

*The Gospel of
Saving Grace*

By Chad Sychtysz

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*This book is dedicated to the good memories of
my brother Tracy (1965–2003)*

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Preface

In 2003, I wