

# God's AstoundinG GrAce



Excerpt from the Beareans Curriculum



# GOD'S ASTOUNDING GRACE

## Lesson One **Introduction to Grace**

### **Introduction**

#### **1. Our Topic: Free Grace**

Grace! What an awesome experience! What an astounding revelation! Christians of all times have basked in the astounding wonder of God's grace.

John Newton,<sup>1</sup> former slave-trading sailor turned saint, wrote the well-known lyrics, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!" Another hymn writer, overjoyed with the thought of grace, wrote, "Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt."<sup>2</sup> Still another gloried in grace by writing,

*Wonderful the matchless grace of Jesus,  
Deeper than the mighty rolling sea,  
Wonderful grace, all sufficient for me, 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!<sup>3</sup>*

### **Points to Note**

1. Grace is central to biblical Christianity.
2. The gospel of Christ is the gospel of the grace of God (Act 20:24).
3. Grace is what distinguishes the faith of the Bible from “faiths” made up by human thought. No one can rightly accuse one of “majoring on the minors” when he majors on grace, for the message of grace is found in Scripture from cover to cover.
4. The right perspective about Grace is necessary for personal salvation, as well as for holy living, or “growth in grace” (2Pe 3:18). Grace is a topic of supreme importance.

### **Purpose of the Lesson**

The purpose in this lesson is to build up the individual believer thorough the truth knowledge biblical doctrines of grace.

## **A. Grace Simply Defined?**

- Though the word *grace* in Scripture has various meanings, we will concentrate upon grace as it relates to salvation.
- Grace means a “gift.” A good, short definition is “the unmerited favor of God.” Grace is free, or else it would not be a gift.
- Grace comes to us from God Himself. He is the Fountain of every good and perfect gift (Jam 1:17).

### **A Much Saving Grace**

God, in His grace, blesses mankind abundantly and in many different ways. Scripture speaks of “the manifold<sup>5</sup> grace of God” (1Pe 4:10).

God’s grace is for the just and the unjust as well. Mat 5:45).

The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works...The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou gives them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfies the desire of every living thing. (Psa 145:8-9, 15-16)

God’s grace to all is evident in the spiritual realm as well as the physical. God has revealed Himself to all men so that none are completely without a knowledge of Him (Psa 19:1-6; Rom 1:18-20). He grants sinners time to repent,<sup>6</sup> even if they ultimately persist to the end in their stubborn rebellion (Pro 1:22; 29:1). We refer to God’s abundant goodness toward all men without discrimination

“Saving grace,” we are referring to the grace of God that brings *salvation* (Ti 2:11). This grace is not enjoyed by all, since it is evident that not all men will be saved (Mat 7:13-14). Only believers are saved by grace through faith (Eph 2:8). Unbelievers perish, since they do not receive *saving* grace.

## **B. Our Need of Grace**

A simple definition of sin is “disobeying God, or the inner attitude to disobey God.” A sinner is condemned before God and deserve God’s wrath both now and hereafter. God clearly set forth His requirements to man, and man has glaringly, repeatedly, and defiantly fallen short of them.

Not only do we practice sin, we are sinners by nature. Rebellion against God is ingrained in us. We are in bondage to sin, held captive as its slaves. We cannot free ourselves from sin; only God can deliver us. The only hope for sinners like us is God’s mighty grace.

### **1. The Fact of Sin**

Of course, our initial rebellion against God began in the Garden of Eden. God permitted our first parents to eat of every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve ate of it and disobeyed God (Gen 3).

Though God was gracious to Adam and Eve, they still produced corrupt, sinful offspring. “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one” (Job 14:4).

Their first son, Cain, expressed his selfish rejection of God by killing his brother Abel (Gen 4). A sinful nature has been passed on to all Adam’s sons. “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom 5:12). Even from birth, we enter this world with a sinful nature. “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psa 51:5). “What is man, that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. How much more abominable<sup>7</sup> and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity<sup>8</sup> like water?” (Job 15:14-16). That speaks of you and me!

“Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child” (Pro 22:15). The word *foolishness* here comes from a Hebrew word meaning “wayward, quarrelsome, unrestrained, guilty.” Though children are often thought of as completely innocent and without sin, this is mere illusion. The fire of sin smolders in their little hearts and is fanned into a flame as they grow up, except for the grace of God. The only exception to this, of course, is Jesus Christ our Lord, Who was completely without sin (1Pe 2:22-23; 1Jo 3:5).

