

Relational Grace: The Reciprocal and Binding Obligations of *Charis*

Disclaimer: Most people think they already know what grace is...Please have an open mind and heart....Studying it in Greek and in its context shows that it is not cheap ...

By Brent Schmidt

Charis (Grace)

Why is it so important to gain an understanding about grace?

- Appreciate and take full advantage of the atonement of Jesus Christ
- Gain enabling relationships with God the Father and His Son
- Gain more spiritual gifts and blessings as we receive the gifts God has already given
- Realize an apostasy happened and a restoration is necessary
- Because of Jesus' atonement, a *charis* relationship enables us to become like Heavenly Father

What is grace (*charis*) in one word?

- Gift
- Favor

Anciently, all gifts are reciprocal, covenantal and establish relationships



Social Sciences on Grace

- There is no such thing as a gift with no-strings-attached in any culture
- Marcel Mauss' and Marshall Sahlin's anthropological field studies
- Generalized reciprocity is often vertical and creates kinship relationships

Social equilibrium and cohesion could not exist in any society without “the reciprocity of service and return service.”

Georg

Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1950), 387.





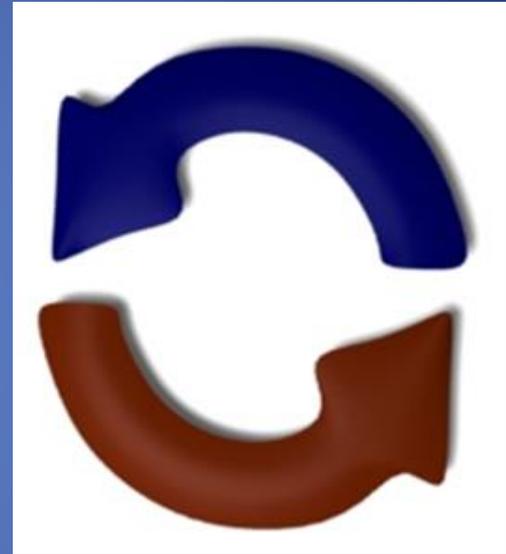
The obligation to make a gift, the obligation to receive it, and the obligation to repay it. Thus gift-giving creates reciprocal relationships.

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).

Generalized Reciprocity

Generous giving with an expectation that something, however small, will be given in return, which is a “characteristic of the intimate relationships of kinship and friendship.”

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



Old Testament *Charis*

- In Genesis 21:23 the Canaanite Abimelek expected something in return for his grace (*hesed; charis* LXX) done to Abraham
- The “Joseph Cycle” (Gen. 37-41) explains how reciprocity runs its course and through God’s *charis* and Joseph’s obedience (reciprocal *charis*) to God’s commandments, Joseph prospers, becomes the viceroy over all Egypt and saves all people

Aristotle



“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.”

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

Beginning in the Iliad, Achilles was upset with King Agamemnon because he did not fulfill his *charis* obligations to reward him for his faithful military service (Il. 9.316). Achilles famously sulked because the asymmetrical, vertical covenant associated with *charis* was not fulfilled.

