

The Basics About God's Grace



Discovering God's Word
Bible Study Series

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Learn what God's grace is and why it is relevant to your life

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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The Basics About God's Grace

The subject of “grace” is one that is frequently encountered in the Bible. In fact, the word “grace” appears 148 times in the *New King James Version* of the Bible. The main focus of grace in the Bible, of course, is the grace of God. Specifically, we are most interested in the grace that God has promised to show to people under the New Covenant through Jesus Christ.

This grace is something that we should all be very interested in understanding. For instance, when the apostle Peter spoke concerning the salvation Christians are set to experience, He said, “Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into” (1 Peter 1:10-12).

Those who lived before this grace of God appeared to mankind and the angels (who, evidently, never had access to the grace of God) desired to gain an understanding of this grace that you and I can now understand and enjoy. Unfortunately, there are many

people in this world who have either never considered the grace of God, misunderstood the grace of God, or misapplied the grace of God. Surely, then, we should give this subject our utmost attention and gain the proper understanding of God's grace from the pages of Scripture!

In this lesson, we want to examine the basics about God's grace. We want to consider what God's grace is and why it is relevant to our lives. Then, we want to answer three important questions about God's grace. In our search of the Scriptures for an understanding of God's grace, let us all simply accept whatever the Scriptures teach to be true about the grace of God, putting aside all preconceived ideas and opinions. Let's learn the basics about God's grace as God teaches us!

Defining God's Grace

Whenever we are talking about God's grace, we are really talking about the kindness and favor that God has shown toward us which we do not, in any way, deserve. It is truly unmerited (unearned) favor that God has shown toward mankind. It is coupled with the love and mercy of God and is especially shown toward mankind who has committed sin. The ultimate manifestation of the grace of God toward mankind is through sending Jesus Christ to die on the cross so that sinful man could be saved eternally in Heaven!

God's gift

The best illustration that can probably be used to describe the grace of God is that of a gift. Think about the gifts that you have received during your life. The concept of a “gift” is something that you have not earned. Instead, it is something that an individual *chooses* to give to you of his/her own free will.

Romans 6:23 will prove helpful in this matter. The apostle Paul states, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Consider the two contrasting words that are used in this verse: Wages and gift. There is a

big difference between these two, one that directly relates to your life and spiritual wellbeing.

A “wage” is something that you have earned. Whenever you are hired to work a job, you agree to a particular salary in exchange for a certain kind and amount of work. So, whenever your paycheck comes, the amount of money you receive is what you have earned for your labor. In this same way, Paul says that what we have all earned by failing to obey God (committing sin) is spiritual death. This is separation from God. Ultimately, sin results in eternal separation from God in Hellfire. For, Revelation 21:8 says, “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

Since we all have sinned and fallen short of glorifying God (Romans 3:23), this is what we all deserve to experience for all of eternity! However, God has provided a gift to us. Romans 6:23, again, says that “the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” So, even though we all deserve to experience eternal death in Hellfire, God has provided the gift of eternal life in Heaven. This gift is available in and through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Not of ourselves

Ephesians 2:1-10 should help us appreciate the nature of God’s gift even more. “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For

by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

As you think about what each one of us *did* deserve, just look at the first three verses of Ephesians 2. We were spiritually dead because we had all made the decision to live according to the ways of this world (i.e. the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life that are contrary to the will of God, see 1 John 2:15-17). We followed the will of the devil rather than the will of God, as he tempted us to please ourselves rather than God. And, because we conducted ourselves in these sinful ways, we were “children of wrath,” just as all others who had sinned against God. That is, we deserved to experience the wrath that God will show toward all those who do not obey Him.

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 is helpful to understand the wrath that God will show toward those who do not obey Him. The apostle Paul says that Jesus Christ will return, “in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.”

So, this is what you and I (and every sinner) earned for ourselves by sinning against God. Thankfully, passages like this one in Ephesians 2 helps us to understand our opportunity to be saved from such eternal destruction in Hellfire! There are three terms used concerning God in verses 4 through 10 that are all interconnected.

