

# THE GRACE OF GOD HAS APPEARED TO ALL, BRINGING SALVATION

(Titus 2:11)

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## Session 1

### GRACE AND FAVOUR

#### Experiencing goodness in a desperate situation

'Grace' is a word found mostly in translations of the New Testament. We will start to get a sense of what it means by looking at some equivalent words in the Old Testament, which are often translated as 'favour'. Here are a couple of situations in which these words are used.

Firstly Ezra, on the return from exile (about 500 years before Christ):

At the evening sacrifice I got up from my fasting, with my garments and my mantle torn, and fell on my knees, spread out my hands to the LORD my God, and said, 'O my God, I am too ashamed and embarrassed to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. From the days of our ancestors to this day we have been deep in guilt, and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been handed over to the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plundering, and to utter shame, as is now the case. But now for a brief moment **favour** has been shown by the LORD our God, who has left us a remnant, and given us a stake in his holy place, in order that he may brighten our eyes and grant us a little sustenance in our slavery. For we are slaves; yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to give us new life to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judea and Jerusalem (Ezra 9:5-9).

The situation is one of guilt and judgment, in which God has shown favour to His people. Without this, they would be totally lost. Another way Ezra speaks of this is to say: 'the gracious hand of our God was upon us' (Ezra 8:18; compare 7:28; 8:22, 31: 'he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes along the way').

Israel was in a similar situation in the time of Moses (about 1250 years before Christ), after the people had broken God's commandments by making and worshipping a golden calf. Here the associated words signifying God's grace are highlighted:

Moses said to the LORD, 'See, you have said to me, "Bring up this people"; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, "**I know you** by name, and you have also found **favour** in my sight." Now if I have found favour in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favour in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.' He said, 'My **presence** will go with you, and I will give you rest.' And he said to him, 'If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.' The LORD said

to Moses, 'I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name.' Moses said, 'Show me your **glory**, I pray.' And he said, 'I will make all my **goodness** pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, "The LORD"; and I will be **gracious** to whom I will be gracious, and will show **mercy** on whom I will show mercy' (Exodus 33:12–19).

See how essential God's favour is in this situation—without it, all would be lost. See also how personal and direct it is. God's grace is God Himself coming to do good to us. God then gave Moses a revelation of His glory and goodness—God's very nature:

The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name, 'The LORD.' The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God **merciful and gracious, slow to anger**, and abounding in **steadfast love and faithfulness**, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, **forgiving** iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty' (Exodus 34:6–7).

Note how forgiveness of sin is included here, but not by ignoring the reality of guilt. Moses was bold to respond:

And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped. He said, 'If now I have found **favour** in your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, **pardon** our iniquity and our sin, and **take us for your inheritance**' (Exodus 34:8–9).

Similarly, Jacob (about 1800 years before Christ), was looking for favour from his brother Esau—without it he would have been dead meat (see Genesis 32:3–20). Jacob hoped to win Esau's favour by sending him gifts, but God, in response to Jacob's prayer, had already changed Esau's heart (see Genesis 33:4–11).

*In what situations have we known our absolute need for the grace of God?*

*Think about whether these are just one-off occasions, or indications of how it is all the time.*

### **Which comes first?**

Here is another 'favour' situation, much earlier still, in the time of Noah:

Noah found favour in the sight of the LORD ... Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God (Genesis 6:8, 9).

We might ask, 'Why did Noah find favour in the sight of the LORD?' We might naturally answer that it was because Noah was a righteous man. But there is a certain order here: God's favour comes first, then we are told that Noah was righteous and blameless, and then that he walked with God. In all the scenarios we have looked at so far, God's grace and favour have come directly into sinful and desperate situations. Could it be that Noah found favour in the sight of the LORD simply because God showed him favour? And that the other things—being righteous and blameless, and walking with God—followed from that? This could be a new thought for some of us.

## Session 2

### THE GRACE OF GOD AND JUSTIFICATION

#### **The grace of God has appeared to all, bringing salvation**

We ended the last session looking at the order of things in the case of Noah: did Noah find favour in the sight of the Lord because he was righteous, or did his righteousness follow from the Lord having favour towards him? So far we have found that the grace or favour of God comes directly into sinful situations, to change them and bring real hope.

So we come to the New Testament use of the word 'grace':

For the grace of God has appeared to all, bringing salvation, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds (Titus 2:11–14).

Note again the order in which things happen.

*What situation are we in before the grace of God appears?*

*What condition are we in after the grace of God has appeared?*

*What has made the difference?*

*What are we then looking forward to?*

Before the grace of God appears, we are in impiety, worldly passions, and iniquity. After the grace of God has appeared, we are being trained to renounce those things, and here and now to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives; we are a purified people, belonging to Christ, and zealous for doing good. To make this difference, something has happened called salvation (being saved or rescued). This has come on account of Jesus Christ giving himself for us to redeem us (set us free at great cost) from what we have been in and to bring us to purity and belonging to Him. Now we have a hope that is full of blessing, when we will see and know and participate in the full glory of God and of Christ.

