

# Extraordinary Grace

Ephesians 2:1-9

## Intro

During a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world debated what, if any, belief was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities. Incarnation? Other religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form. Resurrection? Again, other religions had accounts of return from death.

The debate went on for some time until C. S. Lewis wandered into the room. “*What’s the commotion about?*” he asked, and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity’s unique contribution among world religions. Lewis responded, “*Oh, that’s easy. It’s grace.*”

Bono, lead singer of the band U2 said in an interview with beliefnet.com, “*The most powerful idea that’s entered the world in the last few thousand years—the idea of grace—is the reason I would like to be a Christian.*”

What do you think of when you hear the word grace? Most people perhaps think of grace as saying grace before meals. In the Christian community we are constantly surrounded by this word, but do we truly understand the magnitude of grace? Grace is an incredibly critical and important doctrine of the Christian faith.

Some of the most detailed theology textbooks do not offer any concise definition of the term. Someone explained grace with this acronym:

God's  
Riches  
At  
Christ's  
Expense

That’s not a bad way to characterize grace, but it is not a sufficient theological definition.

A. W. Tozer expanded on that idea by saying, “Grace is the good pleasure of God that inclines him to bestow benefits on the undeserving.”

The theologian Berkhof explained grace as “*the unmerited operation of God in the heart of man, effected through the agency of the Holy Spirit*”.

The key word in what these great minds have said is this, “unmerited” – grace is completely undeserved and therefore it leads to the conclusion that grace is in essence a free gift given to us by God through Christ.

Grace is a constant theme in the Bible, and it culminates in the New Testament with the coming of Jesus. Grace is mentioned 170 times in the Bible. It is used and defined in two primary ways.

## What is Grace?

**1. Grace is God's unmerited favour.** That is, grace is God doing good for us that we do not deserve. In the Bible, grace and mercy are like two heads of the same coin. Mercy is God

withholding judgment or evil that I deserve; grace is God giving me blessing or good that I do not deserve. Because of God's mercy, I do not receive the judgment of God against my sins; because of God's grace, I receive eternal life and a promise of heaven though I do not deserve it.

Grace is not only God's unmerited favour but it is kindness from God which we don't deserve. There is nothing we have done, nor can we ever do to earn God's favour and kindness. It is a gift from God. Grace is divine assistance given to humans for their regeneration (rebirth).

An atheist once said, *"If there really is a God, may He prove Himself by striking me dead right now."* Nothing happened. The atheist proudly announced, *"You see, there is no God."* His friend responded, *"You've only proved that He is a gracious God."*

## **2. Grace can also be defined as God's sufficiency or God's fullness in the life of the believer.**

The Lord told Paul, *"My grace is sufficient for you: for my strength is made perfect in weakness"* (2 Corinthians 12:9). This means that the grace of God in Paul enabled him and empowered him in his weakness.

Another verse states, *"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work"* (2 Corinthians 9:8). God's grace working in us supplies the sufficiency whereby we may abound to every good work. I like to call grace *"God's enoughness."* By this I mean that God is enough for us no matter what the situation we face.

**Extraordinary Grace** - let's elaborate on this remarkable grace.

### **1. Something We Cannot Earn**

This is a foreign idea because we live in a society that is based on earnings and rewards.

For example, we work tirelessly for a week or two then anxiously await our hard earned paycheck. Correct me if I am wrong, but I have never heard of anyone going up to their boss after they receive their paychecks and saying, *"Thank you, oh thank you for this undeserved gift. How can I possibly thank you enough?"* No, this is not how it works. You earned that paycheck. We are engrained with the idea that the more and harder we work the more we will receive in return. This idea is very present in the business world and in our society.

\*Grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us more and there is nothing we can do to make God love us less. Grace means that God already loves. It is absolutely not determined on what we do, it is not earned.

### **2. Grace Is Allowing Second Chances**

Jesus' parable of the prodigal son and the gracious Father in Luke 15 illustrates this perfectly... Grace allows second chances and that is what God does for us. When we stumble, when we struggle, when we are disobedient, and unfaithful. God is always there to welcome us back with open arms when we are repentant.

I do not think there is any greater example of this than the life of the Apostle Paul. He was a devout religious Jew. He hated the name of Jesus. He purposed in his heart to do everything he could to stop the spread of Jesus' name. He went from church to church ravaging them, dragging the believers out and having them thrown in prison.

This great man who wrote about half of our New Testament confessed, *“I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man.”*

Paul knew grace and understood grace because he had experienced grace. This grace changed Paul’s life forever. God’s grace gave him a second chance.

### **3. Grace Is A Means To Salvation**

Years ago when I studied about the different religions of the world I found an interesting common denominator in most religions. In order to attain life after death one had to work and earn it through personal effort and work.

