

SAVING GRACE
Ephesians 2:8-9

Good News About Grace
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Complete these very common phrases for me: If it sounds too good to be true...it is. We make money the old fashioned way, we...earn it. There is no such thing as a free...lunch. There is no gain without...pain. God helps those who...help themselves.

Everything about the American way of life teaches us that you get what you earn in life. There is no free lunch. You make your bed and then you sleep in it. We know what it means to work hard and use elbow grease. We tell people, “You get exactly what you deserve in life.”

This is called the American Work Ethic. It is a value that has been drilled into many of us and is often stressed in certain political debates. The only problem is that God does not operate on the American work ethic and he does not endorse certain political ideologies. And this, of course, can many times make it very difficult for us to relate to God.

Psalm 145:8 says that *“God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.”* The Bible says that God is a “gracious God.” That means he loves to be gracious to you and me. He loves to bless and help people who don’t deserve it. That’s his nature. Aren’t you glad that God blesses people who don’t deserve it?

The truth is that we can’t understand the Christian life unless we understand grace. It is at the heart of our faith and relationship with God. When we understand grace, my friends, we feel closer to God. The more we understand grace the more we are going to love God and be grateful to him. It is through grace that God brings himself to you and me.

These next few weeks we’re going to be focusing our message and teaching time on, “Good News About Grace.” And yet what is grace? There is really no single definition to describe what grace is all about. One definition is, “God’s love in action.”

I know that many of us probably think we understand grace. We say we are saved by God’s grace through faith. But the reality is that even though many of us say we are saved by God’s grace we don’t act like it. In fact, we rather spend most of lives acting like we are saved by our actions and good works.

Many of us still think we need to please God by trying to be perfect. We think of God as some picky parent in the sky with a clipboard and pen watching our every move. We think that if we do a certain number of good works God is going to say, “Good girl...Good boy.” We’re saved by grace but we are actually living by works.

When we really understand and believe grace it’s going to bring so much joy to our lives. It is the most liberating reality in the whole world. So this is where we are going to focus these next

few weeks. My goal is that through these teaching times that we will not only better understand grace, but that we will also experience it; that we will feel its joy.

This morning I will look at five aspects and definitions of Saving Grace. How do you and I know for sure we are going to heaven when we die? We will look at the acrostic using each letter of the word G.R.A..C.E.

G—God’s gift to me. Romans 3:24 says, *“We are now made right with God by his grace, which is a free gift through Jesus Christ.”* It is a free gift. If we were to ask a hundred people on the street, “How do you get into heaven?” most would say we have to earn our way to heaven.

And yet we need to remember, my friends, that our God says that salvation is absolutely free. You don’t work for a gift. You can’t earn it. You can’t buy it. You can’t work for it.

We need to be clear that this is the fundamental difference between Christianity and every other religion. I don’t care if it is Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, etc. Every other religion is based on works and you can summarize this in one word—“do.” There are certain things one needs to do to earn God’s favor. Rules, regulations, rituals, etc.

On the other hand, we can summarize Christianity in one word—“done.” It’s already been done for you and me. It was done on the cross by Jesus Christ. He paid for our salvation. He paid for our sins. It’s already been done. Jesus said on the cross, *“It is finished.”*

The truth is that there isn’t anything we can do to save ourselves. We simply receive God’s gift of grace by faith. It’s the greatest gift we will ever be offered. If we really understand grace we will receive it in our hearts as a priceless gift. We will trust in Jesus’ amazing grace.

R—Receive by faith. God’s gift is to be received by faith. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, *“For it is by grace that you have been saved through faith and this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God. Not of works so no one can boast.”* Faith is the key that unlocks the door to heaven.

It’s just a gift, but we need to receive it by faith. If I have a gift for you and say, “Here’s this gift for you. It’s \$100. Come and get it.” It will just sit there unless you come and receive it by faith. You need to have faith that I’m going to give it to you.

Romans 4:16 says, *“For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace.”* Salvation is not based on my performance; rather it’s based on God’s promise. Heaven is not based on my merit, but on God’s mercy. That’s why he gets all the credit. It’s God’s free gift that is to be received by faith.

You may remember the story Jesus told of the Prodigal Son. This one son took his half of the inheritance and went over to the Sunset Strip in Jerusalem and began partying. He had a great time—wine, women and song—until he hit bottom morally, spiritually, financially. He is totally broke and there are no ATM’s at the mall. He is forced to eat with the pigs.

So he comes to his senses, decides to go back to his father and tell him he has blown it, that he doesn’t deserve to be called a son anymore. Yet the father runs to meet his son on the road. He

gives him a bear hug and embraces him. He puts on him the royal robes and family ring. Now that's grace, my friends. This kid deserved condemnation, but instead he received unconditional love. That is God's grace received by faith.

A—Available to everyone. The good news with all this is that God does not play favorites regardless of your background, your status, your sin. It doesn't matter if you are a religious person, a non-religious person, or one with no religious background at all. God says it is available to anyone who opens up their hearts to faith. *"Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

Now friends, we may have done some nifty things in life, but if we think these things are going to get us into heaven, forget it. Heaven is perfect and we are not. The only way we're going to get in is by receiving God's gifts to us. It means receiving it by faith which is available to every person—no matter who you are, the color of your skin, your language, your life history.

C—Grace Comes Through Christ. John 1:17 says, *"The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."* Why through Jesus? Why not Allah? Why not someone else? It is because Jesus paid the price for our salvation. No one else has done that. On the cross Jesus paid for our sins.

Grace is totally free...there is no doubt about that. And yet it is not at all cheap. It cost Jesus his life. He paid for our admission. Another acrostic of Grace is *"Gods Riches At Christ's Expense."* It comes through Jesus and only through Jesus.

E—It is Extended throughout Eternity. Romans 6:23 says, *"The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."* The results of God's grace go on forever and ever. Eternal life is one of the benefits of grace. God saves the best for last and truly the best is yet to come.

Have you ever thought what heaven is going to be like? The Bible tells us it is going to be three things: a place of reunion with loved ones who have believed in the grace of God; a place of reward for the way we have served and given to people on earth. It's going to be a place of release from all pain, all suffering, all sadness, sorrow, grief, depression, all loneliness, etc.

There's only one catch. We need to receive it by faith. If you get a gift and don't unwrap it, it's a worthless gift. Does this mean I can receive God's gift and keep on living any way that I want to thumbing my nose to God? Of course not! Jesus says, *"Go and sin no more."* Let me help you change. He does not want us to destroy ourselves.

God's amazing grace, my friends, is available right here and right now. Today! That's why he brought you here. You're not here by accident. If you have never received God's saving grace, what are you waiting for? May we open our hearts this very day and receive God's gift by faith.