

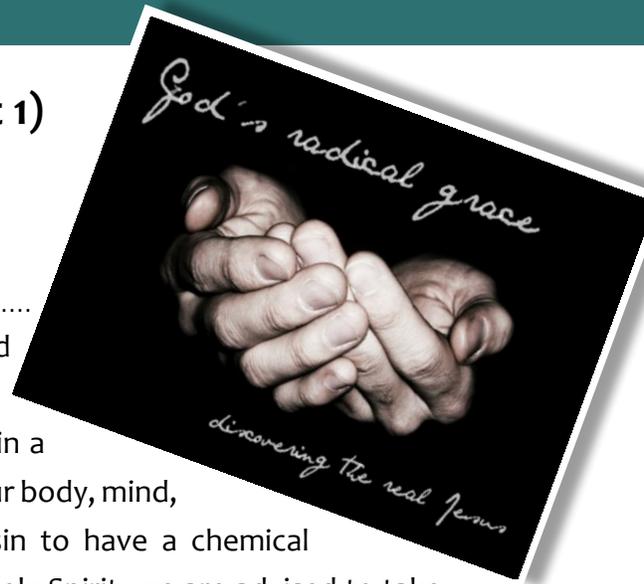
“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9

Understanding God's Grace (part 1)

Theme: God's grace provides Salvation and freedom.

Review of Lesson 21

Depression is a dark cloud of gloom that will not go away and dominates a person's life. Depression is a mood, a feeling of unexplainable sadness now (it can exist even if a person believes in a bright, heavenly future). The causes of depression can come from our body, mind, or spirit. Generally, it is caused by low serotonin, and it is no sin to have a chemical imbalance in body chemistry. Since our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, we are advised to take care of it. It is important to get a lot of exercise and to have a diet that concentrates on foods as close as possible to how God created them. It is good to get professional help to deal with depression. Each of us has to make sure we do not cause additional pain to a depressed person by judging or accusing them of sin. Instead, offer true comfort, pray together, read the Bible together, be there for them and listen, advise seeking professional help for situations beyond your understanding, and believe no situation is hopeless with the Lord.



Bible Truth

Introduction

Since grace is one of the most important biblical topics, it is talked about extensively in Christian circles. It is important because the Bible says, "**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**" (Eph. 2:8-9). The main topic of these verses is being saved—it is Salvation that is the gift of God. We have the choice to believe (have faith). If we do, God's grace saves us. God gives us that saving grace when we believe. Our passion to learn about God's grace stems from the fact that His grace is what saves us (provides our Salvation). Being saved means we are delivered from the penalty (Hell) of our sins unto a glorious future in Heaven. Salvation is the major theme of the entire Bible; it is why Christ

came to earth to die. No topics are more important than salvation and God's grace.

We are conditioned to believe we get what we deserve in life—sort of a merit system. If we work hard, we get paid; if we study hard, we get good grades; and if we do wrong, we get punished. Many religions make the mistake of teaching the merit system applies to being saved. For today, the Age of Grace, the Bible clearly teaches Salvation and God's grace are given to us in a different way than in the past. In the past, the biblical Law was merit-based, but Christ taught it could never make a person accepted in God's eyes. The Law's merit system could only bring death. **"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" (Rom. 3:20-21a).

In the Age of Grace, God's grace is given to us totally independent of our merit. It is a totally new concept in which God acts on our behalf (favors us) out of the goodness of His heart. God already knows each person, already loves them, and already has a plan for each person's life. God is already on our side and wants to bless us abundantly. All He asks is faith in Jesus Christ. The faith He seeks in order to be saved is a simple faith (that you are a sinner and Christ died for your sins). We do not have to know all sorts of things about the Bible. When we have that simple faith, God will save us by His grace.

Defining Grace

Grace in the Old Testament basically has the meaning of "favor" (loving kindness as in Ruth 2:10). Grace in the New Testament adds more insights into what grace means, but favor is still the basic idea. God has always acted in grace (been gracious) since it is a part of His nature. If we were to list the attributes of God, we would think of love, truth, knowledge, power, etc., and certainly very high on that list would be grace.

The Bible indicates that grace refers to undeserved love and kindness. No human can ever deserve God's love and kindness. So we can never earn His grace. If we are to receive His grace, it has to be out of His desire to give it out without any thought of our merit. Indeed, God's grace is given to us based on His love for us, and not on anything we do or could possibly do to deserve it. His grace is an unmerited favor to us and without limit. That same grace has a divine influence on our hearts and lives changing us from within. Our definition of grace is:

Grace is God's free favor and kindness to us which is not merited or repayable. It has a divine influence on our heart (our spirit) and lives.

