



“THE GRACE OF GOD...”

Part 1

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There is not a more thrilling, comforting, exhilarating, and calming truth taught in the Word of God than the grace of God. One of the most known and beloved hymns of all time is called “Amazing Grace” and grace truly is amazing.

Some find it incredible that a loving God could allow a person to go to hell. That’s not incredible for we have all at some time rebelled against God. What’s amazing is that a HOLY God could allow us into heaven. We can attribute that to His wonderful grace. But it’s important that we understand what grace is, what it does, how and to whom it is applied, and that we understand its boundaries or limits. And it does have boundaries.

A single sermon could not begin to address much less exhaust all the scriptures that teach us something about God’s grace. But thankfully, in one short text, Paul concisely deals with four aspects of the grace of God that we all need to understand. These four truths can quickly dispel many of the false notions that people have about grace.

For our scripture reading, we turn to Paul’s letter to Titus; Titus chapter 2, beginning in verse 11, where the apostle writes: “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”

How do you view the grace of God? Is it unconditionally received? Is it an umbrella that covers all our sins whether we repent of them or not? Is it only offered to certain people? Those are all questions we will look to the bible to answer today in part one of a two-week study.

Grace is one of the most commonly used doctrinal terms in the New Testament, appearing 128 times in the New King James translation. Obviously, it is important. The word simply means ‘favor’ or ‘good will’ or ‘loving kindness’ and is used in several ways in the bible. It doesn’t always refer to the grace shown when God saves us from our sins. It can mean favor shown to the Christian in living the Christian life. God provides the Christian with strength and comfort in suffering and calls that ‘grace’ in 2 Corinthians 12:9. He gives us the grace we need to serve Him and to serve others. He gives us grace to sing even in our trials and our difficult circumstances. But today, we are talking about God’s SAVING grace. This is what Paul was talking about in our text, Titus 2, verses 11-14: “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”

Paul puts the amazing grace of God into the proper perspective for us in these four verses. We need that perspective because as the bible itself warns, there are many misrepresentations and abuses of grace being taught and believed in the world today. Some underestimate the grace of God, instead relying on their own righteousness, which is no righteousness at all. The bible makes it clear that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23) and that no person is righteous before God in and of themselves. “both Jews and Gentiles...are all under sin. There is none righteous, no not one.” (Romans 3:9-10) In other words, it matters not how hard a person tries, how good their intentions are, what their lineage is, how devoutly religious they are; all still find themselves under sin and condemned. That should humble every one of us before God and before others. We are all in critical need of the grace and mercy of God and never underestimate that need!

But there are just as many if not more who OVERESTIMATE the grace of God. They almost see it as a naïve and sentimental emotion on the part of God that just overlooks the sins we commit because God loves us so much and in effect, grace provides us with a blank check to live as we please and God will save us regardless. That’s not true either. Both are perversions of God’s saving grace. So, it would do us well to look closely at what Paul tells Titus and to see the four things that he teaches us about the grace of God.

First, Paul shows us that the grace of God is **REDEEMING** grace. Salvation from sin involves redemption for without the intervention of God, we are sold out to sin and our souls are in the clutches of the devil. We thus share in the condemnation that is promised him one day. But through Christ, God has redeemed those who have believed in Christ, repented of their sins, confessed the Lord, and obeyed the gospel in baptism. This is the case because of God’s grace and no other cause. Look carefully in Titus 2:11, “For the grace of God which brings salvation...” Mankind has offered nothing that would induce God to be kind and give us anything except the judgment we deserve. We all fall short. No person listening to me today nor any other person who lives, has ever lived, or ever will live, except the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, has ever lived a sinlessly perfect life. Every single one of us has broken the law of God. We have done the things that God said not to do, and we have failed to do everything God has told us TO do. Both are sin. That means every one of us (without Christ) appears before God as a sinner and the soul that sins are under the penalty of death. (Ezekiel 18:20, Romans 6:23)

Now, you may regret the sins you’ve done in the past and try to clean up your life and please God going forward but that within itself doesn’t rectify the sins you’ve committed in the past nor will you live the rest of your life without at some point falling short of God’s perfect standard. So, where does that leave

us? It leaves us up a creek without a paddle. It leaves us on the sure path to eternal hell. Friend, again, it's not so hard to believe that God would condemn a sinner, it's hard to understand how He can save a sinner without compromising His own law and His own holiness! That's the mystery, except that God is willing to be gracious and provide us with something we could never earn for ourselves. That's the quintessential meaning of GRACE. And if you don't see your sins and your condition in that light, you don't understand sin, nor grace, nor the gospel. But praise the Lord that He is willing to save. Thank God that He reached down His pure and holy hand to a sinful and rebellious world and offered to forgive and redeem. Now, that forgiveness must allow God to remain holy and true to His word. He doesn't just wink and look the other direction. Saving us required the vicarious sacrifice of His sinless Son and Paul said that through placing our faith in Him who died in our stead, God can justify us (or consider us as being without sin) and at the same time remain the JUST and HOLY God that He is. (Romans 3:26).