The first is God’s *mercy*. This is God *not* giving us what we *do* deserve. Namely, we deserve the eternal punishment in Hellfire because of sinning against God. So, God is merciful when He does *not* give us this punishment that we have earned.

The second is God’s *love*. This is what caused God to help us whenever we were desperately in need. He does not *want* to condemn anyone to Hell. So, God sent His only begotten Son from Heaven to earth in order to provide the necessary sacrifice for

sin. In doing so, we now have the opportunity to *not* perish eternally in Hell and to have eternal life in Heaven (John 3:16).

The third is God's *grace*. Although God's mercy does *not* give us what we *do* deserve (eternal punishment in Hell), God's *grace gives* us what we do *not* deserve (eternal life in Heaven). Notice that Ephesians 2:5 states that it is "by grace you have been saved." Thus, we can be saved from the fires of Hell and live forever with God in Heaven!

Concerning God's *grace*, notice that it is described as the "exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (verse 7). There is no gift that has ever been offered to mankind that is greater than God's gift of eternal salvation in Heaven through Jesus Christ. First, it has the greatest cost. The cost of this gift is the blood of the Son of God, who left Heaven in order to suffer and die at the hands of wicked men (see 1 Peter 1:18-21). Second, this gift offers the greatest pleasure. God's gift is eternal life in a place that has no pain, no sorrow, no tears, no suffering, and no evil. It is a beautiful place beyond all human comprehension where we will forever be in the presence of God!

Now, we must recognize that it is by God's *grace* that we can all be saved and that it is not of ourselves. It is the gift of God! Once we had committed sin, we deserved to experience the wrath of God. And, after we had sinned (even just one time), we could never do *anything* to earn eternal salvation in Heaven. The only way that any of us could have Heaven as our eternal home rather than Hell is *if* God gave it to us! Now, we must believe fully that God has given us this opportunity and live according to faith.

Three important questions about God's grace

These two passages (Romans 6:23 and Ephesians 2:1-10) help us to understand a great deal about the *grace* of God. But, we need to dig a little deeper and investigate how the Bible answers three questions. For, our understanding of these three questions will have a great impact on how we live our lives and whether we will truly receive the *grace*

of God. First, "Is God's *grace* available to everyone?" Second, "Can God's *grace* be resisted?" Third, "What is our responsibility toward the *grace* of God?" Let's consider how the Bible answers these questions.

Is God's Grace Available To Everyone?

God's *grace* is truly amazing and far greater than any of us deserve. But, who has access to God's *grace*? Do only a few people who have been predetermined by God have *access* to God's *grace*? Has Jesus Christ *only* died for these few? Or, has God's *grace* been made available to everyone? Let's consider.

Jesus died for everyone

There are some who believe and teach that God has predetermined which individuals will be saved and which ones will be lost. So, it is only fitting that these individuals believe that only those who have been preselected by God to be saved have access to the *grace* of God. Those who have been predetermined by God to be lost have no opportunity to be saved and no access to the *grace* of God.

However, this is false doctrine. Although the Bible does speak of God's act of predestining (or, deciding beforehand), we need to consider the scope of this predestination. Ephesians 1:4-5 will be sufficient to see this point. Paul said, "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will."

Consider the nature of God's choice. It is *not* that God chose to only save certain *individuals* and condemn others contrary to their own will. Instead, God simply chose the location of salvation. God decided that those who would be in Christ are the ones He would save. And, those who would not be in

Christ would not be saved. But, He has left it up to each individual to choose either to be in Christ or not.

One of the ways we can see that God's grace is available to everyone is that Jesus Christ died for everyone. So, He has given everyone the *opportunity* to have their sins forgiven and be saved eternally in Heaven. Although there are some who believe and teach that Jesus Christ only died for those who will be saved, the Scriptures teach otherwise.

Consider John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." God did not just love those who would love Him in return and be obedient to Him. Instead, God loved everyone enough to send Jesus to die for them and give them an opportunity to be saved!

