

## EMBRACING GRACE – Part One – Introduction to Grace

### 1. Introduction

- a. This morning I am beginning a sermon series entitled Embracing Grace.
- b. I have given it that title because most of us in this room have a mental comprehension of what grace is.
  - i. We understand we would be nothing without grace.
  - ii. But while most of understand grace, it is quite another thing to “embrace” grace.
  - iii. Many of us have been the beneficiaries of God’s grace, but perhaps have not embraced grace. To embrace grace is to allow it to change your life. This sermon series will be about doing just that...allowing the grace of God to transform you!

### 2. **Ephesians 2:3-9** “...*(we) were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 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.*”

### 3. **What is Grace?**

- a. Some of you here may not understand the concept of grace. It may be a brand new word to you, or one that you have heard used but never heard explained. So I will lay out the basic definition of grace as well as try to show you how God works in and through grace.
  - i. **Grace is the undeserved, unmerited, and unearned favor of God.**
  - ii. Grace is the manner in which God has consistently treated mankind.
- b. In its most simple terms, **Grace is getting something you don’t deserve from God.** But it is also much more than that.
  - i. Allow me to illustrate it in terms of my grandmother during the time of the Great Depression: Unemployed men would come to my grandparent’s door during the Depression looking for food. She would fix them a plate of food and ask nothing in return from them. Now while some of us would call that grace, it is a far cry from it. It is simply charity. However, if instead, that unemployed man approached her door and she recognized him as the man who had stolen her silver from her home the week before...and then, instead of calling the police, serves him a plate of food, with no questions asked or anything in return...then you might be able to categorize that as “grace.”
  - ii. God’s grace is more than simply something you don’t deserve, although it certainly is that. It is broader, including the concept of negative merit (or demerit) as opposed to something un-merited.
  - iii. In our relationship with God, there is either merit for obedience or demerit for disobedience, but there is no such thing as “unmerit.” There is either merit or demerit but no unmerit.
- c. **V3** lays the groundwork for this: “*we were by nature, children (or objects) of wrath*”
  - i. This contrast of what we were is being made to demonstrate the nature of God’s grace.
    1. Our nature, our very core of who we were was in rebellion toward God. We deserved nothing, in fact, we *deserved* to be punished.
    2. So if you are walking in rebellion toward God and God answers your prayer for a better job, food on your table, etc., that is *God acting graciously toward you.*
  - ii. You didn’t deserve it, you did nothing to cause God to act graciously toward you, in fact, you did the opposite of acting positively toward God and **yet** God was gracious toward you.

- iii. The bible is filled with examples (some of which we will cover in the weeks ahead) of God's graciousness toward people who didn't deserve His kindness.
  - d. Jesus never used the word himself (but he certainly taught it and lived it).
    - i. To understand grace, we need to go back to an old Hebrew term that meant: "To bend, to stoop." The term came to mean offering condescending favor.
    - ii. Writer Donald Barnhouse defines grace with love: "Love that goes upward is worship. Love that goes outward is affection. Love that stoops is grace."
    - iii. This is what God has done for us. He has stooped, way down to our level, to where we are. He became man in Jesus Christ and then stooped even further, taking our sin and its punishment upon Himself onto the Cross where He died in our place.
    - iv. This is why so many people call grace AMAZING!
  - e. **V4** tells us WHY God has made us alive with Christ... "*But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us*"
    - i. God's grace is motivated by His love and His mercy.
      - 1. These qualities speak to the nature and goodness of God.
      - 2. I find it odd that people view God as a mean guy in the sky just waiting to zap us when we do wrong. He is just the opposite. He is not seeking to condemn, but to rescue us. This grace is motivated by His abounding riches of mercy and love.
      - 3. The term for "rich in mercy" is a term that describes someone who has an incredible supply of wealth. That wealth is His mercy.
    - ii. I want you to understand something here: (Aristotle used to slap his student just before he made a point he wanted them to remember)
      - 1. **God's readiness and willingness to extend mercy to you goes far beyond your willingness to receive it.**
      - 2. You may be here today wondering if God can still love you after what you did...or what you've done. You may be carrying a load of guilt or shame around and you can't let it go because you just simply can't imagine that God would ever forgive you.
      - 3. There is absolutely nothing you can do, nothing you have done, or nothing you will ever do that will put you outside of the reach of God's rich mercy.
  - f. **V5** explains the counterintuitive conduct of God in our case, when it says "*made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved.*"
    - i. God didn't wait for you and I to clean our lives up when He sent His Son to take our sins and their penalty upon the cross. He didn't wait for us to act nice or to repent before He reached out to us. He did it long before we even thought about Him.
      - 1. I love to try to explain this to young children at Vacation bible school so that they might begin to grasp the incredible love of God for them. I ask them if there is anyone in their neighborhood or school who you don't like or get along with. Maybe someone that you are mean to sometimes. Imagine then, if you were in really big trouble – maybe you had to go to jail or get a spanking, and that person, who you had never been nice to, came along and said, "I'll take your place, I'll take your punishment" What would you think about that person from then on? How would you treat them in the future? You would be grateful wouldn't you?
      - 2. That is what God did for you and me. We were acting badly toward God, we weren't being His friends, in fact, sometimes, we are much worse than that toward Him. So God sent Jesus to take the punishment we deserved, and Jesus died on the cross to take the penalty that we deserved for our bad actions (called sin).
      - 3. That is the nature of Grace – getting something we don't deserve... in this case, forgiveness and a relationship with God that we couldn't do on our own.

