

# Grace: God's Standard of Proof

By Charles Mwewa

*"My grace is sufficient for you..."* (2 Corinthians 12:9a)

*"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,"* (Ephesians 2:8-9)

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## Introduction

One of the ways in which the law serves justice, is that it prescribes standards by which allegations must be proven. In democratic societies, both defendants and the accused are given an opportunity to provide a defence or to defend themselves. This process is variedly called due-process, rule of natural justice or the right to be heard, or procedural fairness, or even the rule of law. The legal standards to prove matters are based on a scale of balance – serious offences are allocated very high thresholds, while less serious offences have very low standards. Generally, there are four common standards: For crimes, it is beyond a reasonable doubt; for civil wrongs, it is on the balance of probabilities; for administrative infractions, it is based on reasonable apprehension of bias; and for immigration/refugee cases, it is usually the “clear and convincing” standard. Offences attract more or less rigorous standards depending on the constitutive structure of the offence. Thus, crimes have a more rigorous standard than civil wrongs or regulatory and administrative offences. In this sermon, we contrast the legal standard of a crime to the New Testament divine standard of grace and ascertain that God’s grace is amazingly an uncommon blessing. The following points will be discussed: The criminal standard; the sin standard; and the grace standard. The points will be preached in that order before rendering a conclusion with its related prayer.

## 1. The Criminal Standard

In criminal law, to convict an accused defendant, the Crown (the State or the Director of Public Prosecutions or the People) must prove a case beyond a reasonable doubt. That is, they must establish that the accused both thought evil of doing a crime (or *mens rea*) and that they, in fact, put those thoughts in action and acted evilly (or *actus reas*). The establishing of these two elements is a very rigorous and high standard process. Both elements must be found to be convicted. Otherwise, if only one is present, the accused will be acquitted. Thus, you can think of killing someone but as long as you do not follow-up on those “evil thoughts” with attendant actions, a crime is not committed. And *vice versa*, if you kill someone without a requisite *mens rea* present, such as killing someone while asleep or while being temporarily insane or without mental capacity or while being a minor child, a crime is equally not committed. The Crown must prove that both elements are present for the Court to convict.

## 2. The Sin Standard

There is only one element to sin, it is akin to a legal principle of absolute liability or a single-element culpability regime. One act or a single thought is enough to warrant guiltiness. Thus, “But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”<sup>1</sup> This is the only requirement to sin, either think it or do it. The only defence one has is either don’t think it or don’t do it. Before grace, it was nearly impossible to avoid sin culpability. In the Old Testament, the standard was known as the “Glorious

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5:28

Standard,” and none, if anything, was able to reach it. It was unattainable. Therefore, it is truthful to state, “For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.”<sup>2</sup>

If one was appearing before the Judgment Seat of God, before the grace dispensation, they had neither a lawyer nor a mediator. They had a notorious very high standard (Glorious Standard) to prove their innocence. They were to prove sinlessness by stating categorically that they either did not do the alleged sin or they did not think it. If they thought it, did it or both, they were culpable. The penalty for sin is, and was, death: “For the wages of sin is death...”<sup>3</sup> There was no room for error, no excuses, and no salvation from sin.

The old regime would only allow for temporary pacification of God’s wrath through equally very rigorous sacrificial offerings through the blood of innocent animals. All this did, was to cover sin, albeit, temporarily, so that God would not be revulsed by it. It neither forgave sin nor cleaned it. So, God was still searching for a more perfect system – that would both forgive and clean sin and would provide for an effective clemency procedure – such as with effective lawyering before His throne. But thanks be to God, because these were accomplished through one Person, Jesus Christ.

First, Christ became the sacrifice itself – perfect and blameless: “For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”<sup>4</sup> Note here that perfection precedes holiness. At the point of salvation, we are made perfect before God. However, the process of becoming holy (or sanctification) goes on throughout our matriculation period till we die. The reason we are perfect at salvation is because God now relates to us through the Person of His Son: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”<sup>5</sup> Note that Christ did not become a “sinner,” rather, He became sin itself. God was dealing with the problem of sin once and for all. God, literally, placed all of the world’s sin on His Son, and by that act, once and forever, He punished sin. And in the same act, He permanently liberated from sin those who had lived under its bondage.