Consider Hebrews 2:9. "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone." By God's grace, Jesus Christ tasted death for *everyone* – not just those God knew would be saved!

God wants everyone to be saved

If God had arbitrarily preselected certain people to be saved and certain people to be lost, He certainly could *not* say that He desires for everyone to be saved. For, if God could choose to save one person regardless of anything that person does, He could choose to save everyone in the same way. And, no one would have to be lost.

However, the Scriptures do teach that God wants everyone to be saved. He does *not* just want certain people to be saved. And, He has *not* just given certain people the opportunity to be saved.

Consider 1 Timothy 2:3-4. "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Even though all people had sinned against Him, God *desires* for **all** mankind to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

God does not want any person to remain ignorant of the truth and be eternally lost. Certainly, then, He would not just give the opportunity of salvation to a select few!

Consider 2 Peter 3:9. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." God's patience endures the evil that we do to Him whenever we sin. For, He could destroy us all the moment that we sin against Him and send us straight to eternal punishment. Yet, He endures these evils because He is giving us the opportunity to come to repentance. The reason He is doing this is because He does not want anyone to perish. Instead, He truly desires for all people to come to repentance and be saved!

God's grace has appeared to all mankind

Not only can we see that God desires all people to be saved and that Jesus Christ has died to make salvation possible for all people, but the Scriptures directly teach that God's grace has appeared to all mankind. It has been made readily available for all people who desire to be saved from their sins and live their lives for Jesus Christ to partake of.

Consider Titus 2:11. "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men." As we have already established in this lesson, God's grace brings salvation. And, it is brought in no other way but through His grace. Now, it is essential that we recognize it has "appeared to all men."

The idea of the word "appeared" is that it has been made visible and has been made to shine on each person. Therefore, all mankind can know about the opportunity of salvation that the grace of God has made available. And, they can know that they can partake of this salvation-bringing grace! It has left no one in the dark, no matter how great a sinner he/she may be.

Just think about the apostle Paul. He considered himself to be the "chief" of sinners. Then, he said, "For I am the least of the apostles, who am

not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:9-10).

Paul recognized that if he (with all the sin he had committed, even in persecuting those who followed Jesus) could be saved, then anyone could be saved! Therefore, you must firmly conclude that both you and all people have access to the salvation-bringing grace of God! No one is refused access to God’s grace!

Can God’s Grace Be Resisted?

God’s salvation-bringing grace has been made available to all mankind. But, all that we have established is that it is *available* to everyone. This has said nothing of receiving God’s grace so as to be saved. So, can the grace of God that brings salvation be resisted? Or, does God force His grace upon certain individuals so that they will be saved, whether they desire to be saved or not? Let’s consider.

The Bible teaches personal responsibility

The entirety of the Bible teaches personal responsibility. The Bible demonstrates that we possess free will to choose either to be obedient to God or to be disobedient to God. He does not force either upon us.

Consider Adam and Eve. When God placed them in the Garden of Eden, He gave them the opportunity to enjoy everything He had made and to live forever in that paradise. And, He gave them a choice to obey or disobey Him. He commanded them not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, promising that they would die in the day they ate of it (Genesis 2:16-17). And, whenever the serpent tempted Eve to eat of the tree, she made her own decision to disobey God, as did Adam (Genesis 3:1-6). As a result of their individual decisions to disobey God, they experienced the consequences.

Consider the Israelites. They were reminded of the choice they had throughout their history. For instance, in Deuteronomy 30:15-20, Moses presented a choice to them. He said that he set before them “life and good, death and evil” (verse 15). If they would love the Lord, walk in His ways, and keep His commandments, statutes, and judgments, they would live, multiply, and receive blessings from the Lord. But, if their hearts would turn away from God to worship and serve false gods, they would be punished and would not have their days prolonged. So, Moses said, “I call heaven and earth as witness today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live” (verse 19).

