



The Incredible
Journey

AMAZING *Grace*

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AMAZING GRACE

INTRODUCTION

The Bible introduces God as a Being who is infinite in wisdom, power, goodness and love (Isaiah 40:13,14,26; Exodus 34:6; 1 John 4:8). Yet many people struggle to match this description with the condition of our world today, which the Bible says was originally created by God (Genesis 1:1). Perhaps you have wondered, *if God is so gracious, all-loving and all-powerful, how can there be evil in this world?* This is an essential question to consider.

One of the most important truths revealed in the Bible, is that God takes no pleasure in evil; He is not in the

least responsible for it. In fact, God is working today to ensure that "*affliction* (i.e. evil) *shall not rise up the second time*" (Nahum 1:9).

God's long-term plan to eradicate evil completely from the universe is based on one key concept: grace. In Ephesians 2:8,9, the apostle Paul highlights the essential role of grace in God's treatment of sin, by saying,

"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).

In this booklet, we will discover the unique Bible definition of grace. We will see why God's grace is the only hope for lost humanity, and the tremendous cost at which it has been provided to us. We will then explain the power of grace, and see why it is the only sustainable solution to the terrible problem of evil.

Finally, we will consider the personal application of grace, and see how this can be a reality in your life and mine.

THE BIBLE DEFINITION OF GRACE

Let's begin by looking at the Biblical meaning of the word "*grace*". Focusing on the New Testament, "*grace*" is translated from the Greek word "*charis*", and is used there over 150 times. Although "*charis*" has a range of meanings, a unique idea that stands out in the writings of Paul the apostle, is grace as the totally undeserved favour and forgiveness of God toward human beings who have wilfully rejected His love. Someone has said "*grace is salvation love in action*".

This concept of grace has some similarities to common uses of the word today. For example, many institutions allow a "*grace period*" on loans, during which customers have extra time

to make a repayment before being charged a late fee. Similarly, a library may reset the due date of a book to give a borrower a few extra days to return it before charges apply. A policeman may reduce or cancel a speeding fine if it is a person's first offence. In all these cases, it is totally within the rights of the service supplier to charge the person who has failed to meet his or her commitment. In these cases grace is an expression of goodwill toward a person who does not really deserve it.

The above examples give us a faint glimpse of the depth and riches of God's grace. To understand just how amazing His divine grace is, and why it is the only remedy for evil, we need to understand the true human condition.

THE HUMAN NEED OF GOD'S GRACE

When God first created everything, all was perfect and beautiful, fully

in harmony with His gracious and benevolent character (Psalm 18:20; James 1:17; Genesis 1:31). Sadly, however, the highest of God's angels, Lucifer, indulged in pride, discontent and finally an insane jealousy of his Creator (Ezekiel 28:12-18; Isaiah 14:12-14). He then used deception to persuade one third of the angels to unite with him in rebellion against God (Revelation 12:3,4,7,8).

When he and his sympathisers were cast out of heaven, Lucifer, thereafter called Satan, continued his warfare against God on this earth. Disguised as a serpent, he entered the Garden of Eden, and persuaded Adam and Eve to eat the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 3:1-6). This was in direct opposition to God's command (Genesis 2:16,17).

By yielding once to the suggestions of Satan, Adam and Eve's natures changed. Selfishness took the place of love;

and they found themselves powerless captives, controlled by an influence of evil stronger than their own. We, as their children, have consequently inherited this same attraction to sin. Sin is something that each individual on Earth has voluntarily participated in during their life,

"for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

The Bible describes the condition of the natural human heart in words like these: *"deceitful above all things"; "desperately wicked"; "unclean"; "dead in trespasses and sins"* (Jeremiah 17:9; Isaiah 64:6; Ephesians 2:1).