This puts paid to any notion that we may have had that God's grace comes to us because we have done something to qualify ourselves for it—that does not come into consideration at all. The opposite is in fact the case:

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is sure (Titus 3:3–8).

## Justified by his grace

*What does it mean: 'justified by his grace'?*

We need to begin with our Lord Jesus Christ. He was fully in the favour of God as one loved and approved by God. In this one instance, not as God's favour coming into a sinful situation, but in a rightful and fitting way. This is true from his youth—we are told:

*The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him (Luke 2:40).*

Nowhere was this made more plain than in his baptism:

*Now when all the people were baptised, and when Jesus also had been baptised and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased' (Luke 3:21–22).*

Thus John is able to say of Jesus:

*we have seen his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).*

The abundance of grace that we receive from God, John says, comes from this one's fullness of grace:

*From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace (John 1:16).*

This begins to explain how we can receive God's grace and favour in situations in which we are displeasing to God—God's pleasure towards us relates to the pleasure He has in His Son. This has something to do with the truth that this Son has come in our flesh, fully identified with us in love.

More than this, however, needs to be considered. Remember how God showed Moses that He would act in His mercy and grace and steadfast love and forgiveness, yet not by overlooking the guilt of those who remain opposed to Him, but in bringing to bear the full consequences of iniquity as much as is necessary (see Exodus 34:6–7; compare 20:4–6). When we are 'foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another' (Titus 3:3), and so on, God will not pass over the guilt of our sin, by virtually condoning it, or pretending that it is not there, or that it does not matter. What kind of God would He be if He did? On the contrary, we are told:

*the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth (Romans 1:18).*

God gives human beings over to the terrible outworking of their sin: to its impurity, degradation and perverseness, to the full measure of wickedness, and hardness of heart—to the judgment of distress, anguish, and deserved death (see Romans 1:18–2:11). As long as we are in this position, with all of this in operation, how can God come to us with His favour, good pleasure and praise (as in Romans 2:29, which speaks of a person who receives praise from God!)? Especially as the damning conclusion is reached:

*There is no one who is righteous, not even one . . .*

there is no one who seeks God (Romans 3:10–11).

Our sin and guilt, in all its terrible outworking—our defiant despising of God—must be engaged, dealt with, and removed permanently, for any good pleasure and approval of God to come our way.

We need to face the truth: we cannot do this ourselves. Is this is going to happen, it must be an action of God for us. Jesus told the story of two men who went to pray (Luke 18:9–14). One listed some of the good things he had done, which he felt merited God’s approval. The other rightly knew he had no claim to God’s approval—he knew himself to be a sinner. Instead, he asked God to do Himself whatever it would take to make God propitious or favourable to him, a sinner. No doubt he knew that God would not excuse the guilt of his sin, but would visit it with death. But he also knew that God is ‘merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin’ (Exodus 34:6–7), and his trust was wholly in God to be that way towards him—whether or not he had any idea how God could possibly do that. Jesus said: ‘this man went down to his home justified rather than the other’.

*Have we ever been in that desperate situation where we have seen that there is no way out other than by the merciful action of God Himself, however impossible that may seem?  
And have we cried out to God for that?*

### **The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**

Jesus was able to tell that story, and draw that conclusion, because he was the one in whom God was to do the one mighty action that would make this possible. Peter says that Jesus ‘was destined before the foundation of the world’ as one whose precious life-blood would be poured out in death, like a sacrificed ‘lamb without defect or blemish’, through whom we have come to have our faith and hope set on God (1 Peter 1:18–21). On the cross, Jesus personally engaged with our sin and guilt, and all their awful consequences, as God ‘laid on him the iniquity of us all’ (Isaiah 53:6): ‘He himself carried up our sins in his body to the tree so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness’ (1 Peter 2:24). God was unsparing in carrying through the full and necessary consequences of sin for us in His Son: ‘Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”’ (Galatians 3:13). Such was the Son’s total identification in love with us, that Paul could say: ‘For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God’ (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, summarises it in this way:

since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith (Romans 3:23–25).

This is what is meant by ‘justification’: ‘the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe’ (Romans 3:22).

*Is this what has come to us, and is this what we are trusting in for our whole lives?*

## Session 3

### LIVING IN THE GRACE OF GOD

#### **By grace you have been saved**

Paul the apostle tells us whose faith is in Jesus of our present position, and how we got here:

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life (Ephesians 2:1–10).

(Note here the mention of ‘the ruler of the power of the air’—a reference to the evil one, from whom we have also been delivered by God’s grace—another whole story in itself.) God’s intention has ever been that we should be taken up into the same relationship and approval and action that the Son has with the Father—this is His ‘glorious grace’:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth (Ephesians 1:3–10).

