

Grace Alone 1 - All of Grace

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Date: 16 November 2014

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[0 : 00] Straight away, we'll come back to that in a minute. So I put up this quote again from Philip Melancthon,! Only by grace do you justify, and only by faith are we justified.

! So really we're doing this the wrong way round, because as Melancthon points out, grace comes first. But we think perhaps of justification by faith first, so that's what we've been looking at.

But now we're going to come to the other half of the quote. Only by grace does God justify us. What does the word grace mean?

Where does it come from? The word grace actually occurs 115 times in the NIV New Testament. So not in that John passage, but lots of other places.

It translates a particular Greek word, charis, which of course is related to the word charismata, a gift. And like grace in English, the word charis can have a variety of meanings, but the most common one in the New Testament is it describes the favor of God for his people.

[1 : 16] And there's often a particular emphasis on that favor being unmerited. It's the favor that we don't deserve. And so God loves his people, not because they're lovable, but out of his own goodness.

And so we're going to look at a few examples of what grace does, but I've put on the screen there, grace means unmerited favor. That's what the word means here. Now, I want to, before we turn to that John passage, I want to look at some of the things the scripture just says that grace is about, what grace does, as I said.

I would suggest that you don't look these up because I'm going to go through them fairly quickly.

I've put them all up on the screen. I wouldn't normally recommend just pulling verses out of context like this, but I'm not going to expound them in detail.

I just want you to notice what they're about, what the New Testament says that grace does, what it's about. So the first one is Ephesians chapter 1, verses 7 and 8.

And it's about, well, these verses, first of all, are about salvation and justification, the things we were thinking about last week. Ephesians 1, 7 and 8 says, In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

[2 : 44] And then just a few verses later, Ephesians 2, verses 8 to 10 says, For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Well, I've only chosen two out of the many that I could have chosen, that says that salvation is a matter of grace.

Salvation comes from grace, but that's just two examples that it tells us about, the New Testament tells us about what grace does. But grace does a lot of other things as well.

It tells us about how we are made holy and how we persevere in the faith. Sanctification is the process of making believers holy and eradicating sin within their life.

It can also be a state. Sometimes the Bible says we are sanctified, sometimes it says we're becoming sanctified, but basically it is about making us like Christ, making us holy as he is holy.

[4 : 02] Acts chapter 20, verse 32 says the following, Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

So what's he saying there? It can build you up and give you an inheritance. So it's about becoming like Christ and making it to the end, inheriting.

Romans 6, 14 and 15 says, For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. What then?

Shall we sin, because we are not under law, but under grace? By no means. So we are made holy because we are under grace and not under law.

What else does grace do? Christian generosity and other Christian virtues are a result of grace, the scripture tells us.

[5 : 08] So in 2 Corinthians 8, verses 1 and 2, we read the following. And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God had given the Macedonian churches out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

Where did the Macedonians' generosity come from? It came from the grace that God had given them. What about the gifts that God gives to equip his church?

Where do those come from? Romans 12, 6. We have different gifts according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.

And Peter says exactly the same thing. In 1 Peter 4, verse 10, each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in all its various forms.

So these gifts, if you're administering the gifts that God gives to his church to serve others, then you're actually administering God's grace to his church in various forms.

[6 : 29] What else? Well, there's that verse I quoted already in the prayer. Why do we pray?

What's the basis in which we come to God in prayer? Well, he says, tells us, Hebrews 4, verse 16, Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

We approach the throne of grace so that we may find grace. And actually, John rather sums it up, and Paul, every spiritual blessing we have, in fact, comes through grace.

John 1, 16 to 17, so John does use the word grace sometimes, just not in that particular passage we read. From the fullness of his grace, we have all received one blessing after another.

For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. And Paul writes a similar thing in 1 Corinthians 1, verses 4 and 5.

I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way, in all your speaking and in all your knowledge.

[7 : 52] So all the things we've been enriched with, Paul tells us, come from the grace found in Jesus Christ. So grace is seen as the origin of faith, the origin of spiritual progress in the individual, the origin of the spiritual gifts to the church and progress in the church, whether they're gifts of preaching or administration or generosity.

In fact, it's clear that everything in the Christian life comes from grace. It's all grace. And so to understand this, we're actually going to look at a passage where the word, as I said, as we saw, the word grace doesn't come in at all.