In the same way, Joshua told the Israelites that they needed to make a choice. Joshua 24:14-15 says, “Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” In both examples, they were given the opportunity to make a choice. And, based on the free exercise of their will to either obey God or disobey God, they would receive blessings or punishment.

Then, consider the choice that God gives you to make. The salvation-bringing grace of God has been made readily available to you. But, you can either choose to partake of God’s grace or not to partake of it. God has not forced you to do either. Instead, He has simply made it freely available to everyone and invited everyone to come to Him and partake of these eternal blessings!

For instance, Jesus Christ invites by saying, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

Similarly, we read of an invitation to come to the Lord and partake of His grace in Revelation 22:17. “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.”

It is possible to receive the grace of God

The Scriptures clearly teach that it is possible for individuals to make the choice to receive the grace of God. In fact, there are many examples in the Scriptures of men and women hearing the saving message of the gospel and being obedient to it so that they could be saved.

Consider Acts 2. Some who heard the gospel of Jesus Christ preached on this occasion recognized that they had sinned and needed to be saved. They asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (verse 37). Then, after Peter commanded them to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins, he exhorted them to be saved (verses 38-40). And, “those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them” (verse 41). These individuals had personal responsibility and made the choice to obey God and be saved!

Consider Acts 18. Whenever the apostle Paul was preaching in the city of Corinth, Acts 18:8 says, “Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.” Notice the simplicity of this text. Those who heard the gospel’s message that tells about God’s grace could choose to believe it and obey it (by being baptized). And, the same is true today for anyone who wishes to receive God’s gift of eternal salvation!

It is possible to resist the grace of God

Although the Scriptures teach that it is possible to accept the grace of God and be saved, they also teach the opposite. In fact, there are many examples in the Scriptures of men and women hearing the saving message of the gospel and *choosing* not to be obedient to it so that they could be saved.

Consider Acts 7. On this occasion, Stephen was preaching to the Jews and telling them that they were guilty of killing the Son of God. As he was preaching, he concluded that they were “stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears!” He said that they “always resist the Holy Spirit,” as their fathers had also done (verse 51). So, they rejected God’s truth and, therefore, did not access the grace of God that was available to them!

Consider Acts 13. The Jews opposed the preaching of the gospel that was being accomplished by Paul and Barnabas. As a result, they said to the Jews, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles” (verse 46). Notice carefully that these Jews had judged *themselves* unworthy of everlasting life by not believing and obeying the gospel. God had not made that determination for them. In the same way, those who reject the gospel of Jesus Christ today will not access the grace of God!

What Is Our Responsibility Toward The Grace Of God?

Since it is possible to resist the grace of God, we must consider our responsibility toward it. Since it is possible to resist the grace of God, what exactly has God done for us? Does He require us to do something in order to receive His grace? And, once we have accessed His grace, do we have any further responsibility? Let’s consider.

God has only done His part in salvation

Think back to the two verses we considered earlier in this lesson. Romans 6:23 and Ephesians 2:1-10 both demonstrated that God has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. There is simply no way that we could save ourselves from the consequences of our sins. We were desperately in need of God’s salvation-bringing grace! In fact, we would be hopelessly lost without it. So, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God has done His part in

saving us. And, He has left us to determine whether we will accept His grace or reject it!

Sadly, the majority of people in this world will reject this great opportunity to be saved. Jesus said, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14). The choice is ours. But, most people will choose the easy path in life that results in sin and everlasting destruction.

There is something we must do to be saved

Many people have suggested that since eternal salvation in Heaven is God’s gift that we do not have to do anything in order to receive it. However, even gifts have conditions attached to them. For instance, suppose someone sends you a gift in the mail. This gift is in the form of a \$50 check. Since it is a gift, you have done nothing to earn it – and could do nothing to earn it. But, in order to receive the gift, you must go to the mailbox, take out the envelope, remove the check, sign the check, take the check to the bank, and ask for the money. Now, you have your \$50 gift. It is still a gift. You have still done nothing to earn it. But, there were conditions for receiving the gift. And, if you had not done your part in receiving the gift, it would have been an accessible, but worthless gift (i.e. an unsigned check).