### **Romans 3,**

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one

...For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God (vv. 10-12, 23).

## **2. The Bondage of Sin**

The Bible clearly teaches that men are by nature enslaved to sin. Jesus taught that only His true disciples really knew the truth and enjoyed spiritual liberty (Joh 8:31-32). The Jews who heard Him did not realize how enslaved they were and how much they needed the freedom of which Jesus spoke (8:33). Then the Lord said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin” (8:34). From the surrounding text, it is obvious that the word *servant* is used to mean “slave”—one who cannot free himself from his bonds. Sin is the master. That this is the condition of every lost man is explicitly taught in many Scripture texts. For example, Romans 6:16 says, “Know ye not, that to whom ye

yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" We all begin life in this world as servants or slaves of sin. The prophet Jeremiah testified of man, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer 17:9). Further, we are no more able to do good than anyone is able to change the color of his skin or a leopard change his spots (Jer 13:23).

Referring to Simon the sorcerer, Peter said that since his heart was not right with God, he was "in the bond of iniquity" (Act 8:20-23). Again, speaking of false teachers, Peter taught, "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage" (2Pe 2:19).

Men are also the captives of Satan by nature (2Ti 2:26). He is the god of this world, and all the unsaved serve him because he has blinded their minds to the gospel so that they cannot see its glory (2Co 4:3-4). Sinful man cannot even know the things of the Spirit of God, since they are spiritually discerned (1Co 2:14).

Sin is so ingrained in us that no human efforts can remove it (Pro 27:22). The carnal<sup>9</sup> mind cannot obey God's Law nor please Him (Rom 8:7-8). Apart from God's grace, we do not fear Him (Rom 3:18) nor seek Him (Rom 3:11). We have corrupt hearts that inevitably choose corrupt paths. There is no good thing in us (Rom 7:18). These passages are a mere sampling of many in Scripture that unmistakably set forth our utter inability to do good or to turn from sin.

In the light of our natural bondage, it becomes powerfully obvious how desperately we need the grace of God to free us. We not only need God to show us His glory: we need miraculous healing from spiritual blindness that we might see Him. Neither is it enough for God to speak the truth: we need to have our spiritual hearing restored by His Almighty power. God must do more than prescribe the medicine: He must raise us from the dead if we are to live. We need no self-help plan from God: we are utterly dependent upon God to save us and make us what we ought to be.

God chose humanity gives them faith, and makes them new creatures in Christ Jesus (Phi 1:29; Eph 2:8-9; 2Co 5:17).

## God's Provision

### C. The Price of Grace

God's grace is free to us—but it was costly to Him. In order for God to bestow His grace freely upon us, it was necessary for a terrible price to be paid on our behalf.

## **1. The Wages of Sin**

Sin against God must be punished, “For the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). We have “earned” death because of our disobedience to God. The universal testimony of Scripture is that the penalty of sin is death (e.g., Gen 2:17; 3:19; 20:7; Num 14:29; Eze 18:4, 20; Jam 1:15). God’s justice must be satisfied, as well as His mercy. The only way this can be accomplished is if the penalties of God’s Law are met. Ultimately, no one’s sins against God can go unpunished.

## **2. Christ in Our Place**

This brings us to the very core of the gospel message: “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures” (1Co 15:3). The sacrifice of Christ on the cross was a substitutionary, voluntary payment for sins on behalf of helpless sinners, that God’s grace might be offered freely, and sinners might be rescued from His just wrath.

That Christ died as a Substitute for others cannot be denied by sincere Bible-believers. He Himself was completely innocent of any sin; He was absolutely righteous in every way. Death had no claim on Christ since He was completely blameless, the perfect Example Who pleased His Father in all things (Joh 8:29, 46; 1Pe 2:21-22). The Scriptures clearly teach the substitutionary nature of Christ’s death in many passages (e.g., Isa 53; Rom 5:7-8; 1Pe 3:18). We who believe in Christ deserved to be punished as Christ was. We were guilty. We deserved God’s wrath, not Jesus. Yet Christ, Who loved us so much, willingly stepped between the sinner and God’s wrath and bore the just punishment for our sins (2Co 5:21).

