a town crier. Today he lends and tomorrow he asks it back; such a one is hateful to God and humans. The fool says, ‘I have no friends, and I get no thanks for my good deeds. Those who eat my bread are evil-tongued.’ How many will ridicule him, and how often!”<sup>19</sup> A wise and generous person should have many friends. Ben Sira mentioned the importance of honoring parents through the custom of reciprocity: “With your whole heart honor your father; your mother’s birth pangs forget not. Remember, of these parents you were born; what can you give them for all they gave?”<sup>20</sup> Here Ben Sira teaches that a great gift such as birth cannot be fully repaid but should still be remembered and appreciated.

**A Notable Epitaph.** In a funerary epitaph from Apollonia in Phrygia (first to second century AD), a Jewish woman is praised in recognition of her virtue through the reciprocity motif of *charis*: “Antiochene (by

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16. 1QH 4:30–38; 11:29–32; 13:14–17; 16:11; 1QS 11:9–12; 4QMMT C 25–32.

17. John Koenig, “Occasions of Grace in Paul, Luke and First Century Judaism,” *Anglican Theological Review* 64 (1982): 572.

18. Patrick W. Shekham and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1987), 20:10.

19. Ben Sira 20:14–17.

20. Ben Sira 7:27–28.



race), a descendant of ancestors who filled well the public positions in the country, of the name of Debbora, given (in marriage) to an illustrious man, Pamphylos . . . who loved his children . . . [I am buried here] receiving (from him this monument) as a token of his recognition (*charin*) in return for a chaste marriage bed.”<sup>21</sup> The widower, Pamphylos, reciprocated his appreciation to his dearly departed spouse by means of setting up this epitaph.

## Charis in Hellenistic Literature

In the larger Gentile world during the Hellenistic era, *charis* often meant to give some kind of gift or favor in a religious sense.<sup>22</sup>

*Epictetus*. The Stoic Greek philosopher Epictetus (AD 55–135) made clear one’s complete and total dependence upon God the Creator and one’s small, short-lived participation with God in his “pageant and holiday.” One should learn gratitude according to the notion of grace:

And so, when you have received everything, and your very self, from Another, do you yet complain and blame the Giver, if He take something away from you? Who are you, and for what purpose have you come? Did not He show you the light? Did not He give you fellow-workers? Did not He give you the senses and reason? And as what did He bring you into the world? Was it not as a mortal being? Was it not as one destined to live upon earth with a little portion of paltry flesh, and for a little while to be a spectator of His governance, and to join with Him in His pageant and holiday? Are you not willing, then for so long as has been given you, to be a spectator of His pageant and His festival, and then when he leads you forth, to go, after you have made obeisance and returned thanks (*eucharistesas*) for what you have heard and seen.<sup>23</sup>

Epictetus reminded readers that all gifts came from the gods: “For that Thou didst beget me I am grateful (*charin*); for what Thou hast given I am grateful (*charin*) also. The length of time for which I have

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21. Jean-Baptiste Frey, ed., *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum*, 2 vols. (New York: Ktav, 1936–52), 2:772; Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 149.

22. For example, Plutarch, *Marius* 46; Lucian, *Bis Accusatus* 17.

23. Arrian, *Epicteti Dissertationes* 4.1.103–05; Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 186.

had the use of Thy gifts is enough for me. Take them back again and assign them to what place Thou wilt, for they were all Thine, and Thou gavest them me.”<sup>24</sup> For Epictetus, gods could revoke their gifts at their whim or pleasure, and individuals had no choice but to acknowledge and humbly accept this asymmetrical relationship with the gods. It seems that individuals were better off if they sought reciprocal relationships with the gods.

**Plutarch.** Plutarch (AD 46–120), a prolific Hellenistic writer of histories and biographies, incorporated obligatory *charis* into his works, often signifying favors obtained through strong but asymmetrical relationships in the Mediterranean world. Sometimes he used *charis* to mean graciousness.<sup>25</sup> He condemned those without *charis*, the unthankful (*acharistoi*) who took advantage of the beneficence of the gods: The *acharistoi* “continue to profit by divinity’s love for man, which is everywhere dispensed and at no point fails him in his needs. . . . Deity does not abandon man even when he is sick: there is a special God whose mission it is to bring help and strength at such a time. Not even when a man dies is he forsaken: there is a God who cares for him and leads him to the other world, who is for the dead a lord of repose, an escort of souls to Pluto’s realm.”<sup>26</sup>

Plutarch claimed that love caused the gods to be generous. Mankind, often ungrateful, needed to reciprocate this love, and Greeks should select good friends and become a proper part of the community of the good: “All things belong to the gods, as Diogenes said; among friends all property is in common; good men are friends of the gods; and it cannot be that one dear to the gods should fail to prosper, or that the temperate and upright man should fail to be dear to the gods.”<sup>27</sup> Men should learn

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24. Arrian, *Epicteti Dissertationes* 4.10.16; Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 186.

25. Plutarch, *Moralia* 514F, 676. “*Charin tina paraskeuaxontes allelois*” and “*parthenon charites*.”

26. Plutarch, *Moralia* 758A–B, in Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 185 n. 87. On gratitude towards the gods in Plutarch, see *Moralia* 480C, 485D.

27. Plutarch, *Moralia* 1102F; see also Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 3.110, 115 (110: “*charizomenos koina ta Philon*”). On the happiness of the gods due to their friendships, see Philodemus, *De dis. III*, frag. 84, col. 1, 2–4. Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 187 n. 98; See also the parallel in Acts 2:43–47.

to be friendly according to the Pythagorean ideal that all goods should be held in common within a covenant religious community. Once individuals made covenants and joined these communities, they would be on friendly terms with the gods and would naturally receive these gifts that all—gods and men—shared. The phrase “give and take” (*dos kai labe*) is commonly found in Hellenistic Greek texts.<sup>28</sup> According to Plutarch, “Not only is it necessary for a statesman to keep himself and his home city blameless toward the rulers, but also always to have some friend in the circles of the most powerful as a firm support for the city. For the Romans themselves are best disposed toward the civic exertions of friends. And it is good that those who enjoy benefits from friendship with the powerful use it for the prosperity of the people.”<sup>29</sup> Plutarch described the reciprocal conventions of *charis* to be the norm in his time for creating and maintaining social and political relationships. He considered it important to remind his readers to make covenant relationships with the right families and individuals. Regarding a certain Sciron, he pointed out that “it is not likely that the best men entered family alliances with the worst, giving and receiving the most valuable gifts.”<sup>30</sup> But even though the “best men” sought alliances with other good men, in the ancient world these relationships were usually asymmetrical. These few examples show reciprocity between the prominent and those of middling social status, but it likely extended to the lower class as well.

*Dio Chrysostom and Herodes Atticus.* Other passages in late Hellenistic literature indicate the acknowledgment of a favor and implied reciprocity. Dio Chrysostom (AD 40–120) mentioned that benefactors are more likely to give when they believe they will receive something in return: “For those who take seriously their obligations toward their benefactors and mete out just treatment to those who have loved them, all men regard as worthy of their favour [*charitos*], and without exception each would wish to benefit them to the best of his ability; and as a

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28. Peterman, *Paul's Gift*, 206–7. See Plato, *Laws* 774C.3, 774D.1–2; Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 4.6.10; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, 3.8.5; 4.11.2; 10.18.4; 15.5.1; Demosthenes, *Orationes* 37.37; Xenophon, *Anabasis* 4.8.7; 7.7.36.

29. Plutarch, *Moralia* 814 C; Richard P. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 154.

30. Plutarch, *Vita Theseus* 10.3.

result of having many who are well-disposed and who give assistance whenever there is occasion, not only the state as a whole, but also the citizen in private stations lives in greater security.”<sup>31</sup> Late in the second century AD, Herodes Atticus, healed by a god, could still “return the favour” (*anticharizesthai*) by founding a temple.<sup>32</sup>

## Hellenistic Inscriptions Demonstrating Gratitude

Ancient inscriptions, which are engravings found on buildings, tombstones, altars, and votive monuments, provide a rich source of information for historians about Hellenistic Greece and Rome. By the sixteenth century, ancient epigraphy (the study of ancient epigraphs or inscriptions) had become a highly developed branch of learning, but one that generally failed to connect to biblical studies. For example, Georg Fabricius (1516–71) made an exhaustive study of Latin epigraphy at Rome but did not specifically connect his findings to biblical studies. A major step forward is James A. Harrison’s seminal work, *Paul’s Language of Grace* (2003), which successfully unites an extensive analysis of Hellenistic inscriptions with the New Testament meaning of grace. Harrison’s understanding of the Hellenistic view of reciprocal *charis* leads him to see grace as reciprocal, a notion which “seems to be somewhat neglected in modern New Testament scholarship.”<sup>33</sup> Harrison recognizes the work of Gerald W. Peterman, whose book *Paul’s Gift from Philippi: Conventions of Gift-Exchange and Christian Giving* draws attention to the social norm of returning gratitude in the general time-frame of Paul.<sup>34</sup> These works are crucially helpful in understanding what *charis* meant in New Testament times. The following section of this chapter draws heavily from Harrison’s work on *charis* in inscriptions, and I express my indebtedness to him.

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31. Dio Chrysostom, Thirty-First Discourse, in *Dio Chrysostom*, trans. J. W. Cohoon and H. Lamar Crosby, 5 vols. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1940), 3:13.

32. Parker, “Pleasing Thighs: Reciprocity in Greek Religion,” 112–13.

33. Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 352. This is part of the concluding statement of his excellent book.

34. See Peterman, *Paul’s Gift*, 53–65; Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 7.

Since these inscriptions can be difficult to understand because of the archaic language style and context, the inscriptions discussed in this chapter are summarized in this chart. Readers may find it helpful to have it clearly laid out how *charis* was used in these ancient documents. The use of the word *charis* in these inscriptions generally indicates unequal patronage with implied obligations, a usage which was widespread in eastern areas of the Greco-Roman world, where Paul traveled, preached, made many converts, and wrote his epistles. Discussion and citations of the inscriptions in this chart follow.

Type of inscription and date	Content	Meaning of <i>charis</i>
Oxyrhynchus Papyri 273, first century AD	A woman made an unalterable <i>charis</i> gift of land to her daughter.	A generous gift.
Gordes Document 39, first century BC	Eumenes II recognized his future obligations to Rome because of favors he received.	Power and favors come with obligation.
Papyrus, Letter from Claudius to the Jews in Alexandria, AD 41	Claudius tells the Jews of Alexandria that he would continue to grant them many favors, just as Augustus had done. They should show thanks.	Thanks are required in return for favors.
Decree erected in honor of the prefect of Egypt at Bouseiris, mid-first century AD	In return for favors and benefactions of the Sun Hamarchis, the people of a village gave praise by building a monument.	Thanks and giving gifts in return for favors.
Decree of Tomi, second century	The people gave thanks for protection that the gods had given them.	Thanks and giving gifts in return for safety.
Hymn of Isidorus to Isis-Hermouthis, first century AD	In recognition of a god's blessings of wealth to them, the people promise to pay one-tenth of their blessings.	Thanks and giving gifts in return for wealth.
Series of papyri, <i>Urkunden der Ptolemaerzeit</i> , 168 to 161 BC	People gave gifts to the gods (oil and drink offerings). The people hoped for favor in return.	Appropriate gift-giving.
Decree from Delos, second century BC	A father and son were rewarded with honor at a banquet and exempted from public service.	Honor.
Decree from Pergamon, 175/4 BC	Eumenes II and his brother Attalos did a favor and a good deed. It was decreed that they should be honored and remembered by the people.	Recognition for a good deed.
SEG XI, Decree of Cardamylae, first century BC or AD	The people of Cardamylae praised and gave tangible public recognition to Poseidippos as thanks for his gifts to the city.	Gratitude, recognition.

P. Mich. 1.6, third century BC	Socratos asked Zenon to introduce Aischylos to Kleonikos. Socratos offered favors to Zenon in return for this service.	Creating social relationships.
Decree of a doctor from Histria, second century BC	The decree instructs people to thank men who have good will and to behave in similar fashion.	Goodwill deserves thanks.
Decree of Chalkis, second century BC	The decree praises good men and hopes that others will imitate these benefactors.	Praise for benefactors.
Decree, 71 BC	The Roman benefactors Gytheion, Numerius, and Marcus Cloatius released the city from having to repay two loans.	Granting favors, releasing from debt.
Inscription from Chios in honor of Megakles, the president of the Presbyteroi, first century AD	The elders were grateful for Megakles's works and put up a statue of him as thanks.	Gratitude, recognition.
Stele recording the works of the benefactor Poseidippus of Cardamylae, first century AD	Instructs people to give honor to benefactors. Instructs recipients of favors and goodwill to give honor and thanks in a timely manner.	Honor and thanks are due to benefactors.
Decree honoring Dioskourides, second century BC	This decree marks everlasting goodwill to city leaders and benefactors. The decree was set in the temple of Apollo Delphidios, linking charis with the temple.	Goodwill toward leaders and benefactors.
Inscription of Gaius Caligula, AD 37	The sons of Kotys, who had been sponsored by the emperor Gaius Caligula, put great effort into showing their thanks to him.	Honors and favors must be reciprocated.
Papyrus, P. Mert. 12, AD 58	Chairas and Dionysius maintain their friendship by small returns [charis] of affection.	Friendship.

***Charis in Family Transactions.*** In one record, an official transfer of land, a woman ceded to her daughter a piece of property. This unalterable transfer was termed a charis gift.<sup>35</sup> This transaction must have obligated the daughter to the mother.

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35. B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt, eds., *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1898), (first century AD) 273.14; (third century AD) 2.70.5;

*Inscriptions and Papyri Expressing Gratitude between Rome and Its Citizens.* As the Romans conquered the eastern, Greek-speaking half of the Mediterranean, Roman institutions were described in papyri and inscriptions, preserving and promoting reciprocal notions of obligatory *charis*. The Gordes Document, made valid through Roman authority (*imperium*), shows *charis* as a reciprocal patronage between Rome and her then-indebted subjects. Because the recipients received benefits from Rome, they were then considered unequal, became subjects, and were thus bound to Rome. These grants implied obligations of loyalty toward Rome for her continued protection of their lives and relationships entered into by means of Roman law. In this inscription in Phrygia, Eumenes II affirmed the validity of his grant by stating that “he had power from Rome, unlike those who do not hold power” because his future obligations to Rome would not be considered “empty and deceitful.”<sup>36</sup> The idea of one’s *charis* being worthy is also found in the expression “firm and true *charis*,” written in a Xanthian decree for an orator as well as in a Seleucid letter praising Milesian behavior.<sup>37</sup> Often, inscriptions denoting Roman imperial favor used adjectives such as “divine,” “immortal,” “godlike,” and “eternal.”<sup>38</sup>

Surviving papyri provide further evidence of a first-century notion of the *charis* of the godlike Caesars to their subjects. In a Jewish papyrus, Claudius personally reaffirms the traditional munificence of the Caesars toward the Jewish people in Alexandria:

Since, because of its numbers, not all the populace was able to be present at the reading of the most sacred letter which is so beneficent to the city, I have thought it necessary to publish the letter so that each one of you may read it and wonder at the greatness of our god Caesar and be thankful (*charin*) for his goodwill towards the city. . . . It is also my will that all privileges which were granted (*echaristhē*) to you by

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See Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968); Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 73.

36. Gordes Document 39 in John Ma, *Antiochus III and the Cities of Western Asia Minor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 248.

37. Document 17, 23, *RC* 22, line 12, as found in Ma, *Antiochus III*, 192, and quoted in Greek in the appendix (Xanthian) 308, (Seleucid) 324.

38. G. P. Wetter, *Charis: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des ältesten Christentums* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1913), 206–12; see the discussion in Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 33.

emperors, kings, and prefects before my time shall be confirmed, in the same way that the god Augustus confirmed them.<sup>39</sup>

*Inscriptions Describing Men Exchanging with the Gods.* Ancient decrees exemplify the notion that man could exchange with the gods through gifts. For example, a village performed an act of generosity and thanked a god with a stone monument:

It has been decided by the People from the village of Bouseiris of the Leopolite (nome) who live near the pyramids and by the district secretaries and village secretaries who dwell in (the village) to pass a decree and to erect a stone stele near [the greatest god,] the Sun Hamarchis, from the good deeds engraved on it [showing] his benefactions and letting [everyone] know that his god-like favors recorded by sacred writings, [would] forever be remembered.<sup>40</sup>

The second-century decree of Tomi is a record of the people's return of appropriate thanks (*charitas*) to the gods for protection from recent attacks. The gods' blessing of fertility of crops and the people's festival at harvest is sometimes called the "cycle of the gods' beneficence and the human response of cultic gratitude."<sup>41</sup> Paul's cycle of grace in 2 Corinthians 9:11–15 is very similar to it. In a hymn to Isis-Hermouthis from first-century AD Egypt, Isidorus wrote, "Remembering your [the gods'] gifts, men to whom you have granted wealth and great blessings (*charitas*) (which you give them to possess all their lives) all duly set aside for you one tenth of these blessings rejoicing each year at the time of your Panegyrie."<sup>42</sup> In this case, the principle of paying one-tenth or

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39. H. Idris Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt: The Jewish Troubles in Alexandria and the Athanasian Controversy, Illustrated by Texts from Greek Papyri in the British Museum*, vol. 6 of *Greek Papyri in the British Museum* (Oxford University Press, 1924), 27; V. Tcherikover, ed., *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957–64), 2:153; Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace*, 79.

40. W. Dittenberger, ed., *Orientalis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1960), 666, using "*tas istheous charitas autou*"; Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace*, 28;

41. O. Michel, *Der Brief an die Römer* (Göttingen, 1978), 344 (I.); Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace*, 54, 55.

42. *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 8:549; Isidorus, Hymn II, ll. 21–28; Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace*, 54.



a tithe was implied as a reciprocal duty. Similarly, in a series of papyri (168–161 BC) we learn that people cultivated favor of the god Sarapis by providing sesame and kiki oils for drink offerings. The king and queen gave the twins Thaues and Gaous this oil, which was necessary to fulfill cultic obligations to Serapis in a temple milieu: “For this Sarapis and Isis Anmut may now give to you favor (*charein*) and satisfaction in regard to the King and Queen, on account of your holy relations to the divinity . . . then you should accept elegance (and) favor (*charis*) (because of the fact) that you are piously disposed towards the divinity and of the temple slaves and the rest who are in the temple.”<sup>43</sup>

*Inscriptions Noting the Good Works of Benefactors.* The good works of benefactors were often commemorated by inscriptions denoting specific relationships. The motif of reciprocation often occurred with *charis* specifically expressing some type of gratitude implying some form of repayment, return, and exchange. The first example comes from a second-century BC association decree from Delos rewarding a father and son with an honored place at a guild banquet and the ability to voluntarily participate in public functions. They were to be an example to others: “In order, therefore, that the rest who contemplate the everlasting honor distributed to good men may be zealous imitators of their peers and also that they may enlarge much more readily the temple, having made known the zeal of the guild in regard to an exchanging of favor (*antameipsin charitos*).”<sup>44</sup> In a decree from 175/4 BC of Pergamon, Eumenes II and his brother Attalos observed “that the moment offered an occasion for doing a favor (*charin*) and bestowing a good deed,”<sup>45</sup> and a memorial was created “in order, therefore, that the People may appear foremost in the returning of a favor and be conspicuous in honoring those benefiting the People and its friends voluntarily and in committing the goodness of their deeds to eternal memory.”<sup>46</sup>

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43. Ulrich Wilcken, ed., *Urkunden der Ptolemärzeit*, 2 vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1927–34), 1:34, 35, 36; Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace*, 86–87.

44. F. Dürrbach, P. Roussel, and M. Launey, eds., *Inscriptions de Delos*, 7 vols. (Paris: H. Champion, 1926–72), 4:1521; Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace*, 41.

45. Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace*, 41.

46. Dittenberger, *Orientalis Graeci*, 248, using *eg charitos apodosei*; Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace*, 41.

One inscription shows the great public recognition that came to a benefactor. Like the Delos decree, this recognition is designed not only to thank a generous benefactor but also to inspire others to do likewise.

It was resolved by the People and the City and the ephors to praise Posidippos the son of Attolos on account of the aforesaid kindnesses and also to return never-ending gratitude (*charin*) in recompense of benefits; and also to give to him the front seats at the theatre and the first place in a procession and (the privilege of) eating in the public festivals which are celebrated amongst us and to offer willingly (*char[izom]enous*) all (the) honor given to a good and fine man in return for the many (kindnesses) which he provided, while giving a share of the lesser favor (*charitos*), (nevertheless) offering thankfulness to the benefactors of ourselves as an incentive to the others, so that choosing the same favor (*charin*) some of them may win (the same) honors. And (it was resolved) to set up this decree on a stone stele in the most conspicuous place in the gymnasium, while the ephors make the solemn procession to the building without hindrance, in order that those who confer benefits may receive favor (*charin*) in return for love and honor, and that those who have been benefited, returning honors, may have a reputation of thankfulness before all people, never coming too late for the sake of recompense of those who wish to do kindly acts.<sup>47</sup>

*Inscriptions Noting Social Connections and Financial Favors.* An example of denoting specific *charis* forms of repayment to benefactors is found in an inscription translated by Brent Nongbri, presented at a Society of Biblical Literature meeting:

One line in P. Mert. 2.62 reads: if you do this I shall be obliged [*kecharismenos*] to you. P. Mich. 1.6 reads: Socratos to Zenon greeting. I don't think you are aware about Aischylos, that he is no stranger to us. He has now sailed up the river to your party in order to be introduced to Kleonikos. You would do well, therefore, to make an endeavor to introduce him to Kleonikos; and if he does not [find the latter in your company, get letters of introduction to him] from his friends. By doing so, you will much oblige us (*eucharistēseis*); for I am

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47. *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 2:564 (1st cent. BC or AD); Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace*, 51.

interested in him. And write to us yourself to say what we could do to benefit (*charizoimetha*) you.<sup>48</sup>

This instruction tells a friend how to build *charis* relationships and anticipates that mutual benefits will result. Other examples of stated expectations of *charis* are found in a second-century BC decree of a doctor from Histria: “In order therefore, that the People may manifestly return thanks to both those who have good will towards it and those who have good will among men and behave in similar manner and that (the People) may not be wanting in return of favor (*charitos*).”<sup>49</sup> A second-century BC decree of Chalkis in honor of Archenus reads, “In order, therefore, that the People may manifestly return the appropriate favors to men who are fair and good and the rest, seeing the gratitude (*eucharistia*) of the city to the benefactors, may be zealous imitators of the good men.”<sup>50</sup> More examples of this phenomenon have survived. In 71 BC the Roman benefactors of Gytheion, Numerius, and Marcus Cloatius demonstrated their favor by releasing the city from its repayment of two loans.<sup>51</sup> To cite a first century AD inscription from Chios in honor of Megacles, the president of the Presbyteroi:

The elders (honored) Megacles the (adopted) son of Theogeiton but by birth (the son) of Damonikos, having been the leader of the Council on account of (his piety towards the gods and his merit and love of honor towards themselves. For your glory shines forth, but to noble men (such as you) the illustrious assembly of the elders bestowed

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48. Brent Nongbri, “*Super Argentum et Aurum Gratia Bona*: The *charizomai* Word Group in Papyrus Letter” (unpublished handout from the AAR/SBL Annual Meeting, San Antonio, Texas, 2004; given to me by John Welch and in my possession). An image and similar translation of the recto side of the original papyrus is available online at University of Michigan, *Advanced Papyrological Information System*, [http://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/x-1796/3107r\\_\\_tif](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/x-1796/3107r__tif).

49. *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 24:1100; Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 42.

50. Erich Ziebarth, *Inscriptiones Euboeae*, vol. 12, book 9 of *Inscriptiones Graecae* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1915), 899, using *tas katasias apodidous charitas*; Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 42.

51. R. Cagnat, ed., *Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes*, vol. 3 (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1906), 493; Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 47.

faithful gratitude (*charin*) for (your) works, having set up an image of you, breathing into (it) an impression of appearance.<sup>52</sup>

In imitation of relationships with the pagan gods, *charis* was used to commemorate asymmetrical relationships throughout Gentile society. Monuments were often found in public places. A first century AD stele which was set up in the gymnasium recorded the works of the benefactor Poseidippus of Cardamylae: “In order that those who confer benefits may receive favor (*charin*) in return for love of honor, and that those who have been benefited, returning honors, may have a reputation for thankfulness (*eucharistias*) before all people, never coming too late for the sake of recompense of those who wish to do kindly (acts).”<sup>53</sup>

*Charis* was the foundation of the ritual of building Greek temples that allowed earthly benefactors to be honored for eternity. A second-century BC decree honoring the grammarian Dioskourides states: “Further, in order that the earnest policy of the city may also be everlasting for posterity and that goodwill may be manifest (both) to those who have been set nobly and gloriously over the most honorable customs and to those who intend to increase goodwill towards (the city), inscribe this decree on a stone monument and erect (it) in the temple of Apollo Delphidios.”<sup>54</sup>

In an inscription of Gaius Caligula, the sons of Kotys, who had been sponsored by the emperor in their respective kingdoms, “put a great amount of thought into discovering appropriate recompense to show their good feeling for the gracious act of such a great god (Caligula).”<sup>55</sup> This example of the social standard of recompense for favors from the emperor occurred during the first century AD, when the Julio-Claudian dynasty eclipsed the senators and the other Roman nobles. Through a

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52. *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 26:1021; Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 48. Harrison quotes dozens of other examples in chapter 2.

53. *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 11:948; Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 316.

54. Wilhelm Dittenberger, *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, 3d ed. (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1915–24), 721; Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 316.

55. AD 37. Dittenberger, *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, 798; Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 50.

display of beneficence, the emperors used *charis* to establish numerous clients throughout the empire.<sup>56</sup>

*Inscriptions Denoting Reciprocal Political Alliances.* Political freedom also could come about by means of *charis*. One could even become an eastern client king as a result of just a favor (*charis*) from Caligula.<sup>57</sup> Nero's liberation of Greece was given in return for the assistance of the Greek gods on land and sea. In Pseudo Libanius (later writings attributed to Libanius), condemnation could occur if one did not fulfill one's obligations after receiving grace: "You have received many favors from us, and I am exceedingly amazed that you remember none of them but speak badly of us. That is characteristic of a person with an ungrateful disposition (*acharistou*). For the ungrateful (*acharistoi*) forget noble men (*kalous*), and in addition ill-treat their benefactors though they were enemies."<sup>58</sup>

*An Inscription of Friendship Strengthened through Charis.* In this decree grace established goodwill linking generation to generation. In a papyrus from 29 August AD 58 concerning what forms of thanks were appropriate, Chairas told his friend Dionysius (P. Mert. 12):

Chairas to his dearest Dionysius, many greetings and continued health. I was as much delighted at receiving a letter from you as if I had been in my native place; for apart from that we have nothing. I may dispense with writing to you with a great show of thanks; for it is to those who are not friends that we must give thanks (*charin*) in words. I trust that I may maintain myself in some degree of serenity and be able, if not to give you an equivalent, at least to show some small return for your affection towards me.<sup>59</sup>

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56. Fergus Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World 31 BC–AD 337* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 133–201; Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace*, 49.

57. Dittenberger, *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, 798.

58. Pseudo-Libanius 64; Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace*, 71.

59. Peterman, *Paul's Gift*, 74–75, n. 70–71; text and translation from H. Idris Bell and C. H. Roberts, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Greek Papyri in the Collection of Wilfred Merton, F. S. A.* (London: Walker, 1948), 50–52, ll. 1–12. Peterman notes that the provenance of P. Mert. 12 is uncertain (Oxyrhynchus or Hermopolis).

*Papyri Describing How Charis Came with Obligation of Action and Giving Material Goods.* Showing thanks through deeds was an obligation on the part of the receiver. Papyri Michigan 483 and 493 and Oxyrhynchus Papyri 963, 113, and 531 all confirm the notion that tangible forms of action were a necessary means of showing gratitude with friends.<sup>60</sup>

### Placing Charis in Context

Peterman explains that when a person gave verbal thanks, he also expressed his debt to the benefactor, as late as the fourth century AD.<sup>61</sup> This shows that verbal gratitude was not seen as a replacement for material gratitude. Material gratitude did not have to be a tangible object or gift; it could be honor, privilege, or respect. J. H. Quincey argued that unlike the Englishman, the Greeks “saw an obligation created by a favour received and sought, in their practical, direct way, to discharge it.”<sup>62</sup>

It is likely that, in the words of Harrison, ancient audiences familiar with inscriptions, papyri, philosophers, ancient religion, and religious teachings “must have found the novelty of Paul’s solution [to the honor-and-shame dynamic in Romans, which does not diminish the demands of divine righteousness] not easily assignable to any contemporary understanding of divine beneficence,” but still firmly placed in a first-century context of obligatory grace.<sup>63</sup> Harrison says further:

The parallel of the Augustan “age of grace” with the eschatological reign of Christ’s grace would have been especially potent for Paul’s Roman auditors. I have argued that in Rom. 5:12–21 Paul worked on

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60. See Peterman, *Paul’s Gift*, 79.

61. Gerald W. Peterman, “Thankless Thanks: The Epistolary Social Conventions in Philippians 4:10–20,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 42, no. 2 (1991): 268.

62. J. H. Quincey, “Greek Expressions of Thanks,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 86 (1966): 133–58. Quincey demonstrates throughout this article the plethora of ways in which ancient Greeks said “thank you” without charis. I acknowledge that not every act of gratitude was necessarily reciprocal charis. I note that Quincey implies that a charis debt can be “discharged,” when it was often understood that a charis relationship was permanent.

63. Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 223.

two fronts, employing traditional motifs from the Jewish apocalyptic literature in conjunction with echoes of the Augustan benefaction propaganda. Paul's portrait of believers as obligated beneficiaries in Rom. 6:12–23 would probably have been understood by his auditors against the backdrop of the lucrative career prospects offered to the slaves in the *familia Caesaris* . . . the munificence of Christ totally exceeds that of the Caesars and other first-century civic benefactors in its impartiality and scope.<sup>64</sup>

Likewise, early Christians became obligated beneficiaries who were expected to keep Christ's commandments according to the Pythagorean ideal of sharing with friends as in Acts chapters 2 and 4. In contrast to lucrative legacies realized by gaining favors through Roman wills, Christ granted eternal life, something the Savior's disciples considered impossible to repay. The "Thankful Letter" of Pseudo-Demetrius below which teaches people how to write letters of charis, expressed the possibility that even the sacrifice of one's life could not repay a debt.<sup>65</sup>

The thankful type calls to mind the gratitude that is due (the reader). For example: I hasten to show in my actions how grateful I am to you for the kindness you showed me in your words. For I know that what I am doing for you is less than I should, for even if I gave my life for you, I should still not be giving adequate thanks for the benefits I have received. If you wish anything that is mine, do not write and request it, but demand a return. For I am in your debt.<sup>66</sup>

This institution of charis became so all-encompassing that some worried about reciprocity that had to be repaid by their successors after death. Even those inheriting the property of the deceased were bound by these reciprocal obligations to their benefactor's benefactor.<sup>67</sup> According to A. R. Hands, legacies were gifts "with an obligation attached."<sup>68</sup>

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64. Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace*, 352.

65. See Peterman, *Paul's Gift*, 194.

66. See Peterman, *Paul's Gift*, 82, quoting the text and translation from Abraham J. Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 40–41.

67. Claude Eilers, *Roman Patrons of Greek Cities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 61–83.

68. Hands, *Charities and Social Aid*, 18.

## Conclusion

As demonstrated by dozens of examples above, in typical *charis* relationships in the Hellenistic Mediterranean world, receiving *charis* implied entering into reciprocal covenantal relationships. These examples show that the meaning of *charis* was consistent from archaic and classical Greek down through Koine or common Greek of the Hellenistic world. Literary texts, inscriptions, and papyri confirm the everyday, reciprocal nature of *charis*, consisting of giving and receiving gifts of value, honor, and service. *Charis* relationships occurred between family members, friends, kings and servants, and gods and people.

Jews knew about covenantal relationships from the Bible. Every commandment was a covenant with God. Several stories, including Joseph, Moses, and David, associate the concepts of grace and mercy with covenants. Greek-speaking Jews lived in a culture that depended heavily on reciprocal relationships and understood what *charis* meant. When Paul taught them using the word *charis*, they understood that by accepting God's grace they were making covenantal obligations.

For Greeks, *charis* described the act of giving, the act of receiving, and the act of returning thanks, service, and honor. This system carried into imperial Rome, where it developed into the patron-client system.



## Chapter Four

# Classical Roman Uses of Grace

**A**S THE ROMAN EMPIRE FLOURISHED BEGINNING IN THE last century BC and first century AD, the concept of grace (in Latin, *gratia*) and reciprocity became of great importance. *Gratia* seems to have been involved in every political and social Roman interaction. Hellenistic forms of reciprocal grace became even more rigidly asymmetrical, institutionalized, and enduring. Romans could hardly conceive of friendship without reciprocal exchange.<sup>1</sup> This chapter provides examples of how fundamental *gratia* was in classical Roman society and the various complicated facets of reciprocity.

## Vocabulary

The meaning of the Latin word *gratia* came to encompass all that the Greek word *charis* does: reciprocity, grace, thanks and gratitude, favor, pleasantness, and beauty.<sup>2</sup> As in Greek, Latin vocabulary included nuances of reciprocity. *Charis* and *gratia* are etymologically derived from Indo-European roots. Some aspects of the Roman culture of

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1. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire*, 15.

2. David A. deSilva, "Patronage and Reciprocity: The Context of Grace in the New Testament," *Ashland Theological Journal* 31, no. 1 (1999): 73 n. 27: "The Latin word *gratia* . . . shares the three meanings wedded within the Greek *charis*."

reciprocity were derived independently of the Greeks while other parts of Roman culture run parallel to the ancient Greek traditions of *charis*. Some Hellenistic (“Greeklike”) uses of *charis* were later incorporated into the Roman meanings of *gratia*. The same basic Indo-European root vocabulary emphasizes obligations and reciprocity that existed among the Romans even in the earliest period of their history. A. R. Hands notes, “In the case of early Greece and Rome, language itself points to the original significance of giving and countergiving.”<sup>3</sup> In Roman culture, from the earliest times, the use of dozens of terms for giving and countergiving eventually became connected with *charis* in the eastern half of the Roman Empire and *gratia* in the western half.<sup>4</sup> These terms described what later became the larger Roman institution of reciprocal grace, which defined most social interactions in the ancient Mediterranean world.

