



## TIME OF GRACE®

# *Churchy Words Explained (and Why You Should Care): Grace*

## Study Notes

### *Summary*

Grace is, as some of us have heard a hundred times, amazing. But grace's familiarity can lead to an unintentional dulling of our hearts. Instead of amazing us, shocking us, and confusing us, grace becomes an acronym (God's Riches At Christ's Expense) or a catechism definition (undeserved love). This message, through the story of Paul's conversion, opens our eyes afresh to how amazing grace truly is.

- **Revelation 22:21:** The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.
- **Acts 9:1-19:** <sup>1</sup>Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest <sup>2</sup>and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup>As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup>He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" <sup>5</sup>"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. <sup>6</sup>"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." <sup>7</sup>The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. <sup>8</sup>Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. <sup>9</sup>For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. <sup>10</sup>In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. <sup>11</sup>The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. <sup>12</sup>In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." <sup>13</sup>"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." <sup>15</sup>But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. <sup>16</sup>I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." <sup>17</sup>Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." <sup>18</sup>Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, <sup>19</sup>and after

taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.

- Grace is \_\_\_\_\_.

### *Points to Ponder*

1. Study the three passages where Paul described his conversion to Christianity, noting additional details that didn't appear in Acts chapter 9. The passages are Acts 22:1-16, Acts 26:1-23, and 1 Timothy 1:12-17.
2. In 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9, the longest section on money in the Bible, Paul describes giving as a "grace" (2 Corinthians 8:7). Why would that word apply to giving money away? Read 2 Corinthians 8:9 for a clue.
3. Think of the last person in your life whom you would expect to become a Christian. Pray that God would reach them, just like he reached Saul—by grace.

### *Homework for Next Week*

Read Ephesians 2:1-5.

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Churchy Words Explained (and Why You Should Care): Grace**  
Revelation 22:21; Acts 9:1-19  
February 6, 2022

*Pastor Mike Novotny*

So, a few decades ago, a massive conference of religious scholars was held over in Europe. And as the scholars all gathered around tables and pulled up their chairs, at one point they got into a discussion whether there was anything particularly unique about the Christian faith. I mean, was it the fact that Christians have a holy book that they think comes from God? Well, no, lots of religions have holy books. Was it the fact that they had personal prayers with a higher power? No, lots of religions promote that, too. Was it a belief in an afterlife, a heaven or hell? No, it was not that. Was it doctrine? No. Commandments? No. Rules for living? No. Religious leaders in fancy hats? No, most religions have that. And as they were debating, the legend says that C.S. Lewis walked into the room. Do you know that name? He was the Oxford scholar who was an atheist until intellectually he thought about it, and through God's grace became a Christian in his early 30's. And the question was posed to him, "Mr. Lewis, is there anything unique about the faith that you believe in?" And he said, "Well, that is easy - grace." And he was right.

Whether you are a Christian here today or not, factually, if you would compare the different philosophies, and religions, and thought systems, and world views of the world, you would find out that what makes Jesus and his followers very unique is a teaching called grace. Read the four gospels, the biographies of Jesus. Read the letters of the New Testament by Peter, and Paul, and James, and John, people who knew Jesus personally, and what you will find is that these religious men were not religious in the general sense of the world. They were religious in a very specific way that was founded and based upon this loaded word called grace.

In fact, I had a chance to read every single passage that they wrote that included that word, "grace," and here is what I found out. According to the New Testament, grace reaches people, grace appears to people, grace is poured out on people, so that they find grace, receive grace, believe by grace, and share in grace. If you are a Christian, according to the New Testament you are chosen by grace, called by grace, saved by grace, justified by grace, living in grace, and living under grace. They say that grace is with us, grace works in us, and grace is sufficient for us. They went on to claim that grace overflows, grace increases, grace reigns, grace strengthens, grace gives access to God. That is why we set our hope on grace, grow in grace, and preach the glorious grace of God. That is a lot of grace!

In fact, here is a fun fact. In the Bible, there are 66 different books. The last book is Revelation. In the last book of the Bible, Revelation, there are 22 chapters. In that last chapter, Revelation 22, there are 21 verses, and do you know what the very last book, the very last chapter, the very last verse, the very last word of the entire Bible is? Say it with me - it is, "Amen."

