

Amazing Grace

Romans 3:24

September 21st, 2008

John was born in 1725 to Christian parents. He was instructed in the discipline of Scripture memorization almost as soon as he could talk. His mother sat him on her knee many times and taught him from the Word of God. She encouraged him to commit as many Scriptures from memory as possible at a very young age. It was important that she did that because she died when he was six years old. John was taken out of his home and placed in the home of a relative. But this relative did not share the same values that John's mother did. She actually mocked Christianity. As soon as John was old enough he left that relative's home and joined the British navy. It was not long until he decided to abandon the navy right off the coast of Africa. According to his journal he decided to do this because he knew once he got to Africa he could "sin his fill". Sure enough he did. It was reported that John could actually swear for two hours and never repeat the same word. While he was in the debauchery of sin he met a Portuguese slave trader. This trader took him into his home and it was not long until he was treating him as one of his own. When he would leave to go on one of his slave trading expeditions, John would stay in the household. This man's wife was an African and she hated white men. John wrote that many times while the slave trader was away she would put him in chains. She would not let him eat his food with his hands. She would pour his food on the ground and make him eat like a dog. It was not long until John decided to flee that environment. He found his way to the coast of Africa where he found a British merchant ship going to Scotland. The captain of the ship thought that John had ivory therefore he let him on board the ship, only to discover later that he did not. It did not take long

until he discovered that John was a great navigator. Soon he was navigating that great ship. As they came closer to the coast of Scotland a raging storm overtook their boat. John left his post and went down into the hold of the boat and he and the others began to bail water out of the boat. John wrote that he was down there for days. In the midst of bailing water, the Scriptures he had memorized as a young boy began to flood his mind. There in the belly of that ship he was regenerated by the Spirit of God. God's grace moved upon him and he responded by faith to the revelation of God and what He did in His Son. John Newton's life was never the same. He went on to become a great evangelist. He wrote many hymns. He is known in Europe as the second father of the Church of England. He is known in our lives by those famous words that he penned, "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". From his journal we discovered that his favorite verse in the Bible was Romans 5:20. "Where sin did abound, grace did much more abound." In the hymn Amazing Grace, John tried to write about the abounding, amazing grace of God.

We will ponder God's amazing grace as we study the first part of Romans 3:24.

Scripture

"and are justified by His grace as a gift"

It might interest you to know that this word **justified** comes from the same family of words as the word **righteousness** in verses 21 and 22. As I have stated before, our English words **faith** and **believed** translate the same Greek word family. The reason English translations interchange faith and believe is because we do not have a verb for faith. In the English it comes to us only in the noun form. It is the same way with the word **righteous**. The root of the words **righteous** and **justify** is the word right. We do not have a verb form for right. The opposite of right is to be wrong. We have a verb form for wrong, it is wronged. But in English we cannot say righted, so we say justified. Paul is teaching that the

righteousness of God being revealed is the saving activity of God, whereby He transforms a sinner into a saint. The way that righteousness is applied to the heart and lives of an individual is through faith in Christ. Paul is not being redundant in verse 22, but wants us to know that this righteousness of God is available to all who believe. He tells us there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned, and continually fall short of the glory of God. Now he goes back to his previous statement about faith and belief when he says "*and are justified*". The word justified means that we are brought into a right relationship with God. God has dealt with what was wrong with us in Christ. We were a sinner, and held captive to the chains of sin. We were a slave of sin, therefore a sinner. As a sinner, we all fall short of the glory of God. But God brings us into a right relationship with Him. God does not make you right with Him because there is a change in you; there is a change in you because He makes you right with Him. This saving activity is not anything within you that causes us to be right with God. The transformation from a sinner to a saint that takes place in our life at the moment of justification is all a work of God's grace. That is why he says "*and are justified by His grace*". Grace is God's enabling power. Grace is God doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves, so that we can now do what He did. But you will not find those definitions in Sunday school books, or scholarly books. They all go with this definition, and it is a good definition: **Grace** is "God's unmerited favor". It is "God's loving kindness toward us who do not deserve it". So we are made right with God based on God's unmerited favor. This word grace means that this does not have anything to do with Law, or works, or what is in us. The initiative and completion of our salvation all rests in God. I find it interesting that we get our English word **charity** from this Greek word that is translated grace. In the Christian Church we have been taught to be charitable and gracious. So when we are gracious to people we are bestowing unmerited favor upon them. We are treating them in a way they do not deserve. That is what it means to be gracious. When we are truly charitable we are helping someone who cannot help themselves. I have noticed, even in the Church, that we kind of pick out who we are charitable

to. I have noticed in our area that there are some people we feel like should not even be treated charitably. When someone receives charity, it seems we almost have to have a reason to be charitable to them. In other words, we almost have to believe the reason they need help is because they cannot help themselves, and the reason they are in the mess they are in is no fault of their own. Therefore if it is no fault of theirs, then we are more likely to be charitable. But when we find out someone is in the mess they are in because of their own doing, sometimes we are not as charitable.