### The Roman Patronage System

The relationships formed through reciprocity included what became known as patron-client relationships.<sup>5</sup> In the Roman patronage system, a patron used his or her influence to protect and assist some other person, who became the patron’s client. The patronage system was the principal means of social interaction and material exchange in Roman society. Scholars have pointed out that patron-client relationships were usually unequal and the client could never fully pay back the patron. John Elliott further defines these patron-client relationships as reciprocal: “In this reciprocal relationship a strong element of solidarity linked to personal honor and obligations is informed by

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3. Hands, *Charities and Social Aid*, 27–28.

4. The eastern part of the Roman empire included Egypt and Mediterranean lands east of present-day Italy; the western part included Italy and lands west of it.

5. Scholars point out the differences between the Greek benefactor-receiver system and the Roman patron-client practice (for example, Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor*, 59–68), but there are deep cultural similarities between the two systems that support the purposes of this work.

the values of friendship, loyalty, and fidelity.”<sup>6</sup> Bruce Malina describes these patron-client relationships as “endowing and outfitting economic, political, or religious institutional arrangements with an overarching quality of kinship.” Malina also argues that these kinship ties bound individuals together by mutual commitment, solidarity, and loyalty through “balanced reciprocity.”<sup>7</sup> Gradually these patron-client relationships became institutionalized through generations of use and were later codified in Roman law.

According to early legend, Romulus, the founder of Rome (753 BC), is also named as the founder of patronage. In the Roman mindset, Romulus legally organized Roman society by institutionalizing the aristocracy into the patricians and their dependents or the plebeians. Patronage was thought to be potentially able to unite the interests of these social classes in order to alleviate hostilities experienced among some Greeks. Many Greek city-states sometimes experienced hostilities between rich and poor class lines, and in contrast, according to tradition, Romulus wanted a society in which there was a formal, stable, and symbiotic relationship between rich and poor. A patronage relationship was in some cases hereditary.<sup>8</sup> While Romulus was Rome’s legendary lawgiver, this legend, perhaps in conscious imitation of Solon or Lycurgus, reflects Roman cultural constructs about the patron-client relationship being driven legally from the top down. In Roman law eventually one could become a client in one of four ways: (1) by being conquered; (2) through manumission or the freeing of a slave; (3) by voluntary attachment of a client to a patron; or (4) through inheritance. In many respects, slaves were also clients but were not free.

There were many benefits for both the patron and the client in these reciprocal relationships of the patronage system. Claude Eilers points

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6. John H. Elliott, “Patronage and Clientage,” in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation*, ed. Richard Rohrbaugh (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996), 144–56, esp. 148, 149.

7. Bruce J. Malina, *The Social World of Jesus and the Gospels* (New York: Routledge, 1996), specifically chapter 6, “Patron and Client: The Analogy Behind Synoptic Theology,” 146.

8. Dionysius of Halicarnassus (who came to Rome around 30/29 BC), 2.9–11; Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor*, 60–61; Eilers, *Roman Patrons of Greek Cities*, 19.

out that patrons could not bring forth legal actions against their clients because they were considered kin of the patron.<sup>9</sup> Legally, clients became part of the Roman *familia* and could not be tried by someone in their *familia*. Carolyn Dewald explains that the Latin word *societas* is formed from the stem of *socius*, or ally, meaning “the person who is reciprocally able and willing to show up, who can be counted on to take my interests as well as his own into account.”<sup>10</sup> Latin terms such as *socius* used in association with *gratia* indicate that *gratia* encompassed the sense of reciprocity.

Although the Romans essentially adapted the Greek notion of *charis* and reciprocity was “the major mechanism for structuring relations” in the Roman world,<sup>11</sup> the elements of the patron-client system had always existed.<sup>12</sup> Almost every Roman was a client of a patron, who in turn was a client of another patron and so on. Whoever was able to have the most clients became the most powerful patron in Rome.

Scholars have recognized the importance of the patron-client relationship in Rome’s political system. Erlend MacGillivray argues that

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9. Eilers, *Roman Patrons*, 10, 11, 74: “In one passage we learn that a patron could not bring an *actio furti* against freedmen or clients: *si libertus patron vel cliens, vel mercennarius ei qui eum conduxit, furtum fecerit, furti actio non nascitur* (Paul. Dig. 47.2.90) [If a freedman or a client steals from his patron or a hired labourer from his employer, he commits theft but no action for theft arises]. . . . Another jurist who mentions clients is Masurius Sabinus, who flourished under Tiberius. In the third book of his Civil Law he wrote the following: In the matter of obligations our forefathers observed the following order: first to a ward, then to a guest, then to a client, next to a blood relation, finally to a relation by marriage [Aulus Gellius, *The Attic Nights* 5.13.5]. . . . C. Herennius was also summoned as a witness against Marius. He pleaded, however, that it was against tradition to testify against clients, and that the law removed this necessity from patrons (for this is what the Romans call “champions”); and both the ancestors of Marius and Marius himself from an early age had been clients of the family of the Herennii [Plutarch, *Marius* 5.4] respectively.” The *Attic Nights* is quoted from a translation from J. C. Rolfe, *Aulus Gellius, The Attic Nights* (New York: Loeb, 1927), 195.

10. Carolyn Dewald, “Alternatives to the Golden Rule: Social Reciprocity and Altruism in Early Archaic Greece,” in Neusner and Chilton, *Golden Rule*, 27.

11. Kirk, “Karl Polanyi, Marshall Sahlins, and the Study of Ancient Social Relations,” 188.

12. Eilers, *Roman Patrons*, 187–88.

“patronage was a definingly, and intrinsically, hierarchical relationship; an inherently exploitative system which existed by operating a protracted cycle of reciprocity between patron and client ([as evident in] Juvenal, *Satire* 9).”<sup>13</sup> Peter Garnsey defines patronage as “a lasting relationship between individuals of unequal wealth or power involving the asymmetrical exchange of goods and services.”<sup>14</sup> David Briones points out that the patron needed political support, honor, loyalty, and public alliance, while the client needed much more, including social, economic, and political resources.<sup>15</sup> In sum, the patron-client relationship made Rome tick.

Patrons had enormous power but conversely had significant responsibilities. In order to secure political offices in the *cursus honorum* or political ladder, patronage secured great legacies or lucrative contracts through tax farming or the granting of the authority to collect taxes for Rome. In the introduction of his seminal work on Roman patronage, Richard Saller argues that Roman patronage involved the long-term, asymmetrical exchange of different and unequal goods and services which was “a quality which sets patronage off from friendship between equals.”<sup>16</sup> The return of gifts in a cyclical manner was expected. Seneca attested to this reciprocal exchange between clients and patrons: “Not to return gratitude for benefits is a disgrace, and the whole world counts it as such.”<sup>17</sup>

For many Roman thinkers, the practices of *gratia* were becoming too commercialized. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill argues that early in Roman history, the *Lex Cincia* (the Law of Marcus Cincius Alimentus, passed in 204 BC) sought to discourage patron-client relationships from being

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13. Erlend D. MacGillivray, “Romans 16:2, προστις/προστις, and the Application of Reciprocal Relationships to New Testament Texts,” *Novum Testamentum* 53 (2011): 194.

14. Peter Garnsey, *Famine and Food Supply in the Graeco-Roman World: Responses to Risk and Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 58.

15. David Briones, “Mutual Brokers of Grace: A Study in 2 Corinthians 1:3–11,” *New Testament Studies* 56 (2010): 540–41.

16. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire*, 1.

17. Seneca, *De Beneficiis* 3.1.1; cf. 4.18.1.

mere financial transactions;<sup>18</sup> rather, these relationships should be grounded in virtue. The Romans continued to follow the *Lex Cincia* in later times including the New Testament era and subsequent centuries. As Romans garnered wealth, a great deal of Roman law centered on the topic of inheritance—and *gratia* was often at the center of Roman wills, in which legacy hunters strove to be specifically mentioned in order to inherit something valuable. *Gratia* was at the center of the Roman financial world.

*Gratia* and the patron-client relationship was also the center of political and social life. Julius Caesar (100–44 BC) explained the special relationship a patron was supposed to have with his clients: “Therefore for this reason this custom seems anciently to have been established lest anyone of the people lack aid against the more powerful, indeed no leader allows his own followers to be oppressed or cheated; if he acted otherwise he would have no power over his own.”<sup>19</sup> Caesar strove to protect his clients and thereby revealed the secret of gaining power in Rome.

### Grace in Cicero’s Writings

Cicero (106–43 BC), a contemporary of Julius Caesar who provided a model for Roman propriety and even the Latin language, adapted hundreds of Greek words into Latin literature. In his work on duties (*De Officiis*), Cicero used the word *officium*, or duty (in the general sense of duties appropriate to men) in association with the patron-client relationship. Once a patron-client relationship had been firmly established, one was expected to do his duty.<sup>20</sup> One of the most important characteristics of all Roman patrons—generosity—was the distribution

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18. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, “Patronage in Roman Society,” in *Patronage in Ancient Society*, ed. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (New York: Routledge, 1989), 71.

19. My translation of Caesar, *De Bello Gallico* 6.11.4.

20. Readers familiar with Latin may wonder about the difference between *officium* and *beneficium*. Richard Saller dismisses the idea that there is a clear distinction: “Beneficium, which basically means ‘kindness’ or ‘favor,’ carries much the same force as *officium* when the latter is used with regard to exchange. . . . The distinction between *beneficium* and *officium* is far from clear.” Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire*, 17, 20.

of favors, which was seen in the marketplace, in the spectacles of the Coliseum, and throughout election cycles.<sup>21</sup> In Cicero's letter to his friend Atticus, we read:

You may devote some time to considering how I may be enabled by your kindness to be what decency and gratitude (*gratus*), nay good-feeling, require, in remembering my great debt to Pompey. . . . I, a friend of peace and of both of you, should be so supported by you that I may be able to work for peace between you and peace amongst our fellow-citizens. I thanked you (*gratias*) formerly in the matter of Lentulus, for having saved him, as he had saved me. Yet on reading the letter he has sent me full of thankfulness (*gratissimo*) for your generous kindness, I feel that his safety is my debt as much as his. If you understand my gratitude (*gratum*) to him, pray give me the opportunity of showing my gratitude to Pompey too.<sup>22</sup>

Cicero is often credited in Latin literature for coining new Latin words to express traditional Greek institutions and ideas. Cicero replaced the Greek nuances of *charis* with *gratia*. After going into self-imposed exile and then later being recalled by the Roman people on 4 August 57 BC, Cicero declared:

I should show gratitude (*gratiam*) for services received, I should cherish the friendships that have proved sterling in the fire. . . . Were I for the rest of my life permitted to discharge no other duty save that of giving proof of adequate gratitude (*gratus*) towards merely the chief promoters and foremost champions of my restoration, I should nevertheless count the years that yet remain to me all too scanty a span even for the mere verbal expression of my gratitude (*gratiam*), far more for its translation into deeds.<sup>23</sup>

Cicero, as a "new man" in politics (as someone who had risen to the highest Roman office of consulship and whose fathers had not held this honor), embodied the ideal that he was expected to always remember his benefactors for bestowing opportunities, since he received honors

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21. Velleius Paterculus, 2.86.3; see Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire*, 19.

22. Cicero, *Epistulae Ad Atticum* 9.11a; Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace*, 200.

23. Cicero, *Oratio post Reditum Senatui* 9.23–24; Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace*, 202.

that he was not likely to ever be able to fully return. Romans were expected to show their gratitude both in word and deed for the rest of their lives. It was not right for Romans to be ungrateful in any way. Cicero advanced his own interests when he furthered the interests of his friends, as evidenced in a letter written to P. Silius Nerva on behalf of the interests of his friend Nero: “In this respect, if you give him your assistance, with the man himself you will have made a splendid investment of your kindness, but you will also have exceedingly obliged me.”<sup>24</sup>

Various ethical rules governed these Roman relationships between the benefactor and the recipient. A benefactor was expected to be generous, but “a return was nevertheless expected from the recipient, and his failure to reciprocate brought moral condemnation, the *ingrates homo* (ungrateful person) being among the lowest forms of social life, according to Cicero and Seneca.”<sup>25</sup> If one wanted to be considered honorable within Roman society, it was imperative to fulfill obligations within the patron-client system. If someone benefited from another’s gift, one was under a debt to repay a benefit when the opportunity arose.<sup>26</sup>

### Augustus Caesar as Savior

A generation later, the culture of reciprocity included a culture of highest honor to the emperor Augustus. The emperor was considered “the all-powerful patron in the Roman world, who had access to, and control over, significant material and other resources, such as land, money, status, honour, . . . money, immunities, and other sought-after privileges.”<sup>27</sup> Those who received the emperor’s gifts were expected to publicly demonstrate their *gratia*.<sup>28</sup>

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24. Cicero, *Ad Familiares* 13.64; Loeb translation.

25. Cicero, *De Officiis* 1.47; Seneca, *De Beneficiis* 1.10.4; 7.23.3; Velleius Paterculus, 2.86.3; see also Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire*, 19.

26. Gerald W. Peterman, *Paul’s Gift from Philippi: Conventions of Gift-Exchange and Christian Giving* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 71; Seneca, *De Beneficiis* 1.1.13; 2.24.4; 4.40.5; 5.11.51; Cicero, *De Officiis* 1.48.

27. Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor*, 26–27.

28. Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor*, 26.



For example, the propaganda campaign of Augustus in the East had elevated him to the status of savior of the Roman world. An inscription proclaims that Providence “arranged the most perfect culmination for life by producing Augustus, whom for the benefit of mankind she has filled with excellence” and calls him a “savior for us and our descendants who brought war to an end and set all things in peaceful order.” No Caesar before or after could surpass Augustus because Providence produced Augustus and granted him as a savior [*sotera charismenē*] who surpassed all other benefactors.<sup>29</sup>

It is clear from this inscription that Roman emperors, especially in the provinces, were worshiped as saviors and gods. Horace, a poet patronized by Augustus, propagandized Augustus’ role as Rome’s savior. Horace benefited greatly as he received homes, lands, and slaves through Augustus’ generosity. In an effort to demonstrate his thankfulness, Horace continued to praise Augustus by promoting him as bestower of *gratia*: “[The] country yearns for Caesar. For when he is here, the ox in safety roams the pastures; Ceres and benign Prosperity make rich the crops; safe are the seas over which our sailors course; Faith shrinks from blame; polluted by no stain, the home is pure; custom and law have stamped out the taint of sin; mothers win praise because of children like unto their sires; while Vengeance follows close on guilt.”<sup>30</sup> Like Horace, Philo ascribed to Augustus a role of social and universal savior:

The whole human race exhausted by mutual slaughter was on the verge of utter destruction had it not been for one man and leader, Augustus, whom men fitly call the averter of evil. This is the Caesar who calmed the torrential storms on every side, who healed pestilences common to Greeks and barbarians, pestilences which descending from the south and the east coursed to the west and north sowing seeds of calamity over the places and waters which lay between them.<sup>31</sup>

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29. Inscription called the Priene Inscription of Augustus, in V. Ehrenberg and A. H. M. Jones, *Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Augustus and Tiberius* (London: Clarendon, 1955), 98b (ll. 32–41); see Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 228–29, n. 66, for more discussion.

30. Horace, *Carmina* 4.5.16–24; see also Vergil, *Georgics* 1.24–42; Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 232, n. 79.

31. Philo, *Leges* 144–45; Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 233.

For Horace, Philo, and for many Romans who were convinced by their writings, Augustus was a savior because of the prosperity and justice he had brought to pass. Roman emperors opportunistically portrayed themselves as divine benefactors, bestowing *charis* in the East and *gratia* in the West. The concept of reciprocity with Augustus as a deity extended to Romans taking loyalty oaths to Augustus in return for the promise of peace. These oaths were taken in the temple of Augustus.<sup>32</sup>

### Reciprocal Notions of Grace in the Writings of Seneca

Seneca (ca. 4 BC–AD 65) promoted the ideal of reciprocal grace. This highly influential prolific writer and Stoic philosopher (and also tutor of Nero) followed in the tradition of Cicero’s adaptation of *charis* into *gratia* as he stressed the obligatory nature of grace. According to Seneca, a man is ungrateful if he is unwilling to remain under the obligation to reciprocate. An honorable man would pray about his benefactor in this manner:

I pray that he may remain in such a position as that he may always bestow benefits and never need them: may he be attended by the means of giving and helping, of which he makes such a bountiful use; may he never want benefits to bestow, or be sorry for any which he has bestowed; may his nature, fitted as it is for acts of pity, goodness, and clemency, be stimulated and brought out by numbers of grateful persons, whom I trust he will find without needing to make trial of their gratitude; may he refuse to be reconciled to no one, and may no one require to be reconciled to him: may fortune so uniformly continue to favour him that no one may be able to return his kindness in any way except by feeling grateful to him.<sup>33</sup>

Likewise, Seneca taught, an honorable patron would feel love and concern for those whom they benefited. Both creditor and debtor had many responsibilities, according to Seneca, since “every obligation that

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32. Ehrenberg and Jones, *Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Augustus and Tiberius*, 315; Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 241.

33. Seneca, *De Beneficiis* 6.29.1, in *L. Annaeus Seneca: On Benefits*, trans. Aubrey Stewart (London: G. Bell, 1911), 181–82.

involves two persons makes equal demands on both.”<sup>34</sup> Seneca asserts that receiving a benefit is receiving a debt.<sup>35</sup> For Romans, according to George G. Strem, “correct practice in this matter is critical since giving and receiving are actions that are liable to alter the relationship between individuals.”<sup>36</sup> Romans often sought to form a good reciprocal relationship according to the patron-client system with someone whom they could trust. They were more careful in selecting a friendship with a patron than selecting a creditor from whom they borrowed money. Seneca affirmed:

I must be far more careful in selecting my creditor for a benefit than a creditor for a loan. For to the latter I shall have to return the same amount that I have received, and, when I have returned it, I have paid all my debt and am free; but to the other I must make an additional payment, and, even after I have paid my debt of gratitude, the bond between us still holds; for, just when I have finished paying it, I am obliged to begin again, and the friendship endures; and, as I would not admit an unworthy man to my friendship, so neither would I admit one who is unworthy to the most sacred privilege of benefits, from which friendship springs.<sup>37</sup>

One *charis* relationship that could not be chosen but was still bound by obligation was that of parent and child. Seneca wrote, “Can there possibly be any greater benefits than those that a father bestows upon his child?”<sup>38</sup> He concluded that “the greatest of all benefits are those that, while we are either unaware or unwilling, we receive from our parents.”<sup>39</sup>

Romans such as Seneca held a notion of fortune (*tychē*) which, according to their gratitude, would bless and curse those who accepted gifts. One was not supposed to seek or to reject the gifts from the

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34. Seneca, *De Beneficiis* 2.18.1, in Stewart, *Seneca*, 35–36.

35. Seneca, *De Beneficiis* 2.23.2; Peterman, *Paul's Gift*, 54.

36. George G. Strem, *The Life and Teaching of Lucius Annaeus Seneca* (New York: Vantage Press, 1981), quoted in Peterman, *Paul's Gift*, 54.

37. Seneca, *De Beneficiis* 2.18.5–6, in Peterman, *Paul's Gift*, appendix A, 201–2.

38. Seneca, *De Beneficiis* 2.11, in Peterman, *Paul's Gift*, appendix A, 203.

39. Seneca, *De Beneficiis* 6.24, in Peterman, *Paul's Gift*, appendix A, 202–3.

gods because it was not within one's power to ever repay them: "What madness it is to quarrel with the gods over their gift! How shall a man show gratitude (*gratus*) to those to whom he cannot return gratitude (*gratia*) without expenditure, if he denies that he has received anything from beings from whom he has received most of all, from those who are always ready to give and will never expect return?"<sup>40</sup> For Seneca and probably most Romans of the first century AD, one of the reasons that it was unthinkable to return favors to the gods was because of the sizable expenditures sometimes involved in returning favors in Roman society. While some form of reciprocity was expected, Romans in the first century AD often emphasized that the generous sums they received far exceeded their ability to repay the gift with money.

Petronius's *Satyricon* often mentions this motif in the larger background of the reign of the emperor Nero (AD 54–68). Although some Romans may have considered becoming a patron or a client in this asymmetrical and reciprocal manner to be distasteful or burdensome, they had to secure these relationships to gain their political, social, and economic ends. Sometimes Romans felt forced into a bad relationship just to gain some type of a social or material advantage. Nevertheless, the institution of *gratia* persisted in the Empire until the collapse of Roman political authority in the West in the fifth century AD. The institution of *charis* in the Roman East lasted into the medieval ages with the Romano-Byzantines. Later imperial writers often referred to senators as "clients," as their senatorial status became degraded by ostentatious and autocratic emperors.<sup>41</sup> Some senators, such as the senatorial followers of Sejanus, a bloodthirsty quasi-tyrant who lived during the reign of the emperor Tiberius, did exploit the vertical and asymmetrical connotations of grace to demean others by calling clients outcasts.<sup>42</sup>

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40. Seneca, *De Beneficiis* 6.23.7; Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace*, 207.

41. Cicero, *De Officiis* 2.69; Seneca, *De Beneficiis* 2.23; *De Brevitate Vitae* 19.3.

42. Tacitus, *Annales* 4.2, 4.34; Seneca, *De Consolatione ad Marciam* 6.22.4; Tacitus, *Historiae* 3.66; Richard Saller, "Patronage and Friendship in Early Imperial Rome: Drawing the Distinction," in Wallace-Hadrill, *Patronage in Ancient Society*, 52.

## Possible Objections by Protestant Scholars

Some Protestant scholars such as David Pao have cited Seneca generally to argue that in the ancient understanding of grace, grace could not be repaid.<sup>43</sup> Pao, however, overlooks the fact that Romans had occasionally used *charis* in an excessively commercialized fashion in the first century AD, when the empire was at the height of its power. James Harrison shows an example of just this sort of commercial use: In some ancient commercial papyri, a record of work done by scribes was marked either that a payment had been made to the scribe, or marked with the word *charis* to show that no payment was made. Twenty-five entries marked “*charis*” indicated that work had been done for no charge and was sometimes accompanied by the name of the scribe or a benefactor of the scribal staff.<sup>44</sup> In this case, the word *charis* indicated merely that the work was done as a favor, and no indication is made that two parties had entered into a committed personal relationship. To Seneca such use was not true *charis*. In the passage quoted above, Seneca is arguing against a cheap, commercial form of grace. Seneca was not alone among Roman thinkers in considering commercialized forms of grace to be inappropriate. And Paul also rejected this commercial use in Romans 4:4 with his phrase *tōi de ergazomenōi ho misthos ou logizetai kata charin alla kata opheilēma*, which has been mistranslated in the KJV (with verses 4 and 5 for context) as: “Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom. 4:4–5). My translation of Romans 4:4–5, which reflects the special commercial uses of these ancient Greek words, is: “But for the speculator, commercial gain comes through taking on debt, not through making reciprocal covenants. But for someone who is at leisure, who trusts in the One [Jesus] making the ungodly just, his faith counts as righteousness.” In commercial ancient Greek, *ergazomai* usually meant to trade or invest (Matt. 25:16). It is important to keep in mind that in gentile society,

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43. David Pao, *Thanksgiving: An Investigation of a Pauline Theme* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 170.

44. Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace*, 73.

unlike in ancient Jewish culture, commerce and manual work were considered undignified ways of making a living. Commerce was considered so lowly that Romans of a senatorial class were not allowed to engage in it so they could engage in politics honestly. They delegated these responsibilities to their slaves, according to many statutes preserved in Roman law.<sup>45</sup> In stark contrast to modern American values that often put business on a pedestal, commerce was considered disreputable, while leisure was pursued by the Roman elite.<sup>46</sup> Paul is in disagreement with the special commercial uses of *charis* occasionally employed in the ancient business sector.<sup>47</sup> He is not arguing against the normal Greco-Roman reciprocity associated with grace.

Returning to the example of the twenty-five scribes' work receipts marked "charis," where Harrison says that the word *charis* means simply "no charge," I would like to suggest other possible interpretations. It is not possible for us to know all the connotations of the word *charis* in this use. Perhaps someone did a favor or returned a favor to someone else according to the typical conventions of reciprocity, which was acknowledged and later reciprocated without their reciprocal actions being specifically marked in these documents. Or perhaps this is the cheap, commercial grace of the first century that Seneca, Paul, Cicero and others repudiated. It is unclear to the modern reader what specific obligations that favor implied through reciprocity in these twenty-five entries, but I suggest that they are not conclusive evidence that *charis* means "free."

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45. The master of senatorial class was disallowed by law to be directly involved in business: "Authorization in this [business] connection may be given by will or by letter or orally or through an intermediary and either specifically for a single transaction or generally. So a person who states publicly, 'do any business you like with my slave Stichus; it will be at my risk,' is taken to have authorized all kinds of transactions unless there is a specific exclusionary clause." D.15.4.1.1 in Andrew Borkowski, *Textbook on Roman Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 95.

46. Notice that in many of Jesus' parables the master goes away, leaving his business to his slaves.

47. Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace*, 74; Harrison failed to note these subtle distinctions in the Greek language and in Roman law and culture when he mistakenly writes that "Paul uses similar commercial terminology when contrasting justification by works with justification by faith."

Although admittedly its precise meaning to the ancients is unrecoverable at this point, the word *charis* seems to have occasionally been used in the first century in an increasingly commercialized environment, where it seems possible that it was used to account for the transactions of buying and selling. Harrison pointed out that the verb *charizethai* [to be given a gift] “was standard fare in the commercial papyri” and provided two examples of how the term *charis* was used as an IOU in the Roman East during the first and second centuries AD.<sup>48</sup> The problem with this evidence is that scholars today do not know what the context of these IOU papyri was; the background necessary to interpret the evidence is missing. However, a plethora of literary texts from the Roman period I have quoted clearly demonstrate that long-standing Greco-Roman reciprocity and obligations were still implied in the first century. These other texts provide the missing context a scholar needs to correctly evaluate in commercial transactions of the first century AD.

Reciprocity implied by *charis* occupied a much higher plane for the ancients than did relationships based on purely monetary transactions. Most importantly, reputation was paramount to the ancients. One was expected to give thanks not only through words but also through deeds. In the words of Seneca:

The greater the favor, the more earnestly must we express ourselves, resorting to such compliments as . . . “you do not know what it is that you have bestowed upon me, but you have a right to know how much more it is than you think.” . . . “I shall never be able to repay you with my gratitude, but at any rate, I shall not cease from declaring everywhere that I am unable to repay it.” . . . The person who intends to be grateful immediately, while he is receiving, should turn his thought to repaying.<sup>49</sup>

Seneca saw *charis* as a type of group protection, the way we might see insurance: “It is only through the interchange of benefits that life becomes in some measure equipped and fortified against sudden

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48. Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 74.

49. Seneca, *De Beneficiis* 2.24.4 and 2.25.3, translation in Pao, *Thanksgiving*, 168.

disasters.”<sup>50</sup> According to Seneca, in the Roman context of grace one never demanded to be paid back since the institution of grace was always expected to be voluntary. But once contracted, the reciprocal institution of grace was obligatory since it involved values much higher than money. Seneca wrote:

We are, as you know, wont to speak thus: “A has made a return for a favor bestowed by B.” Making a return means handing over of your own accord that which you owe. We do not say, “He has paid back the favor”; for “pay back” is used of a man upon whom a demand for repayment is made, of those who pay against their will, of those who pay under any circumstances whatever, and of those who pay through a third party. We do not say, “He has ‘restored’ the benefit”, or “settled” it; we have never been satisfied with a word which applies properly to a debt of money. Making a return means offering something to him from whom you have received something. The phrase implies a voluntary return; he who has made a return has served the writ upon himself.<sup>51</sup>

For the Romans, the obligations of reciprocity could never be settled. Grace was not based on mundane principles of simple commercial transactions. Paul affirmed this understanding in Romans 4:4–5, as noted above.

### Grace in the Writings of Other First and Second Century Romans

Other notable Romans of the first century AD stated the strong obligations that were associated with grace. This section will look at the writings of Tacitus, Proculus, Quintillian, and Pliny the Younger.

*Tacitus.* In the beginning of his *Histories*, Tacitus (AD 56–117) presented for his readers his credentials to write an unbiased account of the later first century AD. He argued for his objectivity as a historian since he was unfettered by the traditional Greco-Roman bonds of grace. When he wrote about the short-lived emperors Galba, Otho,

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50. Seneca, *De Beneficiis* 4.18.2, as translated in Pao, *Thanksgiving*, 169.

51. Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales* 81.9–10, in Peterman, *Paul’s Gift*, appendix A, 202.



and Vitellius, he did so impartially because he did not receive favors nor suffer any harm from them. He said he could also write an objective history about the later Flavian emperors (Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian) without love or hate despite the fact they indirectly furthered his public career. Clearly Tacitus's contemporary readers would have assumed that the favors received in the course of a public career created reciprocal obligations that one could not honorably deny.<sup>52</sup> A serious Roman historian like Tacitus, who wanted to write what he considered to be the truth, felt he had to go outside the powerful bonds of grace in order to write a factual, objective Roman history.

*Proculus.* Asymmetrical obligations inherent in reciprocity and patron-client relationships meant that the individual was not free from service to patrons. *Gratia* signified an inferior status that proud aristocrats such as Tacitus eschewed. Slaves were often associated with this asymmetrical, reciprocal system of grace. Partly for this reason, the apostles call themselves *douloi*, slaves (translated in the KJV as “servants”), to show they had humbly made sacred, obligatory covenants with God based on reciprocity. Certainly, however, clients were often free in Roman law. Proculus, a jurist of the first century AD, in the course of a discussion of Roman law related that in a patron-client relationship it should be understood that one of these people is superior, not that the other is not free: “just as we understand that our clients are free, although they are not equal to us in influence, rank or power, so it is to be understood that those who are required courteously to uphold our majesty are free.”<sup>53</sup> The asymmetry of reciprocal grace strengthened the patron-client system, whether it was a superior (a Roman noble or citizen) to a lower class plebian or freedman or woman (who were already manumitted).

*Quintilian.* As Romans often remarked in their letters, even patrons needed gifts of various kinds from their subordinate client friends, although these gifts were of lesser value. The grammarian Quintilian (AD 35–100) depended on the reciprocity of his client-friends who were perhaps his superiors, peers, or subordinates:

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52. Tacitus, *Historiae* 1.1.

53. Proculus, *Dig.* 49.15.7.1, translation by John Rich, in Wallace-Hadrill, *Patronage in Ancient Society*, 117.

The orator (i.e., advocate) will not wish to acquire more than is sufficient for him. And not even a poor orator will accept compensation as if it were pay; but he will enjoy a mutual generosity in the knowledge that his generosity has exceeded his compensation. Nor ought his service come to nothing because it ought not be sold. Finally, the man in debt (i.e., the client) has the primary responsibility to display his gratitude (*gratus*).<sup>54</sup>

*Pliny the Younger.* Both bestower and receiver received benefits from mutual generosity. A reciprocal relationship existed at the beginning of the second century AD between Pliny the Younger and the emperor Trajan, which is well documented because they exchanged many letters that have survived. In *Epistle* 10.5, Pliny requested that Trajan grant citizenship to Pliny's client Arpocras. Pliny described his motivation: "When I was seriously ill last year, and in some danger of my life, I called in a medical therapist [Arpocras] whose care and attentiveness I can only reward. I pray you therefore to grant him Roman citizenship." Trajan eventually granted citizenship to Arpocras, but since Arpocras was an Egyptian and because (as Pliny was unaware) Egyptians according to Roman law had to have Alexandrian citizenship to be eligible for Roman citizenship, a second favor had to be later requested in another letter. So in another letter, Pliny explicitly indicated his gratitude (*gratia*) and noted that the extra favor would further obligate him to Trajan (10.6). The emperor in his response said that he did not grant Alexandrian citizenship indiscriminately, but that in this case he could not refuse (10.7). Arpocras received citizenship not because he met any universal qualification, but because he had provided a favor of medical care for a Roman aristocrat (Pliny) who happened to be a personal friend and client of the emperor. Pliny used his patron-client relationship with his superior to help his own client. Furthermore, Pliny used the language of *gratia* to ask for a favor from the emperor, and there is no reason to doubt that his loyalty to Trajan was strengthened by the emperor's generosity on various occasions.<sup>55</sup> In another letter, Pliny solicited Priscus on behalf of Voconius

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54. Quintilian, *Inst.* 12.7.12, translation in Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire*, 29.

55. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire*, 35.

Romanus that Voconius enter into Priscus's friendship and patronage (*Ep.* 2.13). Pliny also brokered a praetorship, or high government office, for his friend Accius Sura (*Ep.* 10.12).<sup>56</sup> William Johnson and Florence Dupont note that Pliny's tight-knit community of friendship was characterized by a reciprocity that mutually recognized common values, "of which the most important is the theoretical mastery of language."<sup>57</sup> In Richard Saller's analysis, the obligations of the patron-client relationship in these tight-knit social communities even extended from the lowly petitioner of citizenship all the way up to the emperor. It was the right of every Roman citizen to be able to petition the emperor as corroborated by Paul's appeals, recorded in the book of Acts.

### Satire and Criticism about Reciprocal Gratia

Since reciprocity played such a fundamental role in Roman society, it was naturally a subject of satire. The satirist Martial (ca. AD 40–103) wrote witty epigrams that utilized the institution of reciprocity, occasionally to criticize others. For example, Martial wrote to Pontilianus (whom he did not like), "Why don't I send you my little books, Pontilianus? Lest you send me yours."<sup>58</sup> Martial also criticized the custom that clients were expected to rise early and go salute their patron at the patron's home with titles of respect such as *dominus* or *rex* (lord or king). He wrote, "Because I greet you now by your own name whom formerly I used to call 'patron' and 'master,' do not proclaim me insolent. I have bought my cap of liberty at the cost of all my goods and chattels. . . . If you can endure not having a slave, Olus, you can also endure, Olus, not having a patron."<sup>59</sup>

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56. Briones, "Mutual Brokers of Grace," 542.

57. William A. Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 52, quoting Florence Dupont, "Recitatio and the Space of Public Discourse," in *The Roman Cultural Revolution*, ed. Thomas Habinek and Alessandro Schiesaro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 54.