Yes, I will actually show you the passage. It is Revelation 20... sorry I set you up there. The last verse says this. "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen." It is like the Bible insists on getting the last word of grace, and all the author can say is, "Amen." Because people who know Jesus and follow Jesus, they are not just generally religious. Do we pray? Yes. Do we have doctrines? Sure. Do we have a holy book? Absolutely. But what makes this faith so unique, objectively unique, is this one word - grace.

Which kind of begs the question - okay, well, what is it? What is a simple definition that made Jesus stand out in a world where so many people were generally religious? That is what I want to answer for you today. Whether you are a long-time follower of Jesus, kind of new to the church thing, or you are just here with a friend or watching on TV for the first time, today I want to give you a really short, concise, clear, and I hope compelling definition of grace.

But instead of just starting with an open dictionary, I want to start by telling you a story, a story of the first century man who was the poster boy for the concept of grace. We call him Paul, or Saint Paul, or the Apostle Paul. His mom and dad called him Saul. That was his given name, and here is a fun fact. Did you know that the Apostle Paul wrote 28% of the total words of the New Testament? That is a word count, about one-fourth of the New Testament. But if you would track the word, "grace," he is responsible for 73% of its usages. God chose Paul to write 13 letters in the Bible - Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. Every single one of them, every single one, begins with the word, "grace" - I am not trying to trick you this time - and it also ends with the word, "grace." "Grace and peace, grace and peace, grace and peace, grace to you, grace to you, the grace of the Lord Jesus." Like, it did not matter who he was talking to, Paul wanted to make sure that the first word and the last word was the word, "grace."

The internet had not been invented, but if it would have, I am sure Paul would have copyrighted "Grace.com." Paul was single and childless, but if he had met a special someone and had daughters, I bet he would have named them Grace, Gracie, and baby Gray-Gray. I am not sure! He loved it. He could not get enough of it. If you would have met Paul, I could guarantee you in the first minute he would have dropped the word, because Paul's whole life was shaped, and changed, and motivated, and driven by grace.

So, if you have a Bible with you or you just want to follow along on the screen, here is Acts 9, the story of Paul, a.k.a. Saul. "Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem." Paul was deeply religious, profoundly Jewish. He loved the Old Testament and he thought that Jesus was not the guy. And so, Christianity was like this wildfire that was spreading fast, and Paul thought that he had a calling from God to stop it. Now, later in the New Testament, Paul will describe himself as a man who is obsessed, zealous, violent, and we catch that in this text as we find out he was, "Breathing out murderous threats" against the early Christians.

When I think of Saul, at least in the past year or two, I think of him like an evil Mandalorian. Have you seen that show just yet? Like, if you come face to face with, "The Mandalorian," you

are in trouble. He is stronger than you, he is more well-equipped than you. He will hunt you down. Saul is like a bad bounty hunter. And so, it did not matter - male or female, he did not discriminate by gender - if he could track you down, find you, arrest you, drag you back to Jerusalem where you would be killed for simply believing in Jesus. And Paul was absolutely convinced that he was doing the right thing, because Jesus claimed to be God and he categorically was not.

Until one day, Paul met God and found out that his name was Jesus. Verse 3, "As Saul neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he could see nothing. So, they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything."

You know, organized religion is not too popular these days - the scandals, the priests, the pastors, the infidelity, the abuse, and all of it. And so, you know, a lot of people just get in this mindset, and probably, if you are watching at home maybe you have felt this mindset too that, you know, you and God are going to be close. And you are going to love him, and you are going to talk to him, and you are going to worship him, but you do not need this, right? You know, a pastor, a church, the structure - you know, walking into a building does not make you close to God. And so, you kind of think, you know, organized religion is the problem and true spirituality is the solution. But then, you know what happens? You read the Bible. Do you know what the entire Bible is about? Organized religion.

Let me take you back to the Old Testament, where God calls a man named Moses, and he sets apart the Levites to be the priests, and there are the high priests, and there are certain festivals. There is structure where you had to attend an organized religion. And you get to Jesus, and how does he grow up? The Bible says it was his custom to attend church, the synagogue, week after week after week. Jesus, more than anyone, knew the flaws and sins that existed within the church, but what did he do every single weekend? He attended organized religion.