We are made right with God "*by His grace as a gift*". In the KJV it says freely, "*being justified freely by His grace*". ESV says "*as a gift*". This word in the Greek has two primary meanings:

1. Without cost
2. Without cause

Now you understand why our English versions translate this Greek word ***doron*** as "free or a gift". I do not think many people find grace amazing anymore. The reason we do not is because in our society we no longer understand the true nature of a gift. We all understand the nature of a gift being without cost, it is free to us. If anyone knows what it is to receive a gift without cost it is me. On the 1st Sunday of May you gave me a gift of a brand new 4 wheel drive Toyota Tacoma truck. The sticker price was almost \$30,000. You gave it to me as a gift, and I received it. It was free to me, but I do not view myself as driving around in a truck that was free. It was free to me, but there was a cost to you. If I viewed that truck as just free to me without a cost to you, I would be thinking I was driving a cheap truck. If I thought I was driving a cheap truck, I would treat it like I did my Nissan. I do not treat my Toyota like I did my Nissan. I value it as a \$30,000 truck. I value it as a gift. But something has happened to me since I received that new truck. There is something that many of you said that just keeps ringing in my ears. I was very humbled by that gift, but some of you would say that I deserved that truck. But let me ask you, how many of

you really believe after 25 years of putting up with you that I deserve that truck? It hit me that you did not give me a gift. I do not look at my truck as a gift from you anymore because you say I deserved it. If I deserved it then it is owed to me. We understand a gift is being without cost, but I want to suggest that very few of us have ever received a true gift that was without cost and without cause. The cause of you giving me a \$30,000 truck is my relationship with you as your pastor for 25 years. I got to thinking, when I was a kid and it was my birthday, we would have a birthday party and I expected gifts. Would it not have been a sad birthday without gifts? Then I was thinking about all of the gifts I have given my wife on our anniversary, and again they were without cost to her, but they were not without cause. I was giving her those gifts on our anniversary because she has been living with me for 28 years. Therefore I really thought she deserved it. Christmas is almost the same way. When we celebrate it we expect to receive gifts from those that we love and that love us. Therefore we receive gifts from our parents, grandparents, siblings, and so forth. They are gifts in the sense that they are without cost, but they are not gifts in the sense that they are without cause. Do you get it yet? The reason our right standing with God on the basis of grace as a gift is because not only did God pay the cost of our salvation in Christ, it originated in His heart without a cause. Modern versions change Amazing Grace from "a wretch like me" to "a sinner like me". Do you understand why John Newton thought grace was amazing? He did not just view himself as a sinner he viewed himself as a wretch. Therefore he knew when God graced him with a right relationship there was no cause in him that caused it. He knew it was God's amazing grace. Do you understand grace to be that way? I believe we are living in a world that believes God owes salvation to them. Some of us think that because we went to Church God owes it to us to save our kids or grandkids. We think that because we put the cause in us. Salvation in Christ is not only without cost, it is without cause. I cannot even begin to fathom this amazing grace because I cannot get my arms around it. Just imagine Bill Gates, even with the stock market losing 20% of its value, he is still a very rich man. Imagine him going

somewhere on the streets of the United States of America without cause, and choosing the laziest bum ever born and adopting that bum into his family and bestowing all of his fortune on that man. That does not even scratch the surface of what God did for us. Is God's grace amazing to you? Can you ponder this amazing grace? Without a cause in you, totally within Him, God bestowed His grace on you. He did for you what you could not do for yourself. He brought you into a right relationship with Him through His Son so that you can now live in a right relationship with Him. You are an heir of the King of kings and Lord of lords. He put shoes on your feet, a robe on your back, and a ring on your finger. And He brought you, a spiritual bum, into the family partnership. This act of His grace does not leave you a bum. It transforms you into a child of His. We will work with our Father, not for Him, in the family business.