58. Martial, *Epigrams* 7.3.

59. Martial, *Epigrams* 2.68, in Walter C. A. Ker, *Martial: Epigrams* (New York: Putnam, 1919), 149. See also Martial, *Epigrams* 1, 70, 108; 5:20; 6.10; 10.70, 74, 82; 11.24; 12.15, 68; Richard P. Saller, "Martial on Patronage and Literature,"

Patrons often failed to reward their clients sufficiently (from the point of view of the clients) or did so only occasionally and sporadically. Because gifts slowly trickled down the Roman hierarchy, if in fact they trickled down at all, a stark divide began to develop between the wealthy and the poor of Roman society, especially during the first century AD. The satirist Juvenal denounced these proverbially unreliable patrons in Roman society in his Satire 5:

Clients themselves are the dupes, for the patrons have no intention of rewarding their services; a meal is all they get, and that not often; and when at last after two months the neglected client is invited, he is insulted with cheap and nasty fare while the patron gorges luxuriously. Here food may stand as the symbol of the resources a patron distributes: his power over the client derives not from generous and regular distribution, but from keeping him on tenterhooks with the prospect of access to resources which is in fact never fully granted. The client's only chance of breaking out of the system is to make the unacceptable admission that the resources are unavailable and in any case superfluous.<sup>60</sup>

Unfortunately, many patrons abused the potential power they had to bless others. Because they did not benefit others according to their expected reciprocal obligations, a great injustice was committed, resulting in poverty where there should have been shared wealth. For this reason grace became a powerful motif in the New Testament to clarify to Gentile converts that God is always willing, honorable, and capable of granting grace through Christ's gift of the Atonement. God's grace was much more attractive than the limited and mercurial grace clients might or might not receive from arrogant Roman aristocrats. After the third-century AD crisis, when Rome almost collapsed politically and was weakened by decades of civil war, it seems there were far fewer individuals who were able to act as patrons to others. Beginning in the fourth century AD, some early Christians may have abandoned

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*Classical Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (1983): 251. Compare the statements of the poet Statius, who willingly gave gratitude to the emperor Domitian in every way that he could. Statius, *Silvae* 3.1.6.

60. Wallace-Hadrill, "Patronage in Roman Society," 73.

their traditional, stingy Roman patrons and gods to search for the all-gracious Lord.

But assistance from any source in antiquity was usually attractive and was accepted. In the satires of Juvenal and Martial it sometimes appears that nine out of ten Romans were living on charity at this time: five of them lived on government-provided grain and pork, and the other four were dependents of the tenth. Relationships of reciprocity seem to have continued down until the late empire as a means to secure privileges, safety, honor, money, and a career in imperial government.<sup>61</sup> Reciprocity became the social welfare net for those Romans who were destitute of friends and resources.

## Summary

Grace as a Hellenistic institution became deeply embedded in Roman culture and the Latin language as *gratia*. Many Romans, like Paul in Romans 4:4–5, specifically rejected the growing idea that grace was commercial, just a monetary exchange or a quick sale. In the late Greco-Roman, Hellenistic world of the apostles, Cicero, Seneca, Pliny the Younger, Martial, and many other Romans, as cited above, emphasized the widely established view that while initiating and receiving a gift was a matter of choice, giving and receiving gratitude was not an option for honorable elites and their clients but rather an absolute duty which established a long-term and often lifelong patron-client relationship.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, as was the case in the early Greek literature, in Roman culture, when one received a gift, which incurred some kind of obligation to respond gratefully, grace became a debt on which one could not default. Seneca used the expression *debt of gratitude* in many passages.<sup>63</sup> Many Roman sources clarify that grace was the central motivating principle of their patron-client relationships. For Romans, a person who entered into a *gratia* relationship, either as the patron or the client, was taking on an obligation to be honorable, reliable, and generous with means and praise.

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61. See a discussion on this subject in Hands, *Charities and Social Aid*, 48.

62. Cicero, *De Officio* 1.47–48; deSilva, *Honor, Patronage*, 109.

63. Seneca, *Ben.* 2.35.3–4; 5.11.5; 1.4.3.



## **Paul's Use of Charis and the Concept of Reciprocity**

**A**S A ROMAN CITIZEN AND AS A BRILLIANT AND LEARNED Greek-speaking apostle, Paul must have intimately understood the Roman institutionalization of reciprocity in the patron-client system. His Roman gentile converts also intimately understood patronage. For this reason Paul places great emphasis on the fact that grace comes from Christ—and that Christ's grace was not a corruptible monetary exchange like the increasingly unreliable Roman patron-client relationships of his time. God always reciprocates with his children. Paul stood in awe and often marveled that Christ and God offer humans grace at all (Eph. 1–3, for example). Their condescension from their lofty position makes their offer more asymmetrical than any earthly offer could ever be. The crucial point is that Paul did not teach that grace is a one-way, one-time, permanent gift from Christ to mankind. Paul did not reject the notion of reciprocal covenants. These covenants vertically bind man to God through obligations to keep his commandments.

Paul was also a devout Jew. As a Mediterranean society, the Jews were not immune to the influences of reciprocity and patronage. With a focus on worship of God, the Torah taught Jews to love and be loyal to one another as brothers, and the ways this ideology meshed with patronage were complex. For example, Jewish sage Ben Sira “assigns religious value to the presentation of benefits to friends . . . as a way of celebrating God-given bounty. Ben Sira strongly approved of the acquisition of social dominance, especially by sages or the righteous

and wise.”<sup>1</sup> Paul drew on both his Jewish and Roman backgrounds to teach about grace.

This chapter analyzes many of Paul’s uses of grace in order to gain an understanding of what he meant in his first-century AD context. A detailed study of Paul’s relationship with groups and individuals mentioned in his epistles demonstrates that Paul innately understood the social conventions of benefaction, and this understanding must have informed how he used *charis*. Paul was the founder of communities and became the guide, legislator, educator, and benevolent defender of his communities: he became their patron and entered into *charis* relationships with them. I will argue in this chapter using dozens of examples from Paul’s many writings that he understood, respected, intended, and promulgated the social conventions of reciprocity to preach the gospel. As will be demonstrated below, Paul used the term *charis* according to its proper reciprocal Mediterranean social conventions.<sup>2</sup>

For the purposes of this study, I attribute all the writings associated with Paul as having been written by him.<sup>3</sup> At this point, it will be useful to have an overview of the use of the word *charis* and its related words in the whole New Testament. This chart shows the occurrences of *charis*, *charin*, *charizomai*, *charisma*, and *charitoō* as reported in “KJV New Testament Greek Lexicon.” There are 157 occurrences of *charis* in the New

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1. Seth Schwartz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society? Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 15, 169.

2. Paul had a multicultural background as a Jew, Roman, and Greek. He looked forward to a Messiah and recognized Jesus as the Messiah (see Gal. 3:24, where Paul speaks of Jewish law as a guardian until the coming of the *christon*, which in some versions is translated as Messiah). He lived in the Greco-Roman world, wrote in Greek, and was a Roman citizen. On Paul’s background, see Stanley E. Porter, ed., *Paul: Jew, Greek, and Roman* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

3. Some of Paul’s writings have been considered by scholars to have definitely been written by Paul, while other writings attributed to him may have been written by his secretary, another apostle, or by other early Christians. New Testament authorship is peripheral to this study. If pseudo-Pauline writings were considered orthodox by very early Christians because of their teachings, then it is likely that they contain doctrines associated with Jesus’ apostles, whether written by Paul or another Christian leader. Also, when examined through the reciprocal nuances of *charis*, all writings whether attributed or not to Paul emphasize covenants, being obligated to God, and reciprocating love to God and others.



*Occurrences of Charis, Charisma, Charitoō, and Charizomai in the New Testament by Book*

	<i>charis/ charin</i>	<i>charisma</i>	<i>charitoō</i>	<i>charizomai</i>
<b>Gospels and Acts</b>				
Matthew				
Mark				
Luke	9		1	3
John	3			
Acts	16			4
<b>Pauline Epistles</b>				
Romans	26	6		1
1 Corinthians	10	7		1
2 Corinthians	18	1		5
Galatians	8			1
Ephesians	14		1	2
Philippians	2			2
Colossians	5			2
1 Thessalonians	2			
2 Thessalonians	4			
1 Timothy	5	1		
2 Timothy	5	1		
Titus	6			
Philemon	2			1
Hebrews	8			
<b>Other Epistles and Revelation</b>				
James	2			
1 Peter	10	1		
2 Peter	2			
1 John	1			
2 John	1			
3 John				
Jude	2			
Revelation	2			

Testament,<sup>4</sup> translated in the King James Version as *favor, grace, gracious, credit, thank, thankful, thankworthy, acceptable, gratitude, pleasure, liberality, and bounty*. Where *charis* is being used as an adverb (*charin*) it is translated as *because of, for this reason, for the sake of, on account of, and wherefore*. The word *charisma* occurs 17 times and is translated as *gift, free gift, and spiritual gift*. *Charitoó* occurs twice and is translated as *favored and accepted*. *Charizomai* occurs 22 times and is translated as *give, forgive, hand over, deliver, give up, grant, freely give, and bestow*. The list of all verses using these words can be found online.<sup>5</sup>

This chart shows where these words are used in the New Testament. It is clear that Paul used *charis* and its related words more frequently than other New Testament authors, and for this reason we will study works attributed to him first.

This chapter will review *charis* by topics and show that Paul used the word *charis* to mean God's gift, power from God, victory over physical and spiritual death, and, most frequently, as a greeting and expression of hope that Christians would accept God's grace. As will be shown, this gift comes with expectations of performing service and acting righteously.

## The Gift of Grace Invites Service

As did other ancient writers,<sup>6</sup> Paul utilized the word and the idea of grace as a vehicle to teach the importance of service. In Galatians 1:15–16, Paul teaches that he was invited by God's grace to serve by preaching the gospel and he was set apart to do so: "God, who had set me apart before I was born and called [*kalesas*] me through his grace, was pleased

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4. According to *Strong's Concordance of the Bible*, counting "charis" and "charin." There are other ways to study word usage and word counts in the Bible, but Strong's is adequate for the purposes of this study. This number counts every use of the word separately, even those that occur more than once in a verse. In addition to the 157 uses of *charis* as a noun, there are 9 uses of *charin*, the adjective form.

5. The chart was compiled by using resources at *Bible Hub*, s.v. "5485. χάρις (*charis*)," [http://biblehub.com/greek/strongs\\_5485.htm](http://biblehub.com/greek/strongs_5485.htm), citing *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* and the *Interlinear Bible* by *Biblos.com*.

6. See for example the previous discussions of Homer, Aristotle, Proculus, and Thucydides.

to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles” (NRSV).<sup>7</sup> Many translations such as the NIV translate the Greek word *kaleō* to mean “call” in this verse, but I believe *kaleō* is better translated into English as “invited” because charis gifts do not “call” individuals to act, they “invite” them. From a Jewish perspective, Paul was born into the Abrahamic covenant which already placed significant obligations on him to serve God. Paul accepted his invitation to serve and was able to effectively preach the gospel. Having been born in the covenant he was expected to serve God but once he accepted the invitation he was doubly-obligated to serve God. Acknowledging the nuances of charis means that we should not focus only on the offer, but also view Paul’s service as part of the message. Both God and Paul acted.

Galatians 2:9 shows that the “pillars of the church” (Peter, James, and John) approved Paul’s ministry because they saw he had received a full measure of God’s gift of grace (“perceived the grace that was given unto me”). They saw that Paul had received the truth and was teaching it, and he had the power of God with him. They welcomed Paul as a disciple and gave him the right hand of fellowship.<sup>8</sup> The right hand of fellowship and the assignment to go on a mission may be a signal that Paul had entered into a covenant. Paul first became converted and was baptized, and then became an effective missionary.

In Philippians 1:7–9, Paul states, “It is right for me to be thus minded on behalf of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as, both in my bonds and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers with me of grace. For God is my witness, how I long after you all in the tender mercies of Christ Jesus. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment” (English Revised Version). Paul states that he has others’ best interest in his heart through his labors and sufferings as he served them. Because he had served them and they belonged to the

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7. The English translation “But when it pleased God” (KJV) was probably added to the Bible much later and is considered doubtful by New Testament scholars. See Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament*, 3d ed. (London: UBS, 1971), 590.

8. 2 Peter 3:15 is evidence that Peter accepted Paul as a disciple and missionary.

Christian community, he invited them to appropriately reciprocate by developing more love, knowledge, and judgment. Matthew Henry's commentary agrees that grace here indicates how much Paul loved the Philippians because he had served them and they had "joined with [him] in doing and suffering. . . . He loved them because they adhered to him in his bonds."<sup>9</sup> Service and reciprocal response brought unity.

### Converted Communities Entered Charis Relationships

In Ephesians 1:5–6, Paul taught that in God's plan, disciples can truly become children of Christ. "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace [*charitos*], wherein he hath made us accepted [*echaritosen*] in the beloved," is the text according to the KJV. *Echaritosen* might be translated as "he has given with grace." Other translations define *echaritosen* as grace freely given: "To the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves" (NIV) and "To the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (New American Standard Bible). These versions add the idea of grace freely given to the Greek word *echaritosen*, but "freely" is not clearly present in the Greek. The Interpreter's Bible notes, "The verb *echaritosen* (freely bestowed) is formed on the stem of the noun *charis* (grace), as if to mean 'the grace that grace has given.' It is as if the writer were so enraptured with the word that he can hardly bear to let it go; he is absorbed in the thought that God's grace overflows in grace to us, lavishes grace upon us."<sup>10</sup> But Paul's point is that covenants with Christ bring people to him in obligated relationships. This was the social norm in the Mediterranean world and expected according to

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9. *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, s.v. Philippians 1:7–8, online at *Bible Gateway*, <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/matthew-henry/Phil.1.7-Phil.1.8>. Matthew Henry wrote a six-volume, verse by verse commentary of the Bible, published in 1708–10, which is still popular today.

10. Francis W. Beare, "Ephesians," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, 12 vols. (New York: Abingdon, 1953), 10:617. On the same page, Theodore O. Wedel, writing the exposition, firmly reminds us of God's exactness and the costliness of grace: for God to forgive us cost the precious blood of Christ. Thus this version sees grace as both free and costly.

ancient conventions associated with *charis* and what Paul seems to have meant. Paul continues (Eph. 1:7), “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace [*charitos*],” emphasizing aspects of grace, but never denying the need for covenant.

In 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9, Paul reflects on the many facets of the effort to provide relief to the saints in Jerusalem, an effort that formed a three-way reciprocal relationship among the Pauline communities, the saints in Jerusalem, and God.<sup>11</sup> Paul teaches about grace and thanks the Corinthians for giving *charis* gifts to the saints at Jerusalem. The principle Paul teaches here is that those who sow (or give) sparingly will reap (or receive) sparingly, and those who sow bountifully will reap bountifully. Sowing and reaping are reciprocal (2 Cor. 9:6). And just as God gives grace, his disciples receive and are expected to do good works themselves and build communities (2 Cor. 9:8). The Jerusalem members were genuinely and appropriately grateful for the Corinthians’ *charis* gift to them by being concerned for the Corinthians’ well-being and praying that the Corinthians would receive an overabundance of grace (*charin*) from God in return for their gifts. Paul also expressed hope that the Corinthians would eventually be blessed by more gifts of God because they had given the Jerusalem community a gift. The Corinthians’ charitable acts toward those in Jerusalem are a manifestation of their *charis* to God.

Likewise, in Colossians 1, Paul commends the Christian community at Colosse because they not only have faith in Jesus, they also have love for all the saints (Col. 1:4). Their love for other saints resulted from them hearing the gospel and accepting “the grace of God in truth” (Col. 1:6). Because of their entering into that *charis* relationship, Paul and others did “not cease to pray for [them],” and desired that the Colossians would “be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge

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11. Romans 15:25, 28; quoted in Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor*, 133. See also Joubert’s discussion on this topic on pp. 139, 140, 200, 202, 216; and Richard R. Melick Jr., “The Collection for the Saints: 2 Corinthians 8–9,” *Criswell Theological Review* 4, no. 1 (1989): 97–117.

of God.” These expressions evoke several meanings of charis: pleasing, fruitful (or rewarding), and accepting the will of the giver (God).

### **Paul Invites His Readers to Act Properly through Charis**

Paul informed his readers that the righteous must teach correct doctrine (*logos*) so that this doctrine would provide the gift of grace for those listening: “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph. 4:29). For Paul, only by speaking correct doctrine could a disciple offer hearers a chance to enter into and maintain a charis relationship with God.

Gospel discussions should always center on the grace or gift of Christ, as Paul teaches in Colossians 4:6: “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.” Gracious, pleasant conversation should be “seasoned with salt,” which in Greek usage meant to be enlivened with wisdom.<sup>12</sup> If disciples would base their conversation and oration in God’s grace and in wisdom, they would be able to answer every man’s questions and complaints.

### **Paul’s Reciprocal Relationships of Guardian/Prisoner and Master/Slave**

Paul utilized the motif of “prisoner” (2 Tim. 1:8; Eph. 3:1; 4:1) of Jesus Christ to express his dependence on God as guardian in a patron-client relationship informed by charis. In the ancient worldview, this dependent relationship meant that Paul would receive God’s continued blessings of protection. In the beginning of three of Paul’s epistles (namely Rom. 1:1; Philip. 1:1; Titus 1:1) and in Galatians 1:10, Paul referred to himself as a “slave” of God (*douloi*, “slave” in numerous versions; “servant” in KJV) to reflect that he was bound by covenant to do God’s will. Peter and James also used the term *doulos* to depict themselves

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12. Salt was also associated with cleansing and preservation, adding more meaning to this exhortation.

as slaves as a means of teaching that disciples should cultivate reciprocal relationships (2 Pet. 1:1; James 1:1). In belonging to a master/slave relationship, they placed themselves in care of the master, who could eventually free them from death and sin.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, asymmetrical social relationships between patron and client and between master and slave were founded on the reciprocal notion of *charis*. It should be noted that ancient slavery was not based on race. The low class of slaves labored with their hands and were considered tools, as if they were underdeveloped mentally, in contrast to educated slaves who were physicians, scribes, or, rarely, assistants to Roman emperors.<sup>13</sup> Ancient Gentiles held prejudices against manual labor because it was associated with moral corruption, vice, and slavery.<sup>14</sup>

Roman slaves in time gained their freedom through good service and the Roman institution of *peculium* (the slaves keeping a portion of the money they earned for the master).<sup>15</sup> This would be the expectation of most first-century slaves throughout the Mediterranean. The apostles used the slave/servant concept to explain that by keeping their covenant with their master, they would in time be rewarded, but they viewed their covenant as permanent.

The book of Philemon is Paul's letter to Philemon, a slave owner and probably a wealthy church leader in Colosse. Paul asks, and in fact insists, that Philemon welcome back his former (possibly runaway) slave, Onesimus, as a fellow Christian and social equal. Paul's intervention placed Onesimus in debt to Paul.<sup>16</sup> This slave was expected to

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13. See Aristotle, *Politics* 1253b–1254a.

14. Sallust, *Cataline Conspiracy* 4, states that a good Roman, such as himself, should spend one's leisure time in academic pursuits like writing history instead of servile activities like manual farm labor, duties of governance, or pursuing entertainment.

15. "Allowing the slave to hold property [or a *peculium*] provided an incentive for the slave to work hard. . . . Indeed a slave was often allowed to buy his freedom with his or her *peculium*. And when slaves were freed in their master's will, it was common for them to receive the *peculium* by way of a legacy." Borkowski, *Textbook on Roman Law*, 94–96, 114–16.

16. See the discussion in John K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992).

reciprocate and remained “pitiably in even greater debt to Paul, the gracious giver. Even by doing what Paul asks and by providing hospitality, he will never catch up and attain parity with Paul, and this is the whole point.”<sup>17</sup> Paul’s desire to grant *charis* to the slave is a type of the *charis* that Paul taught should exist between mankind as disciple-slave and Christ the master.

## Grace Empowers

Paul taught that grace goes hand in hand with the power of God to do his will. Grace is manifested in the apostles’ powerful actions, speeches, and letters, in the gifts of the spirit that Christians were given, and through the Holy Ghost. The apostles spoke “with great power” about the resurrection, and “God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all” that there were no poor among the converts (Acts 4:33–34, NIV). According to Luke, Paul and Barnabas were entrusted with grace because of the righteous “work which they fulfilled” (Acts 14:26). Paul was trusted by the brethren when he left with Silas because of the effective missionary labors he had been engaged in (Acts 14:40).

Paul writes in his epistles that the gift of God’s grace grants power and that all the diverse spiritual gifts (or powers) are received through grace: “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith” (Rom. 12:6, NIV). In this chapter Paul associates *charis* with the gifts of prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, and showing mercy. Anyone who accepted and used these gifts showed God that he was grateful for the gift and had faith in God. When the recipient accepted the gift, he accepted the obligation to use this power to bless others. Paul’s teaching about *charis* is solidly within the meaning it had for the Greeks.

Paul in the role of an apostle received the power of boldness because of the gift of God’s grace: “Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God” (Rom. 15:15). Paul expressed that

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17. Osiek, “Politics of Patronage,” 143–52.



he was motivated to write boldly because of the charis relationship God had given him.

Paul credits grace as a means of empowerment in several places in his epistles. Paul claimed that because of the gift of grace he was able to be “a wise masterbuilder,” so in turn he fulfilled his obligation by laying a foundation for Christ (1 Cor. 3:10–11). Because of the grace of God he had a “testimony of conscience” that empowered him in simplicity and godly sincerity (2 Cor. 1:12). Paul wrote that the Lord had told him that his grace was sufficient. As Paul became humble, his weaknesses became strengths and gave him power; God’s gift could heal the thorn in the flesh, and receiving this gift perfectly in weakness helped him to appreciate human weakness (2 Cor. 12:7–10).<sup>18</sup> “By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me,” he wrote (1 Cor. 15:10). Everywhere, Paul credits his becoming an effective apostle to the gift of grace: he entered into the reciprocal covenant that Christ offered him, and that relationship gave him strength. Grace served Paul as an anchor, and he taught others to let their hearts be strengthened by grace and not be carried away by false practice (Heb. 13:9). Paul always credits Christ: by the effectual working of Christ’s power, God gave Paul the gift of grace: “I was made a minister, according to the gift of grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:7–8).

The power to repent, change, and obtain forgiveness comes through reciprocal grace. In his first epistle to Timothy, Paul explained that God’s charis provides a way for sinners to repent and enter Christ’s covenant. Then he told that he had been a blasphemer and persecutor, but he obtained mercy. Grace and mercy applied to him personally. He was a true teacher because “the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 1:14).

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18. This evokes Moroni’s message in Ether 12.

## Grace as Victory over Physical Death and the Possibility of Victory over Spiritual Death

Paul credits grace for the means by which Christ performed the Atonement: “he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (Heb. 2:9, NIV). Being empowered through receiving and keeping his covenant with the Father, Jesus was able to overcome physical death. Hebrews and Greeks and everyone else will be saved from death through the grace of Christ. Salvation from physical death (the resurrection) was the good news of the gospel, especially for the Roman Gentiles who typically believed that they ceased to exist after death.<sup>19</sup>

Paul clearly taught that Christ’s grace overcomes physical death through the resurrection—a doctrine that the Greco-Roman world, as exemplified by the city of Athens, rejected (Acts 17). Paul explains, “(14) Death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come. (15) But the gift [of Christ, *charisma*] is not like the trespass [of Adam]. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man [Adam], how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace [charis] of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! (16) Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift [charisma] followed many trespasses and brought justification. (17) For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:14–17, NIV). The term *charisma*, which Paul uses to describe the divine gift of resurrection, describes Christ’s power over physical death. This is a vicarious gift of one to help the many. All will gain immortality. The gift is free in the sense that all who have lived on the earth, regardless of how they lived, will eventually receive it. However, verse 17 deals with another subject: spiritual death,

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19. For example, the writings of the epicurean philosopher Lucretius’s *De Rerum Natura* contain these sentiments. *De Rerum Natura* book 4 says our atoms dissolve into nothingness, signifying that at death we will be obliterated.

or eternal separation from God. By including the condition “those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life,” Paul clarifies that this gift is not received by all people. It is offered to all, but some reject it. This is the gift of spiritual resurrection, or what Latter-day Saint doctrine calls “exaltation” or “eternal life,” life in the presence of God. Paul calls this charis gift “abundant” grace. This plan of salvation from physical and spiritual death was based on the law of sacrifice, specifically the gift of Christ’s sacrifice, which was well known before the world existed (2 Tim. 1:9).

Paul elsewhere affirms that there are two kinds of salvation: physical salvation given to everyone, and spiritual salvation given only to those who come to Christ, obey his word, repent, and become clean through the Atonement. In Romans 11:5–6, Paul explained that in his day as in the days of Elijah (a time when many Jews worshipped idols), a remnant of the Lord’s chosen people had been preserved. Some Jews would accept Christ and be saved through him. When Paul says in Romans 11:6 (consistently using the word charis), “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work,” I believe he means that the Jews (a remnant) who accepted Christ would be preserved and saved through him and not through conformity to Jewish law.<sup>20</sup> Paul establishes that only by coming to Christ can the Jews be saved from spiritual death. While Paul does not here explain that coming to Christ meant accepting Christ’s new law, with higher commandments such as Matthew 5–7 and throughout the Gospels, I believe it is understood in the context of charis that discipleship includes specific requirements such as faith, baptism, and good works. Romans 11:6 is often taken to mean that grace has nothing to do with works and thus there is nothing men can do to earn salvation. But I think Paul’s point is that God has not abandoned the Jews; God wants the Jews to focus on Christ and not on their old law. I would add that Paul stresses that converts must appreciate God’s favor; this verse is not to be taken as a definition of grace that renounces acts or covenants.

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20. “‘Works’ here mean conformity to the Law.” Barnes’ Notes on the Bible, at *Bible Hub*, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/romans/11-6.htm>.

I agree with Adam Miller's reading of Romans 11:7–10: "This means that some of God's insiders<sup>21</sup> have found what they were looking for. Some of them have found grace. The rest, though, were hardened. And of them, many have said: Bereft, they grew listless and dull. They couldn't see with their eyes. They couldn't hear with their ears. They couldn't get up from the couch. They continue lifeless to the present day."<sup>22</sup> Implicit here is that spiritual salvation depends on choices and actions.

In Ephesians 4:7, each person is "given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ," hinting that some who have lived upon the earth will not receive the full benefits of the gift of Christ's Atonement. People follow God to different degrees, make covenants and keep them to different degrees, and will one day receive a degree of glory (1 Cor. 15:40–42). If disciples do not keep their covenants implied by grace, these covenants made with God will have no effect. Keeping covenants is essential to overcome spiritual death and receive exaltation (2 Cor. 6:1). Those who fall from grace by not completely accepting the Savior will not gain exaltation (Gal. 5:4). The Savior grants forgiveness of sins to make it possible for his disciples to return to live with God (Eph. 1:7). His disciples will understand his kind grace through the ages to come (Eph. 2:7) and will have everlasting consolation therein (2 Thes. 2:16).

Here I feel that a brief discussion about the difference between physical death and spiritual death from an LDS point of view is in order. The doctrine of the LDS Church specifies a distinction between immortality and eternal life: "General salvation comes regardless of obedience to gospel principles or laws and results solely in resurrection from the dead. In this respect, salvation is synonymous with immortality, in that the resurrected person will live forever. Resurrection comes to every person born into this world through the sacrifice made by Jesus Christ, whether one confesses Christ or not. . . . Exaltation [immortality in the presence of God, or overcoming spiritual death] comes as a gift from God, dependent upon my obedience to God's law."<sup>23</sup> This statement

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21. "Insiders" is the word Miller uses for the Jews vis-à-vis the Gentiles (outsiders).

22. Adam S. Miller, *Grace Is Not God's Backup Plan* (N.p., 2015), 55–56.

23. Theodore M. Burton, "Salvation and Exaltation," *Ensign* 2 (July 1972): 78–79.

clearly shows that exaltation is a gift (a grace, a favor) that is obtained only upon condition of obedience.

### Grace as a Greeting and Wish for Converts

Greeks commonly used the word *chairein*, related to *charis* and meaning “joy to you,” as a greeting at the beginning or end of letters. Duvall and Hays explain, “Paul and Peter both replaced *chairein* with the word *charis* (‘grace’) and added the normal Jewish greeting ‘peace.’ In this way they completely transformed the standard greeting and filled it with Christian meaning. ‘Grace and peace to you’ is a greeting, but it is also a prayer.”<sup>24</sup> Paul’s primary concern as an apostle was to make sure that all of his converts personally received the full benefits of the gift of Christ’s atoning sacrifice. Almost half of Paul’s uses of the word *charis* are found with expressions of his hopes that others receive grace. In 1 Timothy 6:21, Paul’s statement of hope that grace be with the converts follows much admonition regarding Christian behavior. At other times he states his desire to make grace known to individuals as is found in 2 Corinthians 8:1. Paul uses the term *charis* in Galatians 1:6 (“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel,” NIV), followed by the phrase *of Christ* to demonstrate his concern that church members were moving away from the gospel: not just any *charis*, but Christ’s *charis*. Paul intended to invoke the transformative effects of grace. Judith Lieu writes that by using the term *charis* in these greetings, Paul does “emphasize religious content and give the greeting more than conventional force.”<sup>25</sup> It seems that Paul hoped fellow Christians would wholeheartedly receive the joy that comes from accepting the full benefits of the Savior’s Atonement. Through his prayers, Paul exhorted his fellow Christians to receive the full benefits of the gift of the Atonement by keeping God’s commandments and enduring to the end. Thus Paul uses *charis* both as an appeal that people would reciprocate his good

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24. J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005), 233.

25. Judith M. Lieu, “‘Grace to You and Peace’: The Apostolic Calling,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 68 (1985): 169.

actions and as a reminder about the gift of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, encouraging these early Saints to take the necessary steps that would lead them on the path toward eternal life.

### **Faith, Thanksgiving, and Fulfilling the Law as Part of Grace**

Many more examples of Paul using *charis* to include reciprocity abound in his works. Paul taught in Romans 5:2 that to gain access to grace, one must have faith. In addition, Paul noted in Romans 6:1–4 that baptized disciples cannot continue in sin with grace because the obligatory covenant of baptism has already been made. He counseled the Corinthians that they should not “receive the grace of God in vain,” since it implies obligations and good works (2 Cor. 6:1). Paul hoped that the Thessalonians would glorify Jesus’ name according to grace (*charin*; 2 Thes. 1:2). In Hebrews 4:16, Paul taught that all must “come . . . to the throne of grace” to find “help in time of need.” Reciprocal connotations of obligatory *charis* throughout Paul’s epistles are easy to find. These verses provide additional evidence that Paul’s writings on grace were firmly based in the first-century AD milieu in which he wrote, toiled, ministered, and preached.

Thanksgiving was an essential element which often accompanied the obligatory nature of grace. Gratitude permeates Paul’s writings. We must “give thanks [*eucharisteite*] in all circumstances” (1 Thes. 5:18) and must “be thankful” (Col. 3:15). For covenant people, righteous living is the only appropriate way to respond to the grace of God (2 Cor. 6:1). First Corinthians 1 and 2 Corinthians 8–9 demonstrate proper ancient obligations of thanksgiving to the Lord for his grace.<sup>26</sup> Gratitude and love for God also requires loving one’s neighbor. This same gratitude will help us form a relationship with God as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:9 and Colossians 2:7.

Those who keep their covenants demonstrate gratitude to God. Paul taught that to show thankfulness, disciples must consecrate their lives to the Savior in an appropriate manner.<sup>27</sup> Those who have tasted the heavenly gift of grace but produce thorns and thistles instead of

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26. Pao, *Thanksgiving*, 84.

27. 2 Corinthians 5:14–15; Galatians 2:20; deSilva, *Honor, Patronage*, 146.

fruit represent living a worldly life instead of a Christ-centered one and are close to being cursed and burned (Heb. 6:4–8). Certainly disciples should not slack in the requisite gift of love until they have attempted to show charity for charity—a gift of the spirit that is derived from the roots of charis. This charity is a work that is associated with receiving the full benefits of the Atonement.

In Romans 12 and 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Paul mentions that disciples of the Lord need to make a “living sacrifice.” This living sacrifice was to live a higher law taught by the Savior, for example in the Sermon on the Mount, which replaced animal sacrifice of the law of Moses. The sacrifice of a broken spirit and contrite heart found in Psalm 51:16–17 at last took the place of animal sacrifice.

## The Obligations of Participation with the Community

In 2 Corinthians 8:1–6, Paul described in detail this chain of religious obligations of charis for the Macedonians to perform in behalf of God, Christ, Paul, and Jerusalem.<sup>28</sup> The chiasmic structure of 2 Corinthians 8:13–15 exhibits reciprocity of charitable obligations in the early Christian relationship between Corinth and Jerusalem.<sup>29</sup> Later in 2 Corin-

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28. See Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor*, summary on p. 139.

29. Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor*, 140: “2 Corinthians 8, 13–15 forms part of the apostle’s efforts to persuade the Corinthians to commit themselves to the collection again. Paul in v. 13bff, as part of a larger section 8, 7–15, . . . explicitly addresses the need for balanced reciprocity in the relationship between Corinth and Jerusalem. He does this by way of the following structure:

All’ ex isotetos

En to nun kairo to humon perisseuma eis to ekeionon husterema  
hina kai to ekeionon perisseuma genetai eis to humon husterema  
hopos genetai isotes.

[But that there might be equality.

At the present time your plenty will supply what they need,  
so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need.

The goal is equality (NIV)]

“. . . This chiasmic structure . . . highlights one of the basic principles inherent in reciprocal relationships, although wrapped in the terminology of Paul’s theological reflection, namely that both parties should benefit equally from their social interaction.”

thians 9, the two-way relationship between Jerusalem and Corinth becomes a triangular one that includes God because of active Christian charis.<sup>30</sup> Paul even utilized the reciprocal notion of charis to bless the Saints scattered throughout the Mediterranean.

First Corinthians 9:11 indicates what Paul expects in return for the gifts he has given. He gives converts a precious knowledge of Jesus, and in return asks merely for material gifts. He asks, “If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?” Galatians 6:6 outlines the duty of Christians to share: once they have received the gift of the word of Christ, they have a duty to “share all good things with their instructor” (NIV).