- g. Jump over to **v8**: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;*
- i. By grace you have been saved. There is the picture of demerit. We deserved wrath and found mercy. Grace is the means by which we have been saved.
    1. What does it mean to be “saved?” The word in the New Testament times means so much more than the narrow definition of “go to heaven when I die” that we use nowadays.
      - a. Saved also means to make whole and make right with God.
      - b. It means to deliver from perishing, injury or judgment.
    2. And so God has made us whole, made us right and delivered us from judgment by an act of his grace...He has given us what we do not deserve.
  - ii. Through faith...
    1. Faith is the channel and not the cause of salvation. Faith is the hand that reaches out and receives what is given.
    2. Faith is the act of our believing and acting upon this marvelous truth that God has set us free from performance based living, resting completely upon what God has done for us and no longer trying to achieve our own salvation and deliverance.
    3. Faith is the response to the work of Christ and the graciousness of God.
    4. Grace through faith shows us that all the work has been done for us by Christ. When Jesus said ‘IT IS FINISHED’ he meant what he said.
    5. **Three elements involved in faith:** (use if evangelistic detour is made during sermon)
      - a. **KNOWLEDGE:** right facts, faith is not faith in faith but has an object. The object of our faith is Jesus Christ: His sinless life, His death, burial, & resurrection.
      - b. **APPROPRIATION:** More than just knowing He died as some historical event but knowing that HE died for me. I have a personal need to benefit from His finished work.
      - c. **COMMITMENT:** I personally accept Him as my Savior, I cast myself upon Christ and rest on His promises.
  - iii. And that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God...
    1. The implication here is that both the grace and the faith are gifts from God. We are entirely and totally the products of the graciousness of God.
- h. **V9:** *not by works, so that no one can boast.*
- i. And this principle is at the root of this entire sermon series. Grace leaves no room for boasting because none of it comes from ourselves.
    1. You can’t brag how good you were...
    2. You can’t brag how much God owed you...
    3. You can’t boast how you earned it...
    4. You can’t tell people that you are better than them...
    5. If anything, you can only boast about how bad you were and how GOOD God is!
  - ii. Some folks have a problem with the concept that it is by grace alone that we are saved.
    1. They cannot fathom that they have no part in it other than to EMBRACE Grace!
    2. They believe that if it is all by grace then we have no motivation to be good.
    3. They believe that if it is all by grace, then we will exert no effort in our lives and sit back and be passive.
    4. I would agree with them if all they do is to be beneficiaries of God’s grace without embracing it.
      - a. People do this all the time.
      - b. The bible says that “the sun shines on the just and the unjust alike.”
      - c. In other words, God is gracious to both. Both are recipients. What is the difference between them? The unjust...those who take God for granted or even reject Him, are beneficiaries of His grace without a thought for what

it is or what it costs. The just...those in right standing with God, do more. They embrace the grace of God with gratitude and earnestness.

