

## Lesson 9

### God Is Gracious

One of the most often heard words in evangelical circles is the word “grace.” Yet, it is probably the least understood. The reason the term “grace” has lost its biblical meaning in our day is that men have forgotten about the God of Grace. A wrong understanding of God has brought a watered down concept of grace, and the Church of Jesus Christ in America will never be strong again until from our pulpits rings the truth that a gracious God bestows His full and free grace upon sinners for salvation.

Probably the song most loved and most sung by Christians is “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.*

*Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears relieved;*

*How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.”*

We love the tune but know little or nothing of the theology in the words. How many Christians really understand the grace of God? Do they understand it as John Newton did who wrote the song “Amazing Grace”?

John Newton was a famous Puritan minister who preached the sovereign grace of God in salvation because he came to know the God of Grace through a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Newton’s life until his late twenties was very sinful, for he lived his early life as a depraved profligate. He came from a Christian home and first learned the gospel at his mother’s knee. Even when he was in his deepest sin, he could not shake the teachings of salvation that she had taught him from the Bible and the Westminster Shorter Catechism. The years of 18-24 were evil years for him. By the time he was 18, he was outwardly a professed atheist. He joined the Navy and shortly after, deserted. He loved the sea and as a sailor he began to drink heavily and fed every passion of his life with sin. At one point in his life, he seriously contemplated suicide for he had abandoned any belief in God or a hope of an afterlife. During these dark years, Newton came within a breath of losing his life three times, but God providentially spared him. Late in his twenties, this filthy young sinner met the God of Grace and was saved by grace and his whole life was changed. Newton knew it was the grace of God that turned him to Christ and nothing else. He also knew that if God had not sovereignly saved him by His grace he would have been damned for all eternity. Newton, after his conversion, wrote, “God seems to select the worst of sinners in order to show the exceeding riches of His grace, and the greatness of His mighty power.”

For you Christians, who have wayward children, remember, God in grace can break through to that son or daughter. Continue to pray and remember that they will never be able to shake the gospel that they learned at your knee.

Why did John Newton believe in grace in salvation? Where did he get this concept? Some who sing "Amazing Grace" with gusto would claim that Newton had wrong theology in his concepts of salvation, for he believed that God's grace had to move a sinner to faith in Christ. Newton received his theology from the Bible. The biblical concept of grace and Newton's concept have not changed, but many in our day have either denied grace, compromised grace or never preach on grace because it is too controversial. Grace is watered down and the God of Grace is mocked because men have accepted modernism or forms of modernism over the biblical teachings of grace. Louis Berkhof says,

*"In modern theology, with its belief in the inherent goodness of man and his ability to help himself, the doctrine of salvation by grace has practically become a "lost chord," and even the word "grace" was emptied of all spiritual meaning and vanished from religious discourses." (Systematic Theology)*

## GOD IS GRACIOUS

God says, **"I am gracious"** (Exo. 22:27 KJV), for grace flows from His sovereign holy character.

***"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished . . ." (Exo. 34:6-7)***

***"The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love." (Psa. 103:8)***

What is the definition of grace? Grace is unmerited favor. Grace is the free bestowal of kindness on one who has no claim on it. Grace is the good pleasure of God that inclines Him to bestow benefits upon the undeserving. Grace has no meaning until one properly understands sin. Sin is wrong thoughts and wrong acts contrary to the holy character and law of God. All men are sinners; they are in rebellion to God; and they are enemies of God and deserve absolutely nothing from God but eternal perdition. God owes no obligation to any of His creatures. If He chooses to shower kindness on some of His creatures, it is purely by the grace of a gracious God. Grace cannot be bought, earned or won by men, for if it could be, it would cease to be grace. The grace of God is the source of all spiritual blessings that are bestowed on sinners.

