

St. Mark Bible Study God's Grace

God's Grace

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. ([Genesis 6:8](#))

And the LORD said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name. ([Exodus 33:17](#))

Surely he scorneth the scorners: but he giveth grace unto the lowly. ([Proverbs 3:34](#))

And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. ([John 1:16–17](#))

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. ([Romans 3:24](#))

For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. ([Romans 5:15](#))

To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace. ([Ephesians 1:6–7](#))

But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus.... ([1 Peter 5:10](#))

As was said before, an attribute is something God is, not something God *has*. Grace is therefore something God is. Its meaning is close to, but not the same as, mercy. Just as mercy flows out of the goodness of God, so grace flows out of the goodness of God.

Grace Flows from God's Goodness

Mercy, however, is God's goodness confronting human guilt, whereas grace is God's goodness confronting human demerit. (There is a difference between no merit and demerit. *No merit* is simply a lack; *demerit* means that there is not only

St. Mark Bible Study God's Grace

no merit there but that there is the opposite of merit.) When justice confronts a moral situation, it pronounces death; there is divine disapproval to the point of condemnation. God must stand against the man, because the man stands with his sin; justice must judge. Still, the goodness of God yearns to bestow blessedness even to those who do not deserve it, but who have a specific demerit, and that blessedness is grace.

Grace is God's good pleasure, and it is what God is like. I have said over and over again that one of the big problems of the Church is the loss of the proper concept of what God is like. And if we could restore that again, we could have an army of preachers going up and down the land preaching about what God is like. Pastors and teachers would begin again to tell the people what God is like. It would put strength and foundation under our faith again.

Grace is that in God which brings into favor one justly in disfavor. I'm actually staying very close to the Hebrew and Greek definitions. Grace and favor, incidentally, are often used interchangeably in the English Bible. There is four times as much said about mercy in the Old Testament as in the New. But strangely and wonderfully there is more than three times as much said about grace in the New Testament as in the Old.

"The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" ([John 1:17](#)). Christ is the channel through which grace flows. It is possible to misunderstand this. We have made it to mean that Moses knew only law and Christ knows only grace. This is the typical teaching of the hour, but it is not the teaching of our fathers. You'll not find it in John Bunyan or John Owen or Henry Scougal or any of the Puritans. You'll not find it even in Calvin. You'll not find it among the great revivalists and Church fathers and reformers.

To think that because the law was given by Moses, therefore Moses knew no grace, is to misread that passage. [Genesis 6:8](#) says, "Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD" before there was any law given. And after the law was given, after Moses had been on the mount forty days and forty nights, and God had reached down out of the fire and storm and with His finger had chiseled the Ten Commandments on the tables of stone, it says, "Thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name" ([Exodus 33:17](#)).

St. Mark Bible Study God's Grace

God did not deal with Moses on the basis of law. He dealt with Moses on the basis of grace. And Moses knew it and said, "If I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight" ([33:13](#)).

How could it be that God should act only in law in the Old Testament and only in grace in the New if God doesn't change? If immutability is an attribute of God, then God must always act like Himself. Grace doesn't ebb and flow like the tide; it doesn't come like the weather. God must always act like Himself—before the flood and after the flood, when the law was given and after the law was given. Grace is an attribute of God, that is, something which God is and which cannot be removed from God and yet have God remain God. There was always grace in the heart of God, and there isn't any more grace now than there ever was, and there will never be any more grace than there is now.

Grace: The Only Means of Salvation

Here are two important truths. (And I want you to take it and the next time you hear a professor or a preacher say otherwise, go to him and remind him of this.) The first truth is that no one ever was saved, no one is now saved and no one ever will be saved except by grace. Before Moses nobody was ever saved except by grace. During Moses' time nobody was ever saved except by grace. After Moses and before the cross and after the cross and since the cross and during all that dispensation, during any dispensation, anywhere, any time since Abel offered his first lamb before God on the smoking altar—nobody was ever saved in any other way than by grace.

