



What's So Amazing About Grace

Romans 3:21-31 | Feb 9, 2020

“So how does the magic happen?” That’s the question we heard posed one Sunday by a newcomer who was so impressed by the love and organization of our children’s ministry team. *Clearly so much has gone into preparing this for us. It seems magical. How does it happen?*

That’s a question worth asking of God and the gospel too: So much has gone into opening heaven for us. Awful people like us get accepted by an Awesome King like Jesus. *How does the magic happen?*

Romans 3, tells us how—especially verses 21-26, which many consider to be the most important paragraph in the whole Bible. It explains what’s so amazing, so *magical*, about grace. For 64 verses Paul has explained the depths of our sin and how the wrath of God is being revealed against it. But then comes the great turn of 3:21: “But now the righteousness of God is revealed” ... which comes to us as a gift by faith in Jesus Christ. *Righteousness* is the state of being right with a person because you do right by a person. God, amazingly, puts people like us in that righteous position with him. Two things in particular make this grace so astonishing:

- 1. How sinfully unrighteous we are.** Romans 3:23 famously says that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We’re nowhere close to his righteous standard. It’s like standing on the Jersey shore and trying to jump to France. Some can jump farther than others, but we’re all still an ocean away from the goal.
- 2. How perfectly holy and righteous God is.** God’s perfect righteousness is part of the “problem,” if we dare put it that way. You see, whereas people easily compromise standards and indulge sins (especially their own), God simply cannot do it. His holiness cannot countenance sin. His righteousness, by definition, stands for the right and against the wrong. Yet somehow God justifies the ungodly and acquits the guilty. How? How does the magic happen? In the death of Christ, God accomplishes three things:

- **Redemption from sin:** “Redemption” is a marketplace term signifying the payment of a price to save the life of a prisoner of war, a criminal, a debtor, or a slave (all of which aptly describe us in our sin). Jesus pays for our lives, not with gold or silver, but with his precious blood (1 Peter 1:18-19).
- **Propitiation of wrath:** “Propitiation” is a religious word meaning “a sacrifice that satisfies wrath.” Not that God is a volatile deity who demands a head on a platter to placate him, but he is a holy God who rightly feels wrathful toward sin—just as we do when we suffer a serious crime or abuse. Jesus’ death satisfied that wrath fully and permanently, so now God is “propitious” or favorable toward us.
- **Demonstration of justice:** “Justice” is a legal term, and when a person is justified, he or she is declared to be in the right. Romans 3:26 says that the death of Christ is a show, display, or demonstration that God is both just and justifier. In other words, he is both a just judge and a legitimate justifier of the ungodly. How is this possible? By a brilliant act of impeccable jurisprudence, God judged sin in Christ—and justified sinners in Christ! Without compromising his righteous standard, or cutting a single judicial corner, God justly punished sin and lovingly justified sinners. Thus we are made right with God because Jesus did right by God on our behalf. This is the “magic,” the amazing grace of the gospel.

Discussion Guide

1. Read Romans 3:21-31. What do you find most striking about this passage?
2. Consider what these great theologians say about Romans 3:21-26:

Martin Luther: "This is the chief point of the entire Bible."
John Calvin: "This is the hinge on which everything turns."
Leon Morris: "This is quite possibly the most important paragraph ever written."
J.I. Packer: "This is the Atlas on whose shoulders the whole Christian faith rests."

 - Why do you think they say this about Romans 3—why not the paragraph around John 3:16, or the last paragraph of Romans 8?
 - How would you explain the significance of this text to a non-Christian or new believer?
3. The first great "amazement" of grace is that it comes to sinners like us. Even the most moral and upright of us fall far short of God's glory. H.C.G. Moule wrote,

"The prostitute, the liar, the murderer, are short of God's glory; but so are you. Perhaps they stand at the bottom of a mine, and you on the crest of an Alp—but you are as little able to touch the stars as they."

 - How do thoughts like this help us? How do they help our outlook on ourselves and on others?
4. The second great "amazement" of grace is that God is so perfectly holy and righteous, yet he still saves us by sheer grace. Process through "how the magic happens" in these three accomplishments of the death of Christ for us:
 - **Redemption from sin:** What freedom and release have you experienced through Christ? What is one expression or evidence of how he has redeemed your life?
 - **Propitiation of wrath:** The critics of atonement theology (which involves blood sacrifice) think that propitiation is too primitive a concept. They say it's beneath God. "What kind of deity would require blood and death in order to relax and forgive sin? I wouldn't even want to worship a God like that," they say. How would you respond?
 - **Demonstration of justice:** God had to demonstrate that he is both just and justifier, especially because "in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins." Remember the story of David and Bathsheba? Immediately upon confessing his sin, David hears from the prophet Nathan, "God has taken away your sin." Why would that be unjust apart from Christ?

Does it make legal and logical sense that God can justly justify sinners because of Jesus? Why or why not? How can we help each other come to grips with this core tenet of the Christian faith?
5. What's one take-away for you from this text? What's one thing to know, do, believe, or feel in this Scripture?