### Themes of Reciprocity

Ideals of reciprocity coupled with indebtedness appear frequently in Paul’s writings. There are dozens of examples of traditional Greco-Roman forms of grace in Paul’s writings and in other writings later attributed to Paul in which he does not use the word charis but uses socially related terms. For example: “We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange [*antimisthian*, recompense]—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also” (2 Cor. 6:11–13, NIV). “Owe no man any thing, but to love [*agapē*] one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:8).

In Philippians 4:10, Paul seems to have received the Philippians’ special care. In 4:15, he compliments the saints at Philippi for their gifts to him in support of his missionary work: “No church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.” Paul fulfilled charis when he expressed gratitude for the things sent to him “again unto my necessity” (Philip. 4:16). In 4:19, he acknowledges that he cannot reciprocate directly because he is in prison, and he assures his

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30. Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor*, 200; see Joubert’s excellent summary of active grace required of all Christians for the collection on p. 202, and his final conclusion that Paul practiced reciprocal, obligatory charis, and so should we.



friends in Philippi that his God will do so for him: “My God will supply all your need.” Paul trusts God’s charis covenant.

In Romans 15, Paul elevated the Greek concept of charis from a secular obligation to an ecclesiastical one: “For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord’s people in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them [literally, they are debtors, *opheiletai*, meaning those of Macedonia and Achaia were already indebted to those of Jerusalem]. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings” (Rom. 15:26–27, NIV). Paul says that the converts at Macedonia and Achaia were not only pleased to give donations to the Christians at Jerusalem but in fact owed it to them because the Macedonians and Achaians had been given the gift of the gospel first. Peterman explains that “Paul considers the gospel to be a gift which brings about an obligation of gratitude in the form of a material return” and in Romans 15:26 “confirms our conclusion that Paul has a special relationship with the Philippians as a result of giving and receiving.”<sup>31</sup>

Paul demonstrated reciprocal gratitude to God by caring for his converts as parents care for their children. Like proper Gentile parents who were expected to become the bedrock of their children’s physical existence, education, and general well-being, Paul became a great benefactor to his converts and occasionally received reciprocal blessings from them. As an outstanding missionary he assisted his converts so they could get onto the path to eternal life through the Atonement.<sup>32</sup> Paul seems to have even offered money to them to assist them with their material needs (2 Cor. 11:8). However, as noted above, he seems to have received the Philippians’ special care (Philip. 4:10). In both of these responses Paul followed the typical Jewish and Gentile conventions of grace of his time as he gave and received.<sup>33</sup> First Timothy 5:4 preserves an example, unique within the New Testament writings, of an early church teaching that was very common among the Jews and

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31. Peterman, *Paul’s Gift*, 175.

32. Philemon 19; 2 Corinthians 6:13; Peterman, *Paul’s Gift*, 199–200; Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 342.

33. Philippians 4.15; Peterman, *Paul’s Gift*, 8.

Gentiles: All persons were required to pay back later in life the many blessings they received from their parents.<sup>34</sup> Paul modeled the appropriate parent/child reciprocal relationship for his converts.

### Understanding What Paul Is Really Teaching through Charis

The many passages about charis stress the obligations Christians have. These have often been overlooked as later theologians placed emphasis on the “free” aspects of grace. It is important to try to understand Paul’s teaching as his gentile audience in first century AD would have understood it. I believe Paul’s message has been misinterpreted and distorted by Augustine, Martin Luther, and others, as later chapters will explain.

The oft-cited Romans 3:24 might be used to contradict the thesis of this work. The King James Version reads, “Being justified freely [*dorean*] by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” However, *dorean* means “as a gift,” not *freely*. Gifts were not given “freely” in the ancient Mediterranean world because every gift had nuances of reciprocity. In his translation, Joseph Smith rightly changes the word *freely* to *only* (“Therefore being justified only by his grace . . .”), reflecting the absolute power of the Atonement.<sup>35</sup> In addition to Romans 3:24, the KJV translators rendered the word charis in Romans 5:15–16, 18, as “the free gift.” In his epistle to the Romans, Paul needed to argue for a reciprocal gift of physical and spiritual salvation from the Savior because both Greeks and Romans did not generally understand or accept life after death, resurrection, and eternal life. The first-century philosophies of the day—cynicism, Epicureanism, stoicism, and neo-Platonism—taught divergent and very abstract views on death and the afterlife (or lack of one). Gentiles did not usually accept the doctrine of a physical resurrection or spiritual salvation, necessitating Paul’s frequent treatment of this subject in his epistles, especially to the Romans.<sup>36</sup>

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34. Peterman, *Paul’s Gift*, 17; see also Romans 5:7.

35. JST Romans 3:24.

36. Another example of typical gentile unbelief in the resurrection may be found in Acts 17. Other references are scattered throughout the writings of

In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul sometimes discusses salvation ambiguously but at times refers specifically to salvation from physical and spiritual death. Romans chapter 6 is an example of Paul's teaching regarding the doctrine of being saved from both physical and spiritual death through the Atonement. Paul alternates his teaching in this passage by switching back and forth between two related but distinct concepts of salvation: overcoming physical death and overcoming spiritual death. Romans 6:1–4 discusses not continuing in sin (overcoming spiritual death through obedience). Verse 5 explains that all will be resurrected (overcoming physical death). In verses 6–8 Paul teaches that disciples are freed from sin through Christ (with Christ, a person can overcome spiritual death). Verse 9 deals with the permanence of Christ's resurrection (overcoming physical death). Verses 10–23 explain the theme of avoiding sin through being empowered by Christ's grace (overcoming spiritual death). All will eventually be physically resurrected, but Paul further discusses the doctrines of the gospel which become the means by which his converts may avoid spiritual death.

Because some Christians today do not make the theological distinction between physical and spiritual death, some assume that all will be saved.<sup>37</sup> Many Christians consider a literal, physical resurrection problematic because of anti-materialistic, philosophical notions first taught by Greek philosophers and then adopted by Church fathers who argued for a mystical and only spiritual resurrection.<sup>38</sup> Many traditions follow the fourth-century theologian Athanasius, who argued for some kind of mysterious, nonphysical but spiritual unification with God.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, this form of grace is now associated with deliverance

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epicurean Roman poets from the first century BC such as Lucretius, Catullus, and Horace.

37. See the discussions in Robin A. Parry and Christopher H. Partridge, *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004); and Wayne Morris, *Salvation as Praxis: A Practical Theology of Salvation for a Multi-Faith World* (New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014), 96–98.

38. See a detailed treatment of this subject in Stephen H. Webb, *Mormon Christianity: What Other Christians Can Learn from the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

39. See a good discussion in Keith E. Norman, *Deification: The Content of Athanasian Soteriology* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000). Also see an interpretation

from spiritual death without a literal, physical resurrection. Finally, the ancient convention of reciprocal charis and its obligations is compatible with a material, object-oriented universe.<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps one might argue that Paul overturned reciprocal ideals of grace in his writings. If one looks at the ideas of grace in Romans specifically, which was almost certainly written by Paul, one might find it therefore necessary to reinterpret how he uses grace in writings that were only attributed to him. This theory that Paul taught a new meaning for the word charis is problematic for many reasons. Some Protestant theologians have commonly employed a few select Pauline passages to interpret others.<sup>41</sup> After interpreting Paul's meaning of charis as a free, permanent, no-obligation gift from God, they reinterpret the entire Bible to argue that Paul, in fact, invented a new version of Christianity that his Gentile converts understood and accepted.

Another modern notion associated with free grace in Christendom is that a person does not have to do anything to be saved except confess and believe: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. 10:9). This verse has come to mean for some Christians that a person who makes a one-time confession and continues to believe will be saved.<sup>42</sup> However, Romans 10:9 does not have the covenantal nuances in the KJV that it probably had

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of Iamblichus in Hugh Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present*, ed. Don E. Norton, vol. 12 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient research and Mormon Studies, 1992), 270.

40. I would extend the point to include that reciprocal charis is incompatible with the classical theism in traditional Christendom of an immaterial God without parts or passions, but that is a subject for another time. Webb, *Mormon Christianity*, brilliantly points out many metaphysical advantages of Mormon theology. Adam S. Miller, *Speculative Grace* (Bronx, N.Y.: Fordham University Press, 2013), demonstrates how grace operates in an object oriented universe.

41. See for example the discussion on Klyne Snodgrass below.

42. Examples are easy to find. One is Like The Master Ministries, which explains, "If you believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord, you are saved." Confessing with words but not truly meaning it is not enough; you must actually believe that Jesus is Lord, and that is enough. Like The Master Ministries, *Never Thirsty*, <http://www.neverthirsty.org/pp/corner/read/roo048.html>.

in the first century AD. The word that is translated as “confess” is the verb *homologeō*. In classical Greek, meanings of this word range from “to confess, admit, acknowledge, assent, and to agree.”<sup>43</sup> Beginning as early as the Egyptians, saying a god’s name was very serious because it would give one power over that deity.<sup>44</sup> Names of deities were often used in ritual fashion to gain power over them and the various names of God, including Jehovah, are mentioned together with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob throughout the Old Testament to emphasize Israel’s covenant. An educated, bilingual Roman of the first century AD would have probably understood Paul’s Greek phrase in Romans 10:9 to mean (my translation): “If you vocally assent to the covenantal phrase that Jesus is Jehovah and you have confidence in your heart in Jesus’ physical resurrection, you will be made spiritually well.”<sup>45</sup> Paul is affirming the basics of the plan of salvation with its accompanying covenants and encouraging converts to transform their lives and become true disciples. A sincere testimony demonstrates gratitude for the gift of the Atonement according to the nuances of charis. This passage in Romans does not justify an “easy” form of grace devoid of any obligations.

It is necessary to analyze charis according to its ancient setting to evaluate this conventional argument. James Harrison argued that Paul in Galatians 2:14–15 overturned some conventions of Greco-Roman reciprocity. Harrison believed that certain Christian benefactors “had gone beyond the normal bounds of generosity.”<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, Harrison claimed that in serving and loving in Luke 6:27–38; 14:12–14; 22:24–27, Jesus expected his disciples to go beyond the Hellenistic reciprocity

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43. *Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. “ὁμολογέω,” <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/ljsj/#eid=76103&context=search>.

44. Loren Graham, “The Power of Names: In Culture and in Mathematics,” *American Philosophical Society* 157 (June 2013): 230, available at <http://www.amphilsoc.org/sites/default/files/proceedings/1570204Graham.pdf> (accessed 5 July 2015).

45. For *kyrios* meaning Yahweh, see LXX Gen. 11:5 and *Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. “κύριος,” definitions III.B.3–4, <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/ljsj/#eid=3948&context=search>. The Muslim *shahada* may be a parallel. Part of the conversion to Islam includes public vocal witness that “There is no god but God, and Muḥammad is the Messenger of God.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2007–), s.v. “Shahada.”

46. Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 341.

and honor systems.<sup>47</sup> Certainly some of Jesus' teachings involve other gospel principles including *agapē*, charity, and not just charis. In the conclusion of his work, Harrison seems to defend the traditional Protestant doctrine of free grace by hinting that Jesus and Paul rejected some aspects of Greco-Roman charis while still wisely cautioning the Protestant reader that Paul's ideas about charis could not have been far outside of the first century AD system of reciprocity. Harrison clearly admits that it is unlikely that Jesus and Paul would have taught a new version of charis when he states, "We must resist the temptation to overstate our case at this juncture."<sup>48</sup>

In contrast, another scholar, Klyne Snodgrass, determined that a few passages of Paul have been misunderstood so that they belie Paul's central message of keeping God's commandments. Snodgrass argues that New Testament commentaries become very brief, evasive, and obtuse in the treatment of Romans 2 and try to explain away the text that emphasizes the necessity of good works, especially verse 13: "The doers of the law will be justified." They generally argue that Paul must be speaking only hypothetically because commentators argue that what really Paul believes is found in Romans 3:9 and 3:20. Snodgrass writes, "To argue that Paul did not accept the statements in 2.6–16 not only sets him at odds with Judaism, the Old Testament, Jesus, the rest of Christianity and indeed, himself, but makes difficult any thought of seeing Romans in light of his intended trip to Jerusalem. Paul's defense of his mission would not have had the slightest chance with Jews or Jewish Christians had he rejected this cardinal belief of the biblical and Jewish tradition."<sup>49</sup>

What is Paul teaching about grace in Romans? How should Latter-day Saints interpret grace as a whole in Paul's writings? Before analyzing the meaning of charis in Paul's work, we must be clear what we mean by "salvation." The restored gospel of Jesus Christ makes the critical distinction between the resurrection, or salvation from physical death, and exaltation, or spiritual salvation. Scriptures of the restoration clearly

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47. Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace*, 352.

48. Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace*, 341.

49. Klyne R. Snodgrass, "Justification by Grace—to the Doers: An Analysis of the Place of Romans 2 in the Theology of Paul," *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986): 86.

teach that all will be resurrected (although at different times depending on their faithfulness) and receive a kingdom of glory.<sup>50</sup> Through the Atonement and the Resurrection, the Savior overcame physical death, and everyone will be resurrected. But to overcome spiritual death (to return to live with God and be exalted) we must be valiant in our testimonies of the Savior and keep his commandments until the end of our lives (D&C 76:79). In the next life we will be reciprocally rewarded to the degree we are valiant, receive a fullness of Christ's grace, and make and keep covenants.

Many Christians do not believe in a physical resurrection, but, like Augustine, believe that having a physical body is crass compared to existing as a spirit.<sup>51</sup> However, Latter-day Saints know through modern revelation that we will receive an immortal, perfect body of flesh and bone—not a mundane earthly one. The doctrine of salvation is so important for God's children that these questions must be asked and answered. Only through understanding the difference between salvation from physical and from spiritual death in his epistles do Paul's writings become lucid.

The second doctrinal issue that should be noted, with which many Protestants may be uncomfortable, is that covenants reflecting reciprocal grace were important in both Jewish and Gentile (Greco-Roman) traditions. Surely the covenant of the Mosaic Law is different than the New Covenant established by Christ and restored again by Christ through the Prophet Joseph Smith. But the covenantal relationship between God and his people still exists. In fact, the name "New Testament" should more accurately be "New Covenant."<sup>52</sup> Bernard Jackson concludes that "the theological development of the covenant concept may now be derived from studies of the Greco-Roman background of

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50. Douglas L. Callister, "Resurrection," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1222–23; and Alma P. Burton, "Salvation," in Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1256–57.

51. Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 198 n. 2. Augustine reportedly said, "*Intra feces et urinas nominem natus est*," "We are born between urine and feces," an insult to the birth of humans.

52. Bernard S. Jackson, "Why the Name New Testament?" *Melilah: Manchester Journal of Jewish Studies* 9 (2012): 50–100.

charis (grace). . . . In the Hebrew Bible, covenant is associated in some sources with *hesed*, variously translated lovingkindness or mercy: God is said to keep the covenant and show mercy. Such ‘covenant love’ ‘always has strong elements of reciprocity in its usage.’ . . . charis is not to be taken in the later Christian sense.”<sup>53</sup>

Many groups in Christendom beginning with the early Church fathers rejected the notion of covenants because they associated them with the earlier law of Moses. They seem to have also despised rituals that are a vehicle to making covenants because of later Greek philosophy.<sup>54</sup> By linking charis with covenants with God, even in light of the fact that the law of Moses was now fulfilled, Paul taught the Gentiles how to overcome the effects of spiritual death. Paul states that as a covenantal benefactor (Rom. 5), Heavenly Father offered his Only Begotten Son as a ransom payment (Rom. 3:24). Jesus became a blood sacrifice to fulfill the demands of the laws both of justice and of mercy for both Jew and Gentile (Rom. 3:25, 29–30) because of a covenant of the Atonement (Rom. 3:26). Finally Jesus was resurrected (Rom. 6:4; Philip. 2:11; 2 Cor. 2:8).<sup>55</sup>

Through the Atonement of the Savior, all people are able to make covenants that imply reciprocity, coupled with love for Heavenly Father and others. Like the ancient convention of asymmetrical reciprocity, the covenants that people make today through ordinances

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53. Jackson, “Why the Name New *Testament*?” 62. Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, makes an argument that covenants and reciprocity obligated Israel after receiving God’s mercy. Glueck argues that Israel was bound by covenant to its deity because of the concept of *hesed*. Glueck’s thesis has since been widely accepted but its theological implications have generally not been associated with charis. See a discussion on this subject in the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 305–7 (entry 398). These editors argue that some Old Testament passages using *hesed* do not explicitly obligate individuals or groups. However, covenants or other forms of reciprocity seem to always have been implied in these quoted Old Testament texts when understood in the context of ancient reciprocity, anthropology, and sociology.

54. Latter-day Saints see this as an apostasy, the changing of key doctrines and loss of authority in the centuries after Christ. In the very Greek sense of *apostasia*, this apostasy was a revolt against God’s doctrines and authority.

55. Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 221, provided some of these insights.



are contracted with God alone. Miroslav Volf notes the importance of making covenants with God as part of charity for others: “Untethered from God, self-giving love cannot stand on its own for long. If it excludes God, it will destroy us, for we will then deliver ourselves to the mercy of the finite, and therefore inherently unreliable, objects of our love. The only way to ensure that we will not lose our very selves if we give ourselves to others is if our love for the other passes first through God.”<sup>56</sup> He argues that Jesus’ new covenant of *charis* made *agapē* possible. Baruch Levine adds that the golden rule in Leviticus 19:18 and in the New Testament (Matt. 7:12) are based on ancient notions of reciprocity.<sup>57</sup> By means of reciprocal covenants with God, a convert is enabled to develop love or *agapē* for God and others (Matt. 22:37).

Because of this *charis* relationship established through covenants, disciples are always obligated to keep all of his commandments given through his Son, Jesus Christ. Those who develop the spiritual gift of charity reciprocate thankfulness to God. When disciples keep their covenants, God is reciprocally bound to grant his promised blessings. Having charity for others it is not a sign that one has gone beyond the expectations of a freely granted *charis* in the modern sense. Rather, it is a result of the covenants one has made with God to love all of his children.<sup>58</sup> Conversely, a lack of charity is a sin against God because God expects his children to show concern for others. Certainly following all of Jesus’ commandments in his New Covenant goes far beyond the typical Greco-Roman reciprocity between individuals because it requires loving one’s enemies, going the extra mile, and always forgiving others. The spiritual gift of *agapē* can be lived once covenants are made and kept. But we must remember that the ancient religious concept of *charis* was often formed between the gods and mankind. As the Savior’s disciples develop the gift of charity they fulfill their obligations of reciprocity to Heavenly Father alone—not to man.

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56. Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005), 103.

57. Baruch A. Levine, “The Golden Rule in Ancient Israelite Scripture,” in Neusner and Chilton, *Golden Rule*, 11–12.

58. Briones, “Mutual Brokers of Grace,” 554, has a diagram in figure 1C illustrating the importance of first making covenants with God.

Therefore, in respectful disagreement with Harrison on this point, Jesus or Paul did not, in fact, go beyond the normal bounds of reciprocity within the ancient world. Jesus and Paul emphasized religious forms of reciprocity by loving God through keeping covenants. Because disciples willingly make these covenants with Heavenly Father through his Son and not with anyone else, they must keep Jesus' commandments of this New Covenant according to God's standards. Paul's message about *charis* in the new context of Christ's gospel includes the connotations of obligations, reciprocity, keeping God's commandments, and making covenants. This is how Paul and his message of reciprocal grace were understood by his first-century converts.

Thus the ancient concept of obligatory and reciprocal grace as affirmed by Christ's New Covenant is still in force in the New Testament. When disciples make a choice to serve others, they are acting in accordance with covenants, made and kept in a reciprocal manner with God. They are under religious obligations to others because they are commanded to first love God and then their neighbor. The Book of Mormon beautifully explains that when people serve others, they are only serving God (Mosiah 2:17). Those who keep covenants with God share in God's work and glory, which is "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39).

## Uses of Grace in the Gospels and Non-Pauline Epistles

**T**HE CONCEPT OF CHARIS AND RECIPROCITY WAS IMPORTANT not only to Paul but also to the writers of the other New Testament books. These writings convey how Jesus and his followers understood the covenantal obligations associated with charis. Rather than provide a commentary about every example of the use of charis and reciprocity, this chapter gives brief summaries and points out reciprocity that the reader may have previously overlooked. It is the cumulative use of charis that will show that Jesus taught that grace comes with requirements: commitment, obedience, and sacrifice. This is not to say that Jesus and others in Jewish society subscribed to all aspects of the classical patronage system.<sup>1</sup> But looking at how charis and reciprocity appears in the New Testament helps us compare how it is interpreted (sometimes incorrectly) today.

### The Savior's Use of Grace according to Gospel Writers

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all express an understanding of reciprocity and use it to teach about relationships with God. Jesus as a

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1. For a point of view that the term “patronage” has been used too broadly and “patronage was a distinctly Roman phenomenon that failed to make inroads into broad Greek and Jewish society,” see Erlend D. MacGillivray, “Re-Evaluating Patronage and Reciprocity in Antiquity and New Testament Studies,” *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 6 (2009): 37–81.

young person “grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him” (Luke 2:40). His life serves as a model that individuals receive wisdom and grace gradually (John 1:16, “grace upon grace” [NAS]) as a result of keeping God’s commandments through the aid of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew and Mark do not use the word *charis*, but the concept of reciprocal grace is evident in the teachings, healings, and parables, discussed below. In a sense, Jesus acts as a broker of reciprocity between his Father and all people because he makes possible a connection between them. He taught people to honor God (Matt. 5:16). He asked what reward (*misthon*, recompense) is due to people who love only those who love them (Matt. 5:46). He gave his disciples the power to heal and cleanse (Matt. 10:8). John’s record confirms Jesus’ role as the broker in chapter 17 in the intercessory prayer, where Jesus petitions his Father on behalf of the people and gives an account of his actions. Without these actions, people and God could never be reconciled.<sup>2</sup>

**A Higher Law.** In his ministry, Jesus expected those who accepted his offer of reciprocal grace to live a high standard of behavior. Jesus taught his disciples not to abandon reciprocity as they knew it, but to live it a higher way: to use *charis* relationships not to better their own position in life, but to help others and to follow God’s example of *charis*, which was to offer goodwill and blessings to everyone, not a select few. They were to obey God not only out of duty, but also out of love.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus commanded his disciples to rise above the common stipulations of the Mosaic Law and any other worldly expectations (Matt. 6). The admonition to perform alms in secret seems to reflect the idea that people can expect a reward from God for giving when it is properly done; to perform alms openly is condemned, perhaps because one should seek a reward from God and not the honors of men (Matt. 6:1–4). In Luke’s similar narrative, sometimes called the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus told his disciples to love their enemies, and to do good to them which hate them (Luke 6:27). Disciples were commanded to bless those that curse them, turn the other cheek, and give to whoever asks (Luke 6:28–30). Jesus continued,

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2. Jerome H. Neyrey, “‘I Am the Door’ (John 10:7, 9): Jesus the Broker in the Fourth Gospel,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69 (2007): 284, 285.

explaining these relationships in terms of the reciprocity of his followers who were obligated to God and contrasting them with sinners:

And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank [charis] have ye? For sinners [literally, “missers,” meaning those who miss the mark of God’s will] also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank [charis] have ye? For sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank [charis] have ye? For sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest; for he is kind unto the unthankful [*acharistous*] and to the evil. (Luke 6:31–35)

In this passage Jesus affirms that his disciples must offer charity to all people and not be concerned with earthly reward. Sinners reciprocate only with those who do good to them or love others when it benefits them, and their selfishness is a sin.

***Entering God’s Family.*** Jesus taught that his disciples could become as his mother, sisters, and brothers by doing his father’s will (Matt. 12:46–50). Reciprocity was expected to exist in society, especially between parents and children and other family members.<sup>3</sup> Through obedience to covenants with God, disciples are adopted into God’s family and will receive God’s greatest gift—eternal life. Heavenly Father readily bestows food and clothing on his faithful children (Matt. 6:25–33). Similarly, Jesus was completely faithful to his Father as Patron (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10).<sup>4</sup>

***Thanks and Compassion.*** The Savior’s grace and compassion go hand in hand, as in the feeding of the four thousand men and their families. Multitudes had faithfully followed the Savior for three days and listened to his teaching. The Savior had compassion on them so that they would not go hungry and perhaps die (Matt. 15:32). After Jesus thanked (*eucharistesas*) his Father, he fed the four thousand and their families (Matt.

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3. See the discussion in chapter 3, for example, of the reciprocal responsibilities of family members.

4. Jerome H. Neyrey, *Render to God: New Testament Understandings of the Divine* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 61, 65.

15:36–37). Although he required nothing from the receivers of this gift, they were obligated to give thanks, give praise, and do likewise to their fellowmen, as Jesus had exemplified with his Father.

**Sacrifice Is Necessary.** God's promises of heavenly rewards can be understood as part of reciprocity: cursings or blessings come reciprocally as a result of actions. In Matthew 19, a rich young man was asked if he loves God and his neighbor. The young man was commanded to bless the poor and promised that by giving up his worldly possessions and becoming a disciple, he would reciprocally gain eternal life. He went away because he did not want to give up his great possessions; his choice was a sign of ingratitude. In contrast to the young man's lack of sufficient faith and gratitude, the Savior's disciples claim that they have forsaken all things and thereby have proved themselves worthy of fulfilling reciprocal charis. Because they fulfilled these spiritual obligations toward God, according to the Savior they will inherit thrones during the first resurrection. Jesus continued, "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (JST Matt. 19:28a, 29). True disciples are willing to give up anything for the cause of God's kingdom.

**Focus on God.** Because of their reciprocal relationship, Jesus' disciples were expected to concern themselves not about what mankind might think, but about what God might think of their actions (Acts 5:29). Jesus frequently taught his disciples the importance of doing his Father's will, especially by example, when he said, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). Christ acted with reciprocity with his Father by being thankful and living his Father's will.

**Charity to Neighbors.** Luke 6:27–38 and 22:24–27 teach of being merciful, loving enemies, and being a servant. Harrison comments that these verses are a "searing critique of the Hellenistic reciprocity and honour systems."<sup>5</sup> Certainly Jesus rejected the self-aggrandizing aspects of reciprocity as it was practiced. However, Jesus did not reject the whole idea

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5. Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace*, 352. He reasons, "Jesus, like Philo, may well have sought to undermine the ethos of reciprocity and supplant it with a distinctly theological understanding of beneficence."

of reciprocity; rather, he consistently taught that accepting grace came with requirements, one of which is to have charity to all. These teachings remain firmly rooted in ancient reciprocal traditions of grace. Moreover, when Jesus commanded his disciples to follow the golden rule, “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise” (Luke 6:31), he taught how one should treat one’s neighbor according to the typical honor systems of the period. Jesus affirmed that one could be the greatest in the kingdom of God, but the means to achieve this position was by serving (Luke 22:26), an inversion and affirmation of the typical hierarchy that characterized the Greco-Roman world; this is an important component in understanding ancient grace. Interestingly, Jesus added to this concept of service to others by clarifying that sometimes one’s obligation to God was greater: In Matthew 8:21–22, one of Jesus’ disciples asked permission to leave in order to bury his father, a request that appealed to the obligation necessary to one’s parents. Jesus responded by instructing the man to follow him.

*Jesus’ Healings.* Jesus’ charitable acts of healing were a boon spiritually, mentally, and physically. As receivers of these divine gifts, these individuals were obligated through the conventions of reciprocity to follow Jesus’ instructions after they were healed. Sometimes the Savior commanded individuals to remain silent about his miracles, but they often failed. In all cases, the recipients were obligated to give thanks. Ten lepers asked Jesus to cure their infirmity, and after visiting the priest according to Jesus’ instructions they were cured of their leprosy. Only one of the ten lepers, ironically a Samaritan and therefore less likely to keep covenants according to a Jewish perspective, returned to give Jesus thanks (Luke 17:14–16). Jesus asked him where the other nine were, showing that he expected reciprocal thanks. Because of his desire to give thanks, this former leper was made not only physically well but also “whole.”

When a centurion’s slave was sick, he sent elders of the Jews to Jesus asking him to come and heal his slave. The elders said to Jesus, “He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he built us our synagogue” (Luke 7:2–5).<sup>6</sup> In the Jewish mindset, the centurion’s former good works made him worthy of Jesus’ reciprocal blessing.

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6. See the discussion on reciprocity in Elliott, “Patronage and Clientage,” 145.

John 9 tells a touching story about how Jesus on the Sabbath healed a man born blind. This narrative teaches the proper way to show thankfulness to the Savior. Even after the blind man was questioned with intimidation by the Jewish hierarchy, he did not deny the Savior. These elites wanted him to speak negatively about Jesus, but instead the formerly blind man boldly stated, “He is a prophet.” Although he was persecuted and thrown out of the synagogue for fearlessly testifying of the person who healed him, he realized that Jesus was the Christ, had faith in him, and bore a powerful testimony of the Savior to the scheming Jewish leaders who only wanted to find a pretext to put Jesus to death. This formerly blind man fulfilled the obligations of reciprocity that was expected of him by giving thanks even under persecution.

*Jesus’ Parables.* Many of Jesus’ parables are about people’s reciprocal obligations. In Mark 12:1–12, husbandmen harm and kill the servant messengers and finally kill the son of the owner of the vineyard. In Matthew 21:33–45, one son says he will go but does not, and one son wished to not go, but did. Both of these parables reflect a patron-client relationship gone awry.<sup>7</sup>

In explaining the parable of the great supper, Jesus says, “When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee” (Luke 14:12). We know from Roman satire (as discussed earlier) that when someone was planning a banquet in antiquity, the host carefully considered who would or would not be invited. Guests also calculated the cost of attending a banquet because of the reciprocal obligations it entailed: they would be expected to reciprocate with an invitation to their dinners. Under these conditions, such an invitation might not have been very welcome. Jesus acknowledged the norms of grace and taught a higher way, that disciples should instead make a feast and invite “the poor, the maimed, the lame, and blind,” who by definition would not be able to repay fully. Instead of creating favor with men, disciples would be recompensed by God (Luke 14:14–15; D&C 132:19). Jesus added that the greatest feast of “eating bread” is the one of eternal life “in the kingdom of God.” The

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7. See a good discussion on this topic in Neyrey, *Render to God*, 14, 74.



Atonement is the invitation, and the feast is gained only by having a relationship with God.

In another parable, a slave who has been plowing or feeding cattle is commanded to prepare dinner and then serve the master. This slave does these chores only because he is commanded to do these things. He is not thanked (*charin*) and is considered unprofitable, because it was the slave's duty to do these chores (Luke 17:7–10). This parable is a reminder that disciples cannot make demands of God, just as the receiver of charis cannot make demands on the giver. Disciples must humbly recognize their own nothingness before God. "Unprofitable" used here is the same word as in the parable of the talents describing the servant who buried his talent. This suggests a connection between the two parables: this slave is unprofitable, but could have been more profitable. The parable does not yield much hope for freedom,<sup>8</sup> but many other New Testament verses teach that disciple-slaves are also heirs of Christ and can receive eternal life. Jesus accepted the societal norm that charis was the ameliorating ideal that potentially could benefit the slave if he is granted freedom. The slave's work obviously benefitted the master. The asymmetrical nature of grace allowed both parties to gain temporal benefits from this reciprocal relationship.

In Jesus' parable of the unjust judge, a powerless widow continually pleads and troubles a judge who holds all the power and otherwise would pay no attention to her. The relationship between the judge and the widow can be seen reciprocally: she pleads for help, and he grants her justice. Jesus uses this example to teach his disciples to pray always and not get discouraged (Luke 18:1–8). While the parable of the unprofitable servant stressed humility in a reciprocal relationship, this one might be seen as a balance to it since it teaches disciples to continually plead for God's help, both important messages.

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8. Many slaves were allowed to earn their freedom, but that is not specified in this parable. On slavery, see these excellent works: Moses I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (Princeton, N.J.: Wiener, 1998); Thomas Wiedermann, *Greek and Roman Slavery* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Keith R. Bradley, *Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World, 140–70 BC* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998); Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Reciprocity is at the center of the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt. 18:23–35). The king (representing God) pardoned his slave ten thousand talents, representing the innumerable sins all people have committed, an amount that can never be repaid.<sup>9</sup> The pardon agrees with the ancient notion of reciprocity, which is that a wealthy person should not expect to be fully repaid. When this slave failed to pardon his own slave of a debt of only one hundred denarii,<sup>10</sup> he subsequently fell from grace and was turned over to the tormentors, or those who torture (Matt. 18:28, 34). The first slave was obligated in two ways: he should have acted as an agent for the king and granted forgiveness just as he had received it, and he should have felt of his own will the obligation to help others.

In the similar story of the talents or pounds, the slaves have an obligation to make a profit when the master has gone away (Matt. 25:14–30; Luke 19:11–27). If the slaves please their master, they can keep money under the institution of *peculium* and buy their freedom and the freedom of others who are important to them. However, if they do not fulfill their obligations they will, like the slave who buries his talent or pound, fall from grace and be cast off into outer darkness (Matt. 25:30).

Jesus' teachings, healings, and parables demonstrate that he expected reciprocal actions from his disciples: strict obedience, continual prayer and pleading, forgiving others, and making good use of what he has given us to work with.

### **The Use of Grace in Acts and the Epistles of Apostles Other Than Paul**

The church leaders that Jesus placed in charge understood *charis* to imply reciprocal obligations. They had learned about grace and then became empowered by grace themselves. Through doing Jesus' will to preach the gospel to all the world, they lived up to their obligations

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9. The ancient talent typically weighed twenty-five kilograms of gold or silver. Interpretations of the value in modern purchasing power range from a million to two trillion dollars.

10. A denarius might be worth a day's wage or as much as the modern equivalent of ten thousand dollars.

and were reciprocally blessed through the fullness of Christ's grace. The apostles bore their testimonies with great power because of the strength that came from grace: "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:33). Thus because of their humility in committing themselves to the grace of God, the apostles were able to fulfill their work (Acts 14:26–27). Luke writes in Acts 13:43 that after a religious service many "Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas; who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in grace." After these individuals had been ministered to by the apostles they were expected to continue in the path of righteousness.

The book of Acts records that the disciples had "favor [charis] with all the people" (Acts 4:47). When Barnabas arrived in Antioch, he saw that the grace of God had worked in the hearts of converts (Acts 11:23). Paul and Barnabas spoke "boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders" (Acts 14:3, NIV). Apollos in Achaia met people "who by grace had believed" (Acts 18:27, NIV), showing the role of grace in conversion.