The second truth is that grace always comes by Jesus Christ. The law was given by Moses, but grace came by Jesus Christ. This does not mean that before Jesus was born of Mary there was no grace. God dealt in grace with mankind, looking forward to the Incarnation and death of Jesus before Christ came. Now, since He's come and gone to the Father's right hand, God looks back upon the cross as we look back upon the cross. Everybody from Abel on was saved by looking forward to the cross. Grace came by Jesus Christ. And everybody that's been saved since the cross is saved by looking back at the cross.

St. Mark Bible Study God's Grace

Grace always comes by Jesus Christ. It didn't come at His birth, but it came in God's ancient plan. No grace was ever administered to anybody except by and through and in Jesus Christ. When Adam and Eve had no children God spared Adam and Eve by grace. And when they had their two boys, one offered a lamb and thus said, "I look forward to the Lamb of God." He accepted the grace of Christ Jesus thousands of years before He was born, and God gave him witness that he was justified.

The grace did not come when Christ was born in a manger. It did not come when Christ was baptized or anointed of the Spirit. It did not come when He died on a cross; it did not come when He rose from the dead. It did not come when He went to the Father's right hand. Grace came from the ancient beginnings through Jesus Christ the eternal Son and was manifest on the cross of Calvary, in fiery blood and tears and sweat and death. But it has always been operative from the beginning. If God had not operated in grace He would have swept the human race away. He would have crushed Adam and Eve under His heel in awful judgment, for they had it coming.

But because God was a God of grace, He already had an eternity planned—the plan of grace, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" ([Revelation 13:8](#)). There was no embarrassment in the divine scheme; God didn't have to back up and say, "I'm sorry, but I have mixed things up here." He simply went right on.

Everybody receives in some degree God's grace: the lowest woman in the world; the most sinful, bloody man in the world; Judas; Hitler. If it hadn't been that God was gracious, they would have been cut off and slain, along with you and me and all the rest. I wonder if there's much difference in us sinners after all.

When a woman sweeps up a house, some of the dirt is black, some is gray, some is light-colored, but it is all dirt, and it all goes before the broom. And when God looks at humanity He sees some that are morally light-colored, some that are morally dark, some that are morally speckled, but it is all dirt, and it all goes before the moral broom.

So the grace of God is operated toward everybody. But the saving grace of God is different. When the grace of God becomes operative through faith in Jesus Christ then there is the new birth. But the grace of God nevertheless holds back

St. Mark Bible Study God's Grace

any judgment that would come until God in His kindness has given everyone a chance to repent.

Grace Is What God Is Like

Grace is God's goodness, the kindness of God's heart, the good will, the cordial benevolence. It is what God is like. God is like that all the time. You'll never run into a stratum in God that is hard. You'll always find God gracious, at all times and toward all peoples forever. You'll never run into any meanness in God, never any resentment or rancor or ill will, for there is none there. God has no ill will toward any being. God is a God of utter kindness and cordiality and good will and benevolence. And yet all of these work in perfect harmony with God's justice and God's judgment. I believe in hell and I believe in judgment. But I also believe that there are those whom God must reject because of their impenitence, yet there will be grace. God will still feel gracious toward all of His universe. He is God and He can't do anything else.

Grace is infinite, but I don't want you to strain to understand infinitude. I had the temerity to preach on infinitude a few times, and I got along all right—at least I got along all right. Let's try to measure it against ourselves, not against God. God never measures anything in Himself against anything else in Himself. That is, God never measures His grace against His justice or His mercy against His love. God is all one. But God measures His grace against our sin. "Grace... hath abounded unto many," says [Romans 5:15](#), "according to the riches of his grace" ([Ephesians 1:7](#)). And, says [Romans 5](#) again, "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" ([5:20](#)). God says "much more abound," but God has no degrees. Man has degrees.

One of the worst things you can do is to give people IQ tests. When I was in the army I had an IQ test and I rated very high, and I have had a lifetime of trying to keep from remembering that and keeping humble before God. I think how I rated up in the top four percent in all of the army, and of course, you know what that does to a person. You have to keep humbling yourself, and God has to keep chastening you to keep you down.

But there's nothing in God that can compare itself with anything else in God. What God is, God is! When Scripture says grace does "much more abound," it

St. Mark Bible Study God's Grace

means not that grace does much more abound than anything else in God but much more than anything in us. No matter how much sin a man has done, literally and truly grace abounds unto that man.

