

AMAZING GRACE **(Ephesians 2:8-9)**

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Truly, grace is one of the most important topics discussed in the bible. Grace is what saves man from sin. If God had not extended his grace to man there would be no salvation. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9.) The plan of God for our salvation is outlined in the phrase "by grace you have been saved through faith." "By grace," summarizes all God did for us, sending Christ, giving the bible, revealing the plan of salvation, etc. "Through faith" summarizes all we do to appropriate God's gift-trust, love, and obedience.

Many great passages of scripture focus on God's grace. "...being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:24.) "In him (Jesus) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace." (Ephesians 1:7.) "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men." (Titus 2:11.) The common theme is God's grace.

If we are saved by grace we need to know what grace is. Many definitions have been given for grace. Mainly we hear that grace is "unmerited or undeserved favor." That is certainly true. However, I read a definition that I believe is even more descriptive. "Grace is receiving what you need, but don't deserve." This definition was from a story about Dr. S.M. Lindsay trying to teach a group of boys about grace in his bible class. He was having difficulty getting the point of grace over to the boys so he said, "Grace is what you need, but don't deserve." The boys still struggled. The next day Dr. Lindsay was dressed in his best on his way to a tea. One of his students, Bobby, saw him and threw a snowball at him, knocking off his hat and hitting him in the ear. He saw Bobby running away. Instantly angry, Dr. Lindsay wanted to see that Bobby was punished, but as he thought about the situation he thought of a plan to help Bobby better understand the subject of grace. He knew Bobby did not have a fishing pole because he had loaned him his fishing pole. He went to the store and purchased a jointed fishing pole and took it to Bobby's house. Bobby saw Dr. Lindsay coming and hid in his room. Bobby's mother answered the knock on the door and Dr. Lindsay asked her to give Bobby the fishing pole telling him, "I know this is what you need." Later a very sorrowful Bobby knocked on Dr. Lindsay's door and confessed that he had hit him with the snowball. Dr. Lindsay said, "I know you hit me. That is why I gave you the fishing pole." Bobby did not understand. "Grace is what you need but don't deserve. Now you deserve a spanking, but you need a fishing pole. This is an illustration of grace. I am giving you what you need, but do not deserve," said Dr. Lindsay. "Now, Bobby, can you tell me what grace is?" "Sure," said Bobby, grinning from ear to ear, "grace is a new jointed fishing pole." Bobby still did not have it, but he was getting closer – grace is what you need, but do not deserve.

Sin is a terrible thing and if God had given man what he deserved he would be lost eternally in Hell. Adam and Eve died spiritually that day in the Garden of Eden when they ate of the forbidden fruit. They were separated from God. Sin separates man from God today. God knew man would sin even before he created the world or man. He knew that he would have to send his Son into the world to die for the sins of the world. This is known as the grace of God. God gave

man what he needs, but does not deserve. The Apostle Paul made reference to grace eighty-seven times in his epistles. Reference is made to grace twenty-four times from the book of Hebrews through Revelation. The many times grace is mentioned in scriptures speaks to its importance in God's scheme of things.

The Apostle Paul said that man could not be saved by the Law of Moses. "I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." (Galatians 2:21.) If salvation could be achieved under the Law of Moses then Christ would not have had to die. In Hebrews 10:1-4 the writer explains that the blood of animals could not take away sins, but those sacrifices were a shadow of something better that was to come. The something better that was coming was the Lord Jesus Christ and the sacrifice of himself for sin. Man could not be saved under the Law of Moses because he could not keep the Law perfectly and the blood of animals could not take away sin.

Man cannot be free from sin by his own efforts. Man cannot do enough good works to earn the forgiveness of sins. There is misunderstanding about this even among Christians. There are Christians who are afraid to go to sleep at night because they fear they have not done enough good works during the day and if they should die during the night they would not go to heaven. The truth of the matter is, they have not. If we are going to depend upon our works to get us to heaven we will never make it. Less I be misunderstood, works of God are necessary for salvation and we will notice this shortly. The works referred to here can best be referred to as works of men or works of merit. The simple truth is that one cannot do enough good works to be saved.

Let us notice the relationship of grace and works. As previously noted, the key to this is found in the phrase "by grace you have been saved through faith." (Ephesians 2:8a.) This really says it all. The only way to be saved is through the grace of God. Man cannot remove one sin by his own efforts. You may have heard the statement that goes something like this, "man has to do all he can to be saved and God will make up the difference by his grace." I personally have made that statement to those with whom I was studying scripture. One day I got to thinking about that statement. The obvious became clear. If I can go so far in the process of forgiveness on my own, this of course would include hard work and goodness, then I must be able to get rid of some sins on my own without the help of God. This indicates that I can do some it on my own, but need God's help to get all the way to completely saved. Folks, every sin that is to be forgiven must be forgiven by God through his grace. Let us say it again. Every sin is forgiven by God through his grace.

Now let us look at the "faith" side. Are there works that must be done for God's grace to forgive sins? YES! God's grace is available only to those who are willing to obey his will. How is the grace of God activated in the lives of men and women? OBEDIENCE! Jesus told his disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel (good news) to every creature. What is the good news? That Jesus Christ died on the cross and shed his blood to pay the price for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus then said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16.) Not only must man believe and be baptized, but must also repent of sins. A commitment to the Lord must be made. These are works, but they are works of God in that these are commandments that the Lord gave man for him to take advantage of salvation by God's grace. God's grace does not stop at the waters of baptism. The blood of

Christ cleanses the faithful Christian daily (1 John 1:7). Faithfulness involves obeying the commands of God daily. "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." (1 John 5:2-3a.) Paul said Christians are to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). Grace and faith will get the deed done. Not one without the other. Man is saved by God's Amazing Grace!

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