And then, when he launched this religion, claiming, "I am the Messiah," did he just say to his disciples, "Hey, you know, you do you, just connect with God however?" No! He sent them out with authority and they established communities, and in different cities, in the Book of Acts, they would plant churches with pastors. And then you read the rest of the Bible, and do you know what it is? Romans was written to an organized religion. 1 Corinthians, an organized religion. 2 Corinthians, an organized religion. Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, all organized religions. Thessalonians, organized religions. Ah, Timothy! That was just one guy, right? Do you know who Timothy was? A pastor of an organized religion. Titus? Ah, maybe he is the guy. Nope! He was a pastor on the island of Crete. A bishop was appointing pastors so the whole Christian church could be organized on that island.

You get to the Book of Revelation and Jesus speaks. Who does he speak to? Seven different organized religions. And from cover to cover, you find out that Jesus does not have a single good word for people who are solo in their spirituality. And in a thousand different ways, this happens to people who actually listen to Jesus. We think we are doing okay and he just, he runs the light - boom. And like Paul, we feel so convicted, and it is like we cannot eat, we cannot think, and we wonder, "What is God going to do to me?"

That is how Ruth Graham felt. Ruth is one of the children of Billy Graham, the famous Christian evangelist who died back in 2018. After a pretty messy divorce a few years ago, Ruth fell in love again and she fell in love really fast. Her grown children were pretty concerned. They were not sure about this new guy that mom was dating, and Billy Graham and his wife were very concerned. It just seemed so fast that she was diving into the relationship pool after a very painful divorce, but Ruth believed the message of our culture - that you have to be true to yourself, you have to trust your gut, you have to follow your heart. And so, just after six months of knowing a man, she took her vows and she married for the second time. But one day later, literally one day, she saw it. She saw up close all of the red flags that her parents and her own children were worried about, and within a month, she was so afraid of the man that she had married that she packed up her things and she left. And she was so embarrassed that everyone saw it, but in her desire for love, she had not seen it. And she wanted to run, and she wanted to hide, and she did not want to see her parents face-to-face and tell them the tragic and heartbreaking news, but she knew she had to. She could not avoid her parents forever, and so, she drove home to see her father.

In her book about forgiveness, here is how she tells the story. "As I rounded the last bend in my parents' driveway, I saw my father standing, waiting. The time had come. As I turned off the ignition, my father approached. I opened the car door and... he spread his long arms wide. He wrapped me in his tight embrace and he said, "Welcome home." I was wrapped in grace, unmerited, undeserved, merciful, generous. Billy Graham was not God, but he modeled God's grace for me. Never again would the theological definition of grace be just an academic concept. It was now a personal experience."

Let us finish up the story in Acts 9. Verse 10, "In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Then Ananias went to the house and entered it." Please picture this for a second. "He entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord - Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here - he has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. And Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus." Oh, I love the ending of that story so much! Ananias is like, "Jesus, maybe you have not heard the rumors. He came here to kill me! Yeah." And Jesus says, "No, go. You are right, Ananias. He does not deserve it, he is not worthy of it, but that is not the point of it. Go. I have chosen him, I have loved him, I have spoken to him, and I have saved him."

And if you catch the details of the story, you get the Christian faith. "Brother," Ananias said. Brother? You know, isn't it like apprentice or trainee? We will give him a year. Fix the karma, balance out the scales. You are going to invite him to the table with the Father on day one? Yep. "Brother." Immediately, he was baptized. Immediately, he was filled with the Holy Spirit. Immediately, he spent time with the disciples in Damascus. Any religion or philosophy that makes you earn it would have taken Paul a lifetime to fix what he had broken. But Jesus founded a religion that was based on grace, and so, immediately Paul could be loved, saved, and forgiven. Did he deserve any of it? Not a chance, and that is grace.

If you are taking notes today, I would love for you to grab a pen and write down this simple definition. It is the one that I grew up with in the Christian church. Grace is undeserved love. Paul did not deserve it, but Jesus still gave it. He had no right to it, but Jesus still showed it. Saul deserved to be struck with a lightning bolt. Instead, Jesus struck him with love - grace. And it is undeserved love that is not just for Paul, a.k.a. Saul. It is not just for Peter and Matthew. It is not just for James and John. It is for people like you and people like me. I do not know most of your stories. I do not know what happened in the last 24 hours, the last 7 days, or the last few decades, but I can tell you this - that Christianity is uniquely full of grace.

