

Grace – Part 1

Those that have been with us know that in the Kingdom of God we came to the doorway of salvation and then explored the fuel of faith to come to the place called Abiding in Him; by which we then faced our cross to receive the tribulation/revelation of our cross to fulfill the purposes of Jesus Christ. We begin a new subtopic today called The Grace of God.

Now the common definition of grace is unmerited favor and we don't have to go very far to find evidence of the unmerited favor of God. In fact everything about God and His relationship to man and His revelation to man is by unmerited favor—that is to say all by the grace of God. Now for us as Christians in the 21st century, grace has a potential pitfall. And that pitfall is what is so commonly spoken of in the military of familiarity breeding contempt. That's why the military would reposition people and reassign people every three years or so; because the longer an officer was around, the less respect he would be held by those under his command. So we can become so familiar with the word, grace of God that we tend to become dull to its usage and dull to its impact. We can be so familiar with the evidence of God's grace that we cease to function in regard of it as evidence for God's grace.

But speaking about grace also has potential benefit. But to avail ourselves of the grace of God and its power, we have to awaken ourselves. Ephesians 5:14, Paul writes – Awake sleeper and arise from the dead and Christ will shine on you. So the sleep and deadness that I ask us to awaken from today is that deadness brought about by familiarity with the grace of God to a point where we can say the word without having that word impact us; because we've developed so much familiarity with it. So my desire is to have us awaken to it afresh like little children, to have us begin to see again how amazing and how all transcendent the grace of God is; because the grace of God is transcendent. Transcendent—meaning you can't put a limit on it. You can't put a numerical factor or line anywhere and say the grace of God does not go beyond that line or that numerical value. In other words, in mathematical terms, you have to think of it as infinite. Because when something is infinite, you can never approach it; you can never put something around it and so on. It simply goes on and on. So in numerical terms, if you have a number N, you can always have a number N plus one. And so that series of numbers would go on to infinity. And it's the same way with the grace of God. It is all encompassing and transcendent.

Now in discussing the grace of God, most people (including me) will begin talking about common grace—the grace of God that's poured out on all human beings, whether saved or unsaved. Matthew 5:45 – For He (God) causes His sun (and that means the celestial object, our sun) to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. So God is pouring out His grace to us lavishly just in the provision of our physical surroundings including the sun and the rain and He does it without exception in the sense that it is all on the righteous and the unrighteous. Then the created order—that's where we have to begin. Because remember, if we don't begin our thought process and have it rooted and grounded in Genesis 1:1, we will have a misguided thought, word, or deed. In the beginning God—and every thought that we have has to be traced to that root or else it will be a misguided thought. God created the Heavens and the Earth in the beginning. Before He created man, He brought about an environment to sustain man in the living form as we know him and He began before there was man. He created this Earth to sustain life as we know it. I'm not trying to be an astronomical

physicist of some sort; but when I read about such things, you get into orders of magnitude like the following: that there are dozens of independent physical variables that if any one of them had been off (different) by a factor of 10 to the minus 40th; that's a 10 with a decimal point, 39 zeros followed by a 1; if any one of them had been off by that order of magnitude, then life could not have existed. It's just incredible and unfathomable. How unsearchable and unfathomable are the riches of God's power as revealed in His created order. And all of that happened before there was a man. Imagine that!

So how could a man merit that kind of intricate precision of God's creation? It is by unmerited favor that we even have the planet Earth crafted for us, with the sun pouring down and the top soil rich for agriculture and so on, geologic deposits embedded in the earth for man to use. And when you look out at the trillions and trillions of objects in space, there is no other object that comes anywhere near the conditions upon planet Earth to sustain the life of man. It's just amazing grace manifested even in His created order.