*Is this a living reality for us now, or is it more at one remove as a doctrinal belief—if that?*

#### **The one forgiven much loves much**

If this is where we are, what do we do now? We live towards God and others in all that has come to us, mindful of the way in which it has come. Jesus once told a story of two people who owed money (Luke 7:41–42). One owed a lot, and the other owed a little. Both had their debts cancelled. Jesus asked which one will have more love for the one who cancelled the debt for them. The obvious answer: the one who had the greater debt cancelled. Jesus told this story at a dinner party where the host had shown little concern for Jesus’ comfort and well-being, but an uninvited guest had come to Jesus with a lavish show of love and affection. She knew she had much to be forgiven, and she had been forgiven much, and so she showed great love. The host,

who thought he had little that needed to be forgiven, loved little (Luke 7:36–50). How much we love will be determined by how much we know ourselves to be forgiven.

This will be true first of all, as in this incident, towards the one who has brought forgiveness to us. We now live for Christ:

he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them (2 Corinthians 5:15).

So Paul is able to say: ‘Let anyone be accursed who has no love for the Lord’ (1 Corinthians 16:22)—those who do not love the Lord will be those who are still under the curse of sin—and: ‘Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Ephesians 6:24) those who know the grace of Christ will have an undying love for him.

This love will also be towards others. The grace and favour we have received from God, in our desperate and sinful situations, will be the grace we show to others, in the same kind of situations. Peter once asked Jesus, in effect, if grace could be measured out. Jesus’ reply showed that he knew that God’s grace is measureless, and so should ours be:

Then Peter came and said to him, ‘Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven [or seventy times seven] times (Matthew 18:21–22).

Jesus then went on to tell the story of the one who was forgiven a debt equivalent to 150,000 years of labour, but who had no realisation of how much he had been forgiven—he thought he could have paid it back. Accordingly, he insisted on repayment of a debt owed to him of the equivalent of 100 days work. Forgiveness could not be received or enjoyed by him, because he would not forgive others (Matthew 18:23–35). Jesus said at another time that our love for others, even for our enemies, is to be as extensive as the Father’s love that has come to us when we were His enemies (as in Romans 5:10):

for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous . . . Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:45, 48; Luke 6:36: ‘Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful’).

This means in particular that barriers between ethnic, social and gender groupings are broken down: ‘There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus’ (Galatians 3:28). Barnabas went to the church in Antioch, and he ‘saw the grace of God’:

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, and they spoke the word to no one except Jews. But among them were some men of Cyprus and Cyrene who, on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Greeks also, proclaiming the Lord Jesus. The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number became believers and turned to the Lord. News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast devotion; for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were brought to the Lord (Acts 11:19–23).

What did Barnabas see? Primarily he saw Jews and Gentiles worshipping and serving together. This was the grace of God.

*How much does our appreciation of God's love and forgiveness of us show in our forgiveness and love of others?*

### **Practical grace**

Grace shown to others by those graced by God can be as practical as simple acts of kindness and generosity. When the believers in Jerusalem 'were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness' (Acts 4:31), we are told that 'great grace was upon them all'. This showed in a very practical, and costly, way:

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need (Acts 4:32-35).

Even a good word in place can be an act of grace—and needs to be:

Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear (Ephesians 4:29).

The range of meaning that belongs to the word 'grace' in the New Testament, especially as exemplified in this passage, precludes any narrow doctrinal understanding and usage:

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege [*Gk* grace] of sharing in this ministry to the saints—and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us, so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking [*Gk* this grace] among you. Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in your love for us—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking [*Gk* this grace].

I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. For you know the generous act [*Gk* the grace] of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:1-9).

*List the different translations here of the Greek word for 'grace'.*

*What light do they throw on each other, and on our general understanding of the grace of God?*

### **The grace of ministry**

One of the vital ways in which we live in the grace of God is the telling to others of the grace that has come to us. Paul knew that this was a ministry that he could have only by the grace of God. Indeed:



grace can only be truly communicated when we ourselves are in need of grace in order to be able to communicate

Paul knew that he had this ministry, as he had everything else, 'by God's mercy' (2 Corinthians 4:1). So he spoke of it in this way:

Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him (Ephesians 3:7-12)

So significant and extensive is this ministry—even to 'the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places'—how could it ever be engaged in effectively apart from the grace of God?

All the ministries of leadership in God's word are Christ's gifts of grace, as are the ministries exercised by the whole body. And the goal of these ministries is nothing less than the goal of the grace of God Himself:

But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift . . . The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ . . . speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ (Ephesians 4:7, 11-13, 15).

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Note:

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Bingham, *Great and Glorious Grace*, NCPI, Blackwood SA, 1988, p. 285.