

Amazing Grace

I want to start with a small quiz.

I would like you to complete the following sayings:

- a) There is no such thing as a free
- b) If it sounds too good to be true it probably
- c) We make our money the old-fashioned way, we
- d) God helps those who
- e) You get what you
- f) What you get is what you

Believing such statements makes it very hard for us to accept that God is a gracious God.

Psalm 86:15 [NIV] *“But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.”*

What does gracious mean?

A simple definition is *“God gives me what I need, not what I deserve.”*

Scripture tells us that it is God’s nature to bless undeserving people.

Isaiah 30:18 [NIV] *“Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!”*

God loves to be gracious.

His Grace is unconditional, unlimited and unending.

There are ways in which God’s Grace can make tremendous differences in our lives.

God’s Saving Grace removes my guilt

As no-one is perfect we all have guilt in our lives, we all make mistakes.

Romans 3:23 [NIV] *“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...”*

1 John 1:8 [NIV] *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”*

Ephesians 1:7-8 [NIV] *“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.”*

This is the basic truth of Christianity.

Jesus Christ has already paid for our sins; all we have to do is accept Christ’s Death in place of our own deserved or earned death.

Romans 6:23 [NIV] *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Freedom of our deserved death penalty comes from God as a gracious [undeserved] gift.

There is no reason for us to live in a life of regret and guilt, this is the gospel message, the Good News about what God has done for us through our Saviour Jesus Christ.

John 8:34-36 [NIV] *“Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So **if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**”*

God’s Saving Grace removes our guilt.

When we experience this we really know what freedom is.

Ephesians 2:8-9 [Good News Bible] *“For it is by God’s Grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts but God’s gift, so that no-one can boast about it.”*

Salvation is based on God’s Mercy, not our merits.

Salvation is based on God’s Promise, not our performance.

It is almost comical how some people try to earn their salvation.

Salvation by sincerity:-

“It doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you are sincere.”

The problem is you can be sincerely wrong.

Salvation by subtraction:-

You don’t do this, you don’t do that, you stop doing this or that then maybe God will forgive your sins.

“Don’t cuss, drink or chew or run around with those that do.”

If being a Christian is just obeying a bunch of “*don’ts*” then anyone who lives in a rest home qualifies as a Christian, because you don’t do much in such places, just sit around and wait for your soup.

Salvation by service:-

Be nice, go to church, take the Lord’s Supper, be Baptised, help little old ladies across the street [whether they want to or not].

Salvation by comparison:-

“I don’t need to become a Christian because I am better than ‘so-and-so’.”

The fact is you may be better than ‘*so-and-so*’, I’m sure you are better than I am.

The problem is that God doesn’t judge us by others but by Himself as the standard, so we all fall short of that standard.

We are saved by God’s Grace.

If we could save ourselves the cross would be unnecessary, there would be no reason for Christ to die in agony.

The Grace of God does not finish at the cross.

God's strengthening Grace moulds my life

God's Grace helps me become the person I would really live to be and God wants me to become.

The word used in the Bible for this process is "*sanctification*", which is basically saying "*God re-makes my life*".

God loves us as we are but He loves us so much He doesn't want us to remain as we are !!

Isaiah 64:8 [NIV] "*Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.*"

God is moulding our lives but sometimes we resent how God is doing this to us through circumstances and we just fly off the potter's wheel and seek to "*do our own moulding*".

The problem is that when we give up on God we are moulded by this evil society into its image, its shape.

We then end up something ugly and not the beautiful and useful being that God wants us to become.

Hebrews 13:8-9 [Living Bible] "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever. So do not be attracted by strange new ideas. Your spiritual strength comes as a gift from God, not from ceremonial rules about eating certain foods, a method which, by the way, hasn't helped those who have tried it.*"

A major problem in Christianity is that people start with a relationship and revert to rules.

People fall in love with Jesus Christ and have a close relationship with Him, then concentrate on religious rituals and regulations.

The brand new convert is so happy to "*know the Lord*" then they make the fatal mistake of watching other "*Christians*", how they dress, how they act, certain spiritual sounding words they use.

You no longer say:- "*It was fun*" – you say "*It was a blessing from God*".

We don't "*eat food*" – we "*partake of physical nourishment*".

We don't "*get angry*" – we were "*grieved in our spirit*".

The Bible tells us this was the problem with some of the early churches.

They started with a relationship and reverted to a religion.

Galatians 1:6-7 [NIV] "*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.*"

Galatians 3:1-3 [NIV] "*You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?*"

Revelation 2:1-5 [NIV] "*To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this*

against you: **You have forsaken your first love.** Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.”

If this is not the way to live a Christian life, how should we react to God’s Saving Grace?

Colossians 2:6-7 [NIV] “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, **continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.**”

Just the way we became a Christian is the way we continue to be a Christian, by receiving God’s Strengthening Grace through Jesus Christ in us, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who is a Gift from God, His Grace, just as Jesus Christ was a Gift from God.

John 3:16 [NIV] “**For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**”

Jesus a gracious Gift from God.