But God didn't stop there. He then proceeded to create millions of species of living things—both plant and animal. Those species all had one thing in common. They were all created by the grace of God; because no species that had been uncreated could have merited the favor of God to bring that species into existence. But they also could not know their Creator as we can know Him. So they can never know the grace of God in the way that we know Him because they were not eternal spirit creatures. They were physical beings. But then God created man and He made man different from all the other species. He made man in His own image. Now since man could not merit how he was created because he was nonexistent at that point, how could any man merit being created in the image of God? It was all by the grace of God. We're created as eternal spirit creatures. That alone sets us apart from every other created species and all by the grace of God; created for relationship with Him all by the grace of God. Even that which he put into man which cannot be fulfilled except by communion with God is put there by God. Psalms 42:7 (in the King James Version) – Deep calleth unto deep. In other words the core of man, at his deepest essence, as spirit being can never be fulfilled except in communion progressing to oneness with his God. And we're created that way by the grace of God. Our contemplation of eternal matters is there by the grace of God. Ecclesiastes 3:11 – He (God) has set eternity in their hearts. The fact that we contemplate eternity past and contemplate eternity future is a contemplation that occurs in man all by the grace of God, totally unmerited. We're created, of course, dramatically different from all the other species, not just in being a spirit being, but in regard to the gifts that we so easily recognize—our intellect, our reasoning, analytical skills, language, creative ability, artistic ability, musical ability. And we're created that different with this order of magnitude separating us from all other species all by the grace of God.

And not only are we different, we were given rule over them. Genesis 1:28 (in the King James Version) – And have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that moveth upon the Earth. Now did man merit being given dominion over all the other species? Unmerited favor given to us as a gift all by the grace of God.

Then there's the revelation to man. As part of common grace, God has revealed Himself to every man. Romans 1:20 – For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes, His eternal power, and His divine nature have been clearly seen being understood through what has

been made so that they are without excuse. So every man, simply by observing creation, is without excuse because Psalms 19:1 – The Heavens declare His glory and the Earth testifies of His handiwork. Creation alone—If all you do is look at it, using the God given gifts that He has given man, you have to be in awe of this God Who has revealed Himself in His power, in His intellect, in His design and in His craftsmanship to execute that design. Every avenue that science tries to progress down, to exclude God, comes back to a point which includes God. You know, for centuries, you know the human race thought that space was stagnant; it was just there. And then we learned through the scientists who negate God...that no, it's all expanding and always has and can be traced back to something they called the big bang. Imagine that! That all the matter and energy in all of space was concentrated in an area smaller than one electron; that which is invisible to the human eye. It's so small, about several orders of magnitude; that science goes to that point and has to stop and gasp because they didn't expect it, they didn't predict it, they don't know what to do with it, and they can't explain it. It leads right back to the Genesis account of the creation as He spoke the universe into existence, you see. How can you not be in awe of the grace and the power of God to execute such a creation?

So no man can deny the testimony that God has given of Himself through creation except by fulfilling Romans 1:18 – by suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. In other words, the scientists who exclude God is executing rebellion, not science; because he's taken that which is floridly evident, because God has made it floridly evident to every human being, and suppressing that truth about God in order to remain in a position of self worship and be his own god. It's not science; it is rebellion based on how God views reality and we define truth as being what God is and how God views everything else. So this is how God views reality. Oh, by the grace of God has He given us such an overt, irrefutable testimony of Himself. But in addition to that external witness of creation, God has put an internal witness into us, separate from the written Word of God and separate from that created order. Romans 2:14-15 – For when Gentiles who do not have the law do instinctively the things of the law, these not having the law are a law unto themselves in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or defending them. In other words, that moral law that's in the heart of man is there by the grace of God even in people who refute the existence of God. That is the grace of God. No man can merit such an internal witness of God within himself. So any such internal witness is all by the grace of God.

So God has given us the created order and an overt testimony of Himself all by His grace. But He didn't stop there with the created order. Any number of times, He's directly intervened to overrule the created order in its physical law so as to give further witness of Himself. Now that's what we call a miracle. Since no man can earn a miracle, that is to say the overriding of physical law, then every miracle that has ever occurred has flowed from the hand of God by His grace, not by anything merited on the part of man. Furthermore, God didn't just set the universe up and have it run by itself. He upholds it. Colossians 1:17 – And He is before all things and in Him all things hold together. So when we speak of natural law or scientific law God wouldn't think in terms like that. He would say there's no such thing as physical law; there's only rules that nature has to follow so long as I want them enforced and so long as I uphold their being followed. That's the sovereignty of God. But then God gives us, as His special creatures created in His image, constant and detailed attention that no man can earn—all by the grace of God. The Psalmist was declaring that when he asked that rhetorical question in Psalms 8:4 – What is man

that Thou dost take thought of him? When I view God, who am I that He would even be mindful that I exist? Oh, but it goes beyond that by the grace of God. Matthew 10:30 – but the very hairs of your head are numbered. You see, no man can earn such detailed attention from a holy, transcendent, sovereign God. If you can't earn that kind of detailed attention to the point of having the hairs on your head numbered, then that attention is all unmerited favor and is all by the grace of God. So this God Who is transcendent is personal all by His grace. This God Who is infinite is also intimate all by His grace. That's the transcendent grace of God.