We have a holy book. We have high standards of love. There are commandments and there are doctrines. But more than anything, I want you to know that Christianity is not an Ivy League religion. It is one for killers, like Saul, and sinners, like you. It is the religion for tax collectors like Matthew, and troublemakers, like many of us. It is for prostitutes and people who have slept around. It is for people who doubt and those who have been filled with demons. Christianity is for registered sex offenders and bulldozer moms, and both confess the same fact, that they have fallen short of God's love, but they have been made perfect by the crazy, incredible love of Jesus Christ.

So, friends, I want to encourage you, confess your sins and call on the name of Jesus Christ, because grace makes bad people good, and grace makes relatively good people good enough. Without Jesus and without grace, you cannot get to heaven - you included. But with Jesus and with grace, anyone can get to heaven - you included.

And that is the uniquely surprising, beautiful, and life-changing message that sets the Christian faith apart. Grace is what Agnes experienced many years ago. Author Tony Campolo tells the story that he had a business trip, I believe, in Honolulu. And because of the jet lag, he could not sleep and found himself up at 3:00 in the morning. So, he went to a local diner, kind of a greasy spoon with a rather rough-around-the-edges owner - big belly, white t-shirt stained with grease.



And he found himself a stool at the diner counter, and at 3:30am is when the prostitutes showed up. Apparently, their shift ended about that time and it was their evening custom to gather at this diner. And so, here this Christian man sits with a prostitute on one side and a prostitute on the other, and these prostitutes are talking over him, and one of them says to the other prostitutes, "Tomorrow is my birthday." And the others gave her grief. They said, "Well, do you want a cake?" And the woman, whose name we found out is Agnes, quietly admitted, "I have never had a cake in my whole life." And so, they finished their meal at the diner, they left, and that is when Tony the Christian had an idea. He leaned over the counter and he asked the owner of the diner, "Do you think I could throw Agnes a birthday party?" And the diner said, "Let us do it." And so, he spent the next day finding streamers, and he hung them up. A big sign with markers, "Happy Birthday, Agnes!" The owner of the diner's wife baked the cake, put the candles in, and word quietly spread and Agnes never found out.

And that evening, at about 3:00 in the morning, every prostitute in town was crammed into that little diner. And then, Agnes came through the front door. And they said, "Happy Birthday!" And she was so amazed, her knees buckled. A couple of other prostitutes caught her and they sat her down in a booth, and when she had gathered herself, they brought over her first ever birthday cake. And they sang, and they blew out the candles, and the owner of the diner brought over a knife and he said, "Cut the cake, Agnes!" And she just stared at it. "Go ahead, Agnes, cut the cake." And she stared some more. And she looked up at everyone and she said, "If I promise to come right back, could I take the cake? I want to show my mom."

And the prostitute picked up her birthday cake and she walked out the door, and everyone stared at each other in silence. And the owner of the diner asked Tony, "What kind of church do you go to?" And in a moment, he claims it came from spiritual inspiration and guidance, he said, "I go to the kind of church that throws a party for a prostitute." A prostitute gets a party? That is grace. Saul gets saved? That is grace. God looks at us and he smiles - that is amazing, and that is grace.

So, if I could quote the very last book, and the very last chapter, and the very last verse, and the very last words of this uniquely grace-filled faith, I would say this. "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people," and everyone who is saved by grace said, "Amen." Amen.

Let us pray.

Dear Father in heaven, thank you so much for amazing grace. If you only save the top 10% of moral people - God, if you only saved half, I do not know what I would think. I do not know how I could go through life with any kind of confidence. None of us could. So, thank you, God, that you are not like that. Thank you that you could be Paul, the worst of sinners, and yet be saved. Thank you that anyone here today, anyone listening, that there is still a chance that they can come to you, confess their sins, hold onto Jesus, and be a brother, a sister, one of your sons or daughters. Thank you, Father, that when we come home to you in repentance, your arms are open wide and you say, "Welcome home." Thank you, Jesus, for doing everything, that every spiritual gift could be ours. We love you so much, but we know that you loved us first - not because we earned it and not because we deserve it, but because you are the kind of Savior who is full of grace. Thank you, Jesus. In your name we pray, Amen.