Second, Christ became the witness to the substance and process of redemption. Historically, lasting covenants were sealed with blood. One own’s blood served as an undisputable witness to a permanent covenant. Christ was the witness to the New Covenant by His own blood: “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”<sup>6</sup> The insufficiency of the Old Covenant was in this respect: The blood used was from animals, so, it was temporary. The animals had to die, so, they were left with no witness. However, the New Covenant is permanent because of its sufficiency: It was made through the spotless blood of Christ. The one who gave the blood is a permanent witness because He rose again to testify to the covenant. The Lamb (Christ) is first present in heaven: “Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders,”<sup>7</sup> and second, He lawyers for us: “Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God’s right hand, pleading for us.”<sup>8</sup> Note how intricately this verse announces all the sufficiency of the New Covenant: Condemnation of sin is dealt with. The sacrifice

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 3:23 (New Living Translation)

<sup>3</sup> Romans 6:23

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 10:14

<sup>5</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 26:28

<sup>7</sup> Revelation 5:6

<sup>8</sup> Romans 8:34

died and resurrected. The witness is present in heaven. And Christ is now a lawyer pleading for us. And the next point, we will answer to the question: By what standard does Christ lawyers for us now?

### 3. The Grace Standard

When you sin, you have an advocate before God to plead your case: “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.”<sup>9</sup> Each time you come before God, Christ presents a motion for acquittal (which has already been completed through Him). He appears on your behalf both as witness and advocate (pleader or lawyer). And the standard of proof is Grace – it is not based on whether you think the sin or you act it out – with grace, you are announced free, guiltless, and forgiven just for doing nothing but putting your faith in Christ’s work. In other words, if you trust Jesus with your case, the win is guaranteed. It is by grace (standard of proof) that you have been saved (freed, acquitted, forgiven, let go, made whole again, and etc.) through faith (by simply trusting in the competent work of your lawyer, Jesus Christ).

Call it a mystery or God’s unmerited favor to us, or simply amazing – by grace we can have guaranteed confidence that no matter what we have done or said, we will receive absolution in God’s presence: “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”<sup>10</sup> This verse is a crown jewelry of divine order, for the following three reasons:

First, God’s throne has changed from one of judgment to one of grace. We do not come before God to be judged, but to be vindicated or justified. Second, no matter what we have done or said, we receive mercy from God. Remember, “Mercy triumphs over judgment.”<sup>11</sup> But we must ask for mercy (you cannot receive what you have not asked for). Third, the sufficiency of grace – that we may find grace in our time of need. In another place God has announced, thus, “My grace is sufficient for you.”<sup>12</sup> All these are found only where God the Father and the Son are – in God’s presence.

### Conclusion & Application

Grace, is the lowest standard ever known in the history of creation. Grace needs no proof. Grace demands no evidence. Grace is free for and to all – and all it takes is only to put one’s trust (faith) in Christ Jesus. There is no sin that does not bow before the blazing flurries of grace. There is no sin too high or too low that the standard of grace cannot bring to balance. Even sins that are done or said deliberately are not beyond the reach of grace. And the reason is because grace is a double-edged sword – it is a standard and it is also a teacher (but this will be picked up in a different sermon). If human institutions have condemned you, it is because their standards of proof are too high. But with God, your chances of forgiveness are one hundred percent. There is absolutely no condemnation to those who put their trust in Christ. And because the spiritual standard of proof is low or non-existent, it is possible that most people will make it to heaven even with a simple confession at their death beds. It is possible to be pure, even when you are constantly making mistakes. It is that mysterious – it is called grace.

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<sup>9</sup> 1 John 2:1

<sup>10</sup> Hebrews 4:16

<sup>11</sup> James 2:13

<sup>12</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:9a

### ***Related Prayer***

Dear heavenly Father,

It cannot be said with words what You have done for mankind through Christ;  
His death, is now our perfect life, and in His blood, a perfect Lamb you've sacrificed;  
I pray, that men and women and children everywhere, would in You put their trust;  
And when they sin, forgive, and no matter how dark their deeds, declare them just.

In Jesus' name, our Lord,  
Amen!