

#268 "Abundant Grace"

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Acts 4:33 says, "And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all."

1 Timothy 1: 14 says, "And the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus."

Romans 5:17 says, "For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ."

John 1:16 says, "For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace."

The phrase "abundant grace" almost seems cliché that we may be prone to gloss over the depth of implications that it encapsulates. We need to come at the concept of grace without baggage and boredom, and we need to be impacted by how it transforms our understanding of ourselves, our relationship with God, and our relationship with others.

First, let us concentrate on what the reality of grace says about us. Given that we need grace from God in order to be saved, made whole, given a new identity in Christ, redeemed, regenerated, made holy, and given eternal life, obviously grace is rather abundant in its saving and transformative power. Furthermore, it implies that we are totally hopeless and lost without the grace of God. Grace does not mean that we are pretty good people and that God gives us the added boost to make it to heaven. It means that we are complete and utter failures spiritually because of our fallen wicked hearts and laundry lists of sin (Genesis 6:5, Jeremiah 17:9, Isaiah 64:6, Romans 3:23). Grace says that we need a Savior and that we cannot save ourselves. It means that it makes no sense to trust in manmade systems or rules to save us and make us holy. It means that no amount of obedience can outweigh the sin that we have committed. It means that we are foolish to simply try harder in the flesh to make God accept us and love us. God demonstrated His love to us in Christ while we were yet sinners (Romans 5:8). **We didn't do anything to make Him love us; He just did because it is Who He is!** Grace is God reaching back to us through Christ's sacrifice even when we could have cared less. Grace is a total indictment of man with no exceptions. Grace is totally undeserved, totally unmerited, in no way a credit to ourselves, in no way evidence of anything good we have done, and only credit and glory to God for being merciful and loving to a creation that He loved into existence but which didn't love Him in return (John 1:10). Man needs an abundance of grace because he is abundant filth and hopelessness without it.

Second, let us reflect upon what grace says about the God Who gives it. Grace is revelatory of the fact that God is both good and just at the same time. He couldn't just overlook man's sin because that would make Him unjust and thus not a good God worth worshipping. Jesus had to die as a ransom for

our sin to satisfy God's just wrath (Matthew 20:28). This was a good and generous gift of God to man, and it proved that God would do anything to give man a chance to be redeemed and forgiven. He didn't even withhold His only begotten Son Jesus Christ because He loves man so much (John 3:16). **Grace is not God ignoring sin, overlooking sin, or arbitrarily deciding that it really isn't that bad after all.**

Rather, grace is God giving man the ultimate gift at the ultimate price through Jesus laying down His life so that others could live. Grace is thus an unmerited prize, an un-asked for offer, a gift bought with the greatest price (1 Corinthians 6:20), and the purest expression of love known to the world. God defines the abundance of grace by the gift of His Son Jesus Christ Who gave what only He could give to pay the penalty only He could pay to save what only He could save. Christ not only willingly laid His life down, but He also took it up again (John 10:18) by rising from the dead and proclaiming victory over sin and the grave. By faith in Christ, we can become adopted as sons and daughters of the Most High God and be seated with Him in heaven (Ephesians 2:6). We were lost orphans destined for fire, but in Christ we have a home, a family, and are joint inheritors with Jesus of God's eternal wonders, riches, and blessings. Grace reveals God's incredible love, His kind desire to see man repent and be part of His eternal family, and His absolute goodness and generosity in being willing to give His Son Jesus to die as a ransom for sin.

Lastly, those who understand this grace and who have received of its abundance will find that the wonder of Christ's unconditional love transforms their interactions with others. Ephesians 4:29 says, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear." Grace freely received is always looking to give freely of that abundantly overflowing grace in Christ to others with acts of kindness, words of encouragement, exhortations of truth, and open hearts that listen, forgive, and are gentle (Ephesians 4:32). Colossians 4:6 says, "Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person." Grace points people to God by reflecting His ways to them in gracious actions and speech. Grace doesn't condemn, but grace listens. Grace demonstrates obvious love without condition or agenda, and unconditional acceptance of the person is made clear. Grace, by creating a safe haven, opens up doors that judgment and legalism close because it allows people to be honest with themselves and about what they think about God and about what He thinks about them. Then, truth can be spoken according to the need of the hearer with words guided by wisdom, empowered by the Spirit, and effective for change (1 Corinthians 16:9).

God's grace is so different from what the world is used to. They understand striving for approval, conditional love, working their way up the relational ladder, earning points for favors in return, scratching others' backs so that they will scratch theirs in return, lying, deceit, betrayal, unfaithfulness, keeping records of wrongs, and so on. Grace changes everything and flips the world we know upside down. Grace helps us forgive, for we have been forgiven. It teaches us to love, for we have been loved first. It teaches us to genuinely care about the welfare of others even more than our own (Philippians 2:3-4) just as Jesus did in willingly going to earth and then to the cross (Philippians 2:5-10). Jesus' love controls us (2 Corinthians 5:14), compels us, and motivates us to live in a way that contrasts with the world and makes the world stop and take notice (John 13:34-35, Matthew 5:16). For them, love isn't supposed to be this true, this real, this undeserved, this unconditional, this selfless, this forgiving, this

kind, this priceless, and this permanent. It is humanly impossible, but that is why the gospel is supernatural. God entered the world in Jesus, died for it, rose again, ascended into heaven, and now indwells His church through the Holy Spirit. Abundant grace when properly understood and appreciated cannot be easily hidden or suppressed, but it overflows the heart of the believer and impacts a world of lack, loneliness, loss, and desperate need.

God's abundant grace means that He will always love those who have received of His grace, and He will always only do what is best and kindest for them. He will keep sanctifying them and transforming them into His likeness, and He will use them to shine forth His grace to others. Abundant grace is a supernatural phenomenon, and it will have a supernatural effect.