So God has given us the external witness of creation, the internal witness of the conscience, He's put awareness of eternity in our hearts, He's given the direct intervention of miracles, He has upheld all things, and He's paid attention to us to number even the hairs on our head all by the grace of God. But He didn't stop there.

He gave us His Word in written form. Now that's simply another way of giving us Himself; because God and His Word can be distinguished but not separated. God and His Word are to be thought of as one. Since no man could merit God giving Himself to us in the form of His written Word, then that written Word that we call the Bible is all by the grace of God. But He didn't stop there with the written Word. He gave us Himself in direct form in incarnate form. John 1:14 – And the Word (speaking of Jesus) became flesh and dwelled among us. Imagine that! That God became incarnate, in the form of a man, so as to give us a tangible view of Himself because we cannot see the holy transcendent God, Who is spirit. But He came to show us a protected glimpse of Himself that let us see Who God is and what He looks like through the incarnate Son of God Who came to planet Earth and walked among us. That fulfills Old Testament prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 – Therefore the Lord, Himself will give you a sign. A virgin will be with child and bear a Son and shall call His name Immanuel which means God is with us. Imagine that! Could any man earn the presence of God on Earth in incarnate form? If not, then it's all unmerited favor and all by the grace of God. We see prophecy fulfilled throughout Scripture, related to His incarnation, but also many others. So can any man earn the prophecy of God? Can any man earn God writing history before it occurs? That every prophecy is by the grace of God. Foreknown, foretold, for faith. Because we can walk by faith in this holy transcendent God because He gives us evidence in His written Word of how He writes history in advance using believers and unbelievers alike. That revelation of Himself and His power through prophecy to write history beforehand is given to us all by the grace of God.

How about His relationship with man? Recall even such a simple thing as the origin of choice: God is love. Love is relational. Relational requires choice. If one choice is God, every other choice is ungod or ungodly. The very fact that God gives us choice by which we can reject Him is a revelation of the love of God. We are given choice by the grace of God. It should be self evident to us that no man ever earns patience from God. Recall the essence of God that we talked about as the fierce but righteous judge? Recall that the best testimony of the righteousness of God is Hell itself; because when you realize that this holy God created a Hell and that Hell would await any man from his first sin on, could there be a greater revelation of the wrath of God directed toward every single act of unrighteousness? So Hell, itself, becomes the revelation of the righteousness of God because it's the revelation of how much He hates every act of unrighteousness no matter how small we may view it. That's part of the beauty of Hell. But recall also that what God hates at one extreme, He loves at the opposite extreme. So if He hates

every act of unrighteousness that much to merit Hell for any single act of departure from His purposes, plan, will, and character, then it's the revelation of how much He loves righteousness at the other extreme. Because that which He hates with that kind of horrible wrath, He loves its opposite at the other extreme. And that's the revelation of how much God loves righteousness and that's the revelation of how faithful and true your God is. So Hell, itself, becomes a revelation of the faithfulness of God. And that revelation is all by the grace of God.

So why does God not give us Hell at our very first sin, which we deserve? Well, the key word is *forbearance*. The forbearance of God is a word that we kind of fast forward in Scripture because we don't use it much in common language today. According to Webster, to forbear is to refrain, abstain, hold back, control oneself, to be patient. Forbearance is defined as a refraining from the enforcement of that which is due. So every moment that any human being remains outside of Hell, itself, is all by the forbearance of God. What man can earn such forbearance from a holy God? That forbearance is all by the grace of God. We not only moved past forbearance, we moved past the broader concept of the restraining grace of God. Anytime you see the phrase, He turned them over to, then think restraining grace of God removed. Forbearance is the quality of God, that means that He restrained Himself from giving us what we deserve—namely Hell. Restraining grace, in its broader application, means that He not only restrains Himself, but he also restrains us. He restrains us from giving full expression to all of the evil that is within us. When He removes His restraining grace, the expression of that evil is released and given full expression. God doesn't cause the evil, but if He removes His restraining grace, greater evil is what will flow.

