



LIVING IN THE GRACE OF GOD

“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” [Ephesians 2:6-7 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

The grace of God is an enormous subject, underpinning everything we have looked at so far in this course, from the gospel (“[For by grace you have been saved](#)” [Ephesians 2:8](#)) to the Spirit-filled life (“[As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace](#)” [1 Peter 4:10](#)). Revelation of God’s grace pours through all the writers of the New Testament. It was the essential theme of Paul’s letters, all of which start and end with references to it, and the driving motivation of his ministry:

“[But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the **grace of God.**](#)” [Acts 20:24](#)

It is central to our vision as a leadership that every individual in our churches be established on a foundational revelation of this doctrine. Though this one session can do no more than serve as an introduction, our prayer is that it will inspire you to pursue a lifelong exploration of the inexhaustible wonders of God’s amazing grace.

WHAT IS GRACE?

In popular usage, we can think of “grace” as dignified/polite behavior, elegant movement or as the prayer often said before a meal. However, when we see the word in Scripture, it is typically a translation of the Hebrew word *hesed* or the Greek word *charis*, most frequently conveying the concept of God’s unmerited favor expressed in gifts.

GOD—GRACIOUS FROM THE BEGINNING

Unquestionably, the life and work of Christ revealed the grace of God to mankind in an unprecedented way, but the evidence of His grace is seen throughout the Old Testament. This is not surprising as, contrary to what some have mistakenly thought when looking at the Old and New Testaments, God has not changed. “[For I the Lord do not change](#)” [Malachi 3:6](#) (see also [Hebrews 1:12](#) and [13:8](#)).

In [Exodus 34:6](#), we see one of God’s earliest revelations to man of His identity and nature:

“The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,’”

This truth that God is “**merciful and gracious**” is repeatedly declared and seen throughout the Old Testament. The ultimate demonstration of His grace in and through Jesus Christ is, therefore, totally in keeping with this intrinsic aspect of His nature.

GOD’S SOVEREIGN GRACE

What is also clear throughout Scripture is that God’s grace towards us is an outworking of His sovereignty. We see in [Exodus 33:19](#) that God said to Moses, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.” God elects to bestow grace and mercy on us completely of His own initiative. He is in no way being reactive or responsive to us in doing so. This is clearly seen to be the case in our salvation, as scripture after scripture confirms. For example:

“You did not choose me, but I chose you...” [John 15:16](#)

“We love because he first loved us.” [1 John 4:19](#)

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,”
[Ephesians 2:8](#)

Some struggle with the concept of God’s absolute sovereignty in salvation. This can be for different reasons. At times, it is just a reflection of man’s desire to be in control—which is sin. We like the idea of salvation being a product of our choice rather than merely our God-orchestrated response to His choice. Of course, to many it genuinely feels like it was their initiative, their choice—that they sought God and “found” Him. A. W. Tozer helpfully explains what they are feeling:

“Salvation is from our side a choice, from the divine side it is a seizing upon, an apprehending, a conquest by the Most High God. Our ‘accepting’ and ‘willing’ are reactions rather than actions. The right of determination must always remain with God.”

Another reason why some struggle is because the idea of “unmerited favor” violates their concept of “fairness.” We should all be thankful, however, that salvation is not dependent on fairness (and certainly not on our warped sense of fairness). To be “fair,” everyone should go to Hell! “**For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**” ([Romans 3:23](#)). No one is deserving of salvation; no one has earned anything other than the wages of sin, namely death ([Romans 6:23](#)). It is outrageously unfair that Jesus had to suffer and die for our sins. It is unfair that any of us should receive salvation. For a detailed explanation of God’s sovereignty in election, see [Romans 9](#).

It is good for us to be reminded of the nature of God when thinking about these things:

“He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.” [Deuteronomy 32:4 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

We should be relieved and full of joy that God is indeed sovereign. He chooses to exercise unmerited mercy and compassion towards us in a way that may confound our understanding, but is perfect and just. Praise God for His sovereign grace!



GRACE AND PROMISES

From the beginning, God has outworked His relationship with mankind through covenants, within which He has made promises. God has always been faithful to His Word, despite man's unfaithfulness.

