

UNCONDITIONAL GRACE 1
Ephesians 2:8-9

INTRO: Our subject has been, "The Subtle Undoing Of the Fear of God." But it comes in separate sections of which we have covered two already. We have looked at what the fear of the Lord is in two messages. Then we looked at the undoing of that fear in the subject of unconditional love. I have proposed and argued that unconditional love is unbiblical and that it comforts the unbeliever in his sin and takes the fear of the Lord out of the Christian.

This morning we want to look at the subject of unconditional grace, and because I have a lot to cover, I will spend no more time on introductions and go right to our subject. And so we will begin where I usually begin, and that is by defining what grace is.

I. WHAT IS GRACE?

It is of essence that when one preaches or teaches on some subject such as love or grace or truth etc... that one first define the meaning of such terms. One cannot accurately preach or teach without an understanding of such terms. In recent years some books have been published on the subject of the grace of God. Chuck Swindol wrote the book, "The Grace Awakening" in 1990. Philip Yancey wrote the book, "What's So Amazing About Grace" in 1997.

Now, defining grace, admittedly, is a difficult task. Philip Yancey, a popular evangelical writer, whom I would call a rebellious evangelical, must have experienced some of the difficulty that comes with defining grace for he writes, "Grace does not offer an easy subject for a writer. To borrow from E. B. White's comment about humor, '[Grace] can be dissected, as a frog, but the thing dies in the process, and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind.'" Then he says, "I have just read a thirteen-page treatise on grace in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, which has cured me of any desire to dissect grace and display its innards. I do not want the thing to die. For this reason, I will rely more on stories and syllogisms. In sum, I would far rather convey grace than explain it" (Pg. 16).

And I ask you, if one cannot define grace, how then will one explain it? Perhaps that is why he too, like many others, favors unconditional grace. In his book called, "What is So Amazing About Grace" he quotes David Seamands, of whom he said that he summed up his career in this way: "Many years ago I was driven to the conclusion that the two major causes of most emotional problems among evangelical Christians are these: the failure to understand, receive, and live out God's unconditional grace and forgiveness; and the failure to give out that unconditional love, forgiveness, and grace to other people... We read, we hear, we believe a good theology of grace. But that's not the way we live. The good news of the Gospel of grace has not penetrated the level of our emotions" (pg. 15).

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Now imagine, likening one of the most beautiful words anywhere, whether in the secular world, but much more so in the Bible, and likening the bits and pieces that make up this idea of grace to the innards of a frog, and thinking that if you dissect it, it will die. Here is what I believe would die for men like Yancey if they truly defined this word. Their view of what they 'think' grace is would die. And here is their greatest difficulty in defining this word: it is their prior false notions of what they think it should mean.

In that quote by Yancey, it would seem that he too favors unconditional grace. And in that quote we see the close connection between unconditional love, unconditional forgiveness, and unconditional grace. Why do I spend time on Yancey when I don't agree with him? So that we become aware and are warned of popular modern writers, and so you can understand why we have come to such things as unconditional love, unconditional grace and unconditional forgiveness. You will not read that kind of fluff from the older writers and theologians.

So, what is grace then? Can it be defined? Swindol says in defining grace, "Understanding what grace means requires our going back to an old Hebrew term that meant 'to bend, to stoop.' By and by, it came to include the idea of 'condescending favor" (Pg. 8). I have not been able to find a source that confirms what he says, but he then writes, "To show grace is to extend favor or kindness to one who doesn't deserve it and can never earn it" (Pg. 9). Though I cannot find information that confirms what he says is in the Hebrew background, I do agree with the words that, and I quote, "To show grace is to extend favor or kindness to one who doesn't deserve it and can never earn it."

In my own estimation, no one has done a finer job in defining grace than W. E. Vine. He says grace is to be viewed both from the objective standpoint and the subjective. In the objective sense, grace is, and I quote, "that which bestows or occasions pleasure, delight, or causes favorable regard; it is applied, e.g., to beauty, or gracefulness of person, Luke 2:40; act, 2 Cor. 8:6, or speech, Luke 4:22, RV, 'words of grace' (KJV gracious words); Col. 4:6."