And yet, really this passage is all about grace. So it's quite a long passage. I'm not going to go through it in detail, obviously. But I'd just like to refer you to one or two verses within it.

And start by looking at verse 36. So John 6, 36, says the following. But as I told you, you have seen me, and still you do not believe.

So how did this come about? Well, the crowd had heard Jesus teaching. And in fact, they'd come looking for Jesus.

[9 : 27] He'd crossed the lake and they'd come around and found him. But they weren't looking for the right reasons, he tells us in verse 26. They were looking because they'd received, they'd got a free meal.

And then they made a fairly absurd request for a sign. I say absurd, because they'd just been given one. And even when the sign is explained to them in verses 31 to 33, they still don't catch on.

And then Jesus tries again in verse 35. He can hardly be more explicit in explaining what he's saying. Is there even a note of exasperation in verses 36 and 43?

Jesus is thinking, what more can I say in a sense? What more is there to say? What more can he do for them? Sometimes a child will reject the instruction of even the most careful and caring parent.

And I think actually that although the next passage is recorded as public teaching, it's also very personal. Verse 61 and verse 67, which is probably a bit later.

[10 : 41] Jesus here is kind of musing out loud on their unbelief and on his own central place in salvation history. The crowd claimed to believe Moses, but they didn't really take on board what he's taught.

And in fact, we read in verse 61 and then later in verse 66 that even some of the disciples were starting to have second thoughts. They said, have we really signed up for the right program here? And Jesus says to them, I told you, you've seen me and still you do not believe. In spite of all the evidence, in spite of what they'd seen, they persisted in their unbelief.

Dawkins tries to tell us that we don't believe because we have faith in the face of evidence. Quite the reverse is the case in many ways. We have evidence, we just don't believe it.

So what answer does Jesus give to himself and the twelve? Why is it that they persist in their unbelief? And we find the answer in verse 44 and it's repeated in fact in verse 65, but let's read 64. [11:55] No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him and I will raise him up at the last day.

Now in that one sentence, Jesus turns all their thinking on its head. That's why they don't believe, ultimately, because they can't.

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him and I will raise him up at the last day. So what does that tell us? Firstly, that the Father's drawing is essential.

Without the Father's intervention, evil is so deeply rooted in the human heart that no amount of demonstration or explanation is going to shift it.

It needs a work of grace to a human heart to be changed. But Jesus tells us something else as well, doesn't he? He says that the Father's intervention is decisive.

[12:58] Those drawn by the Father are precisely those whom Jesus will raise up on the last day.

Those who will inherit everlasting life. And this is the greatest truth that the Father's electing love expressed through Jesus Christ is the basis of salvation and is effective in salvation.

It looks as though God can't save, but God can save and God does save. So look at verses 37 to 40. What does Jesus say there?

All that the Father gives me will come to me. And whoever comes to me, I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will, but to do the will of him who sent me.

And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day.

[14:17] Jesus is committing himself here to losing none that the Father gives him. And he says so three times to emphasize the point. You probably know that in the Jewish idiom, if you wanted to really say something that's absolutely true, you really want to emphasize it, you would say it three times.

And yet this does raise questions, doesn't it, in our minds as it raised questions and doubts in the minds of the disciples at the time. This is a hard saying, as they said.

And so we need to look at some of the questions that this raises in our hearts and minds. So I've thought of one, two, three, four, five, six questions there.

What I want to do is look at those first five tonight and then certainly planning next week to look at the question the Jews themselves asked.

How can the Nazarene carpenter be the true bread of heaven who gives life to the world? That was actually before I heard Phil's sermon this morning who to some extent has dealt with some of these issues.

[15:28] But I think I will stick to that but perhaps approach it from a different direction as it were, from the direction of God's grace in sending Jesus Christ.

But we'll look at those first questions this evening and they are questions that we do, when we hear verses like this, we do raise these questions in our mind.

How does this all happen? How does it work? So let's look together at some of those questions and all these questions are addressed in this passage. So I say we'll leave the last one till next week but look at the others.

So first of all how does this work in practice? Well, that's answered quite simply from verse 45.

Those who believe are taught by God himself.