Such descriptions of human nature can be very confronting. They are in complete contrast to much popular philosophy today, which emphasises that the human race is not in need of redemption but of self-improvement. The earliest example of this philosophy

is seen in the life of Cain (Genesis 4: 1-15). In His worship of God, Cain brought a bloodless sacrifice, which showed his rejection of God's promised Redeemer, who was to shed His blood for the sins of the whole world. Cain's act showed that he believed his own works could merit God's favour; that there was no sin for which he needed to repent of. Similarly, popular philosophy promotes the idea that we as humans have the intellect, willpower and technologies to single-handedly save our planet; that our race is the product of millions of years of evolutionary progress; and that morality is a relative concept. The implication of all this, is that there is no such thing as sin.

By sparing the life of Cain the murderer, God demonstrated the inevitable result of this belief. The Bible tells us that the influence of Cain was such that, within just a few generations, *"the earth... was corrupt before God, and...was filled*

with violence"; that "every intent of the thoughts of his (humankind's) heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:11,5).

The history of the descendants of Cain shows that, without God, humanity has no power to regenerate itself. It does not progress upward, toward the divine, but downward, toward the satanic.

Righteousness is defined by God's holy, changeless law (Psalm 119:172). The Bible calls disobedience to God's law "*sin*" (1 John 3:4). Because the law is an expression of the very nature of God (Psalm 19:7-9), breaking it separates us from God, the source of life, love, goodness, and happiness (Psalm 16:11; 36:9). Disregard of God's law is the cause of pain, suffering and death.

Sin is the reason for evil in this world. But God has provided a remedy for sin, a remedy that comes through grace. God, in His character of love and mercy, offers to save all those who truly repent of their sins. Ephesians 1:7 tells us

that God offers us *"redemption...the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."*

The redemption of human beings is a wonderful benefit that comes to us through God's grace. But the significance of God's grace stretches even further than our salvation, as important and incredible as that is. Grace is the means God is using to rid the universe of all evil. But evil is complex. God's plan cannot be a quick fix. Through God's work of grace, called the plan of redemption, or salvation, the true character of God—his mercy, justice, and love—is revealed (Romans 1:16,17). It is this revelation of God's character that will ultimately prove a safeguard against the future intrusion of sin. Let us consider more closely this deeper purpose of divine grace by reviewing briefly the issues at stake in this massive war, the great controversy, between good and evil.

THE DIVINE PURPOSE OF GRACE

"That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7).

When Satan rebelled in heaven, and led one third of the angels into sin, God would not violate the freewill He had given them, and force them to obey (for more on this section, see White, 2017b, pp.419-429). But the deceptions of Satan, and the lies he spread about God, were so cunning and subtle that to destroy him and his followers then would have led even the loyal angels to question the justice of God (John 8:44). Satan's influence would not have been fully destroyed; and after a time, would have resulted in the ruin of the universe through distrust toward God.

Again, God's government is not one of force. His authority rests upon goodness, mercy and love; and these are the methods He uses to achieve His purposes. So God decided that time must be given so that the truth about Satan's claims could be seen. And with the fall of human beings, this earth became the venue where this demonstration could take place (1 Corinthians 4:9).

By excluding Satan from heaven, God declared His justice, and maintained the honour of His throne. But when humans sinned by yielding to the lies of this rebellious angel, God showed His love by giving Christ to save the fallen, corrupt race (John 3:16).

According to the Bible, God consists of three Persons: Father, Son (also called Jesus, or Christ) and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). So to give Christ was the greatest sacrifice that God could make. However, God was willing to do that, because He knew it would bring

eternal happiness to everyone in the universe by eradicating evil for all time.

God's plan would enable Him to expose the lies of Satan. The loyal universe would see what God is really like, and never again have the smallest doubt about trusting Him. God would also show just how much He values His created works, especially human beings, through the tremendous sacrifice He would make to carry out this plan. Let us next consider this, the cost of grace.

THE COST OF GRACE

"You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18,19).

We saw earlier that God has limitless power, wisdom and glory. So it would have been an almost infinite humiliation

for God to become a human being at all, even a perfect one like Adam in Eden. But Jesus gave up His power and glory to become a helpless baby, at a time when our race had been weakened by 4000 years of sin. He gave up His position as commander of the angels to be born in a stable and placed in a feeding trough (Luke 1:35; 2:7). Yet this was only the beginning of His work to save us. Christ voluntarily came to Earth, knowing that He would be despised, rejected, scorned, and crucified, by those He came to save (Isaiah 53; White, 2017a, pp. 27-31).

