

# Grace

INTRO: We begin a new series today on Grace. I will be honest with you and say that this series took me a while to get off the ground with for many reasons.

## I. The difficulty of teaching about grace

### A. First of all, where do I begin?

1. Grace is one of those concepts that we sort of get, and even use the word in a variety of circumstances
  - a) We get a grace period for payments
  - b) We see people in the news that have “fallen from grace”
  - c) We refer to people as gracious, or perhaps graceful
  - d) We say grace before our meal
2. We often talk like we fully understand grace - especially at church
  - a) Grace is in the songs we sing
  - b) It drips from the pages of scripture - so we should understand it
  - c) We hear sermons on it, sing hymns about it, and even read books on the topic
3. All of these things involve a variety of ideas and concepts, so which one best displays what the biblical idea of grace is

### B. Second, how deep do I go about the idea of grace?

1. The biblical concept is quite involved
2. There are a number of words that we get the idea of grace from, each with various nuances
3. There are multiple examples of grace displayed in the pages of scripture, even when the word “grace” is not present in the passage
4. Not to mention the fact that the examples of grace are plentiful and varied as well

### C. Third, which arena of grace do I talk about

1. God’s grace shown to mankind
2. Man’s need for grace
3. The fact that we too should be gracious
4. Have we truly been changed by grace

### D. The other thing that makes it difficult to talk about grace, is that while we love the idea of grace for ourselves, and the grace that God has given us, we often shutter at the unlimited nature of God’s grace

1. Michael Spencer writes “Real grace is simply inexplicable, inappropriate, out of the box, out of bounds, offensive, too much, and given to all the wrong people.”

### E. Yet this is the topic that is before us to try to tackle and get a better handle on

1. Notice I said a “better handle on”

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2. I think as long as we live, as many displays of God's grace that we study, as many changed hearts that offer grace that we encounter, we will never fully "get grace"

## II. What is grace?

### A. We have heard many adjectives to help us describe grace

1. Amazing grace, free grace, scandalous grace, inexhaustible grace, extravagant grace
2. Perhaps the best I have heard might be gratuitous grace - coined by John Calvin
  - a) We usually use the term gratuitous in reference to something that is unwarranted or uncalled for
  - b) For example: sex or violence in movies
3. While grace is something we desire, God's extravagant love in Christ is completely uncalled for
  - a) His grace is unconditioned and unconditional
  - b) For many of us, we feel like there has to be some breaking point for the grace of God
    - (1) We might avoid that trap
    - (2) But often times we still can succumb to the voices around us telling us that what we did was too much
    - (3) Sound like anything you have read before
      - (a) Job, what did you do wrong?
      - (b) You had to do something wrong!

### B. This is where religion tries to jump in to save the day

1. Robert Capon writes, "The world is by no means averse to religion. In fact, it is devoted to it with a passion. It will buy any recipe for salvation as long as that formula leaves the responsibility for...salvation firmly in human hands. The world is drowning in religion...but it is scared out of its wits by any mention of the grace that takes the world home gratis"
2. Religion wants to tame grace, to place it in a box and not allow it to be so wild and reckless
  - a) Unmerited favor for undeserving sinners is never, ever comfortable
  - b) That is why religion wants to tame grace
3. That is what makes Christianity so different
  - a) Christianity declares that through the gospel - the work of Jesus Christ, God has done everything necessary for reconciling us to Himself
  - b) And He did it all without one bit of help from us

### C. So to further help us understand grace, I want to walk through what the Bible is talking about with the words that it uses

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## 1. The OT usages of grace

### a) Henna

- (1) This word is used over 200 times in the OT
- (2) The word signifies favor - usually from a superior to an inferior
  - (a) Such actions can include care for the poor, delivering those in distress, and other acts of compassion
  - (b) Henna is freely given by the superior and can be freely requested by the inferior
- (3) So when you read a statement like “Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord” the word means grace
- (4) Numbers 6:24-26
  - (a) This is an example of a request for grace
  - (b) The petitioner is asking for God’s favor
  - (c) The inferior asking for the superior’s favor
- (5) The word picture, I like word pictures - it gives me something to hang your hat on, is the old story about the union soldier
  - (a) He went to the White House to try to ask the President to be exempt from service because his brother and father were both killed in the battle of Gettysburg, and his mother and sister needed help in planting the crops
  - (b) He was turned away by the guards on duty
  - (c) The soldier was deeply disappointed and sat on a park bench nearby until a little boy approached and asked what was the matter
  - (d) The soldier told him his story to which the little boy took him by the hand and led him back to the White House
  - (e) They walked pass the guards, in the front door, and before he knew it, the soldier was in the Oval Office standing before the President of the US
    - i) The President looked up and said, “Good afternoon Todd, can you introduce me to your friend.”
    - ii) The little boy was Todd Lincoln
    - iii) The soldier pled his case and was granted his petition