Now, that grace shown in Christ is a gift. We did not and will not ever earn His sacrifice. It was the gracious loving-kindness of God that provided such a plan. If you can earn it, then it's not a gift – it's a wage. And we can never place God in our debt. Therefore, Paul said in Ephesians 2:8-9, "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." So, this begs a few questions. If you were with us recently, we talked about the bible phrase "obey the gospel" and we showed from the scriptures that such obedience is necessary to be saved. So, do we have a contradiction? When Paul says we are saved by grace through faith and it's not of ourselves and not of works lest we should boast, was he teaching that salvation is just automatically given and there are no conditions to receiving it? If that's what he's saying, then what in the world do we do with a number of other scriptures? For example, Hebrews 5:9 says that Christ "became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,". What do we do with the words of Jesus Himself when He said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."? (Matthew 7:21) What about Mark 16:16 when He told the apostles to go and preach the gospel to the whole world and then said "He who believes and is baptized will be saved..."

Now, you might reply, that the obedience here is just to believe, but first, that's not what Jesus said there in Mark 16, and second, that wouldn't solve our seeming contradiction either because in John 6:29, Jesus said "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." So, if our work is to believe or put faith in Christ, then how does that square with Paul in Ephesians 2 when he says we are saved by grace THROUGH faith, not of WORKS? And we haven't even considered yet what James said in James 2. Listen to him there in James 2, verses 14 and 20-24. "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?"...But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS ACCOUNTED TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only."

How can Paul say we are saved by grace THROUGH faith and NOT by works but James says faith alone doesn't justify, it is faith working together with his works? Who's right? They're both right. Martin Luther so struggled with this seeming contradiction that at one point he thought he had to deny the inspiration of the book of James. But there's no need for that. The reformers were so opposed to the works-based salvation promoted at the time (and rightfully so) that in running away from Rome, they ran right past Jerusalem and Acts 2:38.

Friend, Paul and James are not talking about the same kinds of works. Paul is talking about a man working his way to heaven. Paul is talking about the person who believes he can be righteous enough for God to accept him, and he is showing the utter folly of such a thought. James is not talking about works of merit. He's not suggesting that we pile up good works and God gives us salvation because we've worked our way up. Not at all. James is talking about the obedience of faith. He's talking about the kind of works that faith produces and no man can boast in such. They are just that, the works of FAITH or trust in Christ – not a record of flawless perfection or meritorious works. But the idea that the sinner is not expected by faith to render obedience to the gospel as a condition of receiving salvation is simply false doctrine.

The question was asked on more than one occasion in the Book of Acts “What must we do?” (Acts 2:37) or “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30) or “Lord, what will you have me to do?” asked Saul in Acts 9:6. Do you know on not ONE of those occasions was any of those people scolded for asking such a question. Never did the apostles rebuke them for asking what they must DO. Instead, they told them what to do! Peter told the people in Acts 2:38 “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins...” Paul told the jailer in Acts 16 to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and then he went on to explain what that meant and that same hour, the jailer and his family were baptized. Jesus Himself told Saul to go into Tarsus and a man would come and tell him what he had to do. When Ananias got there, he told Saul to arise and be baptized and wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord. (Acts 22:16) Preachers today tell you there's nothing a sinner must do; it's all done for you. That sounds good. It preaches good. But that's not what the bible says and that's not what Paul was teaching in Ephesians 2:8-9.

In fact, while we're talking about Saul (or Paul), I want us to see something very interesting that he later said in Acts 22. Long after he became a Christian and an apostle, Paul was arrested at the temple in Jerusalem. As he was being led away, he was allowed to address the mob around him, and he gave a defense of His faith and his conversion. He told the story of what happened on the Damascus Road and how the Lord appeared before Him and how he asked the Lord what he wanted him to do. Listen to how Paul recounted the Lord's response in verse 10. “So I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.’” As I pointed out last week, Saul already believed in Jesus. There was no doubt that Jesus was resurrected now since He saw Him and heard Him speak. He had already repented. He was ready to take orders from the Lord. But there was still something for him to do! And he learned what that was when Ananias came and instructed him to immediately get up and be baptized to wash away his sins and call on the name of the Lord. Now, was Saul saved by grace? Of course he was! Did he have to be baptized to wash way his sins and call on the name of Lord. Yes, he did.

Friend, when you submit to Christ in baptism, you're not earning anything. You're putting your faith in Christ to save you by submitting to His gospel command. Paul puts this beautifully in Colossians 2:12-13. Read it carefully! He says, “...buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,” When did they come to life, being forgiven of their sins? When they were raised with Him after being buried with Him in the waters of baptism, placing their faith in the OPERATION OF GOD. God does the work. The glory goes to Him. But He does it when in faith we submit to the command of His Son and are baptized into union with Him. And yes; that IS salvation by grace through faith, not of ourselves. That IS faith working together with obedience (as James referred to it) resulting in justification. That's the REDEEMING grace of God.

Now, the devil doesn't want you to know that. He wants to pervert the gospel and keep you away from salvation. And he uses as subtle and devious of a means to do it as he can, and he uses religious teachers to convince people of his error. He wants you to believe that God's grace is unconditionally received and applied when, as we have shown, the Word of God teaches otherwise. Lord willing, next week, we will see the next thing Paul refers to in Titus 2 about the grace of God. He shows us that it is a REACHING grace. Who is it for? Who can receive it? I hope you'll join me for the second half of our study, next week.

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