

Give Thanks for God's Grace

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The grace of God is an inexhaustible subject. Various definitions have been offered for the term: 1). Unmerited favor. 2). God's riches at Christ's expense. 3). God's gift(s). We know God loves us because of His grace. God's grace is the gift of His love. His grace is experienced without exception. Jesus said that God "makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust" (Matt. 5:45).

Of course, the greatest gift of God's grace was given in the form of His Son. Jesus affirmed, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

God's grace is an overwhelming concept for us to grasp. Grace is the background to our relationship with God. Yet, grace is often misunderstood, misrepresented, and even underappreciated. We will consider three basic reasons to give thanks for God's grace.

God's Grace...

1. Saves. We are saved by God's grace. Surprisingly, this aspect of grace makes some uncomfortable. We struggle to relate to something being unearned. In almost every facet of life, we derive some benefit by merit. We earn an education by studying and passing exams. We get a paycheck by working. We gain a favorable reputation by doing something nice for someone. Being saved by grace is nearly inconceivable; yet, this is what the Bible declares.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he describes how the human family had rejected God and turned to idols. No one had been faithful to God. There was no one through whom God could use to bring salvation to the world (Rom. 1:18-3:20). When it appeared that all hope had been lost, God sent Jesus to save the world. Notice what Paul explains.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins (Rom. 3:21-25).

The world had not earned salvation from the wrath of God. The world stood condemned by its sin. They could not atone for their sin. They could not bargain and negotiate terms of redemption. Salvation was only made possible by God's grace: Jesus.

Jesus was the lone, faithful Israelite. Therefore, His blood could satisfy the wrath of God directed towards sin. Salvation was offered purely as grace. Now, the world could receive mercy by faith in God's grace; the cross of Jesus.

2. Transforms. God's grace is intended to stir our hearts and command our wills. When we contemplate our sin, God's grace cannot be ignored. Unfortunately, many cheapen God's grace. They view God's grace as permission to sin. If we truly understood the grace of God, we would put this insidious notion to death and repent. God's grace transforms.

The apostle Paul lived in awe of God's grace. As a Jew, he came to realize the futility of trying to earn salvation through the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses only clarified his need for God's saving grace. In a letter to the Corinthians, he wrote, "For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me" (1 Cor. 15:9-10).

Everyone is familiar with Paul's conversion. His transformation continues to give credibility to his testimony of the risen Lord. As Paul reminisced on his change of life, he attributed it entirely to the grace of God.

3. Sustains. God's grace has the power to save us from wrath and transform our character. God's grace can also sustain us throughout life. Life is long and difficult. Living as a Christians often brings our lives greater challenges. Yet, God's grace can sustain us throughout the seasons of life.

For example, Paul tried to encourage the eldership at Ephesus in moving forward in their work. He said, "And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). God's grace can strengthen our faith and ensure our inheritance.

The grace of God sustains us by giving us hope. Paul wrote to Titus, "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:4-7). This text encapsulates the nature and dynamic of God's grace.

Conclusion

God has most certainly given us commands to obey. He has given us work to do. Yet, we must never allow our efforts to overshadow His grace. Without the grace of God, there is no answer to the question, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Without God's grace illuminating the path to immortality, we would be hopelessly lost in the darkness of our sin (2 Tim. 1:8-10). As we reflect on our blessings this holiday season, may we give thanks for God's grace.