They listen to him and learn from what he said and hence they come to Jesus. They may be taught through the words of a preacher or through the words of scripture or some other words and yet if they really believe they're taught by God himself and they listen to him and they learn from what he said and when they've done that they come to Jesus.

[16:57] And the evidence of this in verses 35 and 47 is that they have faith. That's why we've spent so much time looking at the idea of faith because as far as we can see it from our point of view the evidence that they have been taught by God is that they have faith.

God doesn't call us in a way that does violence to our humanity. He doesn't sort of override us and make us believe something we don't want to believe.

Rather he changes our hearts and wills so that we do want to believe and we're able to have faith. So that's how it works. It's a simple answer perhaps to a deep question but that is how it works.

God himself teaches us. And what does this passage tell us about those who have eternal life?

Well just look through the passage with me. Jesus gives actually several different answers here.

Verse 44 those who have eternal life are the ones who are drawn by the Father.

[18:10] Verse 39 they are those who are given to the Son. Verse 40 they are those who look to the Son and believe in other words those who have faith.

In verse 53 they are those who have taken in the life of the Son of Man. and in verse 58 they are those who feed on him.

So he tells us that any of these in a sense is a complete answer to the question who are those who will inherit eternal life?

In a sense any of those is the right answer. but in fact to understand the full counsel of God we need all of them and we see from these that it's faith alone and it's grace alone.

It's only through the grace of God that we inherit eternal life and yet those to whom God extends his electing grace do inherit eternal life.

[19:20] But that raises another question in our minds doesn't it? What about those who give up? If those who come to Jesus will inherit eternal life it doesn't look like it does it?

From the outside we know that there are those who give up. In the parable of the sower I think we read that this morning didn't we? We read the parable of the sower we read the Mark version of it I think we did yeah.

In the parable of the sower Jesus explains that there are those who will hear and receive the word but for various reasons will fall away. We need some of we meet some of them in verse 66 they'd appeared to be of our own of our John passage they'd appeared to be those who were following Jesus but when the going got tough they didn't get going said they went away and warnings to avoid being one of them are scattered throughout the scriptures and we shouldn't forget that some of them are really quite graphic for instance in Hebrews chapter 10 verse 29 the writer says how much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the son of God underfoot who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him and who has insulted the spirit of grace that's really quite strong he says who has actually treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him we'll be thinking perhaps a bit about that next week but it is a very strong statement that somebody who seems to have shown all these marks of grace and yet it turns out they weren't genuine at all now why do we have this and doesn't this contradict what we've just said well certainly there's a warning here not to presume isn't there we need to be continually crying out to

Jesus not to abandon us and continually watching over our own hearts the human heart does have a great capacity for self deception I'm sure we all know that we all find it very easy to deceive ourselves about all sorts of things and certainly about this but in fact the parable of the sower itself gives us the answer doesn't it it's Matthew 13 23 the reference I've got here it's also in Mark of course Matthew 13 23 says the following the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it he produces a crop yielding 160 or 30 times what was sown so there were those where the seed appeared to take root and grow up but it was not truly rooted the seed remember Jesus tells us it's the word of God but when the word of God truly takes root in a heart then it will bear fruit and I think

I read right through to the verse 71 I asked Rosemary to read right through to verse 71 because at the end of this passage we find the tragic case of the traitor don't we the spirit this is verses 63 to 71 I'll read them again the spirit gives flesh the flesh counts for nothing the words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life yet there are some of you who do not believe for Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him he went on to say this is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the father has enabled him from this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him you do not want to leave two do you do you leave two do you

[23 : 33] Jesus asked the twelve Simon Peter answered him Lord to whom shall we go you have the words of eternal life we believe and know that you are the holy one of God then Jesus replied have I not chosen you the twelve yet one of you is a devil he meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot who though one of the twelve was later to betray him again the language is quite strong here Jesus says have I not chosen you the twelve yet one of you is a devil and on the face of it Judas appeared to be chosen like the rest of the twelve as far as anybody could see from the outside and presumably when the twelve were sent out to cast out demons and so on presumably he went with them and as far as we know he did it and he even preached the kingdom of heaven and did the other marks of the apostles and yet verse 65 makes it clear that he was never really called by

