

What is grace? What role does it play in my life? Catholic: Archdiocese of Minn/St Paul

<https://www.archspm.org/faith-and-discipleship/catholic-faith/what-is-grace-what-role-does-it-play-in-my-life/>

Grace is the free and undeserved assistance GOD offers us so that we might respond to his call to share in His divine life and attain eternal life.

GOD's grace, as divinely offered gift, does not take away or restrict our freedom; rather, it perfects our freedom by helping us overcome the restricting power of sin, the true obstacle to our freedom. We call the grace of the Holy Spirit that we receive through faith in Jesus Christ the New Law. Significant expressions of this Law are found in Christ's Sermon on the Mount and his Last Supper discourse, where he emphasizes union with him in love as the substance and motivation for his law of grace.

Grace is the help GOD gives us to respond to our vocation of becoming his adopted sons. It introduces us into the intimacy of the Trinitarian life. The divine initiative in the work of grace precedes, prepares, and elicits the free response of man. Grace responds to the deepest yearnings of human freedom, calls freedom to cooperate with it, and perfects freedom. Sanctifying grace is the gratuitous gift of his life that GOD makes to us; it is infused by the Holy Spirit into the soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it. (CCC, nos. 2021-2023)

In addition to speaking about sanctifying grace, we also speak of actual graces. These refer to the particular interventions GOD offers us to aid us in the course of the work of sanctification. We recognize that many times and in many ways GOD's special love is such that he offers us help to live in a way that leads to sharing his life. Finally, there are sacramental graces, which are proper to the celebration of the Seven Sacraments, and special graces or charisms, which, while given to individuals, are meant for the common good of the Church (cf. CCC, no. 2003).

In this recognition of the reality and important role of grace in the Christian moral life, we face a struggle prompted by our culture's understanding that everything is within our human power. "My power is sufficient." Compare this with our understanding that we are indeed blessed and gifted, but much of what we fight to achieve—while written in our hearts—still needs GOD's grace because of the presence of sin and our inherent human weakness. The New Law is truly Good News, for not only does GOD give us the moral law that leads us to salvation, but through grace we receive divine assistance to follow it. We should always take heart from the words Our Lord spoke to St. Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9).

You can read more from the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, order your own copy, or read questions about it at the [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website](#).

GOD's grace is usually defined as undeserved favor. Grace cannot be earned; it is something that is freely given. We count on GOD's grace and the bridge he built in our relationship with him. Bible verses about grace abound. From the foundation of the Old Testament, we know that grace is a part of GOD's character.

Catholic Answers: <https://www.catholic.com/tract/grace-what-it-is-and-what-it-does>

If you took your parish's catechism classes when you were growing up, you at least remember that there are two kinds of **grace**, sanctifying and actual. That may be all you recall. The names being so similar, you might have the impression sanctifying grace is nearly identical to actual grace. Not so. Sanctifying grace stays in the soul. It's what makes the soul holy; it gives the soul supernatural life. More properly, it *is* supernatural life.

Actual grace, by contrast, is a supernatural push or encouragement. It's transient. It doesn't live in the soul, but acts on the soul from the outside, so to speak. It's a supernatural kick in the pants. It gets the will and intellect moving so we can seek out and keep sanctifying grace.

In its natural state, your soul isn't fit for heaven. What you need to live there is supernatural life, not just natural life. That supernatural life is called sanctifying grace.

If sanctifying grace dwells in your soul when you die, then you can live in heaven (though you may need to be purified first in purgatory; cf. 1 Cor. 3:12–16). If it doesn't dwell in your soul when you die—in other words, if your soul is spiritually dead by being in the state of mortal sin (Gal. 5:19–21)—you cannot live in heaven. You then have to face an eternity of spiritual death: the utter separation of your spirit from God (Eph. 2:1, 2:5, 4:18).

Spiritual Suicide

You can obtain supernatural life by yielding to actual graces you receive. God keeps giving you these divine pushes, and all you have to do is go along.