Jesus not only endured physical torture and disgrace; he experienced the guilt of sin for every person on Earth. As He was dying, it seemed to Jesus that His death would be eternal. He experienced the pain of the second death—complete separation from His Father—until His heart broke (Matthew 27:46; John 19:34). He did all this, and

more, to make a way so that you and I could be saved.

What love this is! The apostle John could not even find words to describe it; instead, he invited us to experience it for ourselves. He wrote, "*Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on (given to) us, that we should be called children of God!*" (1 John 3:1). Through sin, all people have become the servants of Satan, acting like he does and doing his works (Romans 6:16-18). Through Jesus, we may become sons and daughters of God, more closely united to Him than if we had never fallen! It was this hope—the joy of saving many people—that compelled Christ to come to Earth where He would live, suffer and die (Hebrews 2:10; Isaiah 53:11).

Hope in what His sacrifice would accomplish gave Christ the strength to go all the way to the cross. The grace that Christ demonstrated at

the cross, and beyond, also brings hope to lost humanity: hope of peace, hope of forgiveness, hope of glory and hope of eternal life (2 Thessalonians 2:16,17; Romans 5:2; Titus 1:2; 2:13; 3:7). Let us explore a little of these blessings, beginning with the wonders of forgiving grace.

FORGIVING GRACE

"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

Hebrews 4:16 gives us insight into two wonderful blessings that we may have as a result of God's grace. Both of these blessings are essential if we are to be finally saved, and have eternal life.

The first point to note here is that we are invited to *"come boldly"*—that is, confidently—*"to the throne of grace"*. What does this mean? If there is a throne, there must also be a king;

and a kingdom which that king reigns over. When Jesus ascended to heaven after His death and resurrection, He was seated on the right hand of God, *"far above all principality, and power"* (Hebrews 8:1; Ephesians 1:20, 21; see also Acts 7:55,56). Because of His death on the cross, Christ has been crowned as the King of Grace! He has received sovereign rights from God the Father, to give rich gifts to those who trust in Him and believe His promises. Those who do this become the citizens of the Kingdom of Grace (Hebrews 11:13-16).

According to Hebrews 4:16, the first gift that we may claim when we come to King Jesus is mercy. Romans 3:23 tells us, *"All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."* As sinners, we human beings stand condemned before God's holy law, the standard of righteousness in heaven and earth (Romans 7:12). The Bible describes even our best deeds, our *"righteousnesses"*, as *"filthy rags"* (Isaiah 64:6).

We cannot make ourselves righteous by our own efforts. But "*while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*" "*God ... made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*" (Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:19,21). Christ, the sinless One, took our place. He suffered the death that we deserved, so that we could have the life that was His. The righteousness of Christ is a divine gift, offered to us "*without money and without price*" (Isaiah 55:1).

The apostle Paul is an example of someone who was filled with gratitude for God's forgiving grace. Paul, who at one time was "*a blasphemer, and a persecutor*", wrote to Timothy, saying, "*I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief*" (1 Timothy 1:13). Paul also wrote that "*the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus*" (1 Timothy 1:14).

Martin Luther is another significant example of one who received forgiving grace. During the Middle Ages, the wonderful truth of God's forgiveness was almost completely lost. Rather than praying to God, people looked to priests and bishops, or to their own works of penance, as a means to obtain pardon for sins. Very few people had access to the Bible; the majority could not learn its wonderful truths for themselves.

Born near the end of the Middle Ages, Luther (1483-1546) was an extremely pious, self-denying monk, who performed many humiliating works and painful penances in the belief that these were necessary to win God's favour. One day, to his joy, Luther discovered a Bible chained to the wall of the convent where he lived. After that, he spent almost every spare moment studying the word of God.

While on a visit to Rome, Luther decided to perform a penance which was then

available, of ascending Pilate's staircase on his knees. He was making the slow, agonising ascent, when suddenly a Bible verse written by the apostle Paul seemed to thunder in his mind: "*The just shall live by faith*" (Romans 1:17). Luther stood to his feet, and rushed from the place in horror. He realised that his own works could never earn God's favour, and instead began to trust in God's abundant grace and freely offered mercy.