*James's Use of Grace.* James chapter 4 warns against sin, selfishness, and looking to the world instead of God. This disobedience causes God to be jealous. James encourages readers to look to God: "But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (James 4:5, referring to Prov. 3:34).

*Peter's Teachings on Grace.* Peter begins both of his epistles to those who had faith in God and Christ with a hope, "Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied" (1 Pet. 1:2) and "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you" (2 Pet. 1:2), adding meaning to a standard Jewish and Mediterranean greeting. The idea that grace could be multiplied evokes Luke's statement that Jesus grew in grace. Converts would grow in grace through following the instructions in these letters. They should make every effort to add to their faith goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection, and love (2 Pet. 1:5–7). These qualities would prevent them from being unprofitable. Much work would be required. Certainly, says J. de Waal Dryden, Peter wanted all Christians to facilitate "growth in Christian character, chiefly measured in terms of growing moral integrity, and growing practical dependence upon God. This comports with the self-declared confirmatory aim of

the epistle to exhort the communities to stand in the true charis of God ([1 Pet.] 5:12).”<sup>11</sup>

Peter reminds disciples that earlier prophets knew that grace would come and bring salvation: “which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you” (1 Pet. 1:10). He admonished the saints to “gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:13). This exhortation is more than a wish, it is a confident expectation that grace would come. The “revelation” of Jesus Christ may refer to both his manifestation to each individual upon receiving grace and his Second Coming.

Peter, speaking of slaves (a term which was used to describe disciples; see discussion above), credits grace for the power to endure pain that comes from injustice. This power comes from looking to God: “For this is thankworthy [charis], if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable [charis] with God” (1 Pet. 2:19–20).

In giving instruction to husbands, Peter taught that husbands should recognize that their wives are “heirs together of the grace of life.” A husband who honors his wife will not have his prayers hindered (1 Pet. 3:7). Peter taught that faithful recipients of God’s grace would use their gifts to serve others: “As every man hath received the gift [charisma], even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace [charis] of God” (1 Pet. 4:10), evoking the reciprocity in the parable of the unjust servant. Just as James teaches, Peter says that God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble (1 Pet. 5:5).

Just as Peter opens his epistles by discussing grace, he closes both of them with reminders of grace.<sup>12</sup> In closing his first epistle, Peter says

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11. J. de Waal Dryden, *Theology and Ethics in 1 Peter* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2006), 7.

12. Opening and closing an epistle with “grace” and “peace” is in keeping with the Jewish and Greek custom of the day.

that “the God of all grace” had called disciples to glory, and after they had suffered, would restore them (1 Pet. 5:10). He concludes, “I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand” (1 Pet. 5:12). He closes the second epistle with the admonition “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). Peter uses grace in ways similar to the ways used by Paul.

*John’s Use of Grace.* The second epistle of John begins with a hope or blessing similar to those expressed by Paul and Peter: “Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love” (2 John 1:3). The book of Revelation uses grace for bookends: it begins with “Grace be unto you” (Rev. 1:4) and ends “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen” (Rev. 22:21).

*Jude’s Use of Grace.* Jude warns that some evil people had crept in among the saints to corrupt them and were “turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness” (Jude 1:4). The blessing of grace was something that needed to be guarded. To fall into such sin was to break the covenant of grace that disciples had entered into. Grace had been manipulated from doing good continually to a justification for heinous sin. This same manipulation occurs today when grace loses the connotation of strict obedience to all of God’s commands.

## A Unity of Thought about Grace in the New Testament

Hopefully, this brief overview of the use of grace has shown that the authors of the New Testament wished people to accept Christ’s offer to enter into a covenant. They taught that through the gift of the Atonement, all people can return to live in God’s presence and become as he is. All will be resurrected, but only those who keep the commandments and covenants will live with God again. They stressed the principles of faith, repentance, obedience, vigilance, gratitude, love, and humility.

The New Testament writers knew Jesus’ teachings, acts of healing, and parables and understood the reciprocal nature of God’s gifts to people: that God grants physical and spiritual rebirth and eventual exaltation, and that people are expected to give thanks, obey his

commandments, make and keep covenants, and use the gifts from God to bless themselves and others. Where the word *grace* appears in the apostles' records in Acts and elsewhere, it can always be understood to indicate that entering into God's grace means entering a reciprocal relationship with obligations. Because of their first-century understanding of *charis* in Christ's covenant community, early saints strove to keep God's commandments and endure to the end.

## Early Christian and Late Antique Uses of Grace

**E**ARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS WERE GREATLY INFLUENCED by their dual Greco-Roman and Jewish heritage in thinking about salvation which came about through grace. It appears that the word grace (*charis* or *gratia*) was used according to its classical roots in the Greek-speaking East (east of Italy) down through the late fourth century AD, a period which is sometimes known as “late antiquity.” Early Christians such as Tertullian (c. AD 160–220) used the conventions of reciprocal grace to teach the gospel principles of a physical resurrection, eternal life, and exaltation. Tertullian retorted against those who scoffed at the Christian doctrine of eternal life: “You pour forth statues and inscribe sculptured images and have your honorary epitaphs, reading ‘to the eternal memory of . . .’ Why, as far as it lies in your power, you yourselves provide a kind of resurrection for the dead!”<sup>1</sup> Tertullian understood that the most generous gift Christ could bring about during his time in mortality was to grant the universal gift of victory over physical death for all mankind and make it possible for mankind to overcome spiritual death.

When the western part of the Roman Empire began to collapse politically during the third-century crisis, Christianity slowly filled the

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1. Tertullian, *Apol.* 50, 10–11; see also Menander, *Dyskolos* 805–9; S. Leon Sternbach, *Anec. Gr. II*, 131,11 (Vienna: Wiener Studien, 1887), 199; Hands, *Charities and Social Aid*, 56.

vacuum left over from the once-powerful Roman Empire. During the fourth century, as pagan religious traditions were challenged, the Roman Catholic Church made itself the only legitimate patron of all in society, both rich and poor. It transformed the reciprocal, classical obligations between patrons and clients by the ideal of granting church charity to the poor. Peter Brown, an eminent religious historian of late antiquity, writes:

Acts of giving that could still be represented in terms of the traditional generosity of a *euergetés*, of a public benefactor of his city, were now performed, in the Christian church, for the benefit of the “poor.” Such acts of generosity showed that a process of “Christianization of evergetism” was well under way in the post-Constantinian Church. Their resonance was enhanced by the echoes they evoked of the classical *belle époque*. It was satisfying to write about them in old-fashioned terms and especially if it was possible thereby to make invidious comparisons between such actions and the wasteful spending of traditional civic benefactors.<sup>2</sup>

Whereas the Romans were generous by funding arts, Christians gave charity to the poor. Christians serving the poor eventually reshaped social relationships throughout the Mediterranean. Christians considered giving a reciprocal obligation and generosity as a means of becoming spiritually empowered; they had faith that God would honor their gifts to others by rewarding them in heaven.<sup>3</sup>

Women especially played an essential new role in serving the poor outside the traditional bonds of *charis*. Brown explains, “For women had been the other blank on the map of the classical city. It was assumed that gift-giving was an act of politics, not an act of mercy; and politics was for men only. By contrast, the Christian church, from an early time, had encouraged women to take on a public role in their own right, in relation to the poor: they gave alms in person, they visited

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2. Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire; The Menahem Stern Jerusalem Lectures* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2002), 77, cited in Ilana F. Silber, “Neither Mauss, nor Veyne: Peter Brown’s Interpretative Path to the Gift,” in *The Gift in Antiquity*, ed. Michael L. Satlow (Malden, Mass.: John Wiley and Sons, 2013), 207.

3. Gary Anderson, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2013).



the sick, they founded shrines and poorhouses in their own name and were expected to be fully visible as participants in the ceremonial of the shrines.”<sup>4</sup> The ideal of granting charity to the poor subsequently empowered the institution of the church and its hierarchy. The church’s many clients expected it to grant alms to the poor, which by the third century included bishops and clergy.<sup>5</sup> Rowland Smith describes this late-antique phenomenon which rejected traditional Greco-Roman forms of reciprocity in order to strengthen the institution of the church as it shifted “from patronage to charity” and points out that by the fifth century the church was the only acceptable patron of the destitute.<sup>6</sup> Sociologist Iliana F. Silver notes that the poor were ironically overlooked in time as gift-giving focused on sponsoring religious learning.<sup>7</sup> The reciprocal obligations associated with *gratia* in the West<sup>8</sup> were abrogated by the church, its hierarchy, and its educated elites for its own benefit under the pretense of serving the poor.

## Plotinus

In addition to the church subverting the old obligations of *gratia*, by the fourth century neo-Platonic philosophy had a powerful influence on the church fathers. The third-century neo-Platonist philosopher Plotinus (probably a Roman-Egyptian, AD 204–70) became especially popular. His *Enneids* were popular and influential among educated

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4. Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 46, cited in Silber, “Neither Mauss, nor Veyne,” 216 n. 16.

5. Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, 20, cited in Silber, “Neither Mauss, nor Veyne,” 210.

6. Rowland B. E. Smith, “‘Restored Utility, Eternal City’: Patronal Imagery at Rome in the Fourth Century A.D.,” in *Bread and Circuses: Euergetism and Municipal Patronage in Roman Italy*, ed. Kathryn Lomas and Tim Cornell (New York: Routledge, 2003), 159–60.

7. Silber, “Neither Mauss, nor Veyne,” 214.

8. On the divergence between the eastern and western early churches regarding the poor, personal wealth, and asceticism, see Todd E. French, “Altruism or Holy Economy: Ambrose and Augustine’s Care for the Poor,” in *Augustine and Social Justice*, ed. Teresa Delgado, John Doody, and Kim Paffenroth (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2015), 51–72.

Christians. He disliked materiality, extolled the life of the mind, and sought unity with “the One,” associated with light and goodness. Plotinus advised his readers to prepare themselves to become passive, meaning that they must actively pursue the various disciplines necessary to prepare the soul to receive the divine. Ronald Berchman explains:

The form, order, the goodness of life are given a wider extension than merely intellection (*noesis*) by Plotinus. Life in all its diverse forms is not only preintellectual in origin but divinely voluntaristic and original. What is novel in Plotinus is a subtle shift from a God whose activity is purely one of the Intellect, to a God who is both Intellect and Will. There is a divine light, both rational and volitional, that the One gives by an act of love and grace to all things [Plotinus, *En.* VI.7.35.30–34.a]. . . . Hence there is an emphasis in later Neoplatonism of the need for divine grace, combined with a new human receptiveness toward such grace. Without grace the salvation of the soul is impossible. Here, we encounter for the first time the notion of a divine, nonreflective, selfless reciprocity, of giving as a form of charity.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, as a neo-Platonic philosopher, Plotinus argued that humans could not resist grace from the gods. He also argued for an altruistic form of giving outside of the typical patron-client, reciprocal model of *charis*, as Plato had. For Plotinus, grace was not reciprocal—it was free, unconditional, irresistible (it had to be received regardless of agency), and altruistic (motivated by selfless concern for the benefit of others).

## Augustine

Plotinus was not a Christian, but he had enormous influence on the Catholic Fathers of the late fourth century, especially Augustine. Augustine (AD 354–430) became arguably the most influential and

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9. Berchman, “Golden Rule in Greco-Roman Religion and Philosophy,” 51–52. It should be noted that Plotinus, Iamblichus, Porphyry, and Proclus did believe in the importance of good works through rituals they often called *theurgy*. See Brent J. Schmidt, *Utopian Communities of the Ancient World* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen, 2010); Plotinus, *En.* II. 2.5, 13–14; III.2.8; Proclus, *Platonic Theology* 1.19; Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries* 1.12; 1.14; 2.11; 3.16–18; Porphyry, *Ep. Ad Marc.* 16.

revered Catholic apologist and theologian of all time. In many of his works Augustine synthesized neo-Platonic philosophy with Christian traditions. He adapted *gratia* to Plotinus's neo-Platonic philosophical views in order strengthen the church as the only legitimate patron.

Adopting Plato's elevation of the mind over the body, Augustine saw three levels of being and declared the body (and all things external, sensible, and temporal) as the lowest, then the soul, and then God (and all things inner, intelligible, and eternal) as the highest.<sup>10</sup> Philip Cary explains:

Augustine's doctrine of grace develops within the framework of an increasingly complex articulation of the nature of this journey [of moral progress] and the road it follows. To see what resources the Platonist tradition offers him for this purpose, consider Plato's Allegory of the Cave, where ethics is implicit in epistemology. The epistemic journey is up out of the darkness of sensible things into the light of intelligibility, and the ethical goal, which is to say ultimate human happiness, is to enjoy what we see instead of being blinded by it. But that means the epistemological journey is also an ethical one, a journey in which the mind must be purified in order to see God. . . . [This is] not a journey for feet or chariots or ships but for the will. . . . The first step in the journey is to turn the soul in the right direction, away from bodily things and toward the light of the soul's eternal Good. . . . The Platonist imagery of liberation, conversion, and vision obviously has great religious power. . . . [Augustine's goal was to] purify the mind and make it able to perceive spiritual things.<sup>11</sup>

By the early fifth century AD, Augustine had convinced most of Christendom to believe in a nonobligatory, unconditional grace to strengthen the church as an institution of charity and as a strategic maneuver against the Donatists. The Donatists of Northern Africa, the region over which Augustine presided as bishop, argued that the Catholic Church leaders and their successors had lost all legitimacy. During the Emperor Diocletian's persecutions at the beginning of the fourth century AD, Catholic leaders denied their religion, their relationship to other Christians, and their church positions to avoid execution. In order to conveniently combat the Donatists and perhaps to legitimize

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10. Philip Cary, *Inner Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7.

11. Cary, *Inner Grace*, 10–13.

his own authority as a reputable church leader, Augustine subtly and conveniently interpreted grace to be compatible with predestination not being based on works or any kind of reciprocity.<sup>12</sup> He, like Plotinus, argued for the irresistibility of God's grace, effectively severing the link of covenants, reciprocity, and obligations associated with *charis*. "It is not to be doubted," wrote Augustine, "that the human will cannot resist the will of God."<sup>13</sup> Platonic and neo-Platonic philosophers are quoted more often in some sections of his *Confessions* than scripture.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to reciprocal *charis*, Augustine taught, a "wholly gratuitous grace means wholly efficacious and unconditional election: if God chooses to give us grace, then without fail we freely choose to receive it. So it is God who determines who receives grace and who does not."<sup>15</sup> In his treatise *On the Grace of Christ* (418), he argued that *gratia* (grace) was an inner teaching of understanding, perhaps meaning that it was a mystery that could only be understood by an individual, not a gift that we receive from God.<sup>16</sup> Over time, these notions of grace became orthodox. In his works, *Confessions*, *Grace and Freewill*, *Nature*

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12. Augustine, *De Predestinatione* 100.18; see Blake T. Ostler, "The Concept of Grace in Christian Thought," *Dialogue* 23 (Winter 1990): 13–43, for a discussion on this topic.

13. Augustine, *De Corruptione et Gratia* 14; Augustine, *Enchiridion* 100.2; see Ostler, "Concept of Grace in Christian Thought," for more discussion on this topic.

14. At one point in a graduate seminar on Augustine I began to count Augustine's quotations of Plotinus and compare them with how many times Augustine quoted passages from the Bible. In many sections I found that there were many more quotations of Plotinus and other Greco-Roman philosophers than citations of verses of scripture. In class I once jokingly asked the instructor during this graduate seminar on Augustine if we were studying fifth-century, neo-Platonic philosophy or Christianity, to the annoyance of most of my Protestant and Catholic classmates. When studying the writings of the Church Fathers the Latter-day Saint should ask, borrowing from Tertullian, "What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?" or, borrowing from Jerome (347–420, early church father), if one is a "Ciceronian" or a Christian. The topic of grace is a good case study of how the pure gospel of Jesus Christ was adulterated with Greek philosophy.

15. Augustine's main idea in *Ad Simplicianum*, in Cary, *Inner Grace*, 87–88.

16. Augustine, *On the Grace of Christ* 13–22; Cary, *Inner Grace*, 94. Cary critiqued Augustine's inner idea of grace: "In the Bible, God comes to us from outside, for he is other than us, and the Bible knows of no Augustinian inner

of Grace, *The Grace of Christ*, and *Original Sin*, Augustine developed his doctrine that God's free grace was extended unconditionally and without obligations. Through his interpretation of grace and predestination, believing that mankind (including himself) was essentially evil, he had great influence in the formulation of ideas about original sin. Augustine was eventually sainted due to his importance as the most intellectually gifted and most prolific of the church fathers, coupled with his excellent leadership as a presiding church figure over the minority Roman Catholics in the midst of the rival Donatists of Northern Africa, whom he and others branded as heretics.

Describing how Augustine's irresistible grace functions in his theology or how he came to these conclusions about grace would require a book-length discussion which is outside of the scope of this work.<sup>17</sup> While a short and critical treatment of Augustine's use of grace in this work may seem unbalanced, it is only significant to the thesis of this work to explain how his views on grace differed from those of earlier centuries of antiquity. Augustine himself admits he did not have a good command of ancient Greek and never felt comfortable with the essential language of Christian theology.<sup>18</sup> Augustine's rivals, such as Pelagius, who knew Greek well but whose views in support of the Greco-Roman meaning of grace were eventually silenced because they were out of harmony with the views of Plotinus, certainly merit more discussion in this work.

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self where we can turn inward to find this Other within the self." Cary, *Inner Grace*, 130.

17. As a student of a student of Peter Brown, a prolific scholar of late antiquity, I studied the complex subject of how Augustine came to his conclusions about grace in more detail. Noel E. Lenski, student of Peter Brown at Princeton, supervised my dissertation about ancient utopian communities, which deals with many themes related to late antiquity including early Christian monasticism. I had the privilege of taking courses from Dr. Lenski at the University of Colorado-Boulder on Roman numismatics, Roman law, Tacitus, and other subjects related to late antique social and economic history. I also took seminars on late antiquity and authors in late antiquity including one on Augustine from a specialist on Jerome, Andrew Cain, who was also on my dissertation committee. Also, while in graduate school I worked as a full-time employee of the Catholic Church for several years as a Latin and Spanish teacher, where I saw on a daily basis the discussion, application, and defense of Augustine's theology.

18. Augustine, *Confessions* 13.20; 14.23.

Some modern writers have begun to react against the view of the depraved and sin-centered Augustinian version of Christianity, which radically rejected the reciprocity associated with grace. Ian Bradley, a scholar of Celtic-Christian traditions, writes, “A new creation-centered spirituality has developed which stresses the goodness of both the natural and the human world. The most radical exponent of this new movement has been Matthew Fox who has argued in his book *Original Blessing* that Christians should jettison the whole doctrine of original sin and develop a new theology which celebrates the goodness of creation.”<sup>19</sup> Other Protestant scholars justify Augustine’s irresistible grace through arguing against free will.<sup>20</sup> But, in my view, they make this argument by taking a few Pauline verses out of the ancient context of reciprocity. There are many other Pauline verses that allow for the existence of free will. Brad Eastman analyzes many pertinent scriptural passages on the subject and notes that “it is uncertain whether Paul perceives God’s call and election to be irresistible.” Eastman provides many examples that demonstrate that God’s call and election are not “always” irresistible.<sup>21</sup>

## Pelagius

In contrast to Augustine, Pelagius (AD 354–420 or 440), a learned British-born ascetic monk, taught the doctrine of moral agency or free will. Most importantly for this study, Pelagius asserted that necessary personal righteousness should accompany grace. Since he was considered a heretic in later antiquity, Pelagius’ work has not survived except as occasionally quoted fragments in Augustine’s works.<sup>22</sup> Ironically it is only through Augustine’s writings that we learn of Pelagius’ emphasis on receiving grace from God as a gift—implying reciprocity—instead of

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19. Ian Bradley, *The Celtic Way* (London: Darton Longman Todd, 1993), 51.

20. Anthony Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), 105.

21. Brad Eastman, *The Significance of Grace in the Letters of Paul* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 186–87.

22. Jean Daujat, *The Theology of Grace* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1959), 20–21.

relying on God's will. Pelagius' doctrine of grace was in harmony with classical meanings: "God gives all graces to him who has been worthy of receiving them, just as he gave them to the apostle Paul."<sup>23</sup> Pelagius seems to have argued, according to Augustine, that each individual can choose between good and evil and seems to have had the slogan that "whatever I ought to do, I can do."<sup>24</sup> Philip Cary writes, "The worry, of course, is that Pelagius undermines the gratuity of grace by making it into a debt that God must pay to those who deserve it rather than a gift given gratis."<sup>25</sup>

Within the last twenty years some scholars have defended Pelagius as a misunderstood orthodox writer who followed the Greco-Roman traditions established by the early fathers in the East and West. It is likely that Pelagius only argued for a classical, proto-orthodox understanding of grace and he did not assert that Christians could achieve salvation just by their own efforts. While most of the surviving ancient sources about Pelagius were filtered long ago through Augustine's polemical writings, it seems that this British-born monk believed that Christ's gift of grace was available to all.<sup>26</sup> All too frequently in late antiquity, books of scripture were carelessly translated from Greek to Latin without much thought, which may have had some influence on Augustine's misunderstanding of the plan of salvation. Kurt and Barbara Aland note that "Augustine complained, for example, in his *De doctrina christiana* (in a passage apparently written before AD 396/397) that anyone obtaining a Greek manuscript of the New Testament would translate it into Latin, no matter how little he knew of either language (ii. 16)."<sup>27</sup>

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23. Augustine, *De Get. Pelag.* 32; Cary, *Inner Grace*, 80.

24. Erwin Lutzer, *The Doctrines That Divide: A Fresh Look at the Historic Doctrines That Separate Christians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 1998), 155; also quoted in Steele, Thomas, and Quinn, *Five Points of Calvinism*, 210.

25. Augustine, *De Get. Pelag.* 33; Cary, *Inner Grace*, 81.

26. Bradley, *Celtic Way*, 63.

27. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), 187.

## The Problem of Grace in Late Antiquity

Like many theologians today, Augustine wrote about *charis* according to the best of his human ability. It is doubtful he understood the ancient Greek nuances of *charis*. However, he was influential enough to promulgate a new meaning of this word throughout most of Christendom.<sup>28</sup> Augustine did acknowledge grace's empowering nature when he wrote, "It is grace that brings it about that we not only will to do right but are actually able—not by our own strength but by the help of the liberator."<sup>29</sup> Augustine's life of leadership in the church gives evidence that he personally knew the need for obedience and making correct choices, counterbalancing his insistence that grace is irresistible. Certainly in much of his works he argued for a middle way between contemporary conflicting doctrinal viewpoints and avoided many theological extremes. But through his invention of grace's irresistibility, Augustine invented a new meaning of grace arguing that only "free" grace creates a free will, thus becoming entrapped in his own nexus of theology. John Cassian, a contemporary of Augustine, disagreed with Augustine's negative views of freewill and free grace because they denied inherent moral agency.<sup>30</sup>

In his prolific writings, Augustine characteristically combined grace with many other principles of Christianity so that his rivals had a difficult time untangling his complicated philosophical system—much less challenging him and debating him. Thus many simple Christian

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28. Augustine, *Confessions* 13.20; 14.23.

29. Augustine, *Propositiones ex Romanis* 18. See Cary, *Inner Grace*, 44. As recently pointed out to the author by the Catholic scholar Peter Huff, Augustine, unlike Martin Luther, emphasized that individuals must strive to be good. Peter Huff, who held the Besl Family Chair in Ethics, Religion, and Society, Xavier University, and holds the T. L. James Chair in Religious Studies, Centenary College of Louisiana, gave an opening plenary address for the Society of Mormon Theology and Philosophy at Utah State University on 22 September 2012, entitled "Gratia Plena: A Catholic View of Grace in the Book of Mormon." Although acknowledging doctrines of free grace in Augustine's writings, Huff eloquently made these points in defense of Augustine's view of grace in discussion with the author after his talk.

30. Alexander Y. Hwang, "Manifold Grace in John Cassian and Prosper of Aquitaine," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 63, no. 1 (2010): 98.



doctrines became transformed and later became unintelligible to the average believer in Christ because of Augustine's polemical and philosophical writings. He argued that "even faith itself is one of the gifts of grace . . . so grace is before every merit."<sup>31</sup> For Augustine, merits seem to be good actions. In interpreting "Lead us not into temptation," Augustine believed that the Lord's Prayer in the Sermon on the Mount was "the clearest testimony to grace."<sup>32</sup>

There are many problems with Augustine's widely accepted doctrine of grace. It is disconcerting that Christendom adopted his poorly informed views of grace, for this concept is central to the plan of salvation.

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31. Augustine, *Ad Simplicianum* 1.2.7. Cary, *Inner Grace*, 51.

32. Cary, *Inner Grace*, 71.



## Medieval, Reformation, and Modern Uses of Grace

**D**URING THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD (THE FIFTH TO THE FIFTEENTH CENTURIES), writers often looked back to Augustine for guidance as to what constituted orthodox theology. In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas synthesized doctrines of the church, including original sin and its relationship to grace, often relying on doctrines formulated centuries earlier by Augustine, and combined them with the Aristotelian knowledge that was again available in the West. In answering the question of “whether humans can do or wish any good without God’s grace,”<sup>1</sup> Aquinas argued that “human nature needs divine assistance, as primary mover.”<sup>2</sup> For Aquinas, grace was needed to create free will so that anyone could do good. He used Matthew 25:24 to argue that the gracious God “requires nothing from us but what he himself has sown in us.”<sup>3</sup> Instead of looking to the original New Testament, Aquinas perpetuated Augustinian notions of free grace.

Protestant reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin claimed that authority for their actions could be found in the Bible itself (*sola scriptura*, by scripture alone) and not in the Catholic Church. Yet they also accepted Augustine’s doctrines of free and irresistible grace. Their

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1. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Prima Secundae Partis, question 109.2.

2. Michael Mawson, “Understandings of Nature and Grace in John Milbank and Thomas Aquinas,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 62, no. 3 (2009): 351.

3. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Secunda Secundae Partis, question 62.4.3.

reforms succeeded where earlier efforts had not, partly because many German princes were indignant that so many funds from their fiefdoms were being transferred to the Vatican in the form of indulgences. Northern European aristocrats, largely for economic reasons, generously supported reformers and other Bible translators, thereby insuring the reformers' survival. In a way, the theology of grace became a tool of international politics. Translations of the Bible became increasingly available in vernacular languages during the sixteenth century, aided by the invention of the printing press.

### Luther and Early Reformers

Luther in particular was concerned about his personal salvation, convinced of his sinful condition. He came to conclude that the sinner was justified by faith alone (*sola fide*), which relieved him of his guilt. He created a German translation of the Bible in which he emphasized the doctrine of free grace, and Luther held to Augustinian notions of free will created by free grace in his other writings as well.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast, Erasmus argued that Luther's justification of free will because of free grace made God unjust: "By the light of grace, it is inexplicable how God can damn him whom by his own strength can do nothing but sin and become guilty. . . . [T]he fault lies not in the wretchedness of man, but in the injustice of God."<sup>5</sup>

Although they considered the Bible authoritative, Protestant reformers frequently disagreed with each other about what the Bible meant. Grace and other weighty doctrinal concepts of the plan of salvation were subjected to their own various philosophies. Surely, they argued, salvation was not gained through the sacraments of the Roman Catholic faith, and they rejected certain practices of Catholicism. But for many doctrines, they borrowed early medieval philosophies such as grace wholesale, mainly from Augustine, perhaps so they would not seem heretical to their contemporaries.

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4. For example, Martin Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio* 1542, 636.

5. Erasmus, *Diatribes seu collatio de libero arbitrio*, 19, quoted in Ostler, "Concept of Grace in Christian Thought," 34.

These orthodox Catholic doctrines that reformers adopted include the total depravity of man, the nature of God, original sin, and, most importantly for this work, unconditional, free grace. According to Philip Cary, “Luther is notoriously no friend to free will, and his utterly unevasive commitment to prevenient grace<sup>6</sup> includes no commitment at all to our will’s freedom to choose the path of salvation. Rather, he professes his gladness that ‘God has taken my salvation out of my hands into his, making it depend on his choice and not mine, and has promised to save me not by my own work or exertion but by his grace and mercy.’”<sup>7</sup> Luther felt the Sermon on the Mount was the devil’s masterpiece because it required too much of Christians.<sup>8</sup> He notoriously relegated the epistle of James, which emphasized that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:26), to the refuse pile because it “had no gospel quality to it.”<sup>9</sup>

In all fairness, it must be recognized that Luther was engaged in a polemical struggle with the Roman Catholic Church for his personal survival. Certainly for Latter-day Saints he played a central role in world history by helping to prepare a milieu of religious liberty in which the gospel could someday be restored and one in which the Bible was available in vernacular languages. However, at the same time, Luther (initially an Augustinian monk<sup>10</sup>) did perpetuate the Augustinian interpretation of free grace that has continued to perplex Christendom about how to achieve eternal life, the greatest gift of God.

The theology of John Calvin is most notable for its diametric opposition to the understanding of reciprocal charis. Although Calvin does emphasize gratitude as the proper response to grace, he sees grace as

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6. Prevenient grace is grace that precedes human choice, which influences people to act without their acting first.

7. Martin Luther, *On the Bondage of the Will* (LW 33:289), in Cary, *Inner Grace*, 85.

8. D. Martin Luthers Werke (Weimar, 1906), 32:300.

9. D. Martin Luthers Werke (Weimar, 1906), 6:10. See John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 36 n. 123 in particular.

10. See Patricia Wilson-Kastner, “On Partaking of the Divine Nature: Luther’s Dependence on Augustine,” *Andrews University Seminary Series* 22, no. 1 (1984): 113–24.

irresistible.<sup>11</sup> His doctrines were later summarized under the popular acronym TULIP: “Total depravity,” “Unconditional election,” “Limited atonement,” “Irresistible grace,” and “Perseverance of the saints.”<sup>12</sup> It is beyond the scope of this monograph to specifically analyze these other doctrines. But all five of these Calvinistic doctrines were related, albeit in some cases indirectly, to a sixteenth-century Protestant concept of unconditional grace. Calvin argued that those who will be saved cannot resist the grace of Christ which will save them. This “irresistible grace” became the foundation of Calvinistic doctrine and much of Protestant theology today.

But not all contemporaries agreed with Luther and Calvin. Jacob Arminius opposed the opportunistic evolution of grace’s original and classical meanings. Instead, he asserted that God’s children had great power of will. He argued that Christians needed to correctly use their power of will and therefore opposed the doctrine of predestination.<sup>13</sup> Many have said that because Arminius argued for moral agency, he was following ideas about grace advanced by Pelagius. In the seventeenth century, Herbert Thorndike, who adopted some of Arminius’s views, taught the fundamental nature of covenants associated with grace in a spirit of free will.<sup>14</sup> Thorndike asserted the importance of moral agency in fulfilling God’s covenant of grace. Later, the Methodist church incorporated much of Arminius’s theology. Joseph Smith wrote that he was impressed with Methodism (JS–H 1:8) “and thus may have been more Arminian in his thinking at that young age.”<sup>15</sup>

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11. Stephen Webb discusses Calvin’s view that grace creates gratitude, and that gratitude is the necessary and sufficient condition for the moral life. Calvin emphasizes the way grace creates a covenant. Stephen H. Webb, *The Gifting God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

12. See a long discussion of each of these terms in Steele, Thomas, and Quinn, *Five Points of Calvinism*.

13. See a succinct discussion of these theological ideas in Robert L. Millet, *What Happened to the Cross?* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2007), 9.

14. Michael McGiffert, “Herbert Thorndike and the Covenant of Grace,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 58, no. 3 (2007): 440–60, esp. 447–48.

15. Robert L. Millet, “Joseph Smith and Calvinism,” *BYU Studies* 50, no. 4 (2011): 14.

## Modern Theologians

It would be a herculean task to summarize every position made by every theologian on *charis* from the Reformation down to modern times, and it is also outside the scope of this work. However, a few generalizations may be helpful in outlining some major modern Protestant and Catholic positions on *charis*.

First, we will look at a few who argue that modern, reformation, and medieval grace have nothing to do with first-century grace. W. F. Lofthouse was one of these. He wrote in 1933, “In theological language, one word may bear several and even diverse meanings. All the more is this true when the word has to be transferred from one language to another. The *Charis* of St. Paul certainly suffered a ‘sea-change’ when it migrated to the *Gratia* of St. Augustine, the *Gnade* of Luther and the ‘Grace’ of Cardinal Newman.”<sup>16</sup>

Another is German author Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who taught that “cheap grace” was not what Christ intended and contrasted it with “costly grace,” the radical discipleship that was required of Jesus’ followers. He taught respect for the Old Testament with its laws and that the demand for righteous living was still in force. Another is James Harrison (whose work I have cited in previous chapters), who writes:

We cannot penetrate Paul’s deepest intentions in Romans unless we keep in view its contingent nature, the first-century cultural codes that it preserves, and the polemics that the apostle was engaged in. It is worth noting that the famous theologians of grace (Augustine, Martin Luther, and Karl Barth) interpreted Paul for their contemporaries against the cultural backdrop of their own times. Augustine, Luther and Barth wrote their commentaries on Romans and works on theology in polemical contexts. Augustine faced the threat of the Manichees and Pelagius; Luther confronted the merit theology of medieval Catholicism; Barth struggled with the post-war crisis of 1918 and struggled against the anthropomorphic theologies of A. Harnack and F. Schleiermacher. The first-century [AD] context was ignored in each case. But the wealth of first-century social metaphor throughout Romans should caution us against proceeding down this path.<sup>17</sup>

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16. Lofthouse, “Hen and Hēsed in the Old Testament,” 29.

17. Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 212–13, 213 n. 6.

Harrison rightly argued that one must compare first-century cultural contexts in analyzing grace with the much different ideas of grace in the early modern period.

