

# GRACE—THE GIFT OF GOD (GRACE GREATER THAN OUR SIN)

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More often than not, we hear God's grace defined as an undeserved gift—unearned merit or favor. That God loves us in spite of our sin, and that Christ died for us though we don't deserve it is the essence of grace. Unearned, in the sense that we don't deserve it, and merit or favor, in the sense that we can only find our true value in God. But I get the sense that the way we talk about grace today seems to cheapen it. We get ourselves into a tight spot, or we commit a major blunder, and we say, "Oh I've fallen from grace. I've sinned." And we quickly follow with, "But that's okay. God is a God of grace and forgiveness." In other words, we sin, we ask for forgiveness, and God forgives, all in the span of minutes or hours, and we're back to the way things were before.

Jeremy Treat, in an article titled, "Grace is Not a Thing," quoted "the great American theologian Al Pacino" who once said, "I asked God for a bike, but I know God doesn't work that way. So I stole a bike and asked for forgiveness." Now before you criticize Mr. Pacino, think about how you view the call to holy living. "Well, I try to live right, to do the right thing, but I keep making a mess of things. I sin. And every day, when I sin, I just ask God to forgive me," and he does. Could it be that we fail to grasp what the Grace of God is all about by equating it with a free ticket or a get-out-of-jail-free card? What about the transforming power of grace, and what it can do for us if we let it?

Dallas Willard once said that grace is a gift from God, but God is not just the giver of the gift, he IS the gift. What we need and don't deserve is God, his love and yes, his mercy and forgiveness as well. And we receive his grace in the form of himself. So this undeserved gift from God that we call grace is in fact, God, and his presence with us. And we receive his gift day after day, God with us. By his grace we are saved, healed, empowered, restored, loved, to live a life of grace and peace with others. This GRACE is not a one time or an every-now-and-then gift. It is, in fact, the gift of eternal life.

So then, what happens to us when we receive the grace of God. Do we just feel better about ourselves? Do we feel a burden lifted? Perhaps these are residual effects of the grace of God. But I believe that when we receive God's grace, when we experience God with us, we find peace in the midst of a storm, we find joy in the face of darkness, we find hope in the deepest loss, and we find love in the Christ of the cross. And the way to carry on, after receiving the grace and mercy and love of God, is to commit ourselves to search for more and more grace, more and more of God with us. And the only way to receive his grace is with a spirit of humility as we discover more and more of God with us, and we share more and more of that grace with others.

So today, as you experience the warmth and glow of God's presence with you, a presence that is full of grace, grace that is given to you freely, that gushes from the heart of the Christ who died for us, will you humble yourself and pray, and bow down and worship? Will you fall on your knees and sing "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is the Lord?" And as you wallow in the grace of God, will you go deeper and deeper on a path of searching with all your heart to know him better, to experience him right where you are, in the darkest places and in the light? And as that flowing grace covers you, will you share God's grace with one who crosses your path, one whom perhaps you know, one whom perhaps you have trouble knowing and understanding, one whom perhaps is not like you, but who deserves to receive that gift of grace, because God has already determined it for every one of us—all of us?

## PRAYER

Oh God, who is full of grace and love, who is GRACE and LOVE, we humbly ask, will you this day walk with us? And may we, even in our undeserving and unearned ways, walk with you and receive your GRACE, and allow it to permeate our very souls, so that we don't just receive your LOVE, but we live your love, and in living it, we BECOME more like you. AMEN