Grace demanded that an infinite price be paid—the sacrifice of Christ—because of who was offended by our sins, even an infinitely holy God. The next logical question begging to be asked is, “Who receives the benefits of Christ’s death?” In other words, for whom did Christ die? Having established the biblical purpose of Christ’s death, let us consider the biblical extent of it.

## **3. For Whom Did Christ Die?**

The Bible says Christ died for “the world,” for “all men,” and other such expressions. Consider, for example, Isaiah 53:6; John 1:29; 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians 5:19; 1 Timothy 2:4-6; 4:10; Titus 2:11; Hebrews 2:9; 2 Peter 2:1; 3:9; 1 John 2:2; 4:14; John 10:11, 15-16, 26-29; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25-27; Romans 5:8-10; 8:32-33

## 1. God's Power to Save

“The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will” (Pro 21:1). Just as God directs the streams to flow one way or the other, so He turns men’s minds to one course or another. That is clearly the meaning of this proverb. Similar statements are found in Proverbs 16:1 and 16:9..

Artaxerxes, King of Persia, for example, was not known for his sensitivity to the Spirit of God! Yet he decided to send the Jews in his kingdom back to Jerusalem with a fortune out of his own treasury to rebuild the Temple of the Lord! And why did he do such a thing? Ezra, with spiritual insight, explains the cause: “Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this into the king’s heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem” (Ezr 7:27). God put it in Artaxerxes’ mind to show this favor to the Jews, though naturally he would have resisted such an idea.

When Israel strayed from God, He turned the hearts of the Gentiles against them, so that the Gentiles would be His rod of correction. Such was the case when Israel had become numerous in Egypt. The Lord knew how to arouse the Egyptians’ wrath against Israel, so that she would cry unto Him for deliverance. Incredible as it may seem, Scripture teaches us that God inspired the anti-Semitism in the people of Egypt, right up to the Pharaoh. “Israel also came into Egypt; and Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham. And he increased his people greatly; and made them stronger than their enemies. *He turned their heart to hate his people, to deal subtilly with his servants*” (Psa 105:23-25). We can see how effective God’s influence was when, even after Pharaoh saw the Red Sea part, he rushed into it in his madness to slaughter the Hebrews.

In Acts 16:14, we read of Lydia, the first European convert to Christ. She “heard us: *whose heart the Lord opened*, that she attended [i.e., responded] unto the things which were spoken of Paul,” which was, of course, the gospel of Christ. Lydia’s heart was closed to the gospel before Paul came. God opened her heart, and so her heart was open. God did not merely invite her to open her own heart: He opened it. Lydia’s response was a result of God opening her heart, not vice versa. And what God did for Lydia, He can do for anyone, no matter how stubborn. He is “mighty to save” (Isa 63:1).

To know God and Jesus Christ truly, means to be saved, to have eternal life (Joh 17:3). We all are born without the saving knowledge of Christ. According to Jesus, it pleases God to hide that knowledge from some and to give it to others, resulting in their salvation (Mat 11:25-27).

Realizing that man is in bondage to His sin, how could it be any other way? Man cannot free himself from the chains of Satan and sin; only God can free him. And if God delivers a man, he is delivered! Salvation is of the Lord (Jon 2:9). Christ is the Author and Finisher of our salvation (Heb 12:2). He does not just bring us halfway to salvation and leave the rest to us: He Who began a good work in us will complete it (Phi 1:6).

God is the One Who grants repentance to the self-willed and faith to the unbelieving (2Ti 2:24-26). If God grants repentance, we are repentant; if He grants faith, we are believing; if He grants salvation, we are saved!

### **What about Free Will?**

No doubt, many reading this will think, “Well, what about man’s free will? Does not the Bible present man with a choice, either to receive God’s grace, or to reject it? Is not our salvation dependent upon our choice?”

When we speak of free will, we must define our terms carefully. If by “free will” we mean that man is morally neutral and might just as easily choose the good as the bad, we must reject this completely. Man was innocent before the fall of Adam; but after that, we are born in sin with a sinful nature, or a tendency to sin, and with a natural resistance to God. Apart from God’s grace, man is naturally corrupt and sinful, and unable, of himself, to choose the good, but clings hard to that which is evil because this is his strong preference. We have already shown these concepts to be biblical under the heading, “Our Need of Grace.”