Finally, Troels Engberg-Petersen concluded a recent article with the statement that “the villain in all this is the modern, puristic conception of gift-giving. I hope to have shown that this is not there in the ancient sources.”<sup>18</sup>

Let me restate that the problem with understanding grace in the New Testament is not Paul—it is Augustine’s and Luther’s doctrine of free grace. The following examples are very limited to fit the purpose of this work but are still representative of many important Protestant scholars and figures from the Reformation to modern times who have followed Augustinian grace. As previously mentioned in his *De Servo Arbitrio*, Martin Luther sporadically struggled with the question whether “God is to be thought of as saving them by free unconditional invincible grace” without obligations and, like the Protestant theologians Bucer and Bullinger, concluded that man’s spiritual salvation rests wholly on the unconditional, “invincible grace of God.”<sup>19</sup> Melchior Hoffman argued for a radical interpretation of an “invincible grace” that helped mankind do good.<sup>20</sup> This interpretation assisted Protestants in eluding the sometimes stifling authority of the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church. A couple of centuries later, Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) put witty arguments in the mouth of one of his characters, Crispus, that free and unconditional, nonobligatory grace is “proved

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18. Troels Engberg-Pedersen, “Gift-Giving and Friendship: Seneca and Paul in Romans 1–8 on the Logic of God’s Charis and Its Human Response,” *Harvard Theological Review* 100, no. 1 (2008): 43.

19. Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will, a New Translation of De Servo Arbitrio* (1525), ed. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (London: Clark, 1957), 58–59, quoted in Alvin J. Beachy, *The Concept of Grace in the Radical Reformation* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1977), 11–12.

20. Beachy, *Concept of Grace*, 69. Hoffman was eventually condemned by the Strasbourg Synod of 1533 for his nonconformist social views as an early Anabaptist and was later imprisoned. On various reformers, see Jared Wicks, *Man Yearning For Grace: Luther’s Early Spiritual Teaching* (Washington: Corpus Books, 1968); Robert Glasgow, “Church as a Vehicle of Grace in the Theology of John Calvin” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1958); B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharist Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).



to be a dictate of right reason” and “if men are saved it must be by an act of free grace.”<sup>21</sup> Basil Manly Sr. in his sermon “Divine Efficiency Consistent with Human Activity” argued that grace is “free, unmerited and sovereign.”<sup>22</sup> Another Protestant theologian of the early twentieth century, Pilgram Marpeck, believed that grace was free and universal to the extent that he, like Protestant scholars of the Reformation, often used the term *original grace*.<sup>23</sup> A popular contemporary evangelical work entitled *What’s So Amazing about Grace* argues, like the ubiquitous bumper sticker, that “grace happens” unconditionally, freely, and without obligations—for almost three hundred pages.<sup>24</sup>

Even Protestant New Testament Greek and theological commentaries express these biases toward free grace. A small but representative sample of New Testament Greek dictionaries of the last one hundred years exhibit certain subtle but doctrinally significant biases that reflect Protestant thought about Greek *charis*. These dictionaries tend to be Protestant, since Catholic scholars did not generally engage in historical criticism of the Bible until after the Second Vatican Council (1965). Moulton and Milligan’s *Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (1914–29) assumes a free-grace bias and focuses on the “deeper Christian notions involved in New Testament uses” of *charis*.<sup>25</sup> By “deeper Christian notions,” Moulton and Milligan must be referring to the later notions of Augustine and the Protestant reformation. In fact, many of the inscriptions they quote from antiquity under the rubric of “thanks” and “gratitude” actually refer to mortals *reciprocally* giving thanks to the gods as one might expect, and not free grace theology. For instance, *P. Oxy VI.1021.18* (AD 54), “*Dio pantes ophelomen . . . theois pasi eidenai charistas*” (“Therefore ought we

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21. Andrew Fuller, *Works*, 2:675, quoted in Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book, 1986), 116.

22. Basil D. D. Manly, “Divine Efficiency Consistent with Human Activity,” preached at Pleasant Grove Church, Fayette Co., Alabama; M. D. J. Slade, 1849, Tuscaloosa, Alabama; quoted in Nettles, *By His Grace*, 193.

23. Pilgram Marpeck, *Verantwortung* (Vienna: Johann Loserth, 1929), 231; Beachy, *Concept of Grace*, 37.

24. Philip Yancey, *What’s So Amazing about Grace* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Zondervan, 1997), 39.

25. James Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1976), 684.

all to give thanks to the gods”), demonstrates ancient notions of reciprocity and obligation. Arndt and Gingrich’s authoritative *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (1952) lists many ambiguous New Testament scriptures under the rubric “and of Christ who gives (undeserved) gifts to men.” Although highly respected, this dictionary is informed by a Protestant idea of free, nonobligatory gifts and not the classical sense of reciprocity associated with *charis*.<sup>26</sup> Arndt and Gingrich’s work quotes New Testament *charis* passages appositively to define each other as “undeserved” and does not mention the reciprocal classical tradition of *charis*.

The theological lexicon of the New Testament by Hermann Cremer, often quoted authoritatively by Protestant New Testament Greek and theological lexicons, also exhibits considerable Protestant biases. In the beginning of his entry on *charis*, Cremer attempts to not distance himself from the classical Greek understanding but then frankly admits that their understanding of New Testament grace is, in fact, not the same as the word in its classical context:

We cannot affirm that its (*charis*) scriptural use seriously differs from or contradicts its meanings in the classics, for the elements of the conception expressed by it are only emphasized in a distinctive manner in Holy Scripture; but by this very means it has become quite a different word in N. T. Greek, so that we may say it depended upon Christianity to realize its full import, and to elevate it to its rightful sphere. It signifies in the N. T. what we designate *Gnade*, grace, a conception which was not expressed by *charis* in profane Greek, and which indeed, the classics do not contain. . . . *Charis* has been distinctly appropriated in the N. T. to designate the relation and conduct of God towards sinful man as revealed in and through Christ, especially as an act of spontaneous favour, of favour wherein no mention can be made of obligation. See Eph. 2:7, where *charis* is mentioned as a special form of [kindness]. This element of spontaneousness is not prominent in the classical use of the word. . . . *Charis* is no more hindered by sin than it is conditioned by works. With the worthlessness of works in connection with grace we thus have the non-imputation and forgiveness of sin. . . . Thus

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26. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 885.

it must be recognised that the Greek word in this application attains for the first time an application and sphere of use adequate to its real meaning; previously it was like a worn-out coin.<sup>27</sup>

Cremer might have considered whether Paul would write to his Gentile converts with a totally different concept of grace than the classical one that his converts typically used and understood. But the heavy weight of centuries of theology seems to have influenced Cremer to conclude that Paul had invented a new definition of grace. Because of the existence of hundreds of texts and inscriptions that contain the notion of reciprocal grace, the classical use certainly was “a worn-out coin” (but in my view a coin that had great value). Cremer subtly conceded that grace was used so often to imply obligations that this meaning is obvious. Finally, Cremer argued that in classical Greek, *charis* was not used religiously except for the Graces, or *Charites*, which had connections to the ancient Gentile notion of a temple<sup>28</sup>—a topic of great interest to Latter-day Saints which the author is currently exploring. In the words of Cremer himself, many traditional Protestant understandings about *charis* “do not rest on sound, ancient classical footing.”

C. S. Lewis commented on *charis* in a less biased manner. He admitted that grace is a very difficult and touchy subject. He wisely reduced grace to a simple metaphor of scissors made up of two blades: the classical reciprocity of one blade putting forth moral effort, and the other, having faith after receiving a gift from God.<sup>29</sup> He also noted:

On the one hand, we must never imagine that our own unaided efforts can be relied on to carry us even through the next twenty-four hours as “decent” people. If He does not support us, not one of us is safe from some gross sin. On the other hand, no possible degree of holiness or heroism which has ever been recorded of the greatest saints is beyond what He is determined to produce in every one of us in the end. The job will not be completed in this life: but He means to get us as far as possible before death.<sup>30</sup>

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27. Cremer, *Biblico-theological Lexicon*, 572–76.

28. Cremer, *Biblico-theological Lexicon*, 576.

29. C. S. Lewis, *The Joyful Christian* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977), 135.

30. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone 1996), 175; quoted in Robert L. Millet, *Grace Works* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 139–40.

Many pastors do point out the danger of easy grace. True grace, as the evangelical pastor John MacArthur explains, “is more than just a giant freebie, opening the door to heaven in the sweet by and by, but leaving us to wallow in sin in the bitter here and now. Grace is God presently at work in our lives.”<sup>31</sup> MacArthur is concerned that contemporary evangelism promises sinners that they “can have eternal life yet continue to live in rebellion against God.”<sup>32</sup> Paul Holmer writes that stressing the dangers of works is “inappropriate if the listeners are not even trying! Most Church listeners are not in much danger of working their way into heaven.”<sup>33</sup>

## Summary

Thus we see that although Luther took Christianity in a new direction, he and most other reformers kept the understanding of non-obligatory grace that Augustine had created. This view continued through the centuries and into the modern era. But as information about ancient Greek language and culture became easier to find and share, some scholars and theologians began to see that grace should be understood as reciprocal charis. When Mormonism burst onto the religious stage in 1830, it came with new insights into the ancient religious world. One of these insights was about grace as a reciprocal gift.

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31. John MacArthur, *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 32.

32. John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When He Says “Follow Me”?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1988), 15–16. Bruce C. Hafen’s article on grace from the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:560–63, was helpful in providing a few of these references.

33. Paul Holmer, “Law and Gospel Re-examined,” *Theology Today* 10 (1953–54): 474.

## Grace in the Book of Mormon

**T**EACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON, PUBLISHED IN 1830, sometimes stand in tension with ideas of grace that emerged in late antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and the modern era. They reach back into the ideas of grace that are more at home in the worlds of the Bible and the ancient Mediterranean. In teaching that grace is a manifestation of God's goodness to humankind, and that it is closely aligned with mercy and Christ's Atonement to meet the demands of justice and make salvation possible, Book of Mormon usages of grace largely parallel the meanings of *hesed* (mercy) from the Old Testament, the ancient social concepts that all gifts give rise to reciprocal obligations, and the Greco-Roman concept of *charis* in terms of relational reciprocity. In essence, grace in the Book of Mormon necessarily enables and encourages disciples to try to restore broken covenant relationships by finding their way back to God's presence and thus enjoy life and eternal rest embraced by his love and outstretched arms.

This chapter does not provide an exhaustive analysis of grace in the Book of Mormon. Rather, my goal here is to give an overview of the meaning of grace in the Book of Mormon to show that grace is regularly associated there with reciprocal obligations and to situate the Book of Mormon broadly within the spectrum spanning the history of grace. No teaching of the Book of Mormon implies that grace, or the coming or returning to God, is available to humans outside of a reciprocal relationship between God and humanity. The word *grace* is used in the Book

of Mormon in twenty-seven verses, which will be reviewed here thematically. Much more frequently, but conceptually related to the idea of grace, are the relational terms *mercy*, *mercies*, and *merciful*, which together appear about 150 times in the Book of Mormon, with *love* and *loved* being used some 68 times. These and other such terms in the Book of Mormon strongly cultivate the importance of interpersonal relationships between righteous individuals and their God. Thus, the following discussion will first survey all the places in the Book of Mormon where the word grace explicitly appears, author by author. It will then look at King Benjamin's speech and other sermons or texts, which, although they do not use the word *grace*, are crucial to understanding the Book of Mormon's teachings about how one can obtain salvation from death and hell through grace, covenantal service, repentance, and obedience. All of this is made possible only by maintaining a loyal and thankful relationship with Christ, the Redeemer, Lord, and Savior.

### **Explicit Mentions of Grace in the Book of Mormon**

Although all authors who contributed to the Book of Mormon likely understood the important formation and operation of the covenant relations between God and his people (which afforded blessings contingent upon the performance of righteous responsibilities),<sup>1</sup> only seven writers in the Book of Mormon refer to grace explicitly. The insights added by each of these authors reflect their own times, circumstances, needs, and desires, as they urgently wrote about the covenants of God with his people. In this religious context, these writers speak of the grace and goodness God has promised to give to those who will have him to be their God, and at the same time they remind the people of the commitments and obligations they willingly and lovingly have taken upon themselves as their part of the reciprocal covenant relationship between themselves and God.

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1. See, for example, Noel B. Reynolds, "Understanding Christian Baptism through the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2012): 4–37; Victor L. Ludlow, "Covenant(s)," in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 217–18.

**Lehi.** The word grace appears in Lehi's words only twice, in his blessing to his son Jacob, but the word mercy appears from the beginning of his calling as a prophet. Lehi painfully witnessed the unfaithfulness of the people in Jerusalem, which would lead to the destruction of the Temple and the Holy City. He also suffered physical agonies during his family's arduous journey to the New World and was torn by internal strife among his own sons. In facing these challenges, Lehi found refuge in the assurances given to him by revelation that all the inhabitants of the earth could eventually be blessed and preserved by the Lord God Almighty, to which he exclaimed: "Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth; and because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish!" (1 Ne. 1:14). In that vision it was plainly made manifest to Lehi that a messiah would come to redeem the world (1 Ne. 1:19).

At the end of Lehi's life, as he blessed his son Jacob, Lehi spoke about the relationship that would exist between that messiah and those who would receive the benefits of his redemption. On the Messiah's part, he would minister to people in the flesh (2 Ne. 2:4), offering himself "a sacrifice for sin." Lehi affirmed that "redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth" (2 Ne. 2:6). Founded on this reciprocal relationship, Lehi is evidently thinking very broadly here, speaking of a fullness of the various aspects of grace. As Lehi goes on to state, the grace of the Holy Messiah operates together with his "merits and mercy" (2 Ne. 2:8). For Lehi, grace exists within a constellation of divine virtues—God's truth, dependability, holiness, and mercy, even to the laying down of his own life (2 Ne. 2:10). This Atonement, however, would be efficacious only to those who would serve him and would come with "a broken heart and a contrite spirit" (2 Ne. 2:7).

Through this grace, everyone will stand in the presence of God to be judged, and may "dwell in the presence of God" (2 Ne. 2:8, 10). Through his covenant, which God will always remember (Lev. 26:42), all who have died will be resurrected (2 Ne. 2:8); and here Lehi may be thinking of the people in Jerusalem, which he knows has been destroyed, as well as remembering deceased family members.

**Jacob.** No doubt influenced by his father's words, Lehi's son Jacob mentions grace on four occasions in his great covenant speech in

2 Nephi 9–10. Jacob locates grace together with God’s wisdom, mercy, and greatness (2 Ne. 9:8, 53). In a temple context and speaking shortly after the temple in the land of Nephi was completed and dedicated, Jacob distinctively refers to “grace divine” (2 Ne. 10:25), and he sees the extension of God’s greatness, grace and mercy coming through the great “covenants of the Lord,” “his condescensions,” and his covenantal promises that Lehi’s “seed shall not utterly be destroyed,” but that God would preserve them to become “a righteous branch unto the House of Israel” (2 Ne. 9:53).

In order for this salvific relationship to materialize, those bound to God through his covenant, as Jacob taught, must reconcile themselves “to the will of God,” and “remember, after ye are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved” (2 Ne. 10:24). If covenant people do not submit to the will of the devil and to the flesh, God will then cause the spirits to rise, to be protected “from everlasting death by the power of the atonement,” that people “may be received into the eternal kingdom of God” and there praise God in thankful return for his divine grace (2 Ne. 10:25). In this powerful temple sermon, Jacob elaborates in detail much about the covenantal relationship between God and his people, including the services that both he and his people are obliged to perform under what Jacob calls “the merciful plan of the great Creator” (2 Ne. 9:6).

**Nephi.** On only two occasions does Nephi, Jacob’s older brother, refer to grace. First, in the text immediately after Jacob’s temple sermon, Nephi affirms his father Lehi’s declaration that the fullness of grace is to be found in the Holy Messiah and also ratifies the explanation that Jacob had given about the covenant relationship between God and his people. Nephi here looks back not only to the covenant made by God with Lehi and his posterity, but also his soul delights “in the covenants of the Lord which he hath made to our fathers,” evidently referring to the covenants made by God to Moses, Abraham, and others (2 Ne. 11:5). Realizing this full array of covenants that established durable promises and obligations by his fathers, Nephi concurrently delights in God’s “grace, and in his justice, and power, and mercy in the great and eternal plan of deliverance from death” (2 Ne. 11:5). To Jacob’s panoply of grace, wisdom, mercy, and greatness, Nephi adds God’s “justice and power,” and ties grace into not only the merciful



plan by which the world was created, but the “eternal plan” through which God’s people can be delivered from death and remain within the arms of God’s relationship forever.

Second, knowing the value and importance of that relationship, Nephi, later in the text, explains why he works so hard to persuade his posterity and his *brethren*, faithful or recalcitrant, “to believe in Christ,” the Messiah, and “to be *reconciled to God*,” preserving or restoring their good standing within the covenantal relationship between them and the Lord, “for we know that it is *by grace that we are saved, after all we can do*” (2 Ne. 25:23). Here Nephi’s famous words, almost verbatim, echo the words of Jacob in 2 Nephi 10:24,<sup>2</sup> where Jacob admonished *the brethren* to reconcile themselves to the will of God and to remember that “*after ye are reconciled unto God*, that it is only in and *through the grace of God that you are saved*.” Nephi’s phrase, “be reconciled to God,” is a shortened allusion to Jacob’s slightly longer phrases, “reconcile yourselves to *the will of God*” and “after ye are reconciled to God.”<sup>3</sup> When Nephi says that “*we know that it is by grace that we are saved*,” he speaks not only for himself but also implicitly recognizes Jacob as the source of this expression of their belief. Moreover, when Nephi refers to “*after all we can do*,” he would expect his readers to recall what Jacob had previously said, when Jacob explained that salvation can operate through the grace of God only after one is reconciled unto God. “After all we can do” is then an elliptical reference to Jacob’s “after ye are reconciled unto God,” thereby maintaining the covenantal relationship through divine Atonement and human reconciliation of any infractions,

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2. These two verses may be seen as chiasmic parallels, suggesting that they are to be contemplated as a pair. Welch sees the book of 2 Nephi as a five-element chiasm, with Jacob’s commentary of Isaiah (2 Ne. 6–10), having 2 Nephi 10 at its end, corresponding to Nephi’s commentary on Isaiah (2 Ne. 25–30), having 2 Nephi 25 at its beginning. John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), 201, available online at <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1131&index=9>.

3. Stephen Ehat also has noted that both of these verses use the word “after” and not the word “because,” thus avoiding the idea that grace is the result of works. Works, or “all we can do,” is equated with reconciling oneself to God; after a person is reconciled he can then be saved by grace. Stephen Ehat, email to John W. Welch, May 15, 2015.

thereby allowing the grace, justice, wisdom, power, mercy, and greatness of God to operate so that we “are saved” (2 Ne. 10:24; 25:23).

Joseph Spencer, who draws many connections between 2 Nephi 10:24 and 2 Nephi 25:23, places these verses in the context of the whole book of 2 Nephi and the purpose for which Nephi kept his record. What “Nephi and Jacob ask their readers and hearers to do is to be reconciled to God.” This happens when people “stop holding out against God’s purposes, when we ‘yield’ and therefore cease, at last, to be ‘an enemy to God,’ as the angel put it to King Benjamin (Mosiah 3:19),” and enter into a covenant to keep God’s commandments (Mosiah 5:5–8). Spencer suggests that “Nephi took the doctrine of grace to be most relevant when he recognized the real temptation human beings feel to resist the revelatory. . . . Grace is what we are ignoring whenever we resist God’s gentle (or not-so-gentle) entreaties. . . . If we can be still . . . we might know, as Nephi did, that God is God, and that it is God who saves by grace.”<sup>4</sup>

Discussion of Nephi’s view of grace is incomplete without connecting it to his message in 2 Nephi 31. In that chapter, it becomes clear that “all we can do” is to recognize Christ as the Savior, follow him, repent, enter into the covenant of baptism, receive the Holy Ghost, remain steadfast in hope and love, and endure to the end. Those who keep the covenants will then receive eternal life through grace.

**Alma.** The next primary author to use the word grace in the Book of Mormon is Alma the Younger. In three of his most powerful speeches—first in addressing Nephites in Zarahemla who appear to have slackened in their covenantal commitments; second, to faithful recent arrivals from the land of Nephi now resettled in the city of Gideon; and third in addressing the apostate Nehorites in Ammonihah—Alma turned powerfully to grace as a crucial element in maintaining righteousness before God. Like Lehi and Jacob before him, Alma coupled grace with mercy. He went on in describing the Son of God as being full of grace, mercy, truth, equity, full of patience, and longsuffering (Alma 5:48; 9:26; 13:9).

On God’s part in this grace relationship, Alma emphasized that God will “take away the sins of the world” and will be “quick to hear the cries

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4. Joseph M. Spencer, “What Can We Do? Reflections on 2 Nephi 25:23,” *Religious Educator* 15, no. 2 (2014): 33, 36–37.

of his people and to answer their prayers” (Alma 9:26). On the part of the beneficiaries, Alma enumerated that they must “steadfastly believe on his name” (Alma 5:48), and humble themselves before God (Alma 7:3), repent and obey the will of God, and petition God, “supplicating of his grace” (Alma 7:3).

As the high priest of the people in the land of Zarahemla, but having recently stepped down after nine years of serving also as the chief judge, Alma shows particular interest in the judicial aspects of mercy, equity, and justice as he invites his people to be faithful, repent, and to maintain, individually as well as a people together, their relationship with God. Thus, in his words to Corianton in Alma 39–42, Alma names the path to salvation as “the plan of redemption (Alma 39:18; 42:11, 13), “the plan of restoration” (Alma 41:2), “the great plan of salvation” (Alma 42:5) “the great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8, 16), and “the plan of mercy” (Alma 42:15, 31), but he could just as well have called it “the plan of grace.” Alma explains that God’s plan gives mankind time to repent—a space of time between sin and judgment (Alma 42:4), and this is the essence of mercy. If people were to see immediate judgment and punishment for their sins, it would be easy to avoid sin, there would not be any need for faith, and there would not be a space of time for people to examine their hearts or to come to themselves, and the plan of salvation would be frustrated (Alma 42:5). Delayed judgment allows for voluntary, not compulsory, repentance, and that condition makes it possible for mercy to take effect and not destroy justice (Alma 42:13). Mercy defers justice, but does not rob justice, for there will still be a judgment. In Alma’s view, God’s grace extends to a time or space for repentance to occur.

**Mormon.** It is not until Mormon’s editorial and authorial influences are felt in the text that the word grace appears again in the Book of Mormon. First, in describing the baptisms at the waters of Mormon, it appears that Mormon reflects wistfully upon the righteous successes of Alma the Elder, whose posterity would keep the records that were finally entrusted to Mormon. Looking back on that idyllic moment, Mormon was undoubtedly drawn to the beauties of that place, not only because he shared the name of that place of covenanting, but also because of his great disappointment that his own people had turned from their covenants and “that the day of grace was passed with them, both temporally and

spiritually” (Morm. 2:15). He looked back on that as a time when 204 souls were “filled with the grace of God” (Mosiah 18:16), and whose priests for their recompense received only “the grace of God, that they might wax strong in the spirit, having the knowledge of God, that they might teach with power and authority from God” (Mosiah 18:26), and in “doing these things, they did abound in the grace of God” (Mosiah 27:5).

Commenting on the wicked condition that plagued the people of Nephi during the book of Helaman, Mormon devoutly prayed that God might “grant, in his great fullness, that men might be brought unto repentance and good works, that they might be restored unto grace for grace, according to their works” (Hel. 12:24). Knowing as he did the impending demise of the Nephite civilization, Mormon realized that some will not be brought back unto repentance and that indeed some will ultimately be cast out, not being restored to a reciprocal “grace for grace” relationship with God (Hel. 12:25), who would, as a mother hen, have gathered these people unto himself, but they would not (3 Ne. 10:5–6).

In his own day, four centuries later, Mormon could not find grace operating among his people (Morm. 2:15), who had come out “in open rebellion against their God,” in effect repudiating the covenants and the relationship they could and should have maintained with God. Nevertheless, in each of the three letters that Mormon wrote to his son Moroni, Mormon recognized the grace of God that still extended to him and to his few righteous followers. In the first, having survived several initial catastrophic military disasters, Mormon acknowledged that he was able to speak to the congregation of his beloved brethren only “by the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, and his holy will, because of the gift of his calling” (Moro. 7:2). As his second letter begins, grace is once again on Mormon’s mind, who prays continually to the Father in the name of his Holy Child Jesus that he “through his infinite goodness and grace, will keep you through the endurance of faith on his name to the end” (Moro. 8:3).<sup>5</sup> Mormon’s third letter concludes by exhorting Moroni to be faithful, hopeful, and

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5. Likewise, four late New Testament letters, perhaps also authored in times of distress by Paul and John, begin by recognizing that it is by grace, mercy, and peace that they might yet communicate encouragement to their people, albeit in times of great trouble (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4; 2 John 1:3).

reassured that through God's mercy and longsuffering, the grace of God the Father will "abide with you forever" (Moro. 9:25–26).

**Moroni.** Having received this final encouragement from his father, Moroni goes on to complete the plates of Mormon, adding the books of Ether and his own book of Moroni to the final record. From Moroni's perspective, the importance of men coming to God in order for them to partake of and benefit from God's grace takes prominence: "If men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. . . . 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). In other words, everyone must humble themselves, putting themselves in a relationship with God that recognizes him as the Lord, with themselves as hopeful beneficiaries. If they have faith and trust in this relationship, the Father promises to make their weakness a strength.

No doubt, the invitation to "come unto me" in Ether 12:27 reflects the invitation of Jesus Christ who speaks in the first part of the book of Ether, saying, "Come unto me all ye Gentiles, and I will show unto you the greater things," and "Come unto me, O ye House of Israel, and it shall be made manifest unto you how great things the Father hath laid up for you, from the foundation of the world" (Ether 4:13–14). Moroni now affirms that he has "prayed unto the Lord that he would give unto the Gentiles grace, that they might have charity" (Ether 12:36), in particular that the Gentiles would be charitable in not rejecting the Book of Mormon because of the weaknesses of their writers (Ether 12:35). Moroni recognizes that the Gentiles have been given a "talent" and therefore were in some kind of stewardship relationship with God, who expected them to use that talent in doing the will of the Master. As for Moroni, however, having himself been a faithful servant to the Master, the Lord assures him that "because thou hast seen thy weakness thou shalt be made strong, even unto the sitting down in the place which I have prepared in the mansions of my Father" (Ether 12:37). In other words, Moroni is told that he will successfully enjoy the perfection of his relationship with the Lord.

In much the same way as Mormon had concluded his final epistle to Moroni (by invoking a blessing upon Moroni that the grace of God would abide with him forever [Moro. 9:26]), Moroni concludes his

final editorial insertion in the book of Ether by commending Jesus to his readers, that they might seek a relationship with Christ so that “the grace of God the Father, and also the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, which beareth record of them, may be and abide in you forever” (Ether 12:41).

Reiterating these ideas in his final culminating conclusion, Moroni invites all people to “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him,” and to “love God with all your might, mind and strength,” promising “then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ” (Moro. 10:32). By coming to Christ, denying oneself of all ungodliness, and loving God with all one’s might, a grace relationship is created so that the obligor “may be perfected” in and by his Lord. And on God’s part, sanctification in Christ will be brought about “by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ” (Moro. 10:33). All of this is possible through the reciprocally obliging “covenant of the Father” (Moro. 10:33), bestowing upon the covenant observers the benefit of “the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot” (Moro. 10:33).

### **What Is Required in Return for Grace?**

As King Benjamin teaches of mercy, atonement, service, obedience, wisdom, power, and justice (Mosiah 2:39; 3:26; 4:2; 5:15), he teaches that disciples should serve God and others, even though in so doing they still remained unprofitable servants and unable to repay God for his gifts; the very air we breathe is a gift from God (Mosiah 2:22). Even though no one can come close to repaying God for his offer of forgiveness, resurrection, and eternal life, there is still much that disciples must do. Benjamin does not say that nothing is required in return. The recognition of this obligation to keep God’s commandments and praise and thank him parallels the ancient idea of reciprocity. Benjamin’s teachings thus align with the view of *hesed* and *charis* in the ancient Mediterranean world.

### **Grace and Repentance**

Helaman 12:24 commands men to remember God and his greatness: “And may God grant, in his great fulness, that men might be brought

unto repentance and good works, that they might be restored unto grace for grace, according to their works.” The phrase “that they might” suggests that when God brings people to repentance and good works, then they will be restored unto grace for grace, and the final clause clarifies that grace is restored “according to their works.” While this verse may say that grace is dependent on works, it needs to be taken in context of this chapter, which lists many ways that people are foolish, proud, selfish, and forgetful of God. The message is that those whose works are evil will not attain grace until they remember God and repent. Repentance is necessary to obtain grace; disciples must become true followers of God. One of the best examples of this in the Book of Mormon is the conversion of Alma the Younger, who was one of the vilest of sinners (Mosiah 28:4). But after his conversion, Alma labored throughout the rest of his life to build up the Church by working to help others repent and receive the Holy Ghost (Alma 36:23–24).

The Book of Mormon urges all to repent, which parallels the ancient virtue of loyalty to those who had given charis. Because people cannot be saved in their sins (Alma 11:34, 36, 37), we gain full access to the Savior’s grace and can be saved from spiritual death through repentance. Two brief examples illustrate this point. First, when being taught the gospel by Aaron, Lamoni’s father declared that he was willing to give up all his sins to know God (Alma 22:18). Second, repentant Lamanites who became Ammonites buried their swords rather than shed blood again (Alma 24:12–17). These examples demonstrate how the Book of Mormon teaches that those who truly received the gift of the Atonement reciprocally did all in their power to show their thankfulness, be obedient, and endure to the end.

### **One’s Relationship with God Is of Supreme Importance**

Ether 12:27 teaches, “And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and 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.” I read this as God giving men weakness to cause them to realize that he is in charge and that they must seek a relationship with him. Pride is an enemy;

people must become humble before him; God alone has the power to make individuals and communities strong. Humanity's relationship with God is everything, and that relationship must be founded on humility.

Perhaps Moroni 10:32–33 stresses grace more than any other verse in the Book of Mormon:

Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and 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; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God. And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot.

The “if, then” structure throughout this verse marks the cause and effect: those who seek God with all they have and deny themselves of all ungodliness will be forgiven and will be acceptable because of God's grace. Then comes the amazing promise that they may become perfect in Christ. Those who receive this grace cannot possibly deny the power of God. If they become perfect in Christ, they become sanctified. It is God's power, not theirs, that makes them whole. It is because of their relationship with both God and Christ that they become recipients of grace. One does not achieve this reward quickly or easily. In fact, these final verses from the book of Moroni are mirrored by the very first chapters of that same book (chapters 1–6), which describe several ordinances, actions, and commandments necessary to achieve salvation—some of which must be repeated indefinitely (such as meeting often to “partake of bread and wine, in remembrance of the Lord Jesus [Moro. 6:6]).

### **What We Are Saved From and How We Are Saved**

The authors of the Book of Mormon teach that there are two kinds of death that we must overcome in order to become exalted—physical and spiritual. As I will discuss below, Jesus Christ's gift we call grace



will save all people from physical death. It is free to all people; all will be resurrected (Alma 40:4). The Savior's gift can also save people from spiritual death if they keep God's commandments. Book of Mormon prophets teach that only those who fully engage with the Savior's atoning sacrifice are able to escape spiritual death and receive eternal life and exaltation.

Another aspect of grace in 2 Nephi 10:23–24 (mentioned above) is agency, or free will. “Remember that ye are free to act for yourselves. . . . Reconcile yourselves to the will of God . . . and remember . . . that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved. Wherefore, may God raise you from death by the power of the resurrection, and also from everlasting death by the power of the atonement, that ye may be received into the eternal kingdom of God, that ye may praise him through grace divine.” It is clear in this verse that certain actions are required for individuals to reach God's kingdom. They cannot depend on grace alone, though grace is absolutely essential and necessary. In addition to providing this grace, God requires individuals to choose, to work, to act. Both grace and works are essential to this plan.

**Physical Death.** Physical resurrection is the Savior's free gift given to all who have lived upon the earth. The prophet Alma taught in Alma 11:42–45 that God will provide salvation from physical death for all: “Now, there is a death which is called a temporal death; and the death of Christ shall loose the bands of this temporal death, that all shall be raised from this temporal death (v. 42).” Resurrection is an essential part of God's plan for us to receive a body and is contingent on the Atonement. Even though all people will receive resurrection, it will not be all at the same time. The righteous will be resurrected first (Mosiah 15:22).

**Spiritual Death.** When viewed through the teachings of the Book of Mormon, Paul's discussion in Romans 5 about death, judgment, and grace becomes clearer. Spiritual death is separation from God, or being denied access to God's presence. While God will eventually bring all into his presence to be judged (Alma 42:23), for some, this reunion will only be temporary. To truly overcome spiritual death is to enter God's kingdom and dwell with him. Multiple Book of Mormon authors make it clear that faith in Christ, repentance from sin, baptism, obedience to commandments, and enduring to the end in faith are essential for salvation from spiritual death (especially in 2 Ne. 31 and 3 Ne. 11). The most

important aspect of grace in regards to salvation—that of being reconciled unto God or released from spiritual death—occurs through keeping one’s sacred covenants with the Lord. I see this as reciprocal grace.

Some dissidents within the Book of Mormon argued that salvation required absolutely no individual effort and were characterized as teaching popular but false doctrines. The idea that all will enter the kingdom of God whether or not they have repented is condemned in the Book of Mormon through the dramatic silencing of these dissenters. They substituted their system of free grace for the grace offered by the Savior.<sup>6</sup> The dissenter Nehor taught the Nephites a sort of salvation by grace that was unconditional. This doctrine became popular among the people and had to be condemned by the prophets:

He [Nehor] had gone about among the people, preaching to them that which he termed to be the word of God, bearing down against the church; declaring unto the people that every priest and teacher ought to become popular; and they ought not to labor with their hands, but that they ought to be supported by the people. And he also testified unto the people that all mankind should be saved at the last day, and that they need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice; for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life. And it came to pass that he did teach these things so much that many did believe on his words, even so many that they began to support him and give him money. (Alma 1:3–5)

In my reading of this text, Nehor rejected the need for the transformative power of the Atonement, since I believe that he promoted an easy and convenient form of grace in which “all mankind should be saved at the last day.”<sup>7</sup> The Book of Mormon emphatically teaches that this particular interpretation of grace is a false doctrine (Alma 1:14–16). It

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6. John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 2008), 112. Welch does an excellent job analyzing the critical distinctions among the dissenter Sherem, Nehor, and Korihor. Only Korihor is given the label of antichrist. The classical Greek roots of *anti-* and *Christ* refer to someone “who takes the place of the anointed one”—not someone who is the opposite of the anointed one.

