

O THE MARVELOUS GRACE OF JESUS

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"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound." This is the first line of the iconic hymn by the same name written by the English poet and clergyman, John Newton. The verses of this hymn state in poetic form the gospel message which is the good news of God's grace.

Grace is translated from the Greek word *charis* which means favor, blessing or kindness. We can all extend favor, blessing and kindness to others. However, when the word grace is used in connection with God, it takes on a much deeper meaning. God's grace or His favor, blessing and kindness are offered to the undeserving. It is the result of God choosing, in His sovereign will, to bless us rather than to curse us as we deserve.

It is impossible to fully appreciate the wonderful grace of God unless we fully appreciate how lost and undeserving of it we actually are. Psalms 51:5 says, "*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me*" (NKJV). Because of the sin of Adam, we were all born in sin and deserve the penalty of death as the punishment for our sin. However, our lost state cannot be totally blamed on Adam by birth. Although we inherited Adam's sinful

nature, we willingly of our own volition have chosen to sin against God and as a result, deserve His punishment. But God has been merciful to us. God's mercy is another of His wonderful attributes. Although God's mercy is closely associated with His grace, the two are different. God's mercy is the withholding of the punishment which we deserve while His grace is giving us His benevolence which we do not deserve. God extended mercy to Adam and Eve after they sinned and were expelled from the garden of Eden, but God had mercy on them and covered their sinfulness by clothing them with the skins of slain animals. God followed this type by instituting the regular sacrifice of animals to cover the sins of the people for their disobedience of the law.

The Law that God gave to Moses was given to us so that we might know what sin is. "*Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin*" (Romans 3:20, NKJV). The law not only shows us what sin is but how terrible it really is. Romans 7:13 confirms this, "*Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it*

might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful” (NKJV).

We could say that even the law was given to us by the grace of God. The second verse of “Amazing Grace” says it this way, “’Twas grace that taught my heart to fear.” When we come face-to-face with our sin, God brings conviction to our heart and godly fear and sorrow overwhelm us. It develops in us an intense desire for God’s mercy and grace.

For many, many centuries mankind lived under the curse of the law, sustained only by the mercy of God. And then, in the fullness of time, Grace came. *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:14, 17 NKJV).* How do we receive this amazing grace? *“But the **free gift** is not like the offense. For if by the one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the **free gift** which came from many offenses resulted in justification. Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the **free gift** came to all men, resulting in justification of life” (Romans 5:15-16, 18, NKJV).*

We can see from the verses above that the grace of God is a free gift. It is free to us who will believe and accept it, but it does not mean it was free to the One who gave it to us. It cost Christ everything He had to give; His glory as God’s Son in heaven and His own life on earth on the cross. We can say the same as the apostle Paul exclaimed as recorded in 2 Corinthians 9:15, *“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift” (NKJV)!*

It is important that every Christian knows that our salvation, which is our justification before God, comes through His grace alone through Jesus Christ. It can only be received by faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross. How do we get the faith to believe? *“No one can come to Me **unless the Father who sent Me draws him**; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44, NKJV).* *“And He said, ‘Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me **unless it has been granted to him** by My Father’” (John 6:65, NKJV).* *“Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have **obtained like precious faith** with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:1, NKJV).* *“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only **to believe in Him**, but also to suffer for His sake” (Philippians 1:29, NKJV).* From these scriptures we can see that even the faith to believe in the grace of Christ alone is given to us by God.

Salvation by faith in the grace of God through Christ requires nothing by way of performance on our part. *“For by grace*

you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9, NKJV). What a complete work of Christ on our behalf! He gives us the faith to believe in His finished work on the cross for us, and then by His grace, He forgives our sins, justifies us before God, and saves us for all eternity. As the second verse of “Amazing Grace” says, *“...and grace my fears relieved.”* The following scripture passage summarizes this truth so well: *“Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:20-24, NKJV).*

God’s grace is like the two sides of a coin. One side of God’s grace brings us the forgiveness of sins and presents us justified before God through faith in Jesus Christ which we have just discussed. On the other side of the coin is the grace of God by which He provides us power for holy living and our sanctification. It is important to note that grace for the power for living is also a gift that is appropriated by faith in Jesus Christ. The following scripture passage emphasizes this point: *“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh” (Galatians 3:1-3, ESV)?*

Christians often make the mistake of thinking that once they have been saved through faith, that they must now overcome the power of sin in their lives in their own strength. They have mistaken zeal for personal power to live a holy life. This leads only to failure and ultimately to discouragement. You see, the grace of God is really a person, Jesus Christ, who has come to live in the believer by His own Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul described this truth best in the following scripture: *“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, KJV).* Jesus Himself confirmed this for us as recorded in John 15:4, *“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me” (NKJV).*

God’s grace helps in our times of weakness. *“Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:8-9, NKJV).* God does not want us to have any consciousness of our own strength, but rather to openly and honestly confess the total lack of strength of our own. God says that His power is made perfect in the reality of our utter weakness.

God does not want to supplement the flesh's strength, but to totally replace it with His power. I so often think of the following scripture which so clearly shows us that the Christian life is, in reality, the Christ-life: *"But of Him (God the Father) you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption"* (1 Corinthians 1:30, NKJV). This is the grace of God; Christ has come to live His life through us.

It is by God's grace that even in our struggle to overcome the power of residual sin in our lives as Christians, God has provided a means for us to have our sins forgiven. *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us"* (1 John 1:8-10, NKJV). *"Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more"* (Romans 5:20, NKJV).