d. **Once you embrace grace you will not take it for granted!**

- i. I want to go back to **verses 7 & 8** *And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable (exceeding [huperballon] riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus*
  - i. exceeding, incomparable (huperballon) – conjunction huper (over/beyond) ballon (to throw or let go of a thing without caring where it falls, to give over to one's care uncertain about the result).
  - ii. God's riches are so poured out that they have overflowed, His grace is so exceedingly poured out, without CONCERN of whether or not they have results (because inevitably they WILL have results).
  - iii. In the coming ages God is going to "show us off" as products of the "incomparable, overflowing, exceeding riches" of his grace!"
    1. If I borrowed Bill Gates' credit card for just 24 hours. I had both his and mine in my pocket. Visit a fancy restaurant, go to the mall, a local car dealer, buy a second home. Someone might stop me in the middle of all this madness, 'Boy you sure are rich!'. I would have to reply, "Not at all but you are seeing someone's riches on display in my life." And that is what God is interested in: **His riches on display in your life.**
  - iv. This is a small insight into what it means to "embrace grace."
    1. You understand that you are a product of God's grace and that ultimately, God shows off His character in you and through you!
- j. **Grace is expensive!**
  - i. It cost Jesus his life.
  - ii. It is only when we see how much it costs that we begin to embrace grace.
    1. Two guys in a church, Paul and William decided that they really wanted to become godly men. So they started meeting with one another to pray and encourage one another; they even set goals for themselves and their behavior, and then were accountable to the other one. Paul decided he wanted to break his habit of using profanity. He decided he was going to put five dollars in the offering for every time he swore during the week. In order to stay accountable, he would tell William how many times he'd failed. The first week cost Paul \$100.
    2. However, Paul didn't stop his swearing. In fact, while he improved somewhat over the next couple weeks, he really wasn't having the success he wanted and was losing a lot of hard-earned cash.
    3. After the fourth week, William told Paul he had decided that the deal needed to be changed for the coming week, but he wasn't going to tell Paul how it would change. He just said, "Trust me. It will cost you both less and more." When they met the following Sunday before worship, Paul admitted he'd failed again. William put a hand on his shoulder and said, "Paul, I told you this was going to cost you both less and more. It's called grace."
    4. William took out his checkbook, and made out a check to the church, leaving the amount blank. He gave the check to Paul and said, "Your sin still costs, but for you it's free. Just fill in the numbers. And next week there will be more grace."
    5. William's grace cost him \$55 the first week; the second only cost him \$20. There was no third week. Paul couldn't bear to see what his sin was costing his friend, so he quit cussing.
  - iii. Someone said, "*Grace is something that costs the one who receives it nothing, but costs the one who gives it everything.*"

- iv. When you realize just how expensive grace it, you will embrace it and the One who has given it to you.
- 4. There are many more examples of the costliness of God's grace, and of what it means to embrace it than I have time for today. We will learn what they mean together in the weeks ahead.
  - a. Have you embraced God's grace? Or have you take it lightly, as something insignificant? If you take it lightly, it is because you have not yet seen what it cost God.
  - b. If I give you a gift that you think was something I picked up at the dollar store, you probably wouldn't treasure it.
    - i. But if you discovered that I had made it myself, carved and polished it, lovingly spent hours upon it, it would have a different value to you.
    - ii. So it is with how we treat the grace of God.
    - iii. When we realize how expensive it is, it changes our lives!
- 5. Two weeks ago, Jeremy decided to embrace God's grace. Maybe you have taken it lightly. Maybe you haven't seen just how much it cost God. Won't you embrace God's grace today?
  - a. In just a moment I am going to pray. And we will stand and sing songs of worship to our God and King. If during that time, God moves you to come to the altar to spend some time with Him, embracing Him and His grace, I invite you to act upon that urge of the Spirit. If you want someone to pray with you, the deacons and I will be here, worshipping and available to pray with you at any time before or after the service ends. Let's pray.