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The Power of Grace

Ephesians 1 is packed with descriptions of a Christian's new identity in Christ: made holy, blessed in heavenly realms, adopted, chosen, predestined, redeemed, forgiven. Paul says all of these are "to the praise of His glorious Grace".

Grace means "*undeserved favour*." The whole of our Christian experience is defined by what God gives to us freely, not what we work for. The opposite of Grace is "*un-grace*" (the idea of working to obtain God's blessing). The Bible refers to this as living under "Law", where God judges based on performance.

As human beings we find ourselves in a world that is full of un-grace. "You get what you deserve," "survival of the fittest", etc. It takes some getting used to that God loves us completely for free and despite what we've done to deserve his judgment.

"*Mercy*" is where we don't get what we deserve (judgment) and that's an amazing thing! Grace gives us what we don't deserve, above and beyond all measure and expectation.

Past Grace

Ephesians 2:8 says, "*For it is by Grace you have been saved.*" This is the only way of being right with God, through his undeserved gift. Our works have never contributed anything. In fact, **Isaiah 64:6** says, "*all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.*"

The Covenant of Law at Sinai was based on works. And the deluded human heart is reflected in the Israelites response to receiving the Ten commandments: "*Everything the Lord has said we will do!*" (*Ex 24:3*). How they failed!

God promised a new covenant, not of works to please God, but of changed hearts (*Jeremiah 33:31*). The power of this Grace covenant is such that it produces the very

works that were unachievable under the Law covenant: His law written on our hearts and minds.

Our tendency is to always move off a Grace relationship with God to a works relationship.

In Matthew 20, Jesus told a parable that shocked his hearers. Vineyard workers who got paid the same whether they worked hard all day, or whether they came late in the day.

Grace says, in Christ, "God cannot love me any more, he will not love me any less". Jesus demonstrates this radical understanding of grace in his dying moments on the cross with a believing thief (*Luke 23*).

The parable of the Lost Son describes the same thing. A rebellious son first gets mercy and then grace. And an older brother who thinks by time served he has the right to have earned his father's love and blessing. That teaches us that a works relationship with God will never bring us into an understanding of his great love for you.

Present Grace

Grace isn't just the assurance of past offences being forgiven. It's an atmosphere we live in now! Grace has present power. Under the works-covenant, failure pushed us away from God. Under the grace-covenant it draws us to God. **Hebrews 4:16** says, *"Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."*

My sinfulness can never out grow his gracefulness! **Romans 5:20**: *"where sin increased, grace increased all the more."*

Grace is the power for present fruitfulness. **Ephesians 2:10** says, *"for we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do"*.

This grace frees us up to fruitful service.

Ephesians tells us what that might look like:

- a) Fruitfully sharing our faith (3:7)
- b) Loving and serving the church (4:1-6)

- c) Receiving and using grace gifts from God (3:7)
 - d) Speaking truth in love
 - e) Forgiving others (3:32)
 - f) Living in purity (5:1)
 - g) Loving and serving your spouse in marriage (5:22)
 - h) Honouring parents and raising children (6:1)
 - i) Working in your day job (6:5)
 - j) Prayer and spiritual warfare.
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Future Grace

"In order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace-expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus." **(Ephesians 2:7)**

The thief on the cross was exhibit one in eternity. There will be countless millions of other trophies of grace. Men and angels worshipfully pondering, "How did they get into heaven?!"

Ephesians 2:10 remind you that you are are God's workmanship, his masterpiece. By his Grace that is what you are. That is what he's doing with you. Each chapter of your story is entitled Grace. It's a story of undeserved favour.

Questions:

- **Merciful v Gracious.** What do you think is the difference between these words and which one do you associate more in your current view of God?
- **Grace v Un-grace.** Think of something you worked hard for and imagine someone else receiving that without working. What challenges does God's grace confront us with?
- **Staying on the Grace Track.** How can we prevent ourselves slipping back into a works-relationship with God?
- How does God's present grace empower us to fruitfulness?

- Look at the list of ordinary things in *Ephesians 3-6* that grace empowers us in. which of these is a challenge for you right now?
- How does understanding Grace help us to love *a)* other Christians *b)* anybody



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