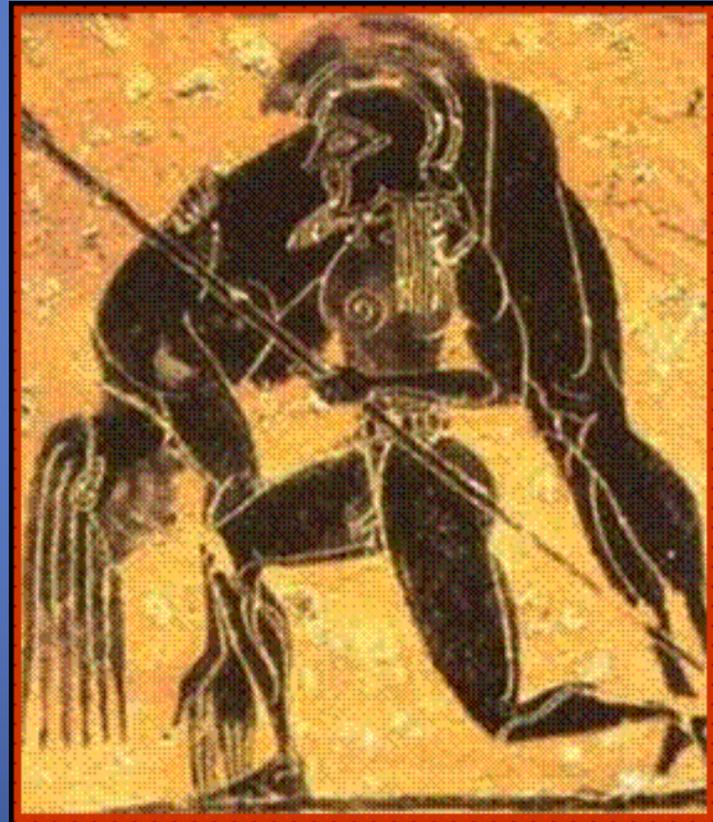




Chryses reminds the god Apollo in the Iliad that he has reciprocated grace (*charis*) through sacrifices at shrines, and calls upon him to destroy the Danaans. Apollo then reciprocates with Chryses. Homer, Iliad 1.39–50; 8.204.

Sophocles (c. 400 BC) Ajax line 522

Favor (*charis*) is always giving birth to Favor (*charis*).



Sophocles

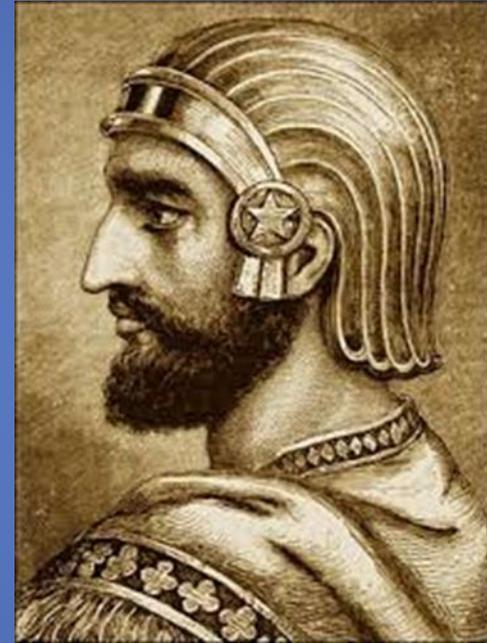


Oedipus: “I am welcome everywhere; every man salutes me, and those who want your favor (*charis*) seek my ear, since I know how to manage what they ask.”

Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 771–74.

Xenophon

“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.” Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 2.8.



2nd Century BC inscription
at Tomi



Epitaph: The people of Tomi give appropriate thanks (*charitas*) to the gods for their protection from the recent attacks of the Karoi...they promised to pay one-tenth or a tithing of their blessings in return called the cycle of the gods' beneficence. James R. Paul's *Language of Grace* p. 55

“Antiochene (by 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.”

The widower, Pamphylos, reciprocated his appreciation to his dearly departed spouse by means of setting up this epitaph. Jean-Baptiste Frey, ed., *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum*, 2 vols. (New York: Ktav, 1936–52), 2:772; Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace*, 149.

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. Seneca, *De Beneficiis* 2.24.4 and 2.25.3.

Jesus Teaches Vertical Reciprocity

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 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)

The Healing of the Ten Lepers



- 10 Lepers were healed but only one, a Samaritan, returned to give Jesus thanks (Luke 17:14-16)
- Jesus asked where the other nine were, emphasizing the importance of reciprocally returning thanks after receiving gifts from God

Romans 3:24 KJV

Being justified **freely** by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

δικαιούμενοι **δωρεάν** τῆ αὐτοῦ χάριτι διὰ τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ:

JST: “only”