But perhaps the most well-known historical figure to rejoice in God's amazing grace was John Newton (1725-1807). Following the death of his devoted Christian mother, Newton became arrogant and rebellious, doing all he could to influence others to sin. Having been a sailor from his late teen years, he eventually became a slave trader. In 1748, afraid that the ship he was aboard might sink during a storm, Newton prayed for deliverance.

However, it was not until about five or six years later, in 1754, that he eventually gave up his life at sea.

From 1751, Newton began to keep a daily record of his thoughts and experiences. His diary entries reveal that he became increasingly disgusted with his life of sin, especially the role he had played as a slave trader. Newton committed his life to God, and instead became a preacher. In his well-known hymn "Amazing Grace", Newton expressed his deep gratitude for God's mercy that had freed him from guilt and shame.

As a persecutor, Paul murdered many people; while Newton as a slave trader wronged many too. These examples show that our sins can hurt others. Ultimately, however, sin also wounds God. Since God is the Creator of all things, to hurt anything that He has made is indirectly hurting Him. David recognised this when he prayed, "*Against*

You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight” (Psalm 51:4). Sin is a rejection of God’s love. When we do wrong to others, God asks us to confess our faults to them (James 5:16). But we must also confess our sins to God (1 John 1:9). Until we do this, we cannot find true peace.

OVERCOMING GRACE

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8,9).

Only through God’s grace can we experience complete forgiveness for sin. But forgiveness is far greater than many people realise. God’s forgiveness is not just a legal act, in which He declares us to be free from condemnation. God not only forgives us for sin; He reclaims us from it. The love flowing out from God’s own heart transforms the heart

of the sinner. God recreates the heart of every individual who surrenders their life to Him ("Heart" in this sense refers to our spiritual nature). This points us to the second blessing spoken of in Hebrews 4:16, which says that God will give us "*grace to help in time of need.*" We need God's grace to overcome temptations to evil. We need God's power to keep His holy law (for more on this, see White, 2017c, p. 87).

You may wonder about texts like Romans 6:14, which says, "*you are not under law, but under grace*"? Weren't we freed from the law when Jesus died on the cross?

However, when we look at the context of Romans 6:14, it is clear that Paul is not saying here that we do not need to keep the law. In the very next verse, Paul himself asks, "*Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?*" And his definitive reply is, "*Certainly not!*" (Romans 6:15).

Paul goes on to explain that those who sin are slaves to sin (verses 16-22; see also John 8:34). Since Satan is the author of sin, those who sin are really slaves to Satan. They may think they are free, but actually they are carrying out Satan's plans for them, which end only in death (Romans 6:23).

Ever since his rebellion in heaven, Satan has hated God's law. He has all sorts of cunning deceptions prepared to persuade people that loving God and following His law will be boring and miserable. He promises freedom to those who live in disobedience to God (2 Peter 2:19). But these are all lies. When we live in obedience to God's law, we will finally reap the results of this choice: love, joy, peace, glory, honour, and immortality (Galatians 6:22,23; Romans 2:7,10; John 10:10).

Think back to the earlier example given of grace, as being pardoned for a speeding offence, for example without

having to pay a fine. Imagine that you are sitting in your car, and the policeman has told you that you are free to go without paying a cent. Think of what you would do under those circumstances. Would you say, "Now that I am pardoned, Officer, I will have nothing more to do with your law!"? Would you rev the engine, slam the accelerator to the car floor, and roar off at 150km/hr, leaving thick black tyre marks behind you? Or would you not rather, meekly thank the policeman for being so gracious and merciful; then gingerly put your foot on the accelerator, and drive away at 10km/hr below the speed limit?

Think also of the examples of grace that we looked at earlier. Saul the persecutor became Paul the apostle; Martin Luther taught people to turn away from sin rather than indulging in it and expecting to obtain forgiveness through monetary payments; and John

Newton was transformed from a slave trader to an earnest preacher.