For instance, he moves you to repentance, and if you take the hint you can find yourself in the confessional, where the guilt for your sins is remitted (John 20:21–23). Through the sacrament of penance, through your reconciliation to God, you receive sanctifying grace. But you can lose it again by sinning mortally (1 John 5:16–17).

Keep that word in mind: mortal. It means death. Mortal sins are deadly sins because they kill off this supernatural life, this sanctifying grace. Mortal sins can't coexist with the supernatural life, because by their nature such sins are saying "No" to God, while sanctifying grace would be saying "Yes."

Venial sins don't destroy supernatural life, and they don't even lessen it. Mortal sins destroy it outright.

The trouble with venial sins is that they weaken us, making us more vulnerable to mortal sins.

When you lose supernatural life, there's nothing you can do on your own to regain it. You're reduced to the merely natural life again, and no natural act can merit a supernatural reward. You can merit a supernatural reward only by being made able to act above your nature, which you can do only if you have help—grace.

To regain supernatural life, you have to receive actual graces from God. Think of these as helping graces.

Such graces differ from sanctifying grace in that they aren't a quality of the soul and don't abide in it.

Rather, actual graces enable the soul to perform some

supernatural act, such as an act of faith or repentance. If the soul responds to actual grace and makes the appropriate supernatural act, it again receives supernatural life.

Really Cleansed

Sanctifying grace implies a real transformation of the soul. Recall that most of the Protestant Reformers denied that a real transformation takes place. They said God doesn't actually wipe away our sins.

Instead, our souls remain corrupted, full of sin. God merely throws a cloak over them and treats them as if they were spotless, knowing all the while that they're not.

But that isn't the Catholic view. We believe souls really are cleansed by an infusion of the supernatural

life. Of course, we're still subject to temptations to sin; we still suffer the effects of Adam's Fall in that

sense (what theologians call "concupiscence"); but God has removed the sins we have, much like a

mother might wash the dirt off of a child who has a tendency to get dirty again. Our wills are given the

new powers of hope and charity, things absent at the merely natural level.

Justification and Sanctification

We've mentioned that we need sanctifying grace in our souls if we're to be equipped for heaven.

Another way of saying this is that we need to be justified. "But you were washed, you were sanctified,

you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11).

The Protestant misunderstanding of justification lies in its claim that justification is merely a legal

declaration by God that the sinner is now "justified." If you "accept Christ as your personal Lord and

Savior," he *declares* you justified, though he doesn't really *make* you justified or sanctified; your soul

is in the same state as it was before, but you're eligible for heaven.

A person is expected thereafter to undergo sanctification (don't make the mistake of thinking Protestants

say sanctification is unimportant), but the degree of sanctification achieved is, ultimately, immaterial to

the question of whether you'll get to heaven. You will, since you're justified; and justification as a purely

legal declaration is what counts. Unfortunately, this amounts to God telling an untruth by saying the sinner has been justified, while all along he knows that the sinner is only covered under the “cloak” of Christ’s righteousness. But, what God declares, he does. “[S]o shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Is. 55:11). So, when God declares you justified, he makes you justified. Any justification that is not woven together with sanctification is no justification at all.

The Bible’s teaching on justification is much more nuanced. Paul indicates that there is a real transformation that occurs in justification. This is seen, for example, in Romans 6:7, which every standard translation—Protestant ones included—renders as “For he who has died is freed from sin” (or a close variant).

Paul is obviously speaking about being freed from sin in an experiential sense, for this is the passage where he is at pains to stress the fact that we have made a decisive break with sin that must be reflected in our behavior: “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (Rom. 6:1-2). “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness” (Rom. 6:12-13).