It is interesting to note that "grace" is never mentioned in connection with all mankind but is always mentioned in relation to the true people of God. There is no such thing as universal grace but there is particular grace to all who are believers in Christ. There is only one questionable verse on universal grace in Titus 2:11 which says, ***"For the grace of God that***

***brings salvation has appeared to all men.***” This could be translated “for all men,” indicating that Christ’s salvation is for all men if all men will lay hold of it. Another possibility is to put this verse in context and it is obvious that it is referring to believers. The “all men” refers to all men who believe in Christ for Titus 2:12 says, ***“It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.”***

It is also interesting to note that the grace of God is seen in both the Old and the New Testaments. This is important because some Dispensationalists try to make the Old Testament teach only law and the New Testament teach only grace, but God does not change from age to age and He is always gracious. Men have always been saved by grace through faith in Christ, and God has always dealt with His people in grace.

## GOD IS GRACIOUS IN SALVATION

A Christian’s salvation is purely by the grace of God. Not one person who is saved deserves it, and if he is saved, it is because God graciously bestowed this salvation on him. We are distinctly told that our salvation is caused by God’s grace and is appropriated through faith in Christ.

***“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”*** (Eph. 2:8-9)

Salvation according to the Bible is never by works but always by grace. Grace and works will no more unite than an acid and an alkali.

***“And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.”*** (Rom. 11:6)

***“The promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace.”*** (Rom. 4:16)

Every phase of a person’s salvation has as its effective cause the grace of God. Election is related to grace.

***“So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.”*** (Rom. 11:5)

Predestination is related to grace.

***“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.”*** (Eph. 1:5-6)

The effectual call of God to a sinner for salvation is related to grace.

***“Who (God) has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.”*** (2 Tim. 1:9)

The justification of a sinner is caused by God’s grace.

***“And are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”*** (Rom. 3:24)

No man deserves his salvation in Christ, and, if he is saved, it is by the pure grace of God.

“Wait a minute, Dr. Arnold,” cries the objector. “It is true that salvation is by grace but it is conditioned on the free will of man, for man must believe before God will move in His grace to save.” Not so, for the Scriptures tell us that even a man’s faith is brought about by the grace of God.

***“When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed.”*** (Acts 18:27)

If man were left to his free will to trust in Jesus Christ, he would never be saved, for the unsaved man naturally chooses against God because he is a sinner. Martin Luther keenly remarked,

***“If any man does ascribe anything to salvation; even the very least, to the free will of man, he knows nothing of grace, and he has not learned Jesus Christ aright.”***

God must grant the sinner the grace to believe or he will never be saved. Most of you who are Christians believe this but when it is put to you so plainly you are stunned at it. You pray for God to help men believe in Christ, indicating that you know the Holy Spirit has to do something to enable a sinner to trust Christ. You even sing about grace. Have you ever listened to the words of the great hymn *I Know Whom I Have Believed*?

Chorus:           *"But I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able  
To keep that which I committed unto Him against that day."*

Stanza #1:       *"I know not why God's wondrous grace, To men He hath made known,  
Nor why unworthy - Christ in love, Redeemed me for His own."*

Stanza #2:       *"I know not how this saving faith, To me He did impart,  
Nor how believing in His Word, Wrought peace within my heart."*

Stanza #3:       *"I know not how the Spirit moves, Convincing men of sin,  
Revealing Jesus thro' the Word, Creating faith in Him."*

Perhaps some of you are still skeptical about sovereign grace, and while you may agree that it is biblical, you feel we should not preach it, for it will drive people away. This simply is not true, for it will attract men to Christ. This point can be illustrated by a college student who recently came to know Jesus Christ as her personal Lord and Savior. She wrote my wife and me a letter and I am convinced that she understands the grace of God better than many people who have been in church for years. Listen to what she said,

"This summer has undoubtedly been the turning point in my life, and I'm really overwhelmed with gratitude and thanksgiving to the Lord that I "turned" in the right direction. I honestly feel so special and yet, at the same time, I know that I am so finite and limited in comparison to our Creator. I'm always bewildered at the fact that God finally gave me the ability to believe, when the world is filled with so many other people that He could have blessed. I realize that our Lord, and no other, can give away His free gift of salvation."