7. Welch, *Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, 207.

hindered many Nephites who followed Nehor and others of his order from truly repenting of their sins.

In an additional example, Korihor drew upon his followers' desire for control and self-righteousness, as he argued that one should carve out success through one's own intellect, brawn, and skills. Under this philosophy, those who are independently strong will naturally progress without any help from the Savior (see Alma 30:16–17).<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, according to Korihor's way of thinking, covenants and grace are not needed. As I have highlighted above, Book of Mormon prophets consistently taught that God required dependence on him alone for salvation.

### **Grace Can Be Lost**

Some who once were righteous fell away and lost the grace that they had received. Even the righteous brother of Jared was warned by the Lord that the spirit would not always strive with him if he continued to forget to pray (Ether 2:15). Throughout the Book of Mormon, we read about dissenters among the Nephites who eventually left the church, refused to repent, and continued to live sinful lives in a state of apostasy, often defecting to the Lamanites. Unless the power of the preaching of the word touched their hearts, as with Aminadab and others mentioned in Helaman chapter 5, dissenters such as Amlici and Amalickiah usually led difficult lives filled with contention, warfare, and often an early death. Nephi told us that the spirit ceased to strive with the Jerusalemites because they rejected the prophets (1 Ne. 7:14). Both the Nephites and the Lamanites eventually rejected the Savior (2 Ne. 26:11; Morm. 5:16) and destroyed each other in combat with merciless slaughter (Morm. 4:5); their whole societies lost grace. Mormon reports that “the day of grace was passed with them” (Morm. 2:15). I will treat this concept of grace “passing away” from individuals more fully in chapter 11.

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8. I note great insights on this topic from Camille Fronk Olson's devotional “What's So Amazing about Grace?” November 10, 2009, at BYU–Hawaii, available online at <http://devotional.byuh.edu/node/386>

## **The Book of Mormon's Contribution**

Most of all, the Book of Mormon teaches that grace and salvation are available only through coming to Christ, following him, and enduring to the end. This point of enduring to the end is taught in nine Book of Mormon verses. For example, the prophet Amaleki exhorts his brethren, “Yea, come unto him, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him, and continue in fasting and praying, and endure to the end; and as the Lord liveth ye will be saved” (Omni 1:26). The Savior’s personal teaching included, “Behold, I am the law, and the light. Look unto me, and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life” (3 Ne. 15:9). This teaching is found only rarely in the New Testament: “But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matt. 24:13; Mark 13:13). Where Paul seems to stress accepting grace, the Book of Mormon more often emphasizes the need for continuing in grace as a lifelong endeavor. This conceptualization of grace in the Book of Mormon resonates strongly with the ancient concept of *charis* that I set forth above: that of reciprocal and obligatory gift-giving. Thus, from a religious perspective rooted in the ancient world (and amply reflected in the Book of Mormon), grace is a reciprocal offering from God that obliges the receiver to act in order to ensure the formation of a saving relationship with God.

## *Chapter Ten*

# **Grace in the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price**

**I**N THE DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS AND PEARL OF GREAT Price, the word *grace* is used in the standard English meanings of the word, including beneficence, favor, kindness, a privilege granted from a person in power, and beneficent power itself. Certain verses in these books of scripture also clearly associate grace with an expectation of obedience and thankfulness of those who receive God’s gift of grace. The word *charis* also encompasses all these meanings, and our study of the uses of grace in the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price is improved by remembering the ancient meaning of *charis* as a reciprocal covenant. In these books, grace helps disciples progress, is the foundation of Christian communities, leads to perfection, is an essential aspect of Christ’s Atonement, characterizes the Savior, and makes ordinances effective.

### **Grace Assists Disciples to Progress**

Some passages using the term *grace* in the Doctrine and Covenants teach that we must first be humble. As we humble ourselves, we enter and keep covenants and progress in the gospel through the Savior’s Atonement. We are reminded by the Savior that we are little children and that we need to “grow in grace and in the knowledge of truth” (D&C 50:40). For this reason we must look to the Savior. In Doctrine and Covenants 93, we read that John bore record of Christ:

And I, John, bear record that I beheld his glory, as the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, even the Spirit of truth, which came and dwelt in the flesh, and dwelt among us. And I, John, saw that he received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace; And he received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness; And thus he was called the Son of God, because he received not of the fulness at the first. . . . And I, John, bear record that he received a fulness of the glory of the Father; And he received all power, both in heaven and on earth, and the glory of the Father was with him, for he dwelt in him. (D&C 93:11–17)

The Savior became “full of grace and truth,” echoing John 1:14, but he did not have this fulness at first. Latter-day Saints believe that he “received grace for grace,”<sup>1</sup> and “continued from grace to grace” as he was obedient and learned how to apply the power of grace.<sup>2</sup> “Grace refers to the gifts and power of God by which we can be brought to perfection. To come to a fulness by moving from grace to grace means that as we obey the commandments, the Father gives us more and more power until we receive a fulness of power.”<sup>3</sup> Lorenzo Snow explains, “When Jesus lay in

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1. Suggesting that “grace for grace” means that Jesus responded to the Father’s grace with his own, see Stephen E. Robinson and H. Dean Garrett, *A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004), 3:182–83. They also note, “It is critically important to remember that the reciprocal nature of ‘grace for grace’ begins with the grace of God (see Mosiah 2:23–24) and not with the merit of the individual (see Alma 22:14), and it continues only as long as we respond graciously. The process is not one of merit and reward so much as one of gift and grateful response. As long as we respond to the gifts of God with graciousness of our own, with devoted obedience to God and loving service to others, he will continue to stay ahead of us, to give us additional gracious gifts, until we eventually receive all things (v. 20; see also Mosiah 2:21–25). This should not be understood as ‘earning’ grace (an impossibility), for in every case God’s blessings are greater than our performance actually deserves, and we remain indebted to him for his gracious gifts to us (see Mosiah 2:24). There is a quid pro quo of sorts, but it is one in which God always leaves us in his debt.”

2. Hyrum Andrus, *Doctrinal Themes of the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 35.

3. “Section 93 ‘Truth Is Knowledge of Things . . .,’” in *Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day

the manger, a helpless infant, He knew not that He was the Son of God, and that formerly He created the earth. When the edict of Herod was issued, He knew nothing of it; He had not power to save Himself; and His father and mother had to take Him and fly into Egypt to preserve Him from the effects of that edict. Well, He grew up to manhood, and during His progress it was revealed unto Him who He was, and for what purpose He was in the world. The glory and power He possessed before He came into the world was made known unto Him.”<sup>4</sup> Two LDS scholars expound that Jesus was fully God before birth, but in becoming human he had to learn as mortals do: “He was, by the will and permission of the Father, fully and completely God. However, when he condescended to lay his divine status aside and become incarnated as a human being, he experienced life as all other humans do. The phrase ‘at first’ refers here not to the beginning of time in the premortal state but rather to the beginning of Jesus’ mortal life.”<sup>5</sup>

The example of how Jesus gained his grace and power to be glorified encourages disciples to follow him in obedience. Doctrine and Covenants 93 continues, “For if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father; therefore, I say unto you, you shall receive grace for grace” (D&C 93:20). Thus disciples can also grow from grace to grace. Latter-day Saints come to Christ through faith, then repentance and baptism, receiving the Holy Ghost, making covenants in the temple, and enduring to the end. Each of these steps is a commitment that leads from grace to grace. Latter-day Saints believe that all people “possess seeds of divinity” and are invited to “cultivate their eternal potential by the grace of God, through the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>6</sup> The goal to become like Christ shapes how Latter-day Saints see their life on earth and after this life.

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Saints, 2001), 217–22, available online at <https://www.lds.org/manual/doctrine-and-covenants-student-manual/section-90-100/section-93-truth-is-knowledge-of-things--?lang=eng>.

4. Lorenzo Snow, in Conference Report, April 1901, 3, quoted in “Section 93 ‘Truth Is Knowledge of Things . . .’”

5. Robinson and Garrett, *Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants*, 3:181.

6. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Becoming Like God,” <https://www.lds.org/topics/becoming-like-god?lang=eng>.

People stop progressing, or fail to progress at all, when they stop accepting further grace. Doctrine and Covenants 88 teaches that all will receive the degree of light which they can accept. The Lord stated that “they who remain shall also be quickened, nevertheless, they shall return again to their own place, to enjoy that which they are willing to receive, because they were not willing to enjoy that which they might have received. For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receiveth not the gift? Behold, he rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift” (D&C 88:32–33).<sup>7</sup> The ancient notion that thankfulness is required in a covenant relationship is inherent throughout this passage. This use of grace shows that obedience, continued effort, and thanksgiving are mandatory for our progression.

### **Grace, or Covenantal Relationships, Allows Disciples to Develop Christlike Communities**

Joseph Smith used the ancient reciprocal meaning of grace perfectly in his instructions to the teacher who welcomes people as they enter the temple as described in Doctrine and Covenants 88:133. Here grace is associated with covenant, fellowship, steadfastness, love, obedience, and thanksgiving, all in a setting of worship: “Art thou a brother or brethren? I salute you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in token or remembrance of the everlasting covenant, in which covenant I receive you to fellowship, in a determination that is fixed, immovable, and unchangeable, to be your friend and brother through the grace of God in the bonds of love, to walk in all the commandments of God blameless in thanksgiving, forever and ever Amen.” Thus we are able to become friends, brothers, and sisters through grace by making and keeping covenants. Learning to work together as communities instructs us as we practice patience, tolerance, empathy, forgiveness, and appreciation.

In the last days, we read that those who remain after plagues and destruction will all know the Lord and “shall be filled with the

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7. For a discussion about grace in this passage see Blake T. Ostler, “The Development of the Mormon Concept of Grace,” *Dialogue* 24 (Spring 1991): 71.



knowledge of the Lord, and shall see eye to eye, and shall lift up their voice” and sing, “The Lord hath redeemed his people, Israel, according to the election of grace, which was brought to pass by the faith and covenant of their fathers” (D&C 84:96–99). This phrase echoes Romans 11:5. The election of being in Zion in the last days comes through grace. This is a reminder that Jesus’ grace is what saves, and Zion will sing of his mercy and not their own deeds. The “faith and covenant of their fathers” evokes the covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The future community of Saints will have learned to be a holy community only through Jesus’ grace.<sup>8</sup> For Latter-day Saints, “election” also evokes having one’s calling and election made sure. This election occurs after one has endured through many years of obedience to God’s commandments and fulfilled one’s covenants.<sup>9</sup>

### Covenants of Grace Lead to Perfection

Throughout the Doctrine and Covenants, salvation depends upon making and keeping covenants, beginning with baptism, and “justification [comes] through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (D&C 20: 30, 73). Only by obedience to these covenants of grace can people dwell with God. Noah is an example of one who was permitted to walk with God. He “hearkened unto the Lord,” obeyed God’s command to preach repentance and baptism, accepted ordination, and called on the Lord for help. Noah “found grace in the eyes of the Lord” because he was “a just man, and perfect in his generation.” He “walked with God” (Moses 8:13–27). Interestingly, the word *teleios* (meaning finished, perfected, mature) in ancient Greek sometimes implies that someone had made a covenant that allowed him or her to “walk with God” (Gen. 6:9, compare Moses 8:27). Noah achieved fullness, or *teleios*, through God’s grace and his own obedience.

Doctrine and Covenants 76:94 emphasizes that those who attain Christ’s presence have received his “fulness.” These are the people who

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8. Robinson and Garrett, *Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants*, 3:61.

9. See the discussion at Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson, *Studies in Scripture*, vol. 1: *The Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 318–19.

attain the glory of the celestial kingdom. They will become like him: they “dwell in his presence . . . and they see as they are seen, and know as they are known, having received of his fulness and of his grace.”

### **Grace Is an Essential Part of the Atonement of Christ**

The term *grace* is used to explain the power of the Atonement to save people from their sins and imperfections, as long as they repent. The Savior’s grace will be sufficient to grant the worthy eternal life: “the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; for my grace is sufficient for you” (D&C 17:8). Similarly, Doctrine and Covenants 18:31 says the Lord’s grace is sufficient for the Twelve Apostles as long as they “walk uprightly and sin not.” Those who do not live up to their obligations through repentance and obedience must suffer as Christ did for their sins (D&C 19:16–17) and will not therefore receive the full blessings of his Atonement.

The Atonement’s functions of justification and sanctification occur only through grace. Through keeping obligatory, reciprocal covenants as they love and serve God with all their might, minds, and strength, people can be justified and sanctified through grace (D&C 20:29–32). This section also makes clear that people can fall from grace by disobedience, and even those who have been sanctified must watch themselves carefully to avoid sin. Partaking of God’s grace is not a one-time event, but is one that requires constant obedience. After people have covenanted, obeyed, and endured, the Savior’s atoning gift of grace is sufficient and can transform them to reach their divine potential. This is a priceless gift.

It is through the enabling power of the Atonement that those who teach will be attended by God’s favor: “Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you” (D&C 88:78). All good things come from God, and all good works are made possible because of God’s gift of grace.

### **Grace Is a Characteristic of the Father and the Son**

The Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price both repeatedly describe grace as a godly characteristic, often associated with truth, justice, and mercy (for example, D&C 84:102; 93:11; Moses 1:6, 32; 5:7;

6:52; 7:11). Phrases such as “Christ is full of grace and truth” are used to show that Christ has reached a fullness of power and authority, just as already noted in the Book of Mormon. He is able and ready to share that grace with all of his children who will accept it. Many passages describe the Son and the Father in terms of their generous nature in granting the gift of grace (such as D&C 109:10). The Savior is merciful and gracious especially to those who fear and serve him (D&C 109:53). Just as he is merciful to disciples, the grace of God obligates them through reciprocity to be gracious, merciful, and kind to those who repent (D&C 76:5).

### **Grace Plays a Role in Ordinances**

The word *grace* is used in association with covenantal ordinances given through God’s favor in the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price. For example, Oliver Cowdery was ordained by the “grace of Jesus” (D&C 20:4). Warren A. Cowdery was offered grace and a place in the mansions of heaven if he would be faithful as a presiding high priest (D&C 106). Joseph Smith was called to be a prophet, seer, and translator only through the “will and grace of God” (D&C 21:1). Other church officers accepted positions according to the “grace of God bestowed on them” (D&C 102:4). In the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, Joseph Smith called on the Lord’s grace in asking him to accept their solemn assembly, and he prayed that the Lord assist his servants and his people with grace to do his will in connection with the temple (D&C 109:10, 44). We have hope for a glorious first resurrection, a priesthood ordinance, through the grace (favor and power) of the Father and Son (D&C 138:14). In ancient scripture, Enoch is given a right to Christ’s throne not because of himself, but through the grace and power of Christ (Moses 7:59). Given through God’s favor and power, these ordinances are connected with the Atonement and salvation.

### **Conclusion**

Grace as used in the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price has a wide range of meanings including favor, power, thanks, and

reciprocity, similar to and including the ancient reciprocal connotations of charis. For example, it means simple favor in D&C 124:9, where the Lord promises Joseph Smith to find grace (favor) in the eyes of many Gentiles. But the word also has connotations of reciprocal covenants and the Lord's power and authority. Nowhere in these scriptures does the word grace indicate something that comes as a free gift with little effort on our part. Joseph Smith properly restored the full meaning of grace through these scriptures of the restoration.

## **Grace in the Writings of LDS Leaders and Scholars**

**F**OR LEADERS, SCHOLARS, AND MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, grace is generally understood as a necessary part of salvation and is accompanied by faith, repentance, obedience, covenants, and enduring. The possibility of salvation comes as a result of Christ's Atonement, and leaders teach that grace is a merciful gift of God. Like the scriptures of the Restoration, leaders have emphasized the assisting, empowering, and finalizing nature of grace through covenants that help us to gain full access to the Atonement and to reach our divine potential. While it would be impossible to give a full history of LDS thought on grace in this work, I will point out several key sermons and studies. My goal is to show that LDS thought regarding grace resonates in many ways with the ancient practice of charis.

### **Relying on Both God's Gifts and Our Own Actions**

The knowledge that people must rely on God's mercy while striving to make and keep covenants dates to the early days of the Church. Joseph Smith linked grace with ordinances that enabled individuals "to perform the great and responsible duties which rest upon you."<sup>1</sup> He

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1. Joseph Smith to the Twelve, 15 December 1840, published in *Times and Seasons*, 1 January 1841, 258.

commented on the common contradictory and extreme notions about grace in his time:

Here is the doctrin of Election that the world have quarreled so much about, but they do not know any thing about it, The doctrin that the Prysbyterian & Methodist have quarreled so much about once in grace always in grace, or falling away from grace I will say a word about, they are both wrong, truth takes a road between them both. for while the Presbyterian says once in grace you cannot fall the Methodist says you can have grace to day, fall from it to morrow, next day have grace again & so follow it, but the doctrin of the scriptures & the spirit of Elijah would show them both fals[e] & take a road between them both for according to the scriptures if a man has receive the good word of God & tasted of the powers of the world to come if they shall fall away it is impossible to renew them again, seeing they have Crucified the son of God afresh & put him to an open frame shame, so their is a possibility of falling away you could not be renewed again, & the power of Elijah Cannot seal against this sin, for this is a reserve made in the seals & power of the priesthood.<sup>2</sup>

Joseph confirms the possibility of falling away and thus rejects irresistible grace—a type of grace that saves individuals regardless of their subsequent actions. What Joseph refers to as “falling away” is more than sin or leaving the church; it is a rejection of what a person has “tasted of the powers of the world to come.” Joseph knew from the Book of Mormon that the only unpardonable sin is to deny the Holy Ghost (Alma 39:6; Jacob 7:19). In any other case, repentance allows a person to return to full fellowship with the Saints, as happened with W. W. Phelps.<sup>3</sup> Thus Joseph’s “road between” the doctrines of other churches was rejecting irresistible grace but putting a price (repentance) on

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2. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Orem, Utah: Grandin, 1991), 330. Joseph also noted, “There are two sins agains[t] which this power does not secure or prevail they are “The sin against the Holy Ghost” And “shedding of innocent Blood” which is equivelant to “crucifying the Son of God afresh & putting him to an open shame. Those who do these it is impossible to renew unto repentance for they are delivered to the buffettings of satan untill the day of redemptions.” Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 335.

3. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 4:162–64 (hereafter cited as *History of the Church*).

coming back into a state of grace. True repentance did not lead to having grace one day and not the next, but rather implied a commitment to be steadfast in keeping the commandments of God, much like the ancient notion of *charis*.

This articulation of a Latter-day Saint position on grace is not extreme like the contemporary “free grace” theological movement referred to earlier. This “middle road” of grace taught by the Prophet Joseph is one in which the grace we receive is reinforced through keeping Jesus’ commandments and making covenants. Joseph stressed enduring to the end to enjoy the full benefits of the Savior’s gift of grace (as revealed in D&C 14:7 and 18:22; see chapter 12). He lived this middle road himself as he did his best to keep the commandments: “I only add, that I do not, nor never have, pretended to be any other than a man ‘subject to passion,’ and liable, without the assisting grace of the Savior, to deviate from that perfect path in which all men are commanded to walk.”<sup>4</sup> Joseph was called by God to restore the essential ordinances and keys that make it possible for people to gain full access to Christ’s grace. Joseph set the Church apart from the view of grace taught by his Protestant contemporaries and emphasized that “being born again comes by the Spirit of God through Ordinances.”<sup>5</sup> Joseph always explained how the keeping of our covenants empowers us to fully receive the Savior’s Atonement through reciprocity.

Brigham Young also emphasized the Savior’s characteristic of mercy coupled with doing all we can to repent in order to expunge all desire to sin: “It requires all the atonement of Christ, the mercy of the Father, the pity of angels and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to be with us always, and then to do the very best we possibly can, to get rid of this sin within us, so that we may escape from this world into the celestial kingdom.”<sup>6</sup> Brigham further taught that “every person who does not

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4. Joseph Smith Jr. to Brother O. Cowdery, *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (December 1834): 40.

5. “History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842],” addenda, p. 13, on Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842?p=548>.

6. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 11:301.

sin away the day of grace, and become an angel to the Devil, will be brought forth to inherit a kingdom of glory” by degrees.<sup>7</sup> He rightly emphasized the importance of mercy, works, working out one’s salvation, and enduring faithfully to the end of one’s life.<sup>8</sup>

## Understanding the Two Parts of Salvation

A number of prophets and apostles today have explained that there are two parts to the concept of salvation—physical and spiritual. Physical salvation means that the immortal spirit will be reunited with the body and will live forever. This gracious gift of resurrection is given to all people, and all will be saved from physical death because Christ died for us and was resurrected. Spiritual salvation means being reunited with God through accepting the grace of Christ’s Atonement, repentance, and making covenants. The gift of overcoming spiritual death (separation from God) will be given only to those who fully participate in covenantal grace, similar to the ancient understanding of *charis*. Only in the celestial kingdom with God is further progression, which Latter-day Saints call exaltation, possible. Thus when Brigham Young taught that we must embrace “all” the Atonement of Christ, he meant accepting the Atonement and overcoming both physical *and* spiritual death. The word *atonement* is rarely used in most translations of the New Testament, but is often used in the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants and clarifies that Christ’s sacrifice atones for both physical and spiritual deaths.

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7. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 288.

8. David Paulsen and Cory Walker explain that “President Young’s view implies that this framing of the question [whether grace is obtained by works or grace] is fundamentally mistaken since it presupposes that full salvation ultimately depends on either human or divine endeavor, when in fact it ultimately requires both. Both God’s saving work and our own diligent striving are essential for us to receive God’s highest blessings, even as our good works are themselves made possible by grace.” David L. Paulsen and Cory G. Walker, “Work, Worship, and Grace,” *FARMS Review* 18, no. 2 (2006): 101–2 (review of *The Mormon Culture of Salvation* by Douglas J. Davies).



## Satisfying Justice and Mercy

Bruce R. McConkie insightfully explains that “grace is granted to men proportionately as they conform to the standards of personal righteousness that are part of the gospel plan.”<sup>9</sup> He noted the spiritual mistake that “we may be born again simply by confessing the Lord Jesus with our lips while we continue to live in our sins.”<sup>10</sup> Elder McConkie affirms that not living according to Christ’s commandments will result in spiritual death. He states that a person “must keep the commandments; he must work the works of righteousness; he must work out his salvation with fear and trembling before the Lord; he must have faith like the ancients—the faith that brings with it gifts and signs and miracles.”<sup>11</sup>

Elder McConkie taught that some modern teachings of free and easy grace are incorrect because they do not help mankind repent. He explains that “anytime men can devise a system of worship that will let them continue to live after the manner of the world, to live in their carnal and fallen state, and at the same time one which will satisfy their innate and instinctive desires to worship, such, to them is a marvelous achievement.”<sup>12</sup> He also points out that certain modern notions of grace are similar to Lucifer’s plan to save all by destroying our agency: these notions are false, have no salvation in them, and are not of God.<sup>13</sup> The grace of Christ’s Atonement is a blessing that a disciple can never repay, but he or she must honor and obey the giver, as was the practice in the ancient spirit of charis. While Elder McConkie emphasizes the necessity of an individual’s righteous actions for receiving God’s grace, Jeffrey R. Holland reminds us that “neither the unconditional nor the conditional

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9. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 339.

10. Bruce R. McConkie, “What Think Ye of Salvation by Grace?” devotional address, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 10 January 1984, 2, available online at [https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/bruce-r-mcconkie\\_think-ye-salvation-grace/](https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/bruce-r-mcconkie_think-ye-salvation-grace/).

11. McConkie, “What Think Ye of Salvation by Grace?” 6.

12. McConkie, “What Think Ye of Salvation by Grace?” 4.

13. McConkie, “What Think Ye of Salvation by Grace?” 7.

blessings of the atonement are available except through the grace of Christ.”<sup>14</sup>

Boyd K. Packer taught that grace is the divine means of balancing justice and mercy. President Packer’s talk *The Mediator*, which was later used in a popular seminary video, has often been utilized to teach youth how grace works. Justice and mercy must be balanced when a creditor and a debtor disagreed about what was fair when the debtor could not pay his debt according to the contract they previously signed. The only way to balance justice and mercy was through a benefactor who is symbolic of Jesus Christ, who paid the debt which satisfied the creditor (justice) and provided mercy to the debtor. However, the benefactor later set terms for the debtor:

“You will pay the debt to me and I will set the terms. It will not be easy, but it will be possible. I will provide a way. You need not go to prison.” And so it was that the creditor was paid in full. He had been justly dealt with. No contract had been broken. The debtor, in turn, had been extended mercy. Both laws stood fulfilled. Because there was a mediator, justice had claimed its full share, and mercy was fully satisfied. Each of us lives on a kind of spiritual credit. One day the account will be closed, a settlement demanded. However casually we may view it now, when that day comes and the foreclosure is imminent, we will look around in restless agony for someone, anyone, to help us. And, by eternal law, mercy cannot be extended save there be one who is both willing and able to assume our debt and pay the price and arrange the terms for our redemption. Unless there is a mediator, unless we have a friend, the full weight of justice untempered, unsympathetic, must, positively must fall on us. The full recompense for every transgression, however minor or however deep, will be exacted from us to the uttermost farthing. But know this: Truth, glorious truth, proclaims there is such a Mediator. “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” (1 Tim. 2:5.) . . . The extension of mercy will not be automatic. It will be through covenant with Him. It will be on His terms, His generous terms, which include, as an absolute essential, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins.<sup>15</sup>

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14. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign* 38 (March 2008): 36.

15. Boyd K. Packer, “The Mediator,” *Ensign* 7 (May 1977): 80.

Although an economic metaphor of a creditor and a debtor may not be the perfect vehicle for discussing spiritual doctrines such as Christ's Atonement, the example does show how the mediator acted with mercy but satisfied justice in making full recompense for every debt (transgression). In this way justice and mercy, using another economic metaphor, are just different sides of the same coin of Christ's charis gift that obligates the debtor and gives mercy.

Teaching that disciples must repent and obey in order to fully receive the Savior's grace, Ezra Taft Benson said, "Yes, Christ changes men, and changed men can change the world. Men changed for Christ will be captained by Christ. . . . Finally, men captained by Christ will be consumed in Christ."<sup>16</sup> Gordon B. Hinckley urged Latter-day Saints to "do the best that you can. That's all we ask of you. Do the best that you can. The Lord doesn't expect you to do more than that."<sup>17</sup> It was understood in the ancient Greek cultural milieu that one in a reciprocal charis relationship would do one's best.

James E. Faust addressed the scriptural terminology of growing in grace: "We are to grow in grace. . . . It is a charming trait or accomplishment, a pleasing graceful appearance. Charm is attractiveness which comes from a feeling of personal dignity, an inner beauty that comes from a feeling of self-worth."<sup>18</sup> That self-worth comes from putting forth one's best effort. Elsewhere, he remarked that "many people think they need only confess that Jesus is the Christ and then they are saved by grace alone. We cannot be saved by grace alone, 'for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.'"<sup>19</sup>

Dallin H. Oaks notes that Christ's disciples must both depend upon God's mercy and keep God's commandments. In addressing the question sometimes raised by our Christian friends as to whether or not we

16. Ezra Taft Benson, "Born of God," *Ensign* 15 (November 1985): 5–6, quoted in Millet, *What Happened to the Cross*, 119.

17. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Church News*, August 31, 2002, 3; quoted in Millet, *What Happened to the Cross*, 142.

18. James E. Faust, "The Virtues of Righteous Daughters of God," *Ensign* 33 (May 2003): 110.

19. James E. Faust, "The Atonement: Our Greatest Hope," *Ensign* 31 (November 2001): 18. For a more complete discussion of interpreting the phrase "it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do" (2 Ne. 25:23), see chapter 9.

have been “saved,” “according to the various meanings we attach to the terms *saved* or *salvation*, our answer will be either ‘yes’ or ‘yes, but with conditions.’”<sup>20</sup> In order to become reconciled to God (2 Ne. 25:23) we must repent, be baptized, keep the commandments and endure to the end. Certainly, humanity “unquestionably has impressive powers and can bring to pass great things by tireless efforts and indomitable will. But after all our obedience and good works, we cannot be saved from the effect of our sins without the grace extended by the atonement of Jesus Christ.”<sup>21</sup>

Sheri L. Dew<sup>22</sup> has emphasized the enabling power of grace to assist individuals in successfully navigating the challenges of life. She emphasized that

the Savior empowers us with His grace not because we’ve earned it, but because He loves us perfectly. . . . The Savior has “all power” in heaven and on earth (see Matt. 28:18; Mosiah 4:9; D&C 93:17). He has the power to cleanse, forgive, and redeem us; power to heal us of weakness, illness and heartache; power to conquer Satan and overcome the flesh; power to work miracles; power to inspire and strengthen us; power to deliver us from circumstances we can’t escape ourselves; and power over death. When the Apostle Paul said, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philip. 4:13), he was describing grace.<sup>23</sup>

The result of receiving the full benefits of Christ’s enabling charis gift will enable disciples to endure hardships, have charity for others, keep the commandments, follow Christ, and help them return to live with God.

There is a danger in focusing too much on our own acts of righteousness in trying to fully embrace God’s gift of grace. Most recently, in the 2015 April General Conference, Dieter F. Uchtdorf stressed that we are not able to “earn our way into heaven.” Certainly “salvation cannot be bought with the currency of obedience . . . [or] ‘because’ of all that we

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20. Dallin H. Oaks, “Have You Been Saved?” *Ensign* 28 (May 1998): 55.

21. Dallin H. Oaks, “What Think Ye of Christ?” *Ensign* 18 (November 1988): 67.

22. Sheri Dew was formerly a counselor in the general presidency of the Relief Society (1997–2002).

23. Sheri L. Dew, “Sweet Above All That Is Sweet,” *BYU Magazine* (Fall 2014): 28–29.

can do.”<sup>24</sup> President Uchtdorf seems here to be addressing members who have made covenants but do not seem to appreciate, understand, or be thankful for Christ’s vertical charis which can never be earned nor repaid.

While the LDS leaders highlighted above were not scholars of Greco-Roman texts, their teachings resonate in different ways with the classical obligatory and reciprocal notion of charis discussed in previous chapters.

### LDS Scholars on the Role of Grace

Several LDS scholars have emphasized the responsibility of individuals to have faith and to make and keep covenants. Robert Millet has studied and written extensively on grace, admonishing Latter-day Saints to fully appreciate Christ’s gift and recognize that people cannot save themselves. He writes that hope empowers us to “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”<sup>25</sup> Reaching the throne of grace represents coming to Christ in all the ways discussed earlier. Millet writes, “The grace of God is not just that final divine boost into celestial glory that a gracious Father and benevolent Savior provide at the time of judgment. We will, to be sure, require all the help we can get in order to be prepared to go where God and angels are and to feel comfortable there. As we fully accept the atonement, we prepare ourselves for the great judgment bar of God mentioned throughout the scriptures.” Millet continues that “through faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ and repentance of their sins, [individuals] receive strength and assistance to do good works that they otherwise would not be able to maintain if left to their own means.” Thus, by fully accepting the grace of Christ’s Atonement through faith and repentance, we receive “an enabling power that allows men and women to lay hold on eternal life and exaltation.”<sup>26</sup>

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24. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “The Gift of Grace,” *Ensign* 45 (May 2015): 108, 109, 110.

25. Millet, *Grace Works*, 141; see Millet’s appositive quotation of Hebrews 4:6 and Moses 7:59 to support his statement.

26. LDS Bible Dictionary, 697. See also Millet, *What Happened to the Cross*, 119–20; MacArthur, *Faith Works*, 32.

The necessity of such a reciprocal relationship is central to the concept of charis.

Millet warns that Latter-day Saints should be cautious about adopting the ways that people of other Christian denominations use the word grace. Some have “an exaggerated stress upon the word grace” to the neglect of baptism and repentance. Some discount the need for a church at all, in their focus on the individual. Millet encourages Latter-day Saints to be humble, to confess, to rely on the Lord, and to realize that they are still required to serve while acknowledging that their service will never be enough to save them.<sup>27</sup>

Hugh Nibley underscored the pressing need to gain the gift of eternal life and exaltation through the fullness of Christ’s grace.<sup>28</sup> Nibley, who knew ancient Greek well, rightly linked the two divine gifts, charis and charity: “If we don’t have them, we have nothing; and if we do have them, we have nothing to worry about, and we will not concern ourselves with these other things [money, fame, power, etc.]. What is a fortune, or even a few more years of life, or a good harvest compared with the awareness of the love and power of the giver? If the giver loves me, I can leave the selection of gifts up to him.”<sup>29</sup> The gift that the eternal giver has promised us is exaltation, or living with God and sharing all that he has.

Truman Madsen emphasized that the LDS position “is not a convenient eclecticism, but a repossession [through the Restoration] of a New Testament understanding that reconciles Paul and James.”<sup>30</sup> As seen earlier, an understanding of ancient obligatory grace further helps us reconcile Paul’s emphasis on grace with James’s emphases on works.

Other LDS scholars have taken various positions on grace. John Gee pointed out the complexity of the dozens of possible meanings of charis and suggested that the study of charis should be sidelined

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27. Robert L. Millet, “The Perils of Grace,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (2014): 7–19.

28. Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, ed. Don E. Norton, vol. 9 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient research and Mormon Studies, 1989), 123–24.

29. Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, 109.

30. Truman G. Madsen, headnote to Dillenberger, “Grace and Works in Martin Luther and Joseph Smith,” 175.

to avoid polemic scholarship.<sup>31</sup> However, as I have already demonstrated, even some Protestant scholars have been jettisoning traditional notions of easy grace in favor of reciprocal and obligatory ones for the last decade. Certainly Gee hints at some of the arguments in his article entitled “The Grace of Christ” that are further explained and supported in this monograph.<sup>32</sup>

Terryl Givens employed “traditional” Protestant viewpoints in his work *People of Paradox* in order to compare and contrast grace in the restored gospel. In his later work *Wrestling the Angel*, Givens writes, “The simplest meaning of the Pauline word for ‘grace,’ charis, is graciousness, or goodwill, undeserved favor or gift.”<sup>33</sup> Givens is apparently unaware of the reciprocal and obligatory connotations of charis in the ancient world, and he thus assumes that Mormonism cannot traditionally fit in the traditional grace vs. works dichotomy.<sup>34</sup> However, while this dichotomy seems to have influenced the rhetoric of both Protestant Christians and Mormons, it appears unnecessary when one understands the ancient milieu of charis. Understanding what first-century AD authors meant in their ancient context challenges the traditional view of a grace-versus-works dichotomy.

