

**The Scandal of Grace**  
**Genesis 45:1-15**  
**Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32**

Like most persons in my generation, I was brought up by hard working parents. My brothers and I were taught that when we work hard, practice good ethics and kindness, and make sound decisions then we would reap the benefits and be rewarded. Bad behavior received punishment while good behavior received reward. For many of you here today, you know what it is like to have to earn a living. You worked hard to get where you are today. The payoff for hard work is a retirement that allows you to live without working and still have a place to rest your head at night and food on your table.

There is nothing wrong with hard work. In fact, hard work does have its benefits. But when it comes to God's grace, we are not entitled to receive it because of our hard work. In fact, we can't do anything to earn God's grace. God's grace is not for sale. Nor is it something we deserve more than those who have done nothing to receive it. This is a difficult concept for us to fully understand and believe. We have witnessed how working hard to get something usually pays off with some sort of reward.

Think of it in terms of two men who are employed by the same employer. One man gets to work on time, puts in a full day's work—even 110% of his effort, and doesn't head home until after his time is up. The other man comes to work late, slacks on his job, is rude to his fellow co-workers, and takes off early from work. Yet when the paycheck comes around, both men are paid exactly the same. Not fair, right?

Or is it? Because God's grace is not something we can earn, any effort to do so brings us to the same conclusion as the other who does nothing to deserve it. The free gift of grace is just that—free! It is free for the good guy as much as it is free to the bad guy. It is free for the straight A student as much as it is free for the class bully. Think of it this way:

During the building of the Golden Gate Bridge over San Francisco Bay, construction fell badly behind schedule because several workers had accidentally fallen from the scaffolding to their deaths. Engineers and administrators could find no solution to the costly delays. Finally, someone suggested a gigantic net be hung under the bridge to catch any who fell. Finally in spite of the enormous cost, the engineers opted for the net. After it was installed, progress was hardly interrupted. A worker or two fell into the net but were saved. Ultimately, all the time lost to fear was regained by replacing fear with faith in the net.<sup>1</sup>

God's grace is like the net below the Golden Gate Bridge. It is always there to catch us when we fall. And for those who have already fallen, grace was there to catch them.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Baxter, The Free Gift. [http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/g/grace\\_gods.htm](http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/g/grace_gods.htm) (accessed August 9, 2011)

Or think of it this way: When a person works an eight-hour day and receives a fair day's pay for his time, that is a wage. When a person competes with an opponent and receives a trophy for his performance, that is a prize. When a person receives appropriate recognition for his long service or high achievements, that is an award. But when a person is not capable of earning a wage, can win no prize, and deserves no award--yet receives such a gift anyway--that is a good picture of God's unmerited favor. This is what we mean when we talk about the grace of God.<sup>2</sup>

Here in Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome shows that many Christians were grumbling that Jews did not deserve God's grace because they refused to believe in Jesus. But Paul refutes this claim and shows how God has always loved His people, even when they disobeyed him and fell far from His ways. This is good news for all persons. For as God's people, God loves us even when we don't deserve it. But there is more to God's love than simply grace. God not only constantly offers us grace, but God is also constantly calling us. God calls us to better our ways. God calls us to our jobs, our families, and our faith journey. God calls us to make the most of our mistakes and learn to be more faithful.

We are comforted knowing that God is gracious to us even when we fall short of his glory and yet we are also called to learn from our shortcomings. The scandal of grace is that it is free—no strings attached. Nothing we can do or say can earn us God's grace. The story of Joseph is a great illustration of this point. Think of how Joseph's brothers, out of jealous anger, sold him into slavery to a foreigner and told their father that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast. Yet because of God's hand in Joseph's life, Joseph overcame his slavery and even false imprisonment to become the second in command in Egypt. And when his brothers came to Egypt during the famine to seek food for their families, they did not recognize that the very one offering them food was the same brother that they sold into slavery!

Joseph, however, knowing that God's hand was guiding his life, knew that it was his responsibility to forgive his brothers. Did they deserve forgiveness? No. In fact, they should have been punished. But the grace of Joseph mirrored that of God's. The irrational, unconditional love of that kind can only be the work of God.

So the next time you see that person who wronged you, remember that God's grace is extended to even that person. The next time you happen upon a stranger who repulses you, remember that God's grace is freely given to that stranger. As hard as it is for us to fully comprehend and accept, we must also understand that what we are not capable of, God is. God is the one who sacrificed His only begotten son—who was himself sinless—on behalf of our sins. God is the one who is calling each person, no matter where he or she is in life, to return to God's love and care.

When Billy Graham was driving through a small southern town, he was stopped by a policeman and charged with speeding. Graham admitted his guilt, but was told by the officer that he would have to appear in court.

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<sup>2</sup> G.W. Knight, Clip-Art Features for Church Newsletters, p. 53. [http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/g/grace\\_gods.htm](http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/g/grace_gods.htm) (accessed August 9, 2011)

The judge asked, "Guilty, or not guilty?" When Graham pleaded guilty, the judge replied, "That'll be ten dollars -- a dollar for every mile you went over the limit."

Suddenly the judge recognized the famous minister. "You have violated the law," he said. "The fine must be paid--but I am going to pay it for you." He took a ten dollar bill from his own wallet, attached it to the ticket, and then took Graham out and bought him a steak dinner! "That," said Billy Graham, "is how God treats repentant sinners!"<sup>3</sup>

No one—not any one in this room or anyone beyond our walls—will ever deserve God's grace, and yet because of God's awesome gift of Jesus Christ, God's grace is free for the taking! May you live in God's grace and share it with everyone around you. Amen.

### **Prayer:**

Gracious Lord,

In your great mercy, we humbly acknowledge that we are your children who make mistakes. Yet you in your unconditional faithfulness and love to us freely offer us the grace we simply don't deserve. Thank you for this most precious gift! In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> *Progress Magazine*, December 14, 1992. <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/g/grace.htm> (accessed August 11, 2011)