The context here is what Protestants call *sanctification*, the process of being made holy. Sanctification is the sense in which we are said to be “freed from sin” in this passage. Yet in the Greek text, what is actually said is “he who has died has been *justified* from sin.” The term in Greek (*dikaioo*) is the word for being justified, yet the context indicates sanctification, which is why every standard translation renders the word “freed” rather than “justified.” This shows that, in Paul’s mind, justification involves a real, experiential freeing from sin, not just a change of legal status. And it shows that, the way he uses terms, there is not the rigid wall between justification and sanctification that Protestants imagine.

According to Scripture, sanctification and justification aren’t just one-time events, but are ongoing processes in the life of the believer. As the author of Hebrews notes: “For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (Heb. 10:14). In regard to justification also being an ongoing process, compare Romans 4:3; Genesis 15:6 with both Hebrews 11:8; Genesis 12:1-4 and James 2:21-23; Genesis 22:1-18. In these passages, Abraham’s justification is advanced on three separate occasions.

Can Justification Be Lost?

Many Protestants go on to say that losing ground in the sanctification battle won’t jeopardize your justification. You might sin worse than you did before “getting saved,” but you’ll enter heaven anyway, because you can’t undo your justification.

Calvin taught the absolute impossibility of losing justification. Luther said it could be lost only through the sin of unbelief; that is, by undoing the act of faith and rejecting Christ, but not by what Catholics call mortal sins.

Catholics see it differently. If you sin grievously, the supernatural life in your soul disappears, since it can’t co-exist with serious sin. You then cease to be justified. If you were to die while unjustified, you’d go to hell. But you can become rejustified by having the supernatural life renewed in your soul, and you can do that by responding to the actual graces God sends you.

Acting on Actual Graces

He sends you an actual grace, say, in the form of a nagging voice that whispers, “You need to repent! Go to confession!” You do, your sins are forgiven, you’re reconciled to God, and you have supernatural life again (John 20:21-23). Or you say to yourself, “Maybe tomorrow,” and that particular supernatural

142 impulse, that actual grace, passes you by. But another is always on the way, God never abandoning us to
143 our own stupidity (1 Tim. 2:4).
144 Once you have supernatural life, once sanctifying grace is in your soul, you can increase it by every
145 supernaturally good action you do: receiving Communion, saying prayers, performing corporal works of
146 mercy. Is it worth increasing sanctifying grace once you have it; isn't the minimum enough? Yes and no.
147 It's enough to get you into heaven, but it may not be enough to sustain itself. The minimum isn't good
148 enough because it's easy to lose the minimum.
149 We must continually seek God's grace, continually respond to the actual graces God is working within
150 us, inclining us to turn to him and do good. This is what Paul discusses when he instructs us: "Therefore,
151 my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my
152 absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will
153 and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be
154 blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse
155 generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day
156 of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain" (Phil. 2:12–16).
157
158 NIHIL OBSTAT: I have concluded that the materials
159 presented in this work are free of doctrinal or moral errors.
160 Bernadeane Carr, STL, Censor Librorum, August 10, 2004
161

[Sarah Koontz](#), *Founder of Living by Design Ministries*

Before GOD created mankind, He knew of our need to be rescued from sin.

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ was not GOD's back up plan. His last resort. His **"get out of jail free card."** Absolutely EVERYTHING that happened between Adam's first breath and Jesus' death was part of GOD's gracious plan to redeem mankind. Including the Old Testament.

The concept of GOD's grace—unmerited favor shown to unworthy men and women—is woven throughout the entirety of the Old Testament.

7 Examples of GOD's Grace in the Old Testament:

1. GOD's grace infuses Noah's Story.

"But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" ([Gen 6:8](#)). Wickedness and evil were so rampant in the hearts of men that GOD actually regretted creating them. Wow! He was ready to wipe them out entirely, but there was ONE man who was righteous, faithful, and committed to walking with GOD. Noah was not a perfect man, yet GOD chose to save his family from destruction. That's grace!