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" (Titus 2:11-14, NKJV). So we see that the same grace of God that brought us salvation also teaches us to walk righteously in this present age. Oh the matchless grace of Jesus!

The grace of God also corrects us when we go astray, and we thank God that even as we had fathers that corrected us when we needed it, our heavenly Father corrects us as he sees fit so that we might not be condemned with the world. *"In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?' If you are not disciplined – and everyone undergoes discipline – then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness"* (Hebrews 12:4-10, NIV).

The grace of God has opened the way for His people to come boldly into His throne room and ask for whatever we need. Jesus opened that way through His death on the cross. The curtain was torn in two giving us access to God through the shed blood of Christ. *"Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet*

without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:14-16, NKJV).

Lastly, God has extended His grace to each of us to minister to the body of Christ. *"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift"* (Ephesians 4:7, NKJV). At the last supper that Jesus had with His disciples before He went to the cross, He took the loaf of unleavened bread into His hands and broke it saying, *"This is My body which is broken for you."* His body was broken for all who would believe on His Name. He was not just speaking of the breaking of His body on the cross, so to speak, but the dispersing of His giftedness to the members of His body. Christ embodied all nine spiritual gifts as well as all spiritual ministries. *"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all"* (1 Corinthians 12:4-7, NKJV). *"...from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love"* (Ephesians 4:16, NKJV).

It seems that the Holy Spirit is saying to the church in this hour that we must give special attention to the importance of each member of the body of Christ contributing their spiritual gift and ministry for the building up of the body of Christ. It seems that now is the hour for every member of the church to give himself/herself to his/her gift(s) and ministries. I like the way the Phillips translation puts Romans 12:6-8, *"Through the **grace of God** we have different gifts. If our gift is preaching, let us preach to the limit of our vision. If it is serving others let us concentrate on our service; if it is teaching let us give all we have to our teaching; and if our gift be the stimulating of the faith of others let us set ourselves to it. Let the man who is called to give, give freely; let the man who wields authority think of his responsibility; and let the man who feels sympathy for his fellows act cheerfully."*

In the passage quoted above, Paul uses the word "gifts" in verse 6. However, in the remainder of the passage, it is apparent that Paul is referring to more than just the specific nine gifts of the Spirit mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. It would appear that he is speaking of various spiritual ministries with which members of the body of Christ may have been gifted. Some of these ministries may lend themselves well to the meetings of the assemblies. However, there are others that extend beyond the church services to the everyday ministering of members of the body one to another which are just as important as the ministry that occurs in the formal services. For example, the ministry of intercession may be exercised in a meeting, but more likely will be manifested in the privacy of the intercessor's prayer closet. The ministry of hospitality will almost always be exercised outside the local service, and yet it can be a great blessing to the church in providing opportunities for much-needed fellowship to occur. The same can be said of the nine gifts


of the Spirit. Some may be manifested in a meeting, but very often these gifts will be manifested in other settings as the members interact one with another..

Notice that it says our gifts come by the **grace of God**. The apostle Paul exhorts us to focus on our ministry in the following ways as translated by J. B. Phillips in the scripture quoted above: concentrate on it, give all we have to it, set ourselves to it, think of our responsibility, act cheerfully, and minister to the limit of our vision. I have had to search my own heart to see if I am giving myself to my ministry with that level of zeal and commitment. However, it seems the Holy Spirit is exhorting us all to do so in this hour. To do so will require personal devotion time on our part. We cannot arrive at the Sunday service having spent little or no time preparing to have something to contribute. We must take the time during the week to wait on God for our ministry. *"How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. Let all things be done decently and in order"* (1 Corinthians 14:26, 40, NKJV). The list above is obviously not a complete list but rather examples of the types of contributions that all members can be prepared to contribute. The body of Christ will never come to maturity without that which every joint supplies. We may not all minister at every service, but we should all be prepared to do so. We are blessed to have a seven-year old and a nine year-old in our local assembly. They have a memory verse every week, and they faithfully minister to the assembly every Sunday by saying their verses. We are all blessed by their ministry and their faithfulness to share it. *"Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful"* (1 Corinthians 4:2, NKJV).

The gospel message is indeed the good news of the grace of God, and this grace has come to us in the person of Jesus Christ. It is through our faith in His sacrificial death on the cross that we receive the free gift of the forgiveness of our sins and our justification before Almighty God. Even our faith to believe is granted by the grace of God. Through this same grace we receive the power for holy living in the person of the indwelling Holy Spirit. And it is by grace that we can admit our utter weaknesses because the power of God is perfected in them. It is by His grace that we have been gifted with spiritual gifts and ministries so that by the inspiration and power of the Holy Spirit we can contribute to the maturing of the body of Christ. Indeed Jesus by His wonderful, matchless grace has truly become for us wisdom from God and righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (ref. 1 Corinthians 1:30). I will close with the refrain of a song I love so much entitled "Wonderful Grace of Jesus" by Haldor Lillenas (1918):

Wonderful grace of Jesus,
greater than all my sin;
how shall my tongue describe it,
where shall its praise begin?
Taking away my burden,
setting my spirit free,
for the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me.

Refrain:

Wonderful the matchless grace of Jesus,
deeper than the mighty rolling sea,
higher than the mountain, sparkling like a fountain,
all sufficient grace for even me;
broader than the scope of my transgressions,
greater far than all my sin and shame.
O magnify the precious name of Jesus, praise his name! 

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