On the subjective side, that is when I experience grace, he says grace must be viewed from the part of the bestower, the giver of grace, and from the part of the recipient, the one who receives grace. According to Vine, on the part of the bestower, *grace is the friendly disposition from which the kindly act proceeds, graciousness, loving-kindness, and goodwill generally.* Then he gives references for that. In this respect, he says, "there is stress on its freeness and universality, its spontaneous character, as in the case of God's redemptive mercy, and the pleasure or joy He designs for the recipient; thus it is set in contrast to debt, Rom. 4:4; 16, with works, 11:6, and with law, John 1:17."

(PICTURE) Let me try to explain those words in picture form. Let me go back to the black boy and the vulture picture. He is on the ground, bent over, and ready to fall over. And sitting silently in the background is the vulture, just waiting for the inevitable. Even when we just see the picture, it sends strong feelings of mercy all over us. Now, let

us say I was close enough to do something about the plight of that boy. Mercy, that is my feelings of compassion, beg me to help. Justice says it is OK to do something and love tells me to do what I can to help. And when I go and carry him to the UN food station, that is grace. Grace gives him food and water. Grace makes sure he is in good hands. Now listen to what Vine says grace is on the part of the one who helps. He says, "...grace is the friendly disposition from which the kindly act proceeds, graciousness, loving-kindness, and goodwill generally." Grace causes kindly acts, as in carrying this boy to food.

But what is grace on the part of the receiver? On the part of the receiver, Vine says, "grace is a sense of the favor bestowed, a feeling of gratitude, e.g., Rom. 6:17 ('thanks'); in this respect it sometimes signifies 'to be thankful,' e.g., Luke 17:9 (doth he thank that servant?' lit. hath he thanks to'); 1 Tim. 1:12." In our illustration, what do you think this boy would feel if someone came along, shoed the vulture away, picked him up and took him to the UN food station? There would well up in him gratitude, and gratitude or thanksgiving, in the NT has the word grace in it. Grace is *charis*, and to give thanks is *eucharisteo*. You would not have to ask this boy if something had been done for him. He would know it.

So, the one who gives something to another, the act of which is graciousness; there is the friendly disposition which causes this one to act on behalf of the one who has found mercy. And the reception of this kindly act, is by grace, and we call it grace. So in salvation, God is kindly dispositioned toward the sinner and it causes Him to act on the sinner's behalf. He feels compassion for us before we are saved, as we feel for this boy in the picture. But on the part of the sinner, who receives this salvation, it causes a feeling of joy and gratitude, as it rightly should. All of this is grace.

This is thanksgiving weekend here in Canada. It is appropriate that we should talk about grace and its relationship to thanksgiving. You see, there is a common grace we all receive in every day life. But there is the special grace of God as relates to

salvation, and that is what we are talking about. Both should make us thankful people.

Now, the Hebrew word for grace is *chen*. This word occurs 69 times in the OT so there is grace in the OT. Now, this word *chen*, comes from the word *chanan*. This word occurs 78 times in the OT. The TWOT says it "depicts a heartfelt response by someone who has something to give to one who has a need." But of the word *chen*, from which we get our name *Anna*, the TWOT says that, rather than focusing on the giver, focuses on the recipient of grace. For example, "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." So we have the idea of someone who has something to give which another needs, and then the one who needs it, getting that which he needs.

So, involved in grace is the idea of someone with the ability to give, giving that to another who has the need. What we have is the exact opposite of earning something (Rom. 11:6; Eph. 2:8-9). From all this, I would say that grace must be viewed from three reference points. 1 The giver of the gift. 2 The gift that is given. 3 The recipient of the gift.

On the part of the bestower, grace is the friendly disposition from which the act of giving proceeds. On the part of the recipient it is receiving that which is needed, the reception of which causes joy or delight.

So, let me put that into the biblical perspective in light of the relationship of law to grace. Let us say I have trouble staying by the truth. It is called lying. So the law says, "Thou shalt not bear false witness." I cannot overcome this problem of lying. It comes so natural to me. That means my sin nature is lording it over me. But now I have lied. And by now I have become a Christian. And now I am convicted about lying. And now I wrestle with the lie I told. That is called conviction. Conviction brings guilt and now I begin to wrestle with this guilt. Now I am to go to the one I lied to and confess what I have done. And I cannot come forth. I need strength to overcome my fierce pride. And grace is the strength to do what I should do. When I determine to go and do what is right, even if it kills me, God will give me the

grace to overcome. You see, grace is not contrary to the law. Grace helps me obey the law. And once I obey the law and keep it, I am no longer under it. If I do not lie, I am not under that law. It has no power over me. As soon as I lie, the law has power over me. So go to Romans 5 (read 5:20-6:2).