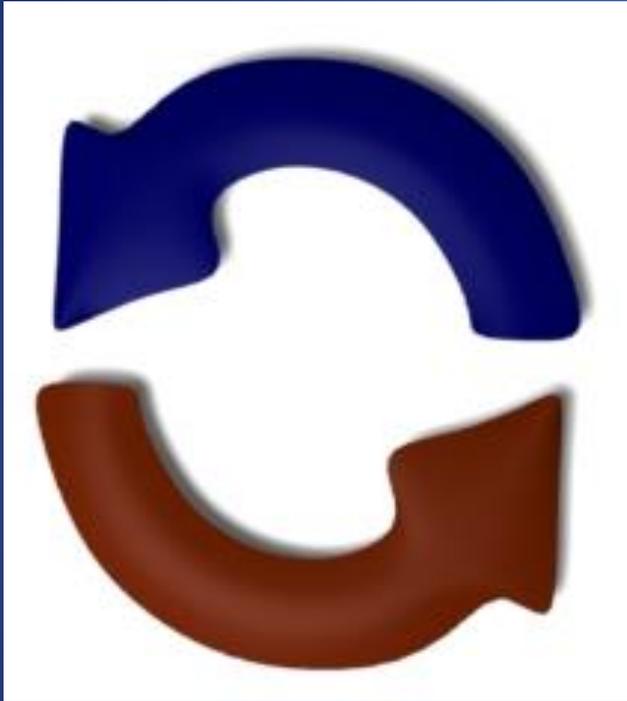
δωρεάν means “as a gift.” However, gifts have obligations

KJV Ephesians 2:8-9: For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

First-Century Probable Meaning:

You are rescued by the gift (of Christ's atonement) through a covenant and this gift of God is not of yourselves, nor are you rescued by practices of the law of Moses so that someone may not boast.

Reciprocity in Paul's Teachings



- 2 Cor. 6:13: charis obligations to parents
- Rom. 13:8-10; 15:26-27; 16:1-2; 1 Cor. 9:3-11; Gal. 6:6: converts are expected to reciprocate both materially and spiritually
- Paul mentions the phrase “giving and receiving in Philemon 1:15;

Cheap Grace Is Unacceptable

Jude 1:4: For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace (*charis*) of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Neo-Platonic Philosophy

- The One (God) freely gives by an act of love, grace (*charis*) to all things. [Plotinus,

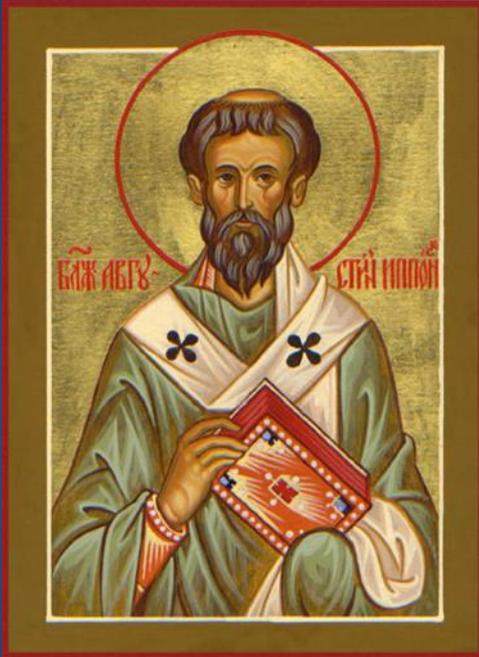
En. VI.7.35.30–34.a]

- Humans must accept God's grace as charity that is not reciprocated. Berchman, "Golden Rule in Greco-Roman Religion and Philosophy," 51–52.

Following Plotinus, Augustine 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." Augustine, *De*

Predestinatione 100.18; *De Corruptione et Gratia* 14; Augustine, *Enchiridion* 100.2.

Limited Atonement

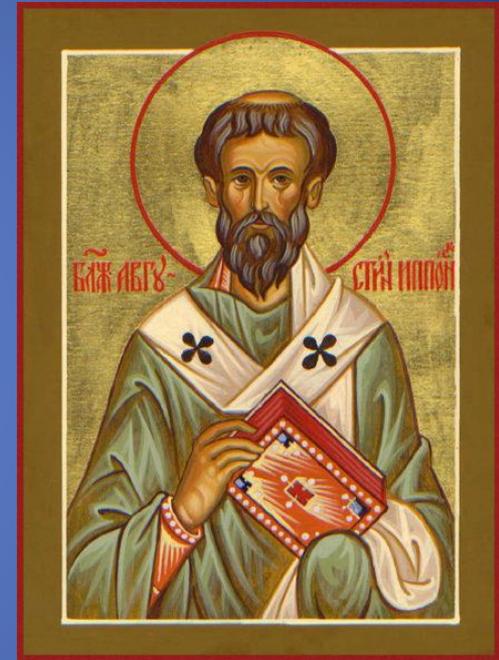


Augustine: “God who determines who receives grace and who does not.”

Augustine's thesis *Ad Simplicianum*, in Cary, *Inner Grace*, 87–88.

Augustine (AD 356-430)

Augustine admits that he did not know Greek well. He would not have understood the reciprocal nuances of *charis* (*Confessions* 8.20)



Augustine's contemporary



- Pelagius was a learned British monk (c. AD 400) who knew Greek very well
- “Whatever one ought to do, one should do”
- He argued that we have moral agency
- Pelagius argued that we are not responsible for Adam’s transgression
- He argued against a “no-strings-attached” and “irresistible grace” because they were not reciprocal

Martin Luther



“God has taken my salvation out of my hands and 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.” (*Bondage of the Will*; LW 33:289)

(Bondage of the Will; LW 33:289)



“God is to be thought of as saving them by free, unconditional, invincible grace.”

The Bondage of the Will,

a New Translation of De Servo Arbitrio (1525)



Calvin's TULIP:

“Total depravity,”

“Unconditional election,”

“Limited atonement,”

“Irresistible grace,” and

“Perseverance of the saints.”

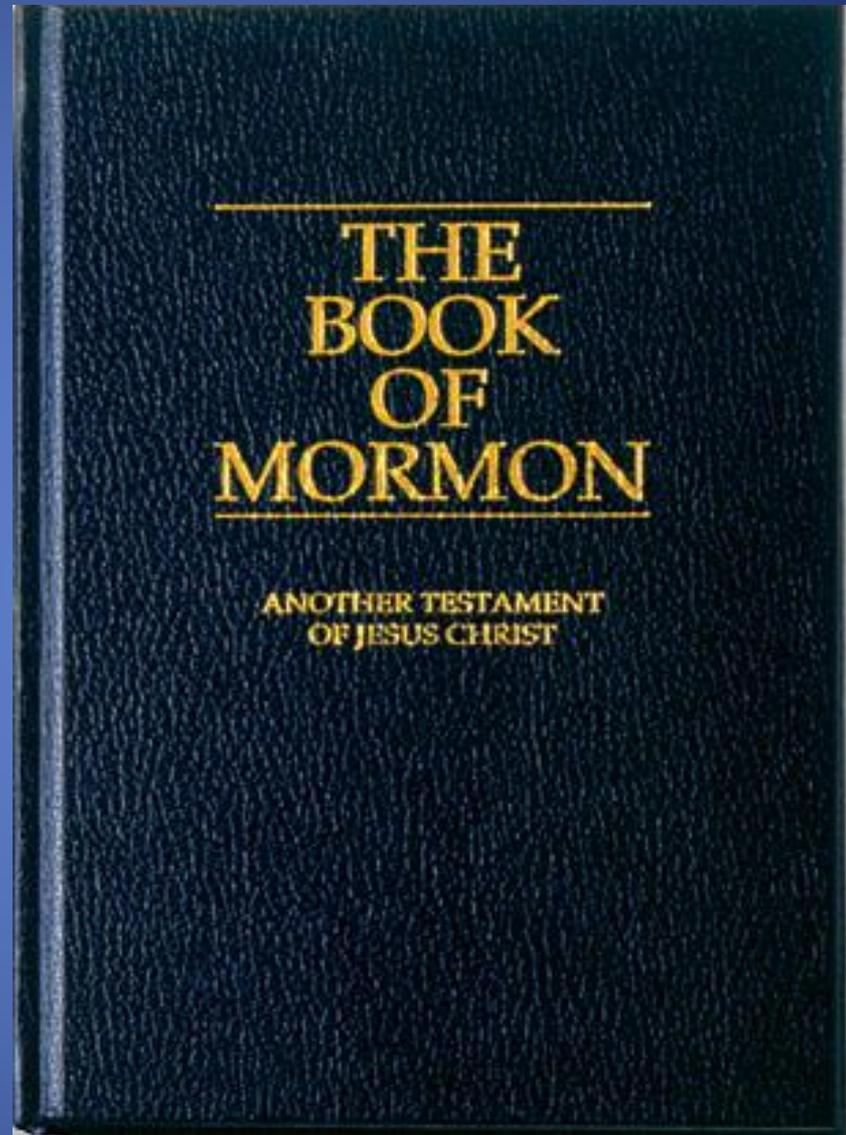
Dietrich Bonhoeffer



“Cheap grace” was not what Christ intended and contrasted it with “costly grace,” the radical discipleship that was required of Jesus’ followers.