In [Genesis 12](#), God chooses Abram (who would become Abraham) and makes a covenant with him that was rich with many wonderful promises. In God's dealings with Abraham, we have many clear insights into His ultimate redemptive purpose in Christ:

“And he brought him outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” [Genesis 15:5-6](#)

“For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.” [Romans 4:13](#)

LAW AND GRACE

In order to fully comprehend the wonder of God's grace, we need to understand something of His righteous expectations of and dealings with His people. Through Moses, God instituted the Law (known as the “Old Covenant”) as a means by which His people might properly respond to Him.

The Law was far more than just the Ten Commandments. It was a whole set of detailed instructions intended to help Israel follow God and grow into a mighty nation. The Law instructed the people of God in His righteous ways and was, in itself, good:

“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.”
[Psalm 19:7-9](#)

Despite the glowing affirmation of the Law in the above scripture, other passages in the New Testament describe it in seemingly less positive terms. This has left many Christians unsure regarding what to think about the Law. What purpose did it serve—and what could it not do?

THE LAW REVEALED SIN

“...Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin...” [Romans 7:7](#)

As we have said, the Law showed what was required in order to live righteously before God. However, in doing so, it actually revealed man's inability and/or unwillingness to obey and respond rightly to God, showing how inherently sinful mankind was:

“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.” [Romans 3:20 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

Though the Law was righteous, it was unable to impart righteousness. In [Romans 7](#), Paul uses the example of marriage to illustrate the binding relationship the people of God had with the Law. He likens the Law to a husband who always points out the right thing to do, but never actually helps his wife do it, and is impotent when it comes to imparting the fruit of righteousness.



THE LAW PROVOKED SIN

Not only did the Law reveal sin, it actually provoked it! [Romans 7:9 \(NIV 1984\)](#) states that “sin sprang to life” as a reaction to the commandment. This is not because the Law was bad, but rather because its goodness evoked a sinful reaction, exposing the extent of mankind’s depravity, the absolute hopelessness of his plight:

“Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.” [Romans 7:13](#)

“Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,” [Romans 5:20](#)

THE LAW AS A GUARDIAN

“Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.” [Galatians 3:23-24](#)

When Paul refers to the Law as a guardian, he uses the Greek word *paidagogos*, which was someone employed to supervise children until they were old enough to come into the “full rights of sons” ([Galatians 4:5 NIV 1984](#)). We come into those full rights by way of the New Covenant:

“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” [John 1:17](#)

The New Covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ is indeed a much better covenant than that of Moses. Let’s look at some of the amazing truths that we experience through the grace of God.

THE RICHES OF GOD’S GRACE

GRACE AND JUSTIFICATION

“but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.” [Romans 5:8-9](#)

Justification results in right legal standing before God. With regard to our sin, it means that we stand before God as though we have never sinned! Our account of wrongdoing—past, present and future—is done away with once and for all. This is why Paul could assert with such confidence, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” ([Romans 8:1](#)).

GRACE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

“For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.” [Romans 5:17](#)

It is not just that the slate is clean, not just that He has paid our debt—He has also credited our account with His righteousness! This means that God doesn’t merely see us as debt-free, but as rich in righteousness, having Christ’s perfect life attributed to our account. We can identify with Paul in his confident aspiration:

“... in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—” [Philippians 3:8-9](#)



It is only because of this that we can “with confidence draw near to the throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:16). How wonderful it is that we no longer relate to God on the basis of our performance, but rather on the basis of Christ’s! This means that, regardless of any current sin and failure we might be experiencing, our position before God remains the same.

DANGEROUS GRACE?

Many feel nervous when contemplating this truth, concerned that this doctrine is dangerous and might promote sin and careless living. Clearly, they are not the first to see the risk. Paul raises and answers the obvious question himself:

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?... What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?” Romans 6:1-2, 15-16

As Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said,

“The true preaching of the gospel of salvation by grace alone always leads to the possibility of this charge being brought against it. There is no better test as to whether a man is really preaching the New Testament gospel of salvation than this, that some people might understand it and misinterpret it to mean that it really amounts to this, that because you are saved by grace alone it does not matter at all what you do; you can go on sinning as much as you like because it will redound all the more to the glory of grace. That is a very good test of gospel preaching. If my preaching and presentation of the gospel of salvation does not expose it to that misunderstanding then it is not the gospel. If a man preaches justification by works, no one would ever raise this question.”
(Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: The New Man, An Exposition of Chapter 6*, Banner of Truth Trust, 1972)