2. GOD's grace endures in spite of Abraham and Sarah's unbelief. *"And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"* ([Gen 12:3b](#)). Did you know that Abraham's fear and sense of self-preservation led him to distort the truth by saying Sarah was his sister (to save his own hide)? Did you know that Sarah laughed at GOD when he said she would give birth to a son in her old age? And then, after laughing at GOD, she encouraged her husband to sleep with another woman to fulfill the promise? Abraham and Sarah's lives were marked with disbelief and disobedience, yet GOD remained faithful to His promise. That's grace!

3. GOD's grace for Joseph gave him strength to persevere. *"You intended to harm me, but GOD intended it for good"* ([Gen 50:20](#)). As Joseph's story unfolds, it's difficult to see GOD's grace in it all—despised by his brothers, sold into slavery, wrongly accused, left to rot in prison. But that's not at all how Joseph saw things. He reveals his perspective in [Gen. 45:7](#), "But GOD sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance." GOD used difficult and trying circumstances to position Joseph as the savior of his people. That's grace!

The Bible is packed with examples of humans who sin and a GOD who forgives.

4. Moses doubted GOD at every turn, yet GOD graciously guided him.

"But Moses said, 'Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else'" ([Ex 4: 13](#)). Moses was as flawed as they come—arrogant, stubborn, doubtful. Yet GOD faithfully walked with him, and as time passed, Moses' learned how to faithfully obey. GOD used this blemished shepherd to lead his wayward sheep out of captivity. GOD chose to listen to and walk with a man who, in his youth, killed another with his bare hands. That's grace!

5. The Israelites repeatedly rebelled against GOD, yet He graciously rescued them.

"And he could bear Israel's misery no longer" ([Judges 10:16](#)). I tried to keep track of how often the Israelites grumbled against GOD, broke His commands, worshiped false idols, etc—but I quickly lost count. Time and again they turned away from GOD, did whatever they wanted, lost GOD's protection, suffered great consequences, returned to GOD, and begged Him to rescue them. Over and over and over again! Sometimes there were lasting consequences for their poor decisions, but GOD showed more grace than was deserved (over and over and over again).

6. Rahab bravely asked GOD to save her (in spite of her past sins) and He did! *"The Lord your GOD is GOD in heaven above and on the earth below"* ([Josh. 2:11b](#)). Rahab is referred to as "the harlot" three times over in scripture. She was a prostitute—a sinner unworthy of GOD's grace. But somewhere along the way, she heard tales of this GOD of Israel. So when the two spies sought shelter in her home, she bravely bargained for her life. She confessed her belief in their GOD and asked for their mercy. And they gave it willingly, to her and all of her family. In fact, she dwelled with the Israelites and faithfully served GOD the rest of her days. That's grace!

209 **7. David lusted, stole, fornicated, lied, and killed—yet GOD saw his heart and loved him.** *“Wash me*
210 *thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin ([Ps. 51:1](#))”* Ok, I saved my favorite for last.
211 David is the ultimate example of GOD’s unmerited favor. But I’ve got to start by mentioning all of his
212 merits. Because there are many. Just open up the book of Psalms, and you will be astounded by how
213 deeply he loved GOD. In his heart of hearts, I don’t think David ever strayed from his love for GOD. He
214 just made some pretty terrible decisions along the way (haven’t we all?). The key is he always turned
215 from his sin and repented. And GOD forgave. That’s grace!
216
217 The Bible is packed with examples of humans who sin and a GOD who forgives. Humans who run and a
218 GOD who pursues. Humans who don’t deserve grace and a GOD who gives it anyway.
219 **If you’ve ever felt unworthy of GOD’s grace, just spend some time reading the Old Testament.**
220 GOD’s grace in the Old Testament is unavoidable, so long as you are looking for it. If you’ve ever felt
221 unworthy of GOD’s grace, just spend some time reading the Old Testament. You will soon discover that
222 no one is worthy of GOD’s grace: not Noah, not Abraham, not Joseph, not Moses, not the Israelites, not
223 Rahab, not David, not me, and not you. **That is what makes it *grace*.**