Old John Bunyan wrote his life story and called it—I think it was one of the finest titles ever given to a book—*Grace Abounding Toward the Chief of Sinners*. Bunyan honestly believed that he was the man who had the least right to the grace of God. Grace abounded! For us who stand under the disapproval of God, who by sin lie under sentence of God's eternal, everlasting displeasure and banishment, grace is an incomprehensibly immense and overwhelming plenitude of kindness and goodness. If we could only remember it, we wouldn't have to be played with and entertained so much. If we could only remember the grace of God toward us who have nothing but demerit, we would be overwhelmed by this incomprehensibly immense attribute, so vast, so huge, that nobody can ever grasp it or hope to understand it.

Would God have put up with us this long if He had only a limited amount of grace? If He had only a limited amount of anything, He wouldn't be God. I shouldn't use the word "amount," because "amount" means "a measure," and you can't measure God in any direction. God dwells in no dimension and can be measured in no way. Measures belong to human beings. Measures belong to the stars.

Distance is the way heavenly bodies account for the space they occupy and their relation to other heavenly bodies. The moon is 250,000 miles away. The sun is 93 million miles away, and all that sort of thing. But God never accounts to anybody for anything He is. God's immensity, God's infinitude must mean that the grace of God must always be immeasurably full. We sing "Amazing Grace"—why, of course it's amazing! How can we comprehend the fullness of the grace of God?

How to Look at Grace

There are two ways to think about the grace of God: One is to look at yourself and see how sinful you were and say, "God's grace must be vast—it must be huge as space to forgive such a sinner as I am." That's one way and that's a good way—and probably that's the most popular way.

St. Mark Bible Study God's Grace

But there's another way to think of the grace of God. Think of it as the way God is—God being like God. And when God shows grace to a sinner He isn't being dramatic; He's acting like God. He'll never act any other way but like God. On the other hand, when that man whom justice has condemned turns his back on the grace of God in Christ and refuses to allow himself to be rescued, then the time comes when God must judge the man. And when God judges the man He acts like Himself in judging the man. When God shows love to the human race He acts like Himself. When God shows judgment to “the angels which kept not their first estate” ([Jude 6](#)), He acts like Himself.

Always God acts in conformity with the fullness of His own wholly perfect, symmetrical nature.

God always feels this overwhelming plentitude of goodness and He feels it in harmony with all His other attributes. There's no frustration in God. Everything that God is He is in complete harmony, and there is never any frustration in Him. But all this He bestows in His eternal Son.

A lot of people have talked about the goodness of God and then gotten sentimental about it and said, “God is too good to punish anybody,” and so they have ruled out hell. But the man who has an adequate conception of God will not only believe in the love of God, but also in the holiness of God. He will not only believe in the mercy of God, but also in the justice of God. And when you see the everlasting God in His holy, perfect union, when you see the One God acting in judgment, you know that the man who chooses evil must never dwell in the presence of this holy God.

But a lot of people have gone too far and have written books and poetry that gets everybody believing that God is so kind and loving and gentle. God is so kind that infinity won't measure it. And God is so loving that He is immeasurably loving. But God is also holy and just.

Keep in mind that the grace of God comes only through Jesus Christ, and it is channeled only through Jesus Christ. The second Person of the Trinity opened the channel and grace flowed through. It flowed through from the day that Adam sinned all through Old Testament times, and it never flows any other way. So let's not write dreamy poetry about the goodness of our heavenly Father who is love—

St. Mark Bible Study God's Grace

“love is God and God is love and love is all in all and all is God and everything will be OK.” That’s the summation of a lot of teaching these days. But it’s false teaching.

Grace Is Released at the Cross

If I want to know this immeasurable grace, this overwhelming, astounding kindness of God, I have to step under the shadow of the cross. I must come where God releases grace. I must either look forward to it or I must look back at it. I must look one way or the other to that cross where Jesus died. Grace flowed out of His wounded side. The grace that flowed there saved Abel—and that same grace saves you. “No man cometh unto the Father, but by me,” said our Lord Jesus Christ ([John 14:6](#)). And Peter said, “There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved,” except the name of Jesus Christ ([Acts 4:12](#)).