God's grace does not release the sinner from the divine law; instead, it changes the heart of sin, to one of holiness; to one that delights to obey God's law. When the heart is renewed by grace, a complete change will be seen in a person's life. Then, the person will say, *"I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart"* (Psalm 40:8).

Through grace, we have the hope of eternal life. But eternal life in a world filled with evil would not be eternal bliss; it would be eternal torture! God's grace empowers us to live *"soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world"* (Titus 2:11,12); and in doing so, guarantees that the future, immortal life of the righteous in the new earth will be one of eternal peace, joy and love (Romans 2:7,10; 2 Peter 3:13).

There is one more important point to note about why it is essential that we overcome sin. We saw earlier that sin hurts others, and ultimately God. One of the ways in which our sin hurts God is that it gives Satan opportunity to accuse God's people, and thus God Himself, before the watching universe (Revelation 12:10; Zechariah 3:1-5; Job 1:9-11; 2:4,5). Satan is always looking for ways to accuse God, because then it seems his rebellion is justified. And each time you or I sin, it gives Satan ammunition for his charges against the divine government. Let's not give him that opportunity! Let's think of how deeply our sins wound Christ, and determine to have nothing to do with them anymore!

HOW TO GROW IN GRACE

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"
(2 Peter 3:17).

In this booklet, we have seen that, as humans, we are desperately in need of God's grace. We have also found that there is a deeper purpose for grace, as it will protect the universe from evil for all eternity. We have also seen the tremendous cost of grace, even the sufferings and death of the Son of God; and the wonderful privileges of mercy and power that Christ is able to offer us, now that He is seated at the right hand of God. But how are we to apply this grace in our lives practically? How can we make this grace our own?

2 Corinthians 3:18 says, *"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord"*. It is a law of the mind that we become like what we "behold"; that is, what we admire. By worshipping God and learning about Him, we will become more and more like Him. As grace is an

essential part of God's character, we will grow in grace by spending time with Him (Exodus 34:6; Ephesians 5:16).

As we learn more and more about what God is like, we will also realise our own faults. The goodness of God will lead us to deep, heartfelt repentance, and we will be truly sorry for the sins that have caused God pain (Romans 2:4).

In God's word, we find the promise, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). We can pray the prayer of David, *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me"* (Psalm 51:10). With a cleansed, renewed heart (Ezekiel 36:26), we will then be empowered to live a new life of obedience; a life of true faith.

Paul describes grace as a *"gift"* (Ephesians 2:8,9). But a gift is only of use if it is accepted. God's grace is

freely offered to all, but only those who accept it will receive the blessings of forgiveness, strength, and eternal life. God will not force us to accept His gift of grace.

Friend, is it your desire to experience God's amazing grace in your life from this moment? If so, I invite you to pray a prayer like this: "Dear God, today I have learned more about your matchless grace. I recognise that I am a great sinner, but that You are a great Saviour. I believe that You sent Your Son Jesus Christ to die in my place. I confess these sins to you (*name specific sins*). I ask for your forgiveness for my past errors, and for overcoming grace, so that I will be set free from these wrong habits. Thank you, dear God, for hearing my prayer, and answering it according to Your great mercy. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen".

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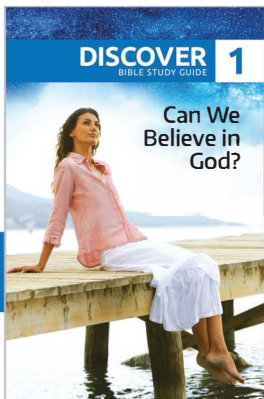
NOTES

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Many people wonder how evil can exist if God is indeed infinite in goodness, power and love. The Bible reveals that God has a long-term plan to completely eradicate evil; a plan that depends on grace.

Discover the cost of grace, why it is the only hope for lost humanity, and how to make it your own today!



Pastor Gary Kent is Speaker for The Incredible Journey ministry. He has produced and presented numerous documentaries on subjects including the Bible, Bible prophecy, world events and natural health. His passion is to share the good news of Jesus' imminent return.

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