It is important to note that when Paul says we should “by no means” go on sinning, his reasoning is not the fear of judgment, but rather because it is inconsistent with Christ’s work in our lives. Far from granting a license to sin, grace actually teaches and empowers us to say “no” to ungodliness:

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,” Titus 2:11-12 (NIV 1984)

GRACE AND SANCTIFICATION

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...” Romans 12:2

Of course, while we are in this tent of sin-infected flesh, we are still tempted to give in to desires that wage war against the Spirit. However, God is committed to our gradual but complete transformation—not merely in some “doctrinal” and intangible way, but in our day-to-day life. This process is called sanctification, and it too is produced by the grace of God:

“In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.” Romans 6:11-14 (NIV 1984)

How are we then to deal with the sin we commit? 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (see also 1 John 2:1).

GRACE AND POWER

Many Christians can function for periods of time relying on their own abilities and strengths, but sooner or later, they will find themselves crushed under the weight of things that can only be sustained supernaturally.

“But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’” [James 4:6](#)

This principle of humble dependency upon God’s grace was very evident in the life of Paul, as one who had much to boast about in terms of training, position, and intellectual ability. Paul struggled with an undefined challenge, which he referred to as a thorn in his flesh. Despite his repeated requests for relief, God allowed it to remain:

“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” [2 Corinthians 12:9](#)

But God’s grace to us is not just sustaining power enabling us to endure hardship and pressure. It is also dynamic power for the advancement of the gospel:

“And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.” [Acts 4:33](#)

“And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.” [Acts 6:8](#)

GRACE AND IDENTITY

“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.” [Ephesians 1:4-6 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

The reality of God’s grace in our lives can be so transforming that it redefines us, literally giving us a new identity and sense of purpose:

“Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power.” [Ephesians 3:7](#)

It is also by His grace that we are energized and equipped for ministry:

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.” [1 Corinthians 15:10](#)

GRACE THROUGH FAITH

From our salvation onward, faith is the means of accessing the grace of God. The gospel is not just “good news;” it is almost unbelievably good news! In other words, it might be described as “too good to be true!” It requires a gift of faith from God even to start to believe. Once that initial gift is given, our maturing and growing in God is all about faith in His continuous grace towards us:

“For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” [John 1:16](#)



BEWARE OF LEGALISM

Having clarified earlier that, in itself, the Law was good, it is important for us to understand that the greatest enemy to living in the grace of God is legalism.

Legalism is the false notion that right relationship with God can be earned by returning to either the Law of Moses or some other set of rules and regulations. Its emphasis will always be one of “trying harder.” It is when addressing legalism that Paul uses his harshest rebukes to the Church:

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?” Galatians 3:1a

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one,” Galatians 1:6-7a

Paul describes turning to the Law for salvation or sanctification as falling away from grace!

“You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.” Galatians 5:4

The spirit of legalism is at the core of false religion and has spawned many successful cults. It has also been the most corrupting influence in the Church throughout the centuries. It is very subtle, not playing on the typical appetites of the flesh, but rather feeding off the results of these acts, namely shame, guilt, emptiness, and hopelessness. And it offers a logical remedy—religion! Even within strong local churches, legalism can be pervasive. It infiltrates in small quantities like yeast, but before long, works through the whole batch of dough (Matthew 16:6-12). It must be identified and rooted out at all costs!

ABOUNDING GRACE

“..All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth.” Colossians 1:6 (NIV 1984)

It is the understanding of God’s grace in all its truth that produces the fruit He desires. We are called to live in the lavish grace of God and encourage others to do so:

“See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;” Hebrews 12:15

As the grace of God in Jesus Christ is the central theme of Scripture, it is fitting that the final verse of the Bible should reference this:

“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.” Revelation 22:21 (NIV 1984)

RECOMMENDED READING

1. *God’s Lavish Grace* by Terry Virgo
2. *Grace Alone* by R.C. Sproul
3. *Putting Amazing Back into Grace* by Michael Horton
4. *What’s So Amazing About Grace?* by Philip Yancey