Discussion: Grace and Salvation are made clear in the song *Amazing Grace*. "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me... I once was lost but now am found, Was blind, but now I see." The author of this song is unknown. Discuss how the author understood the meaning of grace.

Understanding Grace

It is important to better understand the definition above.

- **Free:** there is no way of earning His grace, so God gives it free of charge based on His goodness and love for us. If we could earn it, then we would deserve it (merit it). If you pay for something at a store, you deserve it—you earned the right to own it. Similarly, a gift is something you get for free. If not free, then it is not a gift. We all sin and because of our sins what we really deserve is not good: **"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"** (Rom. 3:23). We deserve death for our sins. That is what the merit system accomplishes. **"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"** (Rom. 6:23).

Our sins take away all the merit we may think we have (like going to church). Thankfully, the Lord has a better way: **"being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"** (Rom. 3:24). This is good news from the heart of the Lord. Grace is freely given and God asks for nothing in return.

- **God's kindness and favor:** God's grace is independent of who we are and what we do; it is totally dependent on Who He is. His grace is holy and

cannot be altered in any way. It is based solely on God's goodness and not our actions. God can give the benefits of His grace to anyone in any way He wants. Thankfully, He offers His grace to us based on faith in Christ (from His heart of love). **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"** (John 3:16). **"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"** (Rom. 5:8).

- **Unmerited:** no one deserves God's grace. It is not our right, and it has nothing to do with our merit or being worthy. If grace had anything to do with our merit, then God would have to withdraw it when we sin—which we all do. It is not given to us based on our work or merit. If it were, it would be based on debt. **"Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness"**(Rom. 4:4-5). In fact, it is our lack of merit that makes us cry out for God's grace. Grace cannot be expressed where the slightest degree of human merit is recognized.

Discussion: Many scout and Christian youth ministries have merit badges or something similar. If you do all that is required, you earn your badge. Your actions prove you are worthy and deserve it—you merit it. Since we are all sinners and thus "unmerited," a human can never merit God's grace. If we are to receive His grace, it has to be in some other way. Discuss Christ's merit as our substitute.

- **Not repayable:** any thought of repaying God for His grace is unthinkable. An act is not gracious if any debt occurs. There is no service, doing good, or offerings that can repay God. If we could pay God back, it would not be His free gift, and we would be

instrumental in paying for our sins. Grace cannot require any debt or cause any thoughts of repayment. It is given to us by His pure kindness and not out of obligation to us. **"Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace"** (Rom. 4:16a). **"And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work"** (Rom. 11:6).

- **Divine influence:** once we receive God's grace, the Holy Spirit enters us (called the indwelling Spirit). The Spirit, working in grace, begins to influence our heart (spirit) and mind (soul) teaching us His truth. This inner working of the Spirit is called transformation (Lessons 13). When the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, there are no miraculous powers, gifts, or experiences. No visions, voices, tongues, etc., accompany His quiet entrance into the heart. During Christ's life and shortly thereafter, these things did happen, but the Bible makes it clear this is not how the Lord works in the Age of Grace. He does not display His presence in an outward, observable manner. What He does provide is inner assurance and peace. You will experience a "quiet" change in your life by the Holy Spirit.

Discussion: It has been said that a Christian is actually a person in whom Christ is happening. What does that mean? (Answer: Christ, in the person of the Holy Spirit, lives within the believer and is actively changing thoughts, behavior, attitudes, desires, etc. This ongoing process "is happening").

The Cross forever disposes of the condemnation of sin (guilt and punishment); all questions of merit have been forever settled because of Christ's death. We merit nothing, but He who was slain on the Cross is worthy of all things. His worth, His merit, His work for us can be transferred to us. God has stated that

Christ's righteousness can be ours by faith in Jesus Christ. So faith makes us one with Christ and the penalty of all our sins is paid in full (past, present, and even all future sins). **"For He (God) made Him (Christ) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"** (2 Cor. 5:21,

parentheses added). **"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit"** (Rom. 8:1).

Life Applications

In our conversations with others on matters of faith, we must always show tolerance in the non-essential topics and unity in the essential topics. The teaching (doctrine) of Salvation by God's grace through faith is an essential topic, so we will try to make sure we have a common understanding (unity). Below is a little quiz to use as a way of helping assure understanding of this topic. The correct answers will be discussed later. There are five true or false questions. Part of a question may be true, but if the entire question is not true, then mark it as false.