- (6) That’s henna - the favor of a superior to an inferior - or one with power to change to one that needs something changed

### b) The next OT word is hesed

- (1) Hesed appears more than 240 times in the OT
- (2) It refers chiefly to God’s one-way love, mercy and compassion for His people
- (3) Hesed and charis are tied very closely together

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- (4) Heseb had a great influence on how the word in Greek (charis) came to be used
    - (a) It was different than the way others would use the word in Greek
  - (5) Where heseb differs from henna is that heseb includes notions of loyalty and constancy not always there with henna
    - (a) Heseb is often translated as the word “lovingkindness”
    - (b) And while that is very true and completely proper, it glosses over just how strong the word is regarding faithfulness, and constancy
    - (c) This lovingkindness is a persistent love and kindness toward His people
  - (6) Heseb was used more often of special relationships - covenant relationships
    - (a) God made promises to His people to deliver, protect, provide, and show kindness to them
    - (b) This word refers to God’s incredible faithfulness to these promises
    - (c) To give you an example, we have the covenant God made with David
      - i) You can read the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7
      - ii) In verse 15 God promises to never remove His love from David like He did with Saul
        - (1) Now, please understand that David, and David’s descendants were still punished for wrongdoing
        - (2) But punishment is a form of love, and God promised never to remove His love from David and that David would always have someone sitting on the throne
  - (7) A word picture is hard to come by for this word for grace
    - (a) In part because it is associated with God’s one-way love for us
    - (b) So we have nothing to compare it to in this life
    - (c) Perhaps the closest we can come is a good parent’s love for their child
      - i) When that child entered the world, any good parent knows at that moment that they will do ANYTHING for their child
      - ii) They will protect them, get them out of jams, provide for them, and love them, regardless the circumstances
- c) What I can give you is a biblical example from the OT - Exodus 34:6-7

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- (1) Just a chapter and a half back you have the scene where Moses comes down from meeting with God and receiving the Ten Commandments
    - (a) Moses comes upon the nation of Israel worshipping a golden calf, and acting foolishly
    - (b) Moses smashes the Ten Commandments and sets things straight back at the camp
  - (2) Then we reach chapter 34 and God is getting ready to give Moses another set of tablets
  - (3) That is when we read Exodus 34:6-7
    - (a) This passage puts on display the essential character of God
    - (b) His people have just sinned against Him by worshipping an idol made by human hands
    - (c) And yet God can say that He is “abounding in love and faithfulness”
      - i) How is love shown by disciplining the nation
      - ii) God says it Himself, I will punish the evildoers, but His lovingkindness remains for thousands of generations
  - (4) This is God’s grace on display in the OT
2. NT usages of grace
- a) The final word to note is from the NT and it is charis
    - (1) If you know anyone named Charisma or Charissa, their names are from this word and mean “grace or graceful”
    - (2) The word is used 156 times in the NT, and appears in every NT book
    - (3) Before I get into the meaning in the NT, I have to back up one step so you understand how it was used in other Greek literature
      - (a) It was used of something that causes a favorable or joyful feeling
      - (b) It was used of favor in general (similar to henna)
      - (c) It was used of a sense of gratitude caused by an act of favor
      - (d) The Greek concept of man was that he was virtuous on his own merit apart from any gift of grace
    - (4) The NT shifted the concept a little more to be like hesed
      - (a) God’s goodness, love, mercy, and kindness toward His people
      - (b) And this without regard to the people’s actions
      - (c) It still held the idea of favor
        - i) Charis was often used of heavenly favor shown toward humanity

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- (5) The ultimate expression of grace in the NT is of course, Jesus Christ
  - (a) He, being God, willingly coming to earth and enter into our pain and suffering is a grace unto itself
  - (b) He suffering at the hands of sinners whom He was dying for, and dying a death He never deserved is the supreme act of grace that forever re-defines the word
- (6) The Bible tells us that “grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”
  - (a) So Jesus is not just “The way, the truth and the life” as John tells us
  - (b) He is full of grace as well
- (7) Jesus is the point of the OT, and the NT
  - (a) All of the grace we read about in Scripture is a foreshadowing of the ultimate expression of grace in Christ

3. The idea of grace can be present in the Scriptures even when the word is never used

4. If you wrung out the Bible, grace would come dripping out of it

III. So why does it matter that we understand the definitions and background of grace from scripture

A. First of all, if Scripture is our authority, we look to it to get a handle on the theologies we claim to cherish

- 1. We do not come up with our own definitions for grace
- 2. And we certainly do not come up with our own definitions of who God is
  - a) God’s Word informs us of what grace is, what it looks like, and who God is
  - b) And did you realize that is a grace in and of itself?
  - c) God did not have to reveal Himself to us, but He did
    - (1) That is the grace of a superior to an inferior
    - d) He did not have to reveal how to please Him but He did
    - e) He did not have to make promises to man at all, but He did
- 3. So part of the reasons understanding the background and definitions is so imperative is so that we are aligning our thoughts with God, not trying to make God align with our thoughts

B. A second reason that grace matters to us is that grace can only find it’s expression in life and relationship

- 1. This seems like a no-brainer, But it is God Himself that expressed grace in life
  - a) He bent down to us
  - b) He initiated everything about the relationship we have with Him
  - c) He expressed grace first to us

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2. But the other side of this is, as we are learning what grace is by observing God, we learn better how to be gracious to others
    - a) We learn to how to humble ourselves and make the first move to someone
    - b) We learn how to initiate relationships to people that never thought they needed a relationship
    - c) We learn to express grace
- C. True grace finds its fullest expression in the presence of sin
1. The greatest expression of grace the world has ever seen was in response to humanity's sinful condition
    - a) Jesus Christ, coming from heaven to be with us was a result of our sinfulness
      - (1) And that required Christ to be around sinful people
      - (2) He had to enter into our world and lives to express grace to us in the greatest way ever
    - b) Jesus greatest act of grace was to give His life for our lives
      - (1) So He could exchange our sin for His righteousness
      - (2) And not one single person in all of history has ever deserved that
  2. What we learn from this is that for us to express genuine grace, it will only happen in the presence of sin
    - a) For us to learn to be gracious, it will be in response to sin
    - b) Some of those sins will be easier to let go of than others
      - (1) That's in part where we get verses like "Love covers a multitude of sins"
        - (a) There are many sins we can easily let go of
        - (b) Our love for that person does not demand they be perfect
      - (2) But we will encounter some will be far more difficult, and require us to press into the graciousness of Jesus to be able to be gracious ourselves
- D. Understanding grace from Scripture, and the grace of God will also help us to understand how our disgrace is removed
1. Disgrace is the opposite of grace
    - a) Grace seeks out a person to love even when they have done nothing or have nothing to give in return
    - b) Grace loves the unlovable
    - c) Grace brings hope, listens, cures, transforms and heals
  2. Disgrace destroys
    - a) It causes pain, and wounds
    - b) It alienates and isolates
    - c) Disgrace makes you feel worthless, rejected and unwanted

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3. If grace is “one-way love” than that means God is coming for you, regardless of what you have done
  - a) You do not have to have personal merit
  - b) You do not have to have something you can offer God in return
  - c) God comes for you simply out of choice
  - d) God comes for you because He has set His affections on you because of how great He is, not because of how great or how horrible you are
    - (1) You are not God’s charity case
    - (2) You are God’s choice

## IV. Where do we go from here?

A. As we walk through this study on grace, we will be considering grace from a few vantage points

1. Obviously, we need to look at grace from the lens of our need of grace from God
  - a) This gives us two essential perspectives
  - b) It gives us a right understanding of who we are before God
  - c) It also helps us see just how amazing the grace of God really is
2. We also want to turn the corner and get very practical on how seeing God’s grace for what it is winds up being the basis for us growing in grace toward the people in our lives
3. To do this we will be look at various passages of Scripture
  - a) They will give us perspective on what grace is
  - b) They will also give us illustrations of how grace looks in real life
    - (1) Be that God’s grace to us
    - (2) Or the grace we should be extending to others

B. My hope is to make this study both theologically rich and very practical in nature

1. Too often we view theology and practicality as opposing forces
2. Theology forms the backbone of all we do so it could not possibly be more practical

CONCLUSION: So to end today, let’s pray for a great understanding of God’s grace, a greater appreciation of it, and both the capacity to know how to extend it to others and the heart overflowing with God’s grace to extend it to others.