II. IS GRACE UNCONDITIONAL?

And now we must ask the question that is the point of this message: Is God's grace conditional, or is it unconditional? Well, let me explain first that in salvation there must be something in the person who has the need of salvation which causes God, the One who is able to meet that need to give it to the lost sinner. You see, there must be something in the sinner that creates a friendly disposition in God, which in turn causes Him to give to the sinner the desired salvation.

You see, God does not give salvation to everyone or just anyone. Why not? Because they have not met the condition that causes a friendly disposition in Him towards them! So, let me ask, to whom is it that God grants salvation? What is the condition in man that causes God to grant grace in salvation to him? You see, if there are no conditions, then salvation is universal and all will get saved. There are many who believe that, but it is clearly, biblically wrong.

Can there be something in man that will cause God to have a friendly disposition towards that person so that He bestows on that person or that sinner the gift of salvation? I am happy to tell you there is. There is, and we shall look at it shortly, but let me say this first: on the sinner's part, when this salvation is received, it causes joy and thanksgiving. All of that, the friendly disposition in the giver, the gift given, and the joy and thankfulness on the part of the recipient is grace. It is God's riches at Christ's expense. It is unmerited favor, and favor is not earned.

And so our big question now is, what is the condition or what are the conditions on which God's grace towards man depends? We could ask it like this: Does God unconditionally extend His grace to man? If so,

then all will be saved. If not, what conditions can there ever be in sinful man that can create a friendly disposition in God towards him, causing God to bestow salvation on him? If there is a condition, and there is nothing man can do to meet that condition, then man is hopelessly lost? On the other hand, if grace is unconditional, then everybody will be saved, and we know that is not true.

So, we ask, is it possible that there can be anything in man that would cause God to want to give salvation to man? Can there be anything in man, that can cause God to have feelings of compassion for man so that He wants to do something for him? Well, it is most fortunate, praise God, that we can answer that with a resound 'Yes'! Actually there are two things, and both cause one condition. Here they are. Listen carefully and remember them: these two things are first repentance, and second, faith. And these two things both require one condition of the heart of man, and here is that one condition (can you tell me?): humility; humbleness; lowliness of mind. Both repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ require humility. When God sees humility and repentance and faith takes place in the heart of man; His grace is poured out on such a person.

There are several Scriptures that have greatly impacted me over the years. Go with me to Isaiah 66 (read 1-2). When man becomes humble, God's grace opens to him like a flower to the sun. It is a huge task to humble man. Pride is our major problem. Go now to 1 Peter 5 (read 5-7). We are instructed to be clothed with humility (vs. 5). The word for humility is *tapainophrosune*. That is a long word for the Greek language. If you have sat in my classes you know that as I view it, the phreen is the data processor of the mind. It is the thinking part. And the word which is attached to that phreen part in this word is *tapainos*. It means low. Humility is 'lowliness of thinking.' It is the exact opposite of 'highmindedness', or as we know it, pride. In my daily reading the other day I came to Proverbs 11:2, which says, "When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble *is* wisdom."

You see, pride is man's major issue. And the condition man must be brought to meet is humility. And repentance and faith both require humility. And the moment man meets the condition of humility, God is ever so ready to extend grace! Herein lies the fault of much parenting. Many parents give in before true humility is reached. When they see little signs of humility, perhaps false humility, they give in. Are you here as a parent? Do you recognize when there is humility in your child? Can your child cause you to think there is humility? Let me tell you something about God. We can never pull the wool over His eyes with regard to humility. And as long as pride is there, the condition has not been met, and God's grace is an illusive pursuit.

Let me mention as an aside note, that this principle of humility applies to the home as well. Are you here as a parent, and you allow in your homes what you know is not right? Dads, set godly guidelines in the home. You will find out soon enough if you have humility in your home. Mothers, if dad sets out godly guidelines, don't hinder him by siding with your children. You will thwart humility. If you stand in the way of that, you will pay for it in your children. We stand strong on some family matters, but let me ask, do we stand strong on godly guidelines in the home? Here is a word for parents this morning. Seek to bring about humility in your children. Discipline until you have humility. And if you do, God's grace will come on them, and you will be blessed.