The fruit of the spirit, remember, is what God really looks like. He wouldn't want us to bear fruit like that if that fruit was different from Himself. The fruit of the Spirit of God can't produce fruit that is different from God. So self control is in the list of the fruit of the spirit because God has it. He controls His wrath so as to express His love—all by His grace. Romans 1:24 – Therefore, God gave them over in the lusts of their heart to impurity. Romans 1:26 – For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions. Romans 1:28 – God gave them over to a depraved mind. I think it is impossible for us to comprehend the evil that would flow if God removed His restraining grace. We know that—should know it—because of Romans 3:12 – There's none who does good, not even one. None who seeks God, not even one. That's quoted a New Testament restatement of the Old Testament verse given in Psalms 14:3. Is it self evident that no man can merit having the restraining grace of God? No man can merit the restraining grace of God; so all such restraint of evil by God is by the grace of God.

So God's restraining grace restrains not only the expression of evil that's within man's own heart. He also restrains the expression of Satan. The functions of Satan are in John 10:10 – The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy. We learned early about the restraining grace of God that restrained Satan in the book of Job. Each time that Satan accused Job before God, God responded by permitting Satan to test Job, but only within confines established by God. Can any man earn having God restrain Satan? Thus, the constant restraint of Satan, keeping him within bounds and limits in regard to his testing of us, is all by the grace of God. That restraining grace of God is probably the single most overlooked part of the grace of God. So let me say it again...God restrains even Himself in the implementation of His judgment. Imagine that! Part of the restraining grace of God is that God restrains Himself in the essence of the fierce, but

righteous judge. And without it, each man would be in Hell with his first sin. God restrains Satan's function to steal, kill, and destroy and God restrains the implementation and expression of evil within man. Imagine that! You see, restraining grace alone, apart from anything else, would be grace that is amazing. We're literally swimming in a sea of the restraining grace of God every moment that we're on planet Earth while largely remaining unaware of it, thinking that God intervenes on some occasions to certain degrees and not recognizing that every single millisecond of our lives we're floating in a sea of the restraining grace of God. As He restrains His judgment, restrains Satan, and restrains the expression that would flow from the dark heart of man in rebellion against Him. Imagine that! Are you not smitten by the restraining grace of God?

Next poster. We have just a few minutes, so I'll at least begin with the second component of grace. We just talked about common grace. Now we'll talk about the grace specifically to the saints. We first of all need to remember that a saint is a believer and a believer is a believer all by the grace of God. Ephesians 2:8-9 – For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works that no one should boast. So if you are a believer, then echo the words of Paul in I Corinthians 15:10 – By the grace of God, I am what I am. So I am a believer in Jesus Christ, a child of God, joint heir with Christ with eternity future guaranteed, in communion with God unto oneness with Him...all by the grace of God. We're justified—that is to say declared righteous before a holy God. So how are we justified? Romans 3:24 – Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. It's worth reminding ourselves that sin is never excused by a holy God. We speak of forgiveness so commonly that we almost forget that forgives does not equal excusing. We are justified, declared righteous, not because our sins are excused, but because our sins are forgiven because they are paid for and paid for by the blood of the Son of God Who came in incarnate form, gave up the glory of Heaven, humbled Himself to go to death, even death on a cross, with all of the physical horror, the psychologic horror, and the spiritual horror of being forsaken by His Father for one reason: so that we could spend eternity with Him...all by the grace of God.

Colossians 2:13-14 – And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us which was hostile to us, and He has taken it out of the way having nailed it to the cross. Not we took it out of the way, not that we can do anything to deal with it; but He has taken it out of the way having nailed it to the cross. So obviously if sin could be excused, would it have to be nailed to a cross by an incarnate God, Himself? No! Sin is never excused; it is forgiven and it is forgiven because it is paid for and it's paid for by the grace of God through His Son, Jesus Christ. Imagine that! Are we being smitten with the grace of God? Are we being awakened to the grace of God? Are we being reminded of the grace of God? Because when we talk about grace it can be like Jesus died for our sins, remember, kind of like my grandfather died in WWII. It's such a rehearsed fact that we state that we become null and void if you will to the impact of it. So my purpose in speaking about grace is, first of all it is true; secondly it is the greatest truth of God. But remember, Christianity is not different from every other world view and belief system because of grace. It is different from every other belief system because it's true. And then the greatest truth of Christianity is that God relates to man through His grace. So you can't talk about God and Jesus

Christ and Christianity without talking about grace. And you can't look at grace for long without being smitten by the transcendence of it.

But that's enough for today and I know my time is up. So we'll pick it up next time.