The reason for that is, of course, that Jesus Christ is God. Law could come by Moses and only law could come by Moses. But grace came by Jesus Christ. And it came from the beginning. It could come only by Jesus Christ because there was no one else who was God who could die. No one else could take on Him flesh and still be the infinite God. And when Jesus walked around on earth and patted the heads of babies, forgave harlots and blessed mankind, He was simply God acting like God in a given situation. In everything that God does He acts like Himself.

But this one act of Jesus, this divine act, is also a human act. It couldn’t have been a divine act alone, for it had to be for man. It couldn’t have been a human act alone, for only God could save. It was a human act and a divine act. It was a historic act, a once-done act, done there in the darkness on the tree—hidden there, that secret act in darkness, never repeated. It was owned and accepted by God the Father Almighty who raised Him from the dead the third day and took Him to His own right hand.

So let’s not degrade ourselves by vulgarizing the atonement. Over the last generation or two, some popular preachers have commercialized the atonement. They are good men and they’ve won some to Christ, and I thank God for everybody that’s been won, but even while you’re winning people to Christ, even winning them in great numbers, you can be so misleading and laying wrong emphasis that you start a trend that is bad.

St. Mark Bible Study God's Grace

These preachers have commercialized the atonement by giving us the doctrine of “paying a price.” I believe He paid the price all right, and I can sing “Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe,” but we must not simplify it and illustrate it, or we vulgarize the atonement. I do not know how He did it. I can only stand as Ezekiel stood in the valley of dry bones and raise my head to God and say, “Oh Lord GOD, thou knowest” ([Ezekiel 37:3](#)). Back there when the prophet said that He would come and give Himself a ransom for many, they didn't know quite what they were writing about, Peter says (see [1 Peter 1:10–11](#)). And even angels watched the quill pens write over the old-fashioned paper the story of the coming Messiah. Looking over the shoulders of the prophets as they wrote, the angels desired to look into it ([1:12](#)). Not even the sharp-eyed angels around the throne of God know how He did it.

Some Things We Do Not Know

In secret, there in the dark, He did a once-done act never done before and never done again. And because He did that, the grace of God flows to all men. Let's remember that angels and prophets and even Paul said, “Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” ([1 Timothy 3:16](#)). Many serious-minded, worthy scholars are ready to say that Paul's mind was the greatest that ever was known in the human race, except of course for the perfect mind of Christ. But this mighty mind never tried to understand it. He said, “Great is the mystery of godliness” ([3:16](#)), and that's all.

We're saved by His blood, but how are we saved by His blood? We're alive by His death, but why are we alive by His death? Atonement was made in His death, but how was atonement made in His death? Let's not vulgarize it by trying to understand it. But let's stand and gaze at the cross and say, “Oh Lord God, Thou knowest! Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!”

And if angels can be envious, they look upon us ransomed sinners and desire to look into it. But God says to the angels, the spirits there before the throne who can bear the burning bliss but who have never known a sinful world like this, “Go help My people.” He sends them out to be ministering spirits to them who shall be heirs of salvation. But He never explains it to them. And I doubt whether there's an

St. Mark Bible Study God's Grace

angel or archangel anywhere in heaven who understands what happened there on that cross.

We know He died; we know that because He died we don't have to. We know that He rose from the dead and because He rose from the dead, we who believe on Him will rise from the dead. We know He went to the right hand of God and sat down in perfect approval amidst the acclamations of the heavenly multitude. And we know that because He did we'll go there with Him. But why? God has shut up this secret in His own great heart forever. And we can only say, "Worthy is the Lamb."

Only Believe

Well, let's not try to understand, let's just believe. It was a hundred years before the Church ever began to try to explain the atonement. A hundred years! The fathers never tried; Paul never tried; Peter never tried. It was only when Greek influence came in that men began to try to think their way through it and give us explanations. And I appreciate those explanations. But for my part, I just stand and gaze on Him and say, "I don't know, I don't know!"

