

Titus 2:11-13

“Grace”

He was born to a pious mother who read the Bible to him every day. She died when he was only 7 leaving him to the care of his sea-captain father who was much less religious. From ages 11-17, he would join his father on long sea trips where he got himself in a lot of trouble. By 17, he had become a common sailor living a harsh life. He eventually became the captain of a slave-trading ship, called *Greyhound*, where his debauchery and mockery of religion hit its peak. On May 10, 1748, while sailing back to England, the *Greyhound* encountered a vicious storm that nearly killed him. At that moment of hopelessness, the man surrendered his life of debauchery of sin abandoning the slave trade and becoming a minister. He is best known for his connection with the anti-slavery politician William Wilberforce and a hymn he wrote. The man's name was John Newton, and the hymn was “Amazing Grace.” Grace, however, cannot be amazing unless we know what grace is.

Grace is still a commonly used word even outside of a religious context. Google offers seven uses for the word including simple elegance (“she moved through the water with effortless grace”), a short prayer of thanks before a meal, goodwill (“at least he has the grace to admit his debt to her”), and even used to address a duke, duchess, or archbishop (“His Grace, the Duke of Cornwall”). But what does the Bible mean by the word?

Let us begin with **Grace Explained**. In English, to be “gracious” means to show kindness or favor even when not required. We can be gracious with our time, resources, patience, etc. Scripture does something similar, but often in the context of status. When someone of higher status shows favor upon someone of lower status, they are showing grace. For example, Potiphar promoted Joseph from the lowest status of slavery to be his “chief of staff” (Genesis 39:4). Likewise, Boaz, a wealthy landowner, saw Ruth, the impoverished widow and immigrant, and graciously invited her to harvest crops from his field (Ruth 2:10).

Status, then, is an important part of what the Bible means by grace. It is a generous gift from one not obligated given to one not entitled to it. For someone to consistently show favor towards people of lower status is to be “full of grace.” Without a doubt, the most “gracious” person in this context is God himself. In fact, one Hebrew word, often translated as “gracious,” is used exclusively of God (see Exodus 34:6; Psalm 116:5).

The beauty of the narrative of Scripture is that the being of highest status, God himself, generously shows favor to humans of significant lower status. The divine to the human. The infinite to the finite. The immortal to the mortal. The holy to the unclean. This is the constant refrain of Scripture. Repeatedly, humans make a mess of everything and, yet God is persistently gracious. Even more, he doesn't wait until we become worthy of his favor. He shows favor, out of an abundance of divine love, while we are still a mess. In fact, the Exodus 34 scene where God's character is most clearly

deniated is given in the context of human wickedness. Moses has returned atop the mountain to get another copy of the Ten Commandments but also to save his people. The Israelites were just found worshipping an Egyptian god – a god that held them in slavery! But instead of destroying them, God forgives them and shepherds them through the wilderness. God is gracious.

This leads to **Grace Effected**. Grace is not an abstract idea, but an efficacious work of God. Grace accomplishes the work of God in the lives of his people for his glory. The first work is *Salvation* (see Titus 2:11). Grace is the saving work of God, by which he saves sinners out of an abundance of divine love. Grace is a divine gift unmerited and undeserved. It must not be confused with a wage earned or an entitlement gained (Romans 3:23-24, 11:5-6; Ephesians 2:8-9). Remember that grace is a gift from the higher to the lower. Even though God is the one wronged, he extends to us saving grace (Ephesians 1:7).

Secondly, *Sanctification* (see Titus 2:12). Grace is the source of salvation and of sanctification. The Christian life is not about duty, but delight. Having been given the gift of God's immeasurable love, we are to be a grateful people who walk in humility and love. Grace saves. Grace sustains. Grace sanctifies (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Thirdly, grace *Secures* (see Titus 2:13). God that saved us is, as we've seen, the same God who, by his grace, is saving us (i.e., sanctification). He is also the God who will save us. Our future is secure in Christ by his grace (1 Peter 5:10).

The fourth efficacious work of grace is *Service*. In Romans 12:6-8, Paul explores various spiritual gifts in the church (including service, teaching, exhortation, and mercy). Paul argues that these gifts are given for the good of others. It is a humbling reminder that God graciously has blessed us with certain talents, abilities, and opportunities. Being the case, we ought to serve others with it.

Finally, grace helps us persevere in *Suffering*. In 2 Corinthians 12:7-9, Paul laments his thorn in the flesh which he called "a messenger of Satan to harass" him. Scholars debate what the metaphorical thorn was, but clearly it was a source of discomfort, frustration, weakness, and limitation to him. Perhaps it was poor eyesight, malaria, or some other condition. Regardless, it weakened and limited him and what he wanted to do. Paul confessed to frequently asking God to relieve him of his suffering, but through it all, he found that God's grace was sufficient. Even while he was weak, Christ was stronger still. The only thing that will help us persevere through suffering is the grace of God.

John Newton died in 1807. He chose the inscription on his grave, "John Newton, clerk, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy." In the funeral sermon for Newton, his friend Richard Cecil quoted Newton as once saying, "Whatever I may doubt on other points, I cannot doubt whether there has been a certain gracious transaction between God and my soul."