Biblically, man’s will is free in the sense that he may choose what he pleases. However, before conversion, we are pleased with sin and hostile to God. Therefore, unless God changes our hearts, we could never desire what is holy and true, for truth exposes our sin and condemns it (Joh 3:19-21).

So God does not passively wait for our choice before He begins to effect our salvation, or else He would wait in vain. Neither does God force us to be saved against our will. Rather, He knows how to turn the will, so that those who were previously unwilling to believe on Christ now turn to Him with full permission of their will. A children’s song captures the truth so well:

*When God wanted the Canaanites out of His land,  
He sent wild hornets, you know.*

*He did not compel<sup>18</sup> them to go against their will,  
 He just made them willing to go!*  
*When God wanted Jonah to go preach His Word,  
 And old Jonah fled and said, "No,"*  
*God did not compel him to go against his will,  
 He just made him willing to go.*  
*God never compels us to go, oh no,  
 He never compels us to go.*  
*God does not compel us to go against our will—  
 He just makes us willing to go!*

The regeneration<sup>19</sup> of each saved person is expressly attributed to the will of God. Our willingness to receive Christ is the *result* of the new birth, not the cause of it. This is clearly the truth set forth in John 1:13. Those who receive Christ “were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” The cause of regeneration is God’s will, not natural descent (not of blood). Nicodemus had to learn that being Jewish did not guarantee him a place in God’s kingdom; he had to be born again. Neither is the new birth caused by a physical impulse (not of the will of the flesh). Neither is it caused by human decision, or “the will of man.” Yet, many professed Bible-believers go on teaching that in becoming a Christian, everything depends on your “decision.” According to them, God just patiently waits for you to make the first move, and then God responds to you. No! The only cause of the new birth is God’s will, not man’s. James 1:18 should settle that beyond all dispute: “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” The God Who purposed the salvation of each one He has chosen, also regenerates each one according to His sovereign pleasure!

## D. The Triumph of Grace

Shall Christ die for sinners and yet see no sinners saved? Could it have been possible that His death would be in vain? Will God begin to save someone and then see them perish after all? Is it possible that a truly saved person could become unbelieving again or lose favor with God? Could God lose the war with Satan over any soul He intends to save? Scripture gives us God’s guarantee that grace shall triumph at last!

## 1. Unfailing Promises

Describing His disciples as sheep, the Lord Jesus Christ promised them the gift of eternal life and stressed the security this granted them (Joh 10:27-29). They are secure in Christ's hand, as well as the hand of the Father. This striking picture shows us God's powerful protective care.

No one admires a quitter. People who are always starting new projects and never finishing any, display a lack of character. Could we possibly imagine God leaving His work undone? It is ridiculous to contemplate that after three days of creation, God could delay at all, much less indefinitely. Salvation is God's work in man. Once He begins by grace to save us, He will not rest until He completes the work that He began! That is the thrust of Philippians 1:6: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." This day of the Lord is the time of our glorification when we enter our eternal state without sin as children God.

Because God is not a quitter, neither are His people. It is true that we all need to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2Pe 3:18), but we also have the assurance of being "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1Pe 1:5), not His faith but ours, given and sustained by His grace. "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1Jo 5:4). The classic biblical text about the relationship of God's work in us and our work as the fruit of His grace is this:

*Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Phi 2:12-13).*

If there were ever a formal statement of the absolute triumph of grace in the salvation of God's elect, it is Romans 8:35-39.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to

come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## **2. Grace from Beginning to End**

Our salvation is by God's grace from beginning to end. By grace, God planned to save us. By grace, He chose those that would be saved. By grace, He became a man to live a sinless life and die a sacrificial death. By grace, He rose from the dead for our justification. By grace, He brought the gospel message to us. By grace, He convicted us of our sin and Christ's sufficiency as a Savior and Lord. By grace, He gave repentance and faith to our hearts. By grace, He made us alive who were dead in trespasses and sins. By grace, He makes us holy. By grace, He will complete that work. By grace, He will glorify us with Christ. By grace, He will fellowship with us eternally in heaven. God's astounding grace is one thing that everyone needs to understand—and for which everyone ought to praise Him!