John 14:16-18 [NIV] “**And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth.** The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

Holy Spirit a gracious Gift from God.

2 Peter 3:18 [NIV] “**But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.**”

We grow through grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

We grow through a close relationship with Jesus Christ and the strengthening power of God’s Grace, the undeserved gift of the person of Holy Spirit in our lives.

The more we trust in God’s Grace, allowing Him to work in us, the faster we will mature, become more like our Heavenly Father.

God’s Sustaining Grace relieves my hurt

God’s Sustaining Grace helps me keep going when I’m in pain, when I want to give up.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 [NIV] “**To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**”

Grace is what we need when we need to keep on, keeping on.

If Paul didn’t get the answer he wanted to his problem, should we pray about our problems?

Yes, to be sure we must.

Hebrews 4:16 [NIV] “**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.**”

In every time of stress or need we are to pray for God's Grace to sustain us.

One of two things will then happen:

- a) God may remove the pain or the stress that is His supplying Grace.
- b) God may leave the pain or stress in our lives, and give us sustaining Grace, the strength to handle the situation to take us through the problem so that we can learn and mature from the trial.

We would never learn or mature if all our problems were instantly removed.

We learn and mature much more through pain than we do through pleasure.

When we accept this Sustaining Grace from God nothing can ever devastate our lives.

No problem, no hurt, no memory, no harm, no stress, nothing at all can destroy us because we realise that *"God's Grace is sufficient."*

What happens if I don't depend on God's Grace?

If we try to work out the problem ourselves without the sustaining Grace of God.

Hebrews 12:15 [Phillips] *"Be careful that none of you fails to respond to the Grace which God gives, for if he does there can very easily spring up in him a bitter spirit which is not only bad in itself but can poison the lives of many others."*

If we try to handle a hurt on our own we are going to become bitter, cynical, critical; you say *"why me?"*

How is it that some people who have problems that are overwhelming remain calm and at peace, while others with less stress in their lives become bitter and critical?

The one allows God's Grace to sustain them and experience peace of mind, the other rejects God's Gift of Grace and becomes critical and angry.

How do we get rid of hurtful memories?

Only one way is to receive God's Grace into our lives, then give that grace to those who have hurt you, and let them go.

The person in your life who hurt you in the past can no longer hurt you unless you let them by hanging onto that hurt instead of giving them the grace you have received from God – forgive them as we are forgiven.

How do we receive this grace?

James 4:6 [Good News Bible] *"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*

Humbly admit we need God's Grace in our lives and we will receive it.

Admit that we need God in our lives.

Pride prevents profiting from God's Grace.

The self-made man worships his maker !!

Admit humbly to God that we need:-

God's Saving Grace for nothing we can do can earn us salvation.

God's Strengthening Grace for us to be moulded and matured into the person we want to be and He desires to make us.

God's Sustaining Grace that stress and trials will **not** lead to bitterness in our lives.

Do this and God is more than willing to pour out His Grace without measure, into our lives.

How do we mature by breaking a bad habit?

Humbly admit it to God.

He won't be surprised.

He already knows we have this habit; He just wants us to admit it.

Then confess it to another trustworthy friend.

Why?

To admit such a secret sin to another person is really humbling!!

That is why we should do this, to humble ourselves so that we can receive God's Grace.

What do we do after receiving God's Grace?

1 Peter 4:10 [NIV] *"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."*

We are to pass on God's Grace to others by living a graceful life.

Grace is in very short supply in society today.

Why? Because people don't understand or receive God's Grace.

Once we understand what God has done for us because of His Grace, we want to spread this Good News.

Without God's Grace we wouldn't exist.

Everything we have, we have received as a Gift from God; our bodies, our brains, our intellect, our talents, life itself.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 [NIV] *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."*

We receive grace to pass on to others to benefit from our graciousness.

For example are we gracious parents?

Do we parent our children by grace, as God does us, His children?

Do we extend unconditional love to our children as God's graceful nature does to us?

Or is everything in our family based on performance?

Accept our children's uniqueness, as God accepts us as we are, unique individuals.

Then through gracious example help our children mature, to become more like Jesus Christ.

Acts 20:24 [NIV] *“However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – **the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.**”*

This is our number one task as a Christian, to be a living testimony to the Grace of God.

This is the Good News that this world needs to know, understand and accept, God's Grace, and God has called us to proclaim that Good News in every way we can.

2 Corinthians 9:8 [NIV] *“**And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.**”*

Grace is the answer to all our needs.

God is telling us that He will take care of all our needs when we accept in faith His Grace.

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 [NIV] *“Remember this: **Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**”*

When we sow grace we will receive grace, the more we sow the more we receive, and there is no limit to the grace we can receive from God.

God's Saving Grace.

God's Strengthening Grace.

God's Sustaining Grace.

All this unlimited, unconditional grace is available when we humbly ask God for it to flow through our lives, that others may also benefit.

This is the Good News from God, that comes through accepting Jesus Christ as their Saviour, Creator and Lord.