The notion of God’s love coming to us free of charge, no strings attached, seems to go against every instinct of humanity. The Buddhist eight-fold path, the Hindu doctrine of Karma, the Jewish covenant, and the Muslim code of law—each of these offers a way to earn approval. Only Christianity dares to make God’s love unconditional.

That’s what many religious people believe. But that’s not what the Bible says. We are saved not by works but by the grace of God.

Ephesians 2:8-9, *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.”*

This brings us to the heart of the gospel, and what is often seen as the heart of the book of Ephesians. Verses 8-9 are ones many of us have memorized, and with good reason – they succinctly and powerfully state the incredible message of salvation.

It really is simple: salvation is by grace through faith. What more needs to be said? God’s grace offers it, we receive it in faith. And lest we go off and think that we are something great because of the exercise of our faith, the verse continues quickly to say it is not of ourselves, and it is nothing we have earned. It is simply a gift, to be believed and accepted.

That is the incredible simplicity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: because of His great love for us, God offers us the gift of salvation by His grace. All we need to do is have faith. And once again, the truth that we have confronted over and over in Ephesians is front and center here also – it is all about God and what God did and does. The focus is on Him – He is the central character, He is the one who pours out grace and saves us.

I don’t understand why this is really so hard for so many of us – why we can’t just accept the gift. Maybe it is part of the Satan’s plan to try to convince us that we have to earn it – we have to work for God’s love and approval rather than simply accepting His gift by faith.

Do you struggle with that? Do you find your service to God becoming an attempt to earn His love and acceptance – in essence trying to earn your salvation? If so, meditate on this verse this week. Memorize it, write in on your fridge, make it your screen saver, whatever – but seek to immerse yourself in the truth that it is by grace through faith that we are saved.

What an amazing grace!

## Application

Now then, what do we do with all of this understanding of grace? We have looked at it being something: We cannot earn, we seen that it allows second chances, and that it is the means to salvation.

Chuck Swindoll said it well, "*Knowing grace is one thing, living it is another.*"

Similarly, we have been given this grace by God; therefore, it is our privilege as well as obligation as Christians to show this grace to others.

When the world thinks of the church, they do not often see grace. In fact, Phillip Yancey quotes a prostitute who was down and out in Chicago. She was asked if she had ever thought about going to church. Shockingly, she replied, "*Church! Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. That would just make me feel worse.*"

How come we are not perceived as giving off grace? Where are we missing the mark? When your friends or your relatives see you, do they see grace? Do they see you extending favour and kindness to others?

I like what C.S. Lewis wrote, "*To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.*"

## Conclusion

Grace is the best gift Christians can give the world because it is the best gift we have ever received. From an early age we are taught to survive in a world that does not know grace. We are taught mottos such as: the early bird gets the worm, no pain no gain, there is no such thing as a free lunch, demand your rights, get what you pay for.

None of these reflect grace.

## Powerful Story

Bill Moyers' documentary film on the hymn "Amazing Grace" includes a scene filmed in Wembley Stadium in London. Various musical groups, mostly rock bands, had gathered together in celebration of the changes in South Africa, and for some reason the promoters scheduled an opera singer, Jessye Norman, as the closing act.

The film cuts back and forth between scenes of the unruly crowd in the stadium and Jessye Norman being interviewed. For twelve hours groups like Guns 'n Roses have blasted the crowd through banks of speakers, riling up fans already high on booze and dope. The crowd yells for more curtain calls, and the rock groups oblige. Meanwhile, Jessye Norman sits in her dressing room discussing "Amazing Grace" with Moyers.

Finally, the time comes for her to sing. A single circle of light follows Jessye, a majestic African-American woman wearing a flowing African dashiki, as she strolls on stage. No backup band, no musical instruments, just Jessye. The crowd stirs, restless. Few recognize the opera diva. A voice yells for more Guns 'n Roses. Others take up the cry. The scene is getting ugly.

Alone, a cappella, Jessye Norman begins to sing, very slowly:

*"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost but now am found --  
Was blind, but now I see."*

A remarkable thing happens in Wembley Stadium that night. 70,000 raucous fans fall silent before her solo of grace. By the time Jessye reaches the second verse,

*“Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,*

*And grace my fears relieved ...,”* the soprano has the crowd in her hands.

By the time she reaches the third verse, *“Tis grace has brought me safe this far, And grace will lead me home,”* several thousand fans are singing along, digging far back in nearly lost memories for words they heard long ago.

*“When we’ve been there ten thousand years,*

*Bright shining as the sun*

*We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise*

*Than when we first begun.”*

Jessye Norman later confessed she had no idea what power descended on Wembley Stadium that night. I think I know. The world thirsts for grace. When grace descends, the world falls silent before it. (Excerpt from Phillip Yancey’s book: “What’s So Amazing about Grace?”)

The world thirsts for grace. When grace descends, the world falls silent before it.

It happened to my daughter Jennifer lately...

Let’s leave here today and tell the precious lost of God’s grace. Let’s also leave today and give the world some grace.