In the same way, although salvation is the gift of God that you can never earn (Ephesians 2:8-9), He has placed *conditions* on receiving it. For, even in Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul spoke of the necessity of faith. But, this is *not* just a mental conviction that God exists and that Jesus Christ is His Son. Instead, the Bible repeatedly demonstrates that this is an active and obedient faith (see James 2:14-26 and Hebrews 11)!

Consider, then, the question, “What must I do to be saved?” This kind of question was asked in the Scriptures on at least two occasions. In Acts 2:37, individuals asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” And, in Acts 9:6, Saul asked, “Lord, what do

You want me to do?” And, it is interesting to note that on both occasions, they were told to *do* something. Those in Acts 2 were instructed to repent and be baptized (verse 38) and Saul was told to go into Damascus to await instruction from Ananias (who told Saul to be baptized, see Acts 9:6 and Acts 22:16).

The Bible has placed the following requirements on receiving the grace of God. First, we must hear the word of God. Romans 10:17 says, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Second, we must believe in God and that Jesus is the Son of God. In John 8:24, Jesus says, “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” Third, we must repent of our sins. Jesus said, “I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). Fourth, we must confess Jesus Christ. Romans 10:9-10 says, “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” And, fifth, we must be baptized (immersed) in water for the forgiveness of our sins. Once again, whenever Peter responded to those who asked what they needed to do to be saved, he said, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

It is at this point that we access the grace of God and are in a saved condition, having our sins forgiven. But, we have still *not* earned our salvation. It is only by God’s grace! Therefore, Jesus taught us that whenever we have done all those things that we are commanded, to say, “We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do” (Luke 17:10).

We must continue in the grace of God

Once we have accessed the grace of God by obeying the gospel’s plan of salvation, we must recognize that there is continued responsibility in living for the Lord. This is the reason why Paul and

Barnabas tried to persuade those they were preaching to, to “continue in the grace of God” (Acts 13:43).

Consider the warning in Galatians 5:4. The Galatians had become Christians by obeying God’s plan of salvation. However, they had gone back to the teachings of the Old Law. Thus, Paul told them, “You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” In the same way, the Christians in the book of Hebrews were shrinking back from the salvation that is in Jesus Christ so as to sin against God, trample the Son of God underfoot, count the blood of the covenant as a common thing, and insult “the Spirit of grace” (Hebrews 10:26-39).

So, it is entirely possible to fall from God’s grace after accessing and being saved by it. Therefore, we must continue in the grace of God by remaining faithful to Jesus Christ and obeying His commandments throughout our lives on this earth. In fact, Jesus gave the following instruction to those who are Christians: “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

Conclusion

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11). God’s grace gives us the opportunity to partake of the greatest gift that has ever been available to mankind! This is the gift of eternal life in Heaven after our earthly lives are over. Everyone living on this earth has the opportunity to partake of this gift. But, it is possible to refuse this gift and be lost in Hell. Therefore, we must all be diligent to meet the conditions God has placed on receiving His gift so that we will partake of the grace of God and be saved! For, it is those who do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ who will experience the wrath of God (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9)!

Study Questions

What is the grace of God?

1. Defining God’s Grace

What does Romans 6:23 help you to understand about the grace of God?

What does Ephesians 2:1-10 help you to understand about the grace of God?

2. Is God’s Grace Available To Everyone?

Who did Jesus die for? Why is this significant?

Who does God want to be saved?

What does it mean for God’s grace to have appeared to all mankind?

3. Can God’s Grace Be Resisted?

Does the Bible teach personal responsibility? Explain your answer.

Is it possible to receive the grace of God? Provide examples.

Is it possible to reject the grace of God? Provide examples.

4. What Is Our Responsibility Toward The Grace Of God?

What has God done regarding salvation? What does God expect from us?

Is there anything we must do to be saved? If so, what does God require?

Is there any continued responsibility toward the grace of God after initially receiving it? If so, what does God require?