The prophet Joseph Smith restored the ancient reciprocal and obligatory notions of covenant-making associated with *charis* through modern scripture

...to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.” (2 Nephi 25:23).



Alma 1:3-5

[Nehor] 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.

The Book of Mormon has ancient, reciprocal nuances of *charis*

- All will be resurrected; “salvation is free” meaning available to all (2 Nephi 2:4)
- Prophets are mostly focused on how to overcome spiritual death through the atonement of grace
- Dissenters and one anti-Christ teach “easy, cheap grace” in Alma 1:3-5; Helaman 7:5
- We are sanctified by grace only by dedicating all to God including “might, mind and strength” (Moroni 10:32)
- We must have a relationship or be reconciled to God and only through the grace of God are we saved (2 Nephi 10:23-24)

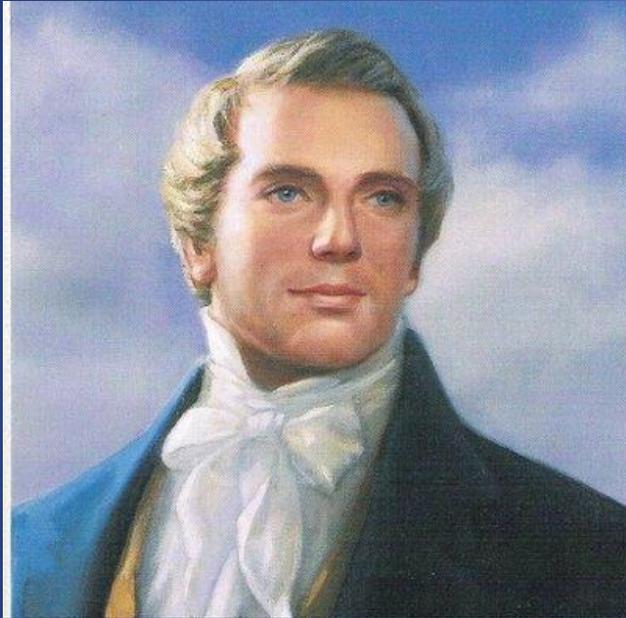
Reciprocal Grace in the Book of Mormon

- Gratitude through grace helps individuals move toward repentance in the story of Enos, Abinadi, King Lamoni and the Anti-Lehi-Nephis
- King Benjamin: we are unprofitable servants but we are still obligated to keep God's commandments (Mosiah 2:21-22)
- Grace is used as justice (2 Nephi 9:8, 11:5; Alma 42:25)
- Tree of Life allegory teaches that we are obligated to hold onto the word of God and continue on the path toward everlasting life (1 Nephi 8, 11)
- We must endure to the end (*charis* relationship)

D&C 88:32–33

“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.”

Ancient notions of
reciprocal *charis* in the
Doctrine and Covenants



- As we keep the commandments we receive a fullness of grace by grace (D&C 93:20) as the Savior did (D&C 93:112-113)
- D&C 17:8: When we keep the commandments the Savior's grace will be enough for us to receive eternal life

Grace Completes Gospel Ordinances

- D&C 20:4: Oliver Cowdery was ordained by the “grace of Jesus”
- D&C 21:1: Joseph Smith was called to be a prophet, seer and translator through the will and “grace of God”
- D&C 102:4: Other church officers accepted positions according to the “grace of God”
- Reciprocal nuances of grace obligated these early church leaders to magnify their callings

What Charis Gifts Has Heavenly Father Given Us?

- His Son (overcame physical and spiritual death)
- The Gift of the Holy Ghost
- Has Preserved agency
- Bodies
- Ordinances
- Prophets
- Priesthood
- As we reciprocate, we get more gifts (more of the Holy Ghost, gifts of the spirit) and we progress grace by grace like Jesus did and become like God (D&C 93)

How Can We
Reciprocate?