As believers in the inspired Bible, we must come to understand that grace is free and it is sovereign. Grace is free in that God freely gives it to men in Christ without any conditions whatsoever (Rom. 3:24). If there were any conditions, it would not be free. Free grace alone can save a sinner from sin and hell. Grace is also sovereign in that God bestows His free grace on whom He pleases.

***"I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."*** (Exo. 33:19)

No man deserves salvation, for all men are rebels and care not about God, so if God is pleased to grant His grace to a limited number to be saved, His justice is not to be impugned. God is not obligated to save those who are willfully determined to go their own way, but if He does save some for Himself it is purely by the grace of a sovereign God. Sovereign grace should

not discourage sinners from coming to Christ for salvation but it should encourage them, for it should cause them to see that their only hope of ever being saved is to cast themselves on the sovereign grace of God, so that God can grant them the grace to believe in Jesus Christ.

John Wesley, a staunch Arminian or free-willer, wrote a hymn, and this hymn tells me that he believed more strongly in the grace of God in salvation than most free-willers do today. While Wesley's practice of grace was more sound than his theology on grace, all this hymn tells us is that God's sovereign grace must override the rebellious, stubborn will of an unsaved person before he will be saved.

*"O my God, what must I do? Thou alone the way canst show;  
Thou canst save me in this hour; I have neither will nor power:  
God, if over all thou art, Greater than my sinful heart,  
All thy power on me be shown, Take away the heart of stone.*

*Take away my darling sin, Make me willing to be clean;  
Make me willing to receive, All thy goodness waits to give:  
Force me, Lord, with all to part, Tear these idols from my heart;  
Now thy love almighty show, Make e'en me a creature new.*

*Jesus, mighty to renew, Work in me to will and do;  
Turn my nature's rapid tide, Stem the torrent of my pride;  
Stop the whirlwind of my will; Speak, and bid the sun stand still;  
Now thy love almighty show, Make e'en me a creature new.*

*Arm of God, thy strength put on, Bow the heavens, and come down;  
All my unbelief o'erthrow, Lay th' aspiring mountain low:  
Conquer thy worst foe in me, Get thyself the victory;  
Save the vilest of the race, Force me to be saved by grace."*

## CONCLUSION

Is there some one this day who has never trusted Christ as a personal Lord and Savior? I want to encourage you, for God does save sinners by His grace. God does grant grace to sinners to believe in Christ, and you will know that He has granted you grace when you believe that Christ died for your sins and was raised from the dead to declare you righteous.

The Bible says, ***“By grace you have been saved through faith.”*** (Eph. 2:8-9) Salvation is by grace but it is also through faith. Your responsibility is to trust Christ and when you do you will come to realize that it was God’s grace that enabled you to make this decision. God gives faith but God does not exercise faith. You must trust the Savior for yourself, and God must grant grace for you to be saved. Great is the mystery of salvation, but oh, how wonderful it is!

Perhaps you are saying, “I want to believe but I can’t. I have tried to trust Christ but I am unable.” If this be your condition, then pray that God will grant you the grace to believe. Pray this prayer until God breaks through to you with His grace, enabling you to own Christ as your personal Savior.

Someone may say, “What if God will not grant me grace even if I want to trust Christ and be saved?” Friend, you would not even desire to be saved unless God is working in your heart to trust the Savior. If you feel the slightest urging of your spirit to trust Christ, this is God’s grace working in you. Trust Christ and experience the amazing grace of an infinite God.

Remember, God saves totally by His grace but not apart from faith in Christ. Christ saves all who come to Him by faith, and He will not turn away one truly repentant sinner who wants the guilt of sin removed and who wants a new life in Christ.

***“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”*** (Eph. 2:8-9)