1. I believe Christ died for my sins, and so I deserve to be saved (Eph. 2:8). ____
2. God's grace saved me and now my duty is to repay Him through service and good works (Eph. 2:10). ____
3. Salvation is God's reward for loving and serving Him. ____
4. I am not worthy of salvation, but I believe Christ's death paid for my sins. So I am saved. ____
5. I have sinned, but am not all bad; Christ knows my desire is to be a good person so He will save me by His grace. ____

Discussion of Questions

Question 1: Belief in Christ is all one has to have in order to be saved, so this person is saved. However, the question is still not totally true. It is not entirely true because no one ever deserves God's grace or to

be saved. Even when you believe in Christ, you do not deserve Salvation. You will receive Salvation on belief, but that is totally due to His grace and not your right to have it given to you. God has saved this person because they believed in Him, but they are mistaken about deserving Salvation. The biblical reference and comment on grace are put there so that you can see how false teaching can seem very biblical. (Answer: false)

Question 2: This person is saved if they truly believe in Christ's death for their sins, but the idea of ever paying God back is totally against Scripture. If it could be paid back, then Salvation would not be a free gift by God's grace. To think of paying God back is to diminish His gift to you bringing His glorious gift down to the meager level of mankind. The good works that spring from our Salvation are a means of showing our love and devotion to Him and not to pay Him back. **"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them"** (Eph. 2:10). (Answer: false)

Question 3: Salvation is never a reward for anything a person does. Loving and serving Him are good things to do after you are saved. Even then they cannot repay even a portion of what God has done. You love and serve Him out of respect and a desire to honor Him and not to gain a reward. If Salvation were a

reward, then your works gained your Salvation, and this certainly does not agree with the Bible. Instead, it is a gift of God's grace without any merit on our part. **"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit"** (Tit. 3:5). (Note: "washing of regeneration" is not referring to water baptism but to the cleansing from sin we get when we are regenerated [saved].) (Answer: false)

Question 4: The plain and simple truth of salvation is stated. This is all that is required (no more, no less). God gives us Salvation (new birth, regeneration) by His grace through faith. (Answer: true)

Question 5: Being good has nothing to do with salvation. Being better than average or being really great is of no value. No one can ever be good enough. Just one sin is all that is needed to send a person to Hell. When it comes to Heaven or Hell, God judges a person for their sins and not how good they are. The believer's sins have been forgiven and totally taken away. God then looks at the believer and declares them righteous (without sin because the blood of Christ removes all sin). Do not ever think the issue is whether your good outweighs your bad; that is the Devil's lie. Again, one sin makes you a sinner, and all have sinned (Rom. 3:23). The wages of sin is death. The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:23). Being good is the result of your salvation, but it has nothing to do with receiving salvation. (Answer: false)

Take 2 Heart

Summary

Grace is God's free favor and kindness to us; it is not merited or repayable. His grace has a God-directed influence on our hearts and lives. He dispenses His grace based on His love and kindness toward us and not because of something we do to earn it. All God asks in order to receive His grace is faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. God's grace is what saves us when we believe in Christ. The good news is no one is so bad that He will deny him/her Salvation, because His desire is to save everyone (1 Tim. 2:4).

Gospel

On simple, child-like faith, God will save you by His grace. If you have faith (believe) in Christ's death for your sins, that is all that you must believe. **"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received; that Christ died for your sins according to the Scriptures"** (1 Cor. 15:3). There is a lot more in Scripture that is great to believe, but those things are not required in order to be saved. When you are saved, there are an incredible number of things that happen to

you (justified, redeemed, baptized into Christ, made one with Him, accepted, sealed, blessed, etc.). You do not need to know, understand, or believe any of these things in order to be saved. **The one and only basic requirement is to believe Christ died for your sins.**

Encouragement

God has already noticed you, loved you, and saved you (if you believe). As His Spirit influences your life, there will be wonderful changes. His grace will produce a gracious heart in you; a heart that desires to be kind and compassionate toward others. As His grace changes you from within, you will experience a new freedom in life you did not know exists. Please do not be impatient; His influence on your life may be slower or faster than you thought. The main thing is to be willing to obey the Word and allow Him to direct your life. As you cooperate with the working of the Spirit in your life, you will see how you are changing into His image, and new-found choices and opportunities await you. Thank you for your love for the Lord Jesus Christ and your desire to grow in grace.