God he had never really believed in fact he was a snake in the midst so Hebrews 10 29 isn't misleading we can sometimes show outward signs of grace and yet it is not the true inward grace of Jesus and we have to be watch our own hearts over this make sure we're not being deceived or self deceiving ourselves the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked says one of the Psalms and the very fact that Judas had walked with Jesus and the apostles actually makes his guilt all the greater doesn't it Jesus said some very uncomplimentary things to those who didn't believe one way or another called them a nest of vipers and all sorts of things but as far as I know it's only Judas who was actually described by Jesus as a devil the one who was closest and yet the one who was the serpent in their midst and is described as a serpent as the devil as the great serpent himself because he's not literally the devil himself but described as a devil the traitor in their midst so yes we shouldn't presume and yet we do call on

God and we believe that God really can save us that grace really is grace otherwise it's no gospel at all really in the end is it if God is not able to save then there is no gospel at all and if in fact I'm not sure whether to say this or not but perhaps I will add this in take a hypothetical example it's one I've used before but imagine a man who had spent his life as a missionary perhaps in a Muslim country life a faithful service to God and then he retires comes back to the UK of course he's used to women being covered up and perhaps he's getting on a bus and he sees a girl going up the stairs in a mini skirt or something and suddenly he's tempted to lust and perhaps he's distracted and gets run over by the bus does that sudden sin cancel all his faithful service for 30 years it makes no sense does it grace is grace and he will be forgiven that sin and yet we shouldn't remain in a state of sin if we do then we have then we do not have true grace as John tells us if we sin we have an advocate with the father yet he writes that we should not sin and the other question that people ask of course is does that mean we're not responsible for our own actions but it's clear that Jesus doesn't mean this the Jews are told to stop grumbling aren't they in verse 43 he didn't say it's your own fault it's not your fault that you're grumbling they weren't sick they were grumbling told them in verse 45 that they need to listen and learn and these are all active words Jesus is telling them that we they and we are responsible to listen and are responsible for not listening and remember the verse we looked at last week John 3 18 says whoever believed in him is not condemned but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only son the word condemned makes no sense unless there is guilt and innocence involved and John who is so keen to convince us of the divine sovereignty and grace and he says more about it than the other gospel writers he's equally insistent on human responsibility and guilt and to the unrepentant the command is always repent and believe but to the converted the message is all of grace everything we have comes from the father do we fully understand this well no

I'm sure we don't perhaps even in eternity we won't fully understand it although Paul does say then I shall know in full but I'm not sure that he means we shall know everything that's the threat that some things that even in eternity will not be able to fully understand because that will be to understand the mind of God himself and we can't really expect to do that but perhaps we'll have a better view of God's grace in eternity but here on earth it's a paradox for us but we have to insist on both these things that God's grace is irresistible and yet if we don't come we're responsible for our own unbelief Jeremiah 31 verse 30 says that everyone will die for his own sin whoever eats sour grapes his own teeth will be set on edge however everyone will die for his own sin and those of you with a very good memory may remember that last week I quoted the next verse

[30 : 13] Jeremiah 31 31 which is when Jeremiah announces the new covenant that will be written on people that the Lord will write on people's hearts we find the same two things together in Jeremiah everyone will die for his own sin and yet in the new covenant the Lord will write the

covenant on people's hearts and then of course we come to the hyper Calvinist heresy it is a heresy is that surely if God chooses if God elects then there's no point in preaching the gospel is there but that's not the way that Jesus looked at it at all and that's not the way that the apostles looked at it at all in our passage Jesus almost seems perplexed doesn't he by the Jews lack of belief there's even a hint of discouragement perhaps in verse 26 and 67 but where does he find encouragement to go on he finds it in verse 37 all that the father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to me

I will never drive away if in the last analysis salvation depends on us then that wouldn't be good news wouldn't be a gospel would it it wouldn't be good news at all and this isn't the gospel that Paul preached what he said is here's a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance Christ came into the world to save sinners of who I am the worst it's a saying that deserves full acceptance and of course it's not that Paul found Jesus on the Damascus road was it Jesus came and found Paul Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners not to make it possible for them to be saved or to give them a few bits of useful teaching or even perhaps even to point them to the father he had a specific task in mind he came into the world in order to save sinners and this is Paul's message and that of the other apostles and it's that message of the church down the ages and it's still our message today as Jesus disciples we go out into the world to save sinners as Jesus disciples we go into the world to save sinners now I don't think that means that everybody is an evangelist and we will use different methods and we will demonstrate