In addition to understanding contemporary discourse about grace, future LDS authors should also be aware of the ancient context of charis. David L. Paulsen and Cory G. Walker, in their article entitled “Work, Worship, and Grace,” quoted LDS Church leaders that might be more acceptable to a Protestant audience to demonstrate that LDS views on grace are not extreme.<sup>35</sup> However, Paulsen and Walker do not discuss the uniqueness of other prophetic and apostolic statements that are less palatable to some traditional Protestant views and that stress the obligations and reciprocity of grace by modern prophets and scripture that align more closely with the ancient reciprocal connotations of charis.

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31. John Gee, “Review of ‘By Grace Are We Saved,’” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 2, no. 1 (1990): 100–106.

32. Gee, “Grace of Christ,” 247–59.

33. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 237.

34. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 236.

35. Paulsen and Walker, “Work, Worship, and Grace,” 102–9, 130–52.

Brad Wilcox gave a devotional comparing Christ's arrangement with us as similar to a mother providing music lessons for her child. "Mom pays the piano teacher. How many know what I am talking about? Because Mom pays the debt in full, she can turn to her child and ask for something. What is it? Practice!"<sup>36</sup> While the analogy is not perfect, nor is necessarily informed by an understanding of ancient charis, it does stress the fact that the Atonement is a gift that cannot be requited, but which also implies obligations. Bruce C. Hafen insightfully pointed out that "others *mistakenly* think our Church is moving toward an understanding of the relationship between grace and works that draws on Protestant teachings." These misconceptions prompted him to give his excellent talk "The Atonement: All for All," which addresses many themes about grace discussed in this work.<sup>37</sup> His entry about grace in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* describes a unique—while moderate—LDS view of grace:

LDS doctrine contains an affirmative sense of interaction between grace and works that is unique not only as to these concepts but also reflects the uniqueness of the restored gospel's view of man's nature, the Fall of Adam, the Atonement, and the process of salvation. At the same time, the LDS view contains features that are similar to basic elements of some other traditions. For example, the LDS insistence that such works as ordinances be performed with proper priesthood authority resembles the Catholic teaching that its sacraments are the requisite channels of grace. Also the LDS emphasis on the indispensability of personal faith and repentance in a direct relationship with God echoes traditional Protestant teachings. The LDS position "is not a convenient eclecticism, but a repossession [through the Restoration] of a New Testament understanding that reconciles Paul and James" (Madsen, p. 175). The Church's emphasis on personal responsibility and the need for self-disciplined obedience may seem to de-emphasize the role of Christ's grace; however, for Latter-day Saints, obedience is but one blade of the scissors. All of LDS theology also reflects the major premise of the Book of Mormon that without grace there is no salvation: "For we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after

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36. Brad Wilcox, "His Grace Is Sufficient," devotional address, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 12 July 2011, available online at <http://speeches.byu.edu/?act=viewitem&id=1966>.

37. Bruce C. Hafen, "The Atonement: All for All," *Ensign* 34 (April 2004): 97.



all we can do” (2 Ne. 25:23). The source of this grace is the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ: “Mercy cometh because of the Atonement” (Alma 42:23).<sup>38</sup>

According to Elder Hafen, the concept of grace in the framework of the restoration balances personal responsibility and obedience with the absolute necessity and mercy of Christ’s Atonement. Much recent academic research concerning the reciprocal nature of charis supports the middle view of grace as taught in the restored gospel.

The restored gospel rightly ignored centuries of speculative philosophy and returned to the original covenantal meanings of grace that were lost during the apostasy. As Blake Ostler says:

Mormonism restores original Christianity in the sense that it returns to a soteriology of divinization through gradual growth from innocence to fully mature humanity, from grace to grace. It returns to a theology of redemption accepted before the notion of original sin, which arose only with the Ambrosiaster mistranslation of the Greek Bible. Mormonism avoids the entire conflict over grace and works because it sees the distinction between them as a false dichotomy. Mormonism does not need to explain how persons can be saved by no act of their own for a sin that was not their own act. It avoids the convoluted debate over how God can justly choose not to save some while choosing others. Further, rather than adopting an arbitrary cut-off between the elect who are saved and the reprobates who are damned, Mormonism adopts a notion of grace accepted in varying degrees. The metaphor of grace as the light offered by God can be re-translated back into Paul’s thought without much straining—so long as Paul’s thought is not overlaid with Augustine and Luther. For both Joseph Smith and Paul, God offered a loving relationship to all persons without any conditions attached. One enters that relationship by having faith in Christ through grace. The relationship is offered through grace because we do not have to—indeed cannot—earn it.<sup>39</sup>

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38. Bruce C. Hafen, “Grace,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 560–63.

39. Ostler, “Development of the Mormon Concept of Grace,” 82–83.

## Reactions to Latter-day Saint Grace

John Dillenberger notes, “In stressing human possibilities, Mormonism brought things into line, not by abandoning the centrality of grace”; . . . it “brought understanding to what had become an untenable problem within evangelicalism: how to reconcile the new power of humanity with the negative inherited views of humanity, without abandoning the necessity of grace.”<sup>40</sup> Douglas J. Davies points out the positive spiritual tension in Mormonism of working out one’s salvation because of its ability to foster spiritual growth.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast, other scholars have recently been quite critical of the LDS Church’s views on grace. In a 2009 New Testament commentary, Robert Harvey and Philip H. Towner wrote that “cults” like the Mormons “mix their strange doctrines with a supposed better understanding of the Bible than that of the historic Reformation churches.”<sup>42</sup> They continue by stating that these “cults tend toward perfectionism, claiming superior holiness over other groups . . . [and] usually offer a means of salvation by works. Denying justification by grace through faith, a cultist will consider grace a reward for faithfully keeping the commandments along with other, usually extra-biblical requirements and conditions.”<sup>43</sup> In rebuttal to Harvey and Towner, it should be pointed out that in sociology, “cult” is just a pejorative term for a new religion.

Others have also criticized The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for its untraditional views on grace. For example, a *Newsweek* journalist mistakenly reported that Mormons “earn their way to godhood by the proper exercise of free will, rather than through the grace of Jesus Christ.”<sup>44</sup> Reverend William Taylor described the Mormon position as a denial that grace has any role in salvation:

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40. John Dillenberger, “Grace and Works in Martin Luther and Joseph Smith,” in *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaean-Christian Parallels*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1978), 179.

41. Douglas J. Davies, *The Mormon Culture of Salvation: Force, Grace, and Glory* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2000), 265.

42. Robert Harvey and Philip H. Towner, *2 Peter and Jude* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 19.

43. Harvey and Towner, *2 Peter and Jude*, 79.

44. Kenneth L. Woodward, “What Mormons Believe,” *Newsweek*, 1 September 1980, 68.

“Mormons deny grace, except as a way of saying that Jesus’ atoning sacrifice won resurrection and immortality for all men, regardless of their worth.” Catholics, he says, in contrast, “emphasize that this ‘new creation’ is something we can never earn; it is God’s gift, given out of love in Grace.”<sup>45</sup>

Harold Bloom, a respected literary critic who has written extensively about the restored gospel, seems to also have accepted an alternative, existentialist view of grace. Bloom refers to Nietzsche, who knew much better as a classicist but in his rejection of the classical Greek tradition he knew so well, as Nietzsche even further distorted the reciprocal concept of grace in the late nineteenth century with the idea of “forgiving ourselves through our own grace.”<sup>46</sup> Admittedly, Nietzsche’s abstract view of grace has captivated some today in postmodern circles. But more importantly for this work and perhaps because of postmodern ideas about grace, Bloom has also expressed a misperception of grace in the restored gospel: “If you have denied original sin and any salvation by grace, and if you have materialized and limited God, then you have placed a particular burden upon the religious capabilities of the human spirit. Sterling McMurrin gently calls this “a liberal doctrine of man”; I would think it might be called something rather more breathtaking. McMurrin also categorizes Mormon theology as “a modern Pelagianism in a Puritan religion,” which is another shrewd understatement.”<sup>47</sup>

Although Bloom has made some significant insights about Joseph Smith and the restored gospel in his work *The American Religion*, he has also perpetuated many mistaken notions about doctrines like grace. Of particular import for this work is his assertion that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints denies any salvation by grace, which is simply not true. In fact, LDS doctrine states just the opposite. Members of the restored Church of Jesus Christ believe, as Joseph Smith stated in his translation, that we are saved *only* through the gift of the Atonement

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45. William Taylor, *A Tale of Two Cities: The Mormons—Catholics* (Pocatello, Idaho: Taylor, 1980), 44, quoted in Ostler, “Concept of Grace in Christian Thought,” 13.

46. Harold Bloom, *The American Religion* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 97.

47. Bloom, *American Religion*, 126.

of Jesus Christ. By means of revelations given through the Prophet Joseph Smith we now are able to understand the reciprocal connotations of grace intended by ancient apostles. Joseph Smith restored the ancient meanings of covenantal obligations implied by biblical writers, supported and confirmed by the hundreds of examples provided above from ancient evidence. Scripture Joseph restored and revelations he received, including the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price, also contain the ancient reciprocal meanings of charis that will be discussed in the subsequent chapters. As we understand the ancient reciprocal and obligatory nuances of grace we are able to understand and better access the full benefits of the gift of the Atonement, become all we can become, and thereby reach our divine potential.

## Conclusion

As demonstrated above, many LDS leaders and scholars teach that the gift of grace implies that we must fulfill our reciprocal obligations by making and keeping sacred covenants which empower us to gain eternal life and exaltation. Yet, while they point out the need for grace and works in exaltation, few have examined the etymology or historical meaning of the word *grace* itself. In fact, when viewed in light of ancient Greco-Roman society, the word charis in the New Testament includes an expectation of works. Still, the aforementioned message is clear that both Christ's gift of grace and our works are needed to help us prepare to meet God. Thus, many LDS leaders and scholars have appropriately described grace as a reciprocal, obligatory gift which helps us spiritually progress in mortality. Spiritual progression will result from a proper understanding and application of Christ's atoning grace, and will capacitate us to receive the greatest gift of God: exaltation.

## **Continuing in Grace by Enduring to the End**

**A**WARENESS OF THE GRECO-ROMAN PRACTICE OF RECIPROCAL charis can inform our understanding of what happens after a person has accepted the grace offered by Christ. Assuming that a person accepting grace is one who has faith in God, who intends to follow in his ways, and who looks to him for help and hope, will that person surely receive eternal life in heaven with God? What happens when the person errs? Whether through weakness or intent, everyone sins, for there was only one sinless person—Jesus. This chapter will show the similarity of charis to the Christian principle of enduring to the end, describe what it means to endure to the end, and show that it is possible to fall from grace.

In ancient times, a proper reciprocal charis relationship was maintained indefinitely. One who received a gift from another was always indebted. Entering into a charis covenant did not fulfill the covenant; the covenant was fulfilled through many years of continuing reciprocity on both sides: upon receiving a gift, the receiver showed thanks, honor, gifts, and service to the giver, and the giver would continue to give favors in return, which required the receiver to continue to show more honor, more gifts, and more service. The relationship was strengthened over time. What happened when a receiver failed to fulfill his obligation? Either the giver could disavow him and cut him off, or the receiver could return to the giver, ask for pardon, and resume

his obligation. A wise giver likely would accept a penitent recipient. A good charis relationship was not a one-way, one-time gift.

Likewise, from this particular vantage point of charis, the grace that Christ offers is not a one-way, one-time gift; it is the beginning of a relationship that is meant to endure and become closer. By maintaining a relationship with Christ, the disciple learns and grows. Disciples may fail, but if they repent, Christ allows them to repent and return to the path.

### More than Simply Accepting Christ

Everyone will receive resurrection and immortal life, but only through enduring to the end can one hope for a fully-formed relationship with God in heaven. I believe that some Christians have come to believe that salvation is simple because of the way they privilege verses such as Ephesians 2:8–9. Here is one example of what I believe is a too-easy view of grace, found in a popular book:

Paul says again: “If by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.” Paul is reasoning in this way: that if I work for a gift or attempt to give money for it, it ceases to be a gift. The only way to get a gift is to take it as a gift.

An old man got up in one of our meetings and said, “I have been forty-two years learning three things.” I pricked up my ears at that; I thought that if I could find out in about three minutes what a man had taken forty-two years to learn, I should like to do it. The first thing he said he had learned was that he could do nothing towards his own salvation. “Well,” said I to myself, “that is worth learning.” The second thing he had found out was that God did not require him to do anything. Well, that was worth finding out too. And the third thing was that the Lord Jesus Christ had done it all, that salvation was finished, and that all he had to do was to take it. Dear friends, let us learn this lesson; let us give up our struggling and striving, and accept salvation at once.<sup>1</sup>

Note that for this author, once a person is saved, God does not require him to do anything, and struggling and striving is pointless. “Works”

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1. D. L. Moody, *Sovereign Grace: Its Source, Its Nature, and Its Effects* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1891), 17.

seem to be interpreted here as negating the actions of a committed disciple, rather than helping disciples to see beyond the rigid requirements of the law of Moses. While I appreciate the joy that Christians (like the old man mentioned above) express, and I agree that we are all absolutely dependent on Christ for salvation, I am concerned that such a view neglects the hard work that is characteristic of true discipleship found in the underlying ancient nuances of charis.

From my perspective, this particular view of grace as a one-time event ignores the principle of enduring to the end, which is clearly taught in the New Testament. Enduring to the end is a struggle, and there is much more to do after one accepts grace. The Savior said that only if his disciples endure to the end shall they be saved (Matt. 10:22; Mark 13:13). He warned about the danger of spiritual shallowness: Poor seedlings “have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word’s sake, immediately they are offended” (Mark 4:17), and not everyone who calls “Lord, Lord,” is saved (Matt. 7:21). Paul encouraged Timothy to be strong in grace and “endure hardness” (2 Tim. 2:1, 3). James writes, “Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” Other verses confirm that enduring in the gospel is essential.

## **The Principles of Enduring to the End in Grace**

Enduring to the end goes beyond simple maintenance of a relationship. It means to improve and continually strengthen one’s knowledge of the Savior and one’s faithfulness by degrees, line upon line. While some have come to read “enduring to the end” as merely to “just hang in there” or “avoid major transgressions,” it clearly means to continue to grow (see 2 Pet. 3:18). It begins with forsaking sin, continually repenting, and being strictly obedient.

Developing Christian attributes is also required. Disciples should act “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:2–3). Moroni 7 and 1 Corinthians 13 both teach the need to develop faith, hope, charity, longsuffering, meekness, and patience. Many other scriptures add to the list of Christlike characteristics.

Participation with other saints is also necessary. Christian disciples should gather together to instruct and edify each other, encouraging good habits such as frequent prayer and gospel study. All are instructed to reach out to others and share the gospel, fulfilling Christ's great commission to preach to all the world (Matt. 28:19–20). The Lamb of God himself summarized those who would be saved: "And blessed are they who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day, for they shall have the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost; and if they endure unto the end they shall be lifted up at the last day, and shall be saved in the everlasting kingdom of the Lamb; and whoso shall publish peace, yea, tidings of great joy, how beautiful upon the mountains shall they be" (1 Ne. 13:37). Seeking to build God's kingdom, especially through missionary work, will enable us to endure to the end and realize those blessings we have been promised through our reciprocal covenants.

Faithful disciples will look to Christ in all things and strive to have the Holy Ghost as their companion. The reward of these inward and outward activities is not just immortality, but eternal life as well: "Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life" (2 Ne. 31:20).

## Falling from Grace

Some Christians believe that a person who has accepted Christ cannot fall from grace. For example, the Westminster Confession of Faith states, "They, whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end and be eternally saved."<sup>2</sup> A statement about the inability to fall from grace by the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant coalition in the United States, reads: "Those whom God has accepted

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2. The Westminster Confession of Faith XVII, section 1; David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, 2d ed. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2004), 65.



in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end.”<sup>3</sup> I use these statements with the caution that they use the word *sanctification*, which is outside the realm of this project.<sup>4</sup> Paul, in teaching converts to trust Christ, tells them they might fall from a relationship of grace: “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4). I believe here he is not telling them that they do not need to worry any more about the law, but only that the law has no power to save them and they should trust only in Christ. In 2 Corinthians 6:1, Paul begs converts to “receive not the grace of God in vain.” Brad Eastman writes that Paul is teaching the importance of working out “the implications of being recipients of God’s grace. Paul even seems to imply that to fail to do so may result in a ‘fall from grace.’ They are to judge themselves to see if they are exhibiting Christian behavior.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, receiving grace in vain must indicate that someone who has received grace may later lose it.

The epistle to the Hebrews tells us that “if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins” (Heb. 10:26), in effect saying that sin negates the initial benefit of accepting grace. Hebrews 12:15 admonishes disciples to “[look] diligently lest any man fail the grace of God.” Peter confirmed that if a person has known the truth and falls into sin, “the latter end is worse with them” than before they knew the truth (2 Pet. 2:20). The Greek word *hamartia* appears frequently in the New Testament translated as “sin,” and it also means “to miss the mark.” Clearly, falling from a relationship of grace is possible.

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3. Southern Baptist Convention, “Basic Beliefs,” <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/basicbeliefs.asp>, under the rubric “God’s Purpose of Grace,” accessed October 5, 2014.

4. I acknowledge that Latter-day Saints also have a form of sanctification from which a person cannot fall, which is called having one’s election made sure. Presumably the prophet Nephi received this blessing, as discussed in Helaman 10. This blessing is rare among Mormons and is not considered a requirement for returning to God.

5. Eastman, *Significance of Grace in the Letters of Paul*, 51–52; see also Judith M. Gundry Volf, *Paul and Perseverance: Staying In and Falling Away* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/Knox, 1990), 280.

## Falling from Grace as Taught in the Book of Mormon

Lehi's vision of the tree of life is quite relevant for our discussion of grace. The tree had "fruit [that] was desirable to make one happy." Lehi tasted the fruit and desired that his family join him, but some did not reach the fruit. Between them and the tree of life were obstacles including a distracting "great and spacious building," dark mists, and a filthy river. Laman and Lemuel did not even move toward the tree; they rebelled with others who were in the tall and spacious building floating on the air of its own pride. Many people fell away into forbidden paths. Some who worked hard to reach the tree and tasted of the fruit became ashamed because of the wicked who were scoffing at them from the building and went away. Those who remained steadfast and ignored the mocking continued to enjoy the fruit (1 Ne. 8).

If we consider the tree and its fruit to represent the grace of God and the blessings of the Atonement, we can see that in this vision, disciples must actively move forward toward grace. Once they have reached the tree, or made covenants through grace, we must remain steadfast and keep our part of the covenants we have made, indefinitely. Of those who taste the fruit, some will qualify for eternal life while others will not. Some keep their covenants for only a short time, and eventually fall away and do not receive the full benefits of the Lord's grace. Lehi's vision stresses that God grants the blessings of exaltation to those who fulfill their duty and remain steadfast, upholding their side of the covenant. They cannot both leave the tree and continue to enjoy the fruit.

Book of Mormon prophets taught that those who have reached the age of accountability (Moro. 8:9–15) and can hold on to the iron rod by making and keeping covenants must work out their own salvation (Morm. 9:27). If they continue to progressively repent and endure to the end, they become like God.

Nephi added that those who keep the commandments as well as endure to the end will be saved in the kingdom of God at the last day. The judgment will occur at a future time (1 Ne. 22:31). Later, Nephi taught that "unless a man shall endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved" (2 Ne. 31:16). Furthermore: "Ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ having a perfect brightness of hope and a love of God and of all men.

Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Ne. 31:20).

The prophet Amaleki also taught that those who come unto the Savior by offering their whole souls unto him, continually fasting and praying and enduring to the end will be saved (Omni 1:26). The prophet Alma the Younger taught his people to not only repent of sin but endure to the end (Alma 32:13). Much later, when the Savior visited the Americas, he repeated this phrase twice to stress its importance: “Look unto me, and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life” (3 Ne. 15:9).

The Savior taught what was necessary to be clean before God:

And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world. And he that endureth not unto the end, the same is he that is also hewn down and cast into the fire, from whence they can no more return, because of the justice of the Father. . . . And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end. (3 Ne. 27:16–19)

Here are the key principles taught by the Savior for entering his kingdom: faith, repentance, baptism, and enduring.

Mormon also stressed the principles of personal worthiness and enduring to the end that will insure that we are not cast out for not keeping our reciprocal obligations (Morm. 9:29). Mormon stressed the importance of continual spiritual development when he taught the principle of enduring to the end.

## **Doctrine and Covenants Teachings on Enduring to the End**

In other scriptures of the restoration, the Savior instructs that the key to eternal life, the greatest gift of God, is keeping the commandments and enduring to the end (D&C 14:7). Adherence to the first two principles of the gospel, repentance and baptism, along with enduring to the end, will ensure our salvation (D&C 18:22). Doctrine and Covenants 20 says

that those who believe and are baptized and endure in faith to the end will be saved, and we are made holy by his grace, “but there is a possibility that man may fall from grace” (D&C 20:31–32). Those who are willfully overcome by the devil and deny the truth and defy Christ will be cast out from the presence of God and become sons of perdition (D&C 76:31).

Latter-day Saints know that they must struggle to return to live with God. The Savior stressed those who are not valiant in their testimony of Him will receive a lesser degree of glory—the terrestrial kingdom (D&C 76:72–79). Finally we have Joseph’s simple, yet profound expression as found in the thirteenth Article of Faith, we “hope to be able to endure all things.” We are able to endure to the end through Christ’s grace, through making and keeping covenants, and through our diligence. All are required for admittance into the kingdom of heaven.

## How Grace Helps Us to Become Converted

**A**NCIENT CHARIS RELATIONSHIPS WERE BASED ON GENEROSITY, need, friendship, honor, and the exchange of money and power, but the charis relationships discussed in scripture are spiritual and divine in nature. God grants the gift of Jesus's Atonement to us and in return we are obliged in certain ways. A divine charis relationship is created when people make and keep covenants according to the rituals and ordinances that God has taught through his prophets. As people strive to keep these covenants, they are converted and their relationship with God is strengthened. Through enduring to the end, people come closer to God.

In this reciprocal relationship, obedience brings blessings, and people are ever more obliged to God (Mosiah 2:24). Through this process, we learn line upon line, being allowed to make choices and even fall into sin and repent. Grace enables the process of repentance and complete conversion to properly occur. Conversion allows us to become what God expects us to become. Elder David A. Bednar taught, "The gospel of Jesus Christ entails a fundamental and permanent change in our very nature made possible through the Savior's Atonement. True conversion brings a change in one's beliefs, heart, and life to accept and conform to the will of God (see Acts 3:19; 3 Ne. 9:20) and includes a conscious commitment to become a disciple of Christ."<sup>1</sup> The Book

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1. David A. Bednar, "Converted unto the Lord," *Ensign* 42 (November 2012): 107.

of Mormon prophet Samuel the Lamanite noted that there were five aspects of being converted to the Lord: (1) believing the prophets; (2) exercising faith in Jesus Christ; (3) repenting; (4) experiencing a mighty change of heart; and (5) becoming “firm and steadfast in the faith” (Hel. 15:7–8).<sup>2</sup> Jesus instructed his disciples that unless they became “converted, and become as little children” they could not enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:3). We must become born again through baptism (1 Pet. 1:23) to become spiritual sons and daughters of the Savior in order to “inherit the kingdom of God” (Mosiah 27:25–26).<sup>3</sup> Certainly, we are commanded to become perfect (JST Matt. 5:48) and to become even as the Savior is (3 Ne. 27:27). As we keep the Master’s commandments, when he appears, we shall be like him (1 John 3:2). Through participating in a reciprocal charis relationship, the power of godliness is made manifest (D&C 88:19–20) and ultimately results in complete conversion, self-mastery, sanctification, and sharing eternal life with God.

Through fully understanding and applying the Savior’s reciprocal grace, we will be able to overcome the challenges we face in mortality. All will face trials in this life. In a statement about mortal challenges, the prophet Joseph Smith taught how personal trials can add to our conversion: “I am like a huge, rough stone rolling down from a high mountain; and the only polishing I get is when some corner gets rubbed off by coming in contact with something else. . . . All hell knocking off a corner here and a corner there. Thus I will become a smooth and polished shaft in the quiver of the Almighty.”<sup>4</sup> Through mortal experiences and the Savior’s grace, we can become “polished” and spiritually sanctified.

Difficult mortal experiences help us become what Heavenly Father wants us to become. Brad Wilcox used the example of learning to play the piano to point out how grace works: parents want a child to learn

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2. Elder Bednar noted, “This is the pattern that leads to conversion.” Bednar, “Converted unto the Lord,” 108.

3. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Challenge to Become,” *Ensign* 30 (November 2000): 33. This talk and its scriptural references helped to develop this chapter.

4. Joseph Smith, *History, 1838–1856, Volume D-1, May 21, 1843*, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

to play and pay for lessons. They can require the child to practice because they know that practice is the only way to learn. The child's practice does not pay for the piano teacher or repay the parents, but practice shows thankfulness for the parents' incredible gift.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Heavenly Father and Christ want us to become like them, and Christ has already paid the price for our sins through his Atonement.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught, "The commandments, ordinances, and covenants of the gospel are not a list of deposits required to be made in some heavenly account. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a plan that shows us how to become what our Heavenly Father desires us to become."<sup>6</sup> In the final judgment, we will be measured by what we have become. Moroni wrote, "He that is filthy shall be filthy still; and he that is righteous shall be righteous still" (Morm. 9:14). We must instead "have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2). Only after complete conversion (which, in turn, is only available through grace) do we gain the full benefits of our reciprocal covenants with Christ.

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5. Brad Wilcox, "His Grace Is Sufficient," devotional address, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 12 July 2011, 2–3, available online at [https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/brad-wilcox\\_his-grace-is-sufficient/](https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/brad-wilcox_his-grace-is-sufficient/). See the earlier discussion of this analogy in chapter 11.

6. Oaks, "Challenge to Become," 32.





## **Conclusion: The Beauty of Obligatory Grace**

**S**INCE THE FIFTH CENTURY AD, A NUMBER OF CHRISTIAN intellectuals, scholars, and priests have taught that grace is something freely bestowed by God with no particular relationship with, or dependence upon, the actions of the person receiving it. Ancient documents, however, provide evidence that this particular notion of the term *charis* is at variance with the understanding of grace before Christ and during the first few centuries after Christ. The meaning commonly understood by a broad range of cultures up until the fifth century was that grace was the essence of a two-way, unequal, reciprocal, binding agreement between two parties in which both were obligated to each other. In other words, grace was not “free.”

The practice in the ancient world of high-ranking people granting favors to their subordinates served New Testament authors as a model for God’s loving bestowal of his benevolence and mercy on humanity through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. On reception of God’s gift, humanity becomes vertically obligated to God and accepts a reciprocal duty to do everything possible to demonstrate gratitude, including keeping his commandments. Both God and humanity are bound by this relationship of grace, which is known as a covenant. *Charis* in ancient Greek texts and in the New Testament denoted covenants in an ideal state of equality that obligated recipients to express joy, thankfulness, and generosity in the spirit of justice. Unfortunately, this ancient understanding of grace was somewhat obscured by Augustine and other early

medieval theologians who were heavily influenced by neo-Platonic philosophy. These authors recast the notion of a reciprocal form of grace to something which was freely bestowed by God and did not depend on or expect any reciprocity in terms of service to God.

During the history of Christianity, a few figures challenged this tradition of free grace, but were dismissed, so their notions of reciprocal grace were downplayed within the larger Christian tradition. Misunderstanding the classical meaning of grace in the modern era has led to much confusion. This medieval and modern understanding of grace—“free grace”—is one used today by several Christian groups. However, the teachings of Joseph Smith and other latter-day prophets and scripture of the Restoration align clearly with the original, first-century meaning of grace.

Passages in ancient Greek and Roman literature, inscriptions, and papyri demonstrate *charis*'s reciprocal connotations in the Mediterranean ancient world and its connections to practices that include slavery, patron-client relationships, covenants, and reciprocity. Even sociology confirms that, culturally, there is no such thing as a free gift. There is not one use of *charis* that unmistakably reflects the aforementioned view of free grace in any ancient Greek text, including the letters attributed to Paul.<sup>1</sup> Although prominent scholars for centuries have anachronistically translated *charis* as completely “free” and without obligation in their translations,<sup>2</sup> there is no ancient evidence to support the previously examined claims of nonobligatory, free, or unconditional grace. In contrast, throughout this work I have clarified that *charis*/grace is obligatory. Some popular, modern notions of grace have drifted far away from the ancient context of grace, which always implies reciprocity, obligation, and various forms of covenants. Thankfully, a number of Christian theologians have sought to understand

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1. The only reference to “free” listed in Liddell and Scott’s lexicon entry for *charis* is Damascus’s *Vita Diodori* 216, which dates to the sixth or seventh century AD. See Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 179–80.

2. For more on Paul’s understanding of man’s inability to requite God’s infinite generosity, see James R. Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace in Its Graeco-Roman Context* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2003), 321–22, quoting Floyd Vivian Filson, *St. Paul’s Conception of Recompense* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1931).

the ancient meaning of *charis* and advocate at least questioning the popular understanding of grace today.<sup>3</sup>

I began this project by wondering if Paul's use of *charis* was actually different from classical usage. I have discovered that his words make the best sense and fit in the framework Jesus taught if we grant the word grace its ancient reciprocal connotations. While I initially wondered if poor translations of the Bible over the centuries might have led to modern misunderstandings of *charis*/grace, I have concluded that the problem is not in the text, but rather in its interpretation. New Testament scholars are able to demonstrate differences between classical uses of grace and those of Paul only by making certain modern assumptions in their interpretations of a few verses of Paul's writings. These misinterpreted verses are subsequently used to interpret all other verses in the New Testament. My interpretations of these few passages (chapter 6) show how Paul's ancient audience in the first century AD would have understood his writings. Luke and Paul—who wrote for Gentile or Hellenistic audiences in a late-Hellenistic, Greco-Roman context in their ministry to the Gentiles—must have implied a Hellenic interpretation in order to be understood by their Gentile readership. Even the few Pauline passages that appear to advocate free grace contain nuances of reciprocal grace ideology and covenant making.

There are two reasons why many misunderstand these verses: First, many Protestant denominations have downplayed the importance of covenant making (although it was a characteristic of both the ancient Jewish and Gentile cultures in the first century AD); their reaction against Catholicism and its attendant obligatory rituals may have also led them to reject the possibility of an understanding of grace that is in any way obligatory. Second, many theologians do not often differentiate between salvation from physical death and salvation from spiritual death, thus creating uncertainty about which kind of salvation is promised by Jesus and what his grace saves people from. But seeing grace in its classical context demonstrates that the teachings of Jesus and his apostles can easily be seen in light of ancient notions of reciprocity. For example, when discussing doctrines such as charity, Jesus taught

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3. See the discussion on Harrison, MacArthur, Holmer, Davies, Bonhoeffer, and others in chapter 8 above.

that his charity bound disciples to God and obligated disciples to have charity for others. This concept is perhaps most clearly set forward in Jesus' statement: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34).

Within the covenants, ordinances, and even degrees of glory in the restored gospel, there are also specific degrees of reciprocity as individuals enter into additional covenants with God and obey those covenants to different degrees. This idea of an increasing reciprocity between God and humanity places even more emphasis on the importance of this individual covenant relationship with God. Similarly, the New Testament apostles linked the notion of grace with making and keeping covenants with God in order to strengthen the individual's desire to follow God's will and keep his commandments.

The aforementioned concept of free grace is in dramatic contrast to the ancient reciprocal concept of grace, a concept that resonates strongly with teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith and restoration scripture. This middle road<sup>4</sup> of grace aligns well with the concept of grace that appears in the Bible in its first-century context. It is clear from the Bible that God offers grace for our benefit. As explored above, Joseph Smith and restoration scripture make clear that reciprocal obligations, covenants, and enduring to the end are part of our charis relationship with God. This relationship is initiated as a favor or deed from God that can never be paid back *in toto*, and which leads to the establishment of covenants between God and humanity.<sup>5</sup> While all people will receive salvation from physical death, obedience to a charis covenant also grants salvation from spiritual death. Individuals must make and keep their sacred covenants, and they are blessed to the degree which they keep and honor them. One must endure to the end in order to receive blessings and return to live with God. Joseph Smith succinctly explained how all can be saved: "We believe that through the

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4. The middle road chooses neither the view that only God determines who receives salvation and who does not, nor the view that salvation is achieved by a simple declaration of accepting Christ's grace. See the discussion of this idea above in chapter 11.

5. John Gee concurs on this general point in "Grace of Christ," 247–59.

Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel” (A of F 3). My work at large demonstrates how some misunderstood passages from the Bible dealing with grace can be more easily understood by viewing these passages through the lens of ancient notions of grace.

My hope is that scholars will apply this ancient understanding of charis to the study of gospel principles such as *agapē* (translated as charity, concern for another’s well-being, or love). In many ways, charis coupled with *agapē* represents mercy in Heavenly Father’s extension of the gift of the Atonement. Another prospect for study is recognition that moral agency and even mortality are charis gifts from God, as they grant us opportunities to fail, repent, give thanks, and make covenants through ordinances. The relationship of reciprocity created, maintained, and amplified by degrees through the charis of Christ’s new covenant also represents the justice of God, stresses personal worthiness, and emphasizes righteousness.

Heavenly Father has the characteristics of perfect love, justice, mercy, holiness, goodness, righteousness, omnipotence, and omniscience. As a perfect, loving Father, God expects us to keep all of his commandments, but has provided a way for us to continually repent so that we may live in accordance with the demands of mercy and justice. Knowing the correct meaning of charis helps us understand both his expectations and the demands of mercy and justice.

We need to understand what the ancient apostles meant by grace in order to properly apply Jesus Christ’s sacrifice in our daily lives. For those concerned about spiritual salvation, which hopefully includes all readers, this is a topic that deserves our attention. Admittedly, the question of how mankind is saved is truly the most central doctrine of Christianity for all who call themselves Christians. We must take seriously the message of repentance and valiantly endure to the end as disciples through Christ’s grace. Only then can we become all that God desires us to become.



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