I don't know how He did it or what it all means any more than a two-year-old baby who stands gazing into her mother's face and says, "Mother, how did I get here?" Mother smiles and says, "You'll know later." She knows a two-year-old intellect won't understand. I think that when we say, "Oh God, how is it?" God will not say, "You will know later." I think He will say, "Believe on My Son." For what is of the earth He lets us know, but what is of heaven, He holds in His own great heart. And what He won't tell the angels, maybe He won't tell us.

Oh the wonder of it, the awesomeness of it! Can we preach too much about it? Can we sing too much about it? Can we pray too much, can we insist on it too much? Maybe we should cease to strain to understand, and we should just hear the story of grace told by the Lord of all grace and the fountain of all mercy, believed by the simple-hearted:

A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all

St. Mark Bible Study God's Grace

together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land. ([Luke 15:11–14](#))

And this ungrateful boy, who had demanded his share before his father's death and thus had violated one of the tenderest conventions of human society, goes and asks for a job feeding hogs—and he was a Jew! Things got worse and worse and he had nothing and finally he had to push a hog away and try to eat some of the husks. And those who fed the hogs wouldn't give him any. They said, "Leave it alone—this is for the pigs." But he managed to stay alive.

Then one day he "came to himself" ([15:17](#)). He had been somebody else, but now he comes to himself. That's repentance! And he thinks about home, about Father, and he knew that Father hadn't changed. That's what Jesus was trying to tell us—the Father hasn't changed.

A long time ago, when I was in my early twenties, I'd heard the prodigal son was a backslider, but I didn't read it in the fifteenth chapter of Luke. He couldn't be a backslider and fit all the circumstances. I'd heard he was a sinner, but I couldn't hear God say of a sinner, "This, my son, was dead and is alive again." It didn't fit the circumstances.

So I went to God and I said, "God, will You show me?" Then I went to a place all by myself. Suddenly there flashed over me the understanding, and I have never had reason to doubt that this was God teaching me His Bible. I've never heard anybody else say this, and I haven't made a lot of it. But God said to my heart, *The prodigal son is neither a backslider nor a sinner. The prodigal son is the human race; they went out to the pigsty in Adam and came back in Christ, My Son.*

There are two other parables there in Luke: the Parable of the Lost Sheep and the Parable of the Lost Coin. The sheep that wandered away was part of the human race that would be saved, and when he comes back he's the part of the human race that is redeemed and will accept redemption. So those of every race and color around the world that have come back all come back in Christ. And they've all come back in the person of that prodigal.

St. Mark Bible Study God's Grace

Do you know what they found the Father to be like? They found He hadn't changed at all, in spite of the insults, wrongs and his neighbors pitying him, saying, "Oh, isn't it terrible the way that boy treated his poor old dad?" His father was humiliated and shamed and sorry and grieved and heartbroken, but when the boy came back, he hadn't changed at all.

Jesus was saying to us, "You went away in Adam, but you're coming back in Christ. And when you come back you'll find the Father hasn't changed. He's the same Father that He was when you all went out, every man to his own way. But when you come back in Jesus Christ you'll find Him exactly the same as you left Him—unchanged." And the Father ran and threw His arms around him and welcomed him and put a robe and a ring on him and said, "This my son was dead, and is alive again" ([15:24](#)). This is the grace of God. Isn't it worth believing in, preaching, teaching, singing about while the world stands?

Where the Grace Is

If you're out of the grace of God, do you know where the grace is? Turn your eyes upon Jesus, and there's the grace of God flowing free for you—all the grace you need. If you set your teeth against Him, the grace of God might as well not exist for you. And Christ might as well not have died. But if you yield to Him and come home, then all the overwhelming, incomprehensible plentitude of goodness and kindness in the great illimitable reaches of God's nature are on your side. Even justice is on the side of the returning sinner: "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" ([1 John 1:9](#)). All the infinite attributes of God rejoice together when a man believes in the grace of God and returns home.

Father, we pray for all of us, that you will sweep away our self-righteousness, even any little, ragged traces of self-righteousness that may be left. Save us from ourselves. Let grace abound from Calvary, and teach us that it is not by grace and something else, but by grace alone, Thy goodness, Thy kindness in Christ Jesus. This we ask in the name of the Lord who loves us. Amen.