Christ's compassion in many ways by works of mercy as well as by preaching we'll point to Christ not just in our preaching but in everything we do sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly and of course we remember that saving is not just getting them to make a decision it's about making disciples and preparing them for the kingdom of heaven and so we're not suggesting I'm not suggesting that the only thing worth doing is standing on a soapbox and shouting repent that wasn't Jesus didn't do that and Paul didn't teach that and only those who consider the whole wisdom of counsel of God could think that but nevertheless let's remember that as soon as we see the gospel as about anything other than saving sinners then we're in trouble and so often the church has made it about something else it's made it about conforming to some political system or religious system or it's made it about social action politics or it's made it about good works now all those things certainly might be good things some of them definitely are good things for the church to be doing but the gospel the center of the gospel is that

Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners and we dare not forget that and in fact if we believe in the sovereignty of God we want to call ourselves Calvinists if you want to use that term that label if we believe in the sovereignty of God then we must preach the gospel as Paul said the love of Christ constrains me and in fact I'd like to give Paul the last word here because like John Paul had a lot of teaching on the sovereignty of God and the grace of God we saw some of it earlier on as we looked at those brief passages but what does Paul say on this subject so I've got two longer passages I think I've got time to read both of them so the first one is going to be Romans 10 8 to 17 and if you find that stick your finger in 2 Corinthians 4 1 to 7

I haven't got the page numbers but somebody got a page number for Romans 10 oh I put it up did I have got the page numbers they're on the screen good yes about this cough so I'm going to give Paul the last word here I say more pretty much I'll just say a little bit at the end but read these two passages and say what Paul makes in this in Romans that great passage on the grace of God which is Romans 10 which comes of course after Romans 9 which is this great passage on God's choice and electing love and what does then Paul say in Romans 10 but what does it say scripture he means there what does it say the word is near you it is in your mouth and in your heart that is the word of faith we are proclaiming that if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved for it is with your heart that you believe and are justified and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved as the scripture says anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame for there is no difference between [36 : 49] Jew and Gentile the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved but how then can they call on the one they have not believed in and how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard and how can they hear without someone preaching it to them and how can they preach unless they are sent as it is written how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news but not all the Israelites accepted the good news for Isaiah says Lord who has believed our message consequently faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ and clearly

Paul means they're the preached word he says doesn't he how can they hear without someone preaching to them we do need to preach the gospel and then 2 Corinthians 4 1 to 7 page 1160 and here's

Paul's talking about the encouragement to preach the word and the way in which he goes about it therefore since through God's mercy we have this ministry that is the ministry of preaching the word of course we do not lose heart rather we have renounced secret and shameful ways we do not use deception nor do we distort the word of God on the contrary by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God and even if our gospel is veiled it is veiled to those who are perishing the God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God for we do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus sake for God who said let light shine out of darkness made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of

God in the face of Christ but we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not for us he says we do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord says we renounce secret and shameful ways well why does he do that because he knows that the God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers if it was merely a matter of persuading people to change their mind then why not use secrets and unshameful ways as we might say why not use all the tricks of the Greek rhetoric as probably what he was thinking of or why not use all the technology and the ideas and the psychology of the modern advertising if it was a matter of persuading people if it was a matter of the image but he says well it's no point in doing that because we know that the God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers and so what does he say we do we set forth the truth plainly by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God

Paul didn't lose heart he said he knew that not all would respond to his message he understood fully how people's minds and hearts were blinded and yet he didn't lose heart he knew that he was an inadequate vessel for the message he says that at the end there doesn't he we have it in this treasure in jars of clay to show that the power is from God and not from us and if Paul considered himself an inadequate evangelist I'm sure all of us will Paul knew that only if God shone his light into dark hearts would there be any response but how did he respond to this knowledge by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God why because we do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus sake so we preach a gospel that is all grace but we do preach it because God commends well commands us to do so but also commends his love through the preaching of his word well Phil this morning finished off with a we'll let the hymn give the final answer let's do the same we'll sing oh it's another John Newton hymn isn't it as well same person amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me 772 I may not get it up on the screen but have time to tell you tell you about