

Grace

Powerful Beautiful Grace

“If you were to scan the entire human vocabulary for the most beautiful word in the universe, what word would you choose? Some might choose love, and I won't disagree. You can make a strong biblical case for that word (John 3:16, Romans 5:8, and John 13:34). You see, God's grace is the most powerful force in the universe, so I would have to argue that it's the most beautiful word in the universe. It reaches you where you are and takes you where God wants you to be. It has the power to do something that nothing else can do: transform you at the causal core of who you are as a human being - your heart.” (Paul Tripp, 6 types of grace)

In Acts 20, Paul is rushing back to Jerusalem from his years of ministry in Asia minor. It is a challenging time for him to finish the course well (vs 18-23) and give a parting message to those he served: his challenge to finish strong and not compromise on proclaiming the gospel of grace. He compares this to the whole purpose of God (vs 27). He warns followers to be prepared for spiritual warfare and to admonish one another (vs 28-31). He challenges them that they need to be built up in the powerful beautiful grace as an inheritance (vs 32).

Through grace God demonstrates His care for all His creation no matter how we respond to him (Matt 5:45, Psalms 145:9). This is called His common grace. This spring was a very busy time for me and some nights I would go to bed asking God how I can get through the tasks of the next day. Even though the next day was busy it would be laced with special messages from God that would cause me to praise Him and give thanks. One of those special events was a pair of Bald Eagles that would spend much of the day in the top of our neighbor's pine tree. In the morning, I could walk out and see them sunning themselves with their wings outstretched and their brilliant white heads and tails lit up by the sun. As the day went on we could hear their chatter and see them soaring on the warm afternoon currents. This experience was God's beautiful gift of common grace to me and anyone else blessed by His creation.

God also has special (saving or sustaining) grace that is just for those of faith. Theologian Herman Bavinck describes special grace as “God's voluntary, unrestrained, unmerited favor toward guilty sinners, granting them justification and life instead of the penalty of death, which they deserved.” This grace is really the “good news!” for us as described in Act 20:24. This gift restores us from our separation from God, our creator. We are restored in our relationship with God based on what Jesus did on the cross and not what we do in our flesh. Ephesians 2:8-9 describes saving grace, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”* This free gift is to those who believe, freeing them from the slavery of trying to earn a relationship with God through merit or works of appeasement.

There is another part to special grace that John Piper, in his podcast “Living and Loving by Faith in Future Grace” explains. He refers to saving grace as “Past grace” or pardon in which we get gratitude. He describes “Future grace” or power as what allows us to do everything from which we get hope. God does not save us just to leave us to struggle through life on our own but He helps and equips us with his future grace. In times of trouble or need we can draw near to God

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to receive His grace for the issues we face (Hebrew 4:16). He also gives us grace to live out our everyday Christian life. Paul describes this in Tim 2:11-12 *“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.”* In CVM, we see God’s grace directing our international staff to respond to the call He has placed on their lives. Recently, in the face of a growing worldwide pandemic we have had staff move their families across the globe to respond to the call God has placed on their lives. When most people would be coming back to their home country for safety, these missionaries were given a special peace from God’s grace to leave their home country. As we humbly respond to God’s call on our lives He equips and empowers us with His grace.

God’s grace is the most powerful and beautiful force in the universe that is available to each of us. Grace is necessary to all those separated from God, a stressed student, an overwhelmed parent trying to manage family and work, or a CVM missionary responding to God’s call. All can turn humbly (James 4:6) to the powerful, beautiful grace of God.

- **Why would Paul Tripp describe grace as the most powerful and beautiful word in the universe?**
- **In what ways have you experienced God’s common grace?**
- **Can you thank God for His saving or special grace for you? If not, what is keeping you from accepting this free gift (Rom 10:9-10)?**
- **John Piper speaks of future grace as the power to live for God in the future, bringing glory to Him and hope to us. In which of the following areas do you need to humbly ask God for grace and power in the future:**
 - a. **The power to stand on His promise and trust in the sufficiency of scripture**
 - b. **The power to abide in Christ**
 - c. **The power to fear the Lord**
 - d. **The power to find joy in suffering**
 - e. **The power to be anxious for nothing**
- **Paul poses in Rom 8:32 *“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”* Do you feel that God is holding anything back in the grace he is offering you?**



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