So let me back up a little. Scripture says, "For God so loved the world that He gave..." Love is based on truth. The truth was that man had been deceived by the devil into thinking sin was good for him. This caused him to sin; and sin, for man, caused a division between God and man, a division that man could not bridge. But the truth was also that there was one way God could bridge the gap for man. It was a very costly way, but there was a way. He could bridge that gap by giving His only Son in man's place. We looked at that last Sunday. And when God gave His only Son for man's legitimate need, that was love. The price of sin was death, but after man dies physically, salvation is not possible. But God

overcame that great problem by sending His only Son to die on man's behalf. Now man can get saved before he dies physically. This morning you are here, physically alive. You may not be physically awake, but you are physically alive. In this time that you are physically alive is the only time you have to make use of that incredible offer of salvation. Christ took man's place in death. Now man can be saved through his substitute, Jesus Christ.

When God gave His only Son on man's behalf, that did not save man. That is what has led to the idea of universal salvation, which is not theologically possible. Rather, it was Christ's death on man's behalf that provided a way for man to be saved. God could not save man IN his sin. That would be unjust, and God is just. So, in providing salvation, God had to do it in such a way as to save man FROM his sin itself. In order to do that, God set out qualifying factors. For man to qualify for this great gift of salvation, God set out two qualifying points. They are repentance and faith. Both require humility. True repentance in any situation requires humility. But not all faith necessarily requires humility, but saving faith does. For example, Richard Dawkins and Bill Nye believe in evolution. That is faith because they believe it. But it does not require humility, rather, it will gender pride. But if Richard Dawkins or Bill Nye were to believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior, it would require humility of the deepest kind for them. Believing in Christ is a humbling act. It means I need saving, and someone else must save me. It puts me under the one who saves.

Now, when God gave His only Son on man's behalf, that came from love but it was grace. Here is grace on the part of the bestower. Titus 2:11 says, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men..." This grace that brings salvation is the Gospel, and the Gospel is the good news that God gave His only Son on behalf of all lost sinners. And this grace is a teacher. Verses 12-14 then tell us what this grace teaches us. Grace says, "...teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus

Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works."

So the grace of God teaches us to deny ungodly and worldly lusts. It teaches us to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present age. It teaches us to look for the return of Christ. And this Christ gave Himself for us, that is grace, in order that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people zealous for good works. That is the grace of God!

Now you may say, "Ok, that is exactly where I struggle. I want to deny ungodly and worldly lusts. I want to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present age. I want to look for the return of Christ. I want to be redeemed from every lawless deed and be purified for Christ and be zealous for good works. I want all that, but I am unable. I fail. I cannot come forth!

And that is where the grace of God comes in again. The grace of God did not only provide for initial salvation, which we know as justification. The grace of God also provided for ongoing salvation, which we know as sanctification. It is in the process of sanctification that we are made holy. Here we overcome sin. Overcoming sin is what the grace of God is all about. Grace does not comfort me in sin. It helps me overcome sin. Grace that does not help me overcome sin is not grace at all.

The best Scripture I know that speaks of overcoming grace is Hebrews 4 (read 16). The throne where God Almighty sits is the throne of grace. That is, it is the throne from which the grace of God is given to needy sinners. And in this verse we find what grace accomplishes. Here we also find mercy. The Lord has tender compassions for us in our need as we battle with sin and the devil. Verse 15 tells us why He feels mercy for us (read). And when we find mercy with Him, we get help in time of need. That help, whatever it is, is grace. It comes by grace. It comes from the throne of grace. It is because we are humbled before Him at His throne.

Someone has said, "Grace that doesn't change your life can't save you either." To go along with that, grace that does not deliver one from sin cannot save one's soul.

James 4:6 gives us the giver (God); the recipient, the humble; and the gift, grace; that is whatever is given.

CONCL: Our subject has been the grace of God. What is grace? Martyn Lloyd Jones says it is notoriously hard to define. What does it mean to show grace? That is grace on the part of the giver? Swindoll says, "To show grace is to extend favor or kindness to one who doesn't deserve it and can never earn it."

What is grace on the part of the receiver? It is, as is so often said, 'Unmerited favor'. It is, as is also said in the acrostic: God's riches at Christ's expense. But what does that mean? Well, let me put it into understandable words, both negatively and positively: It is not the right to live as I want; it is the power to live as I ought. What is grace? It is help in time of need. We need it both to get saved or to live right. We need it to overcome pride. Do you want to stop lying? You will need the strength and courage grace gives.

I have said it like this in the past: in the biblical sense grace is whatever we need whenever we need it either to become a Christian or to overcome sin. You need strength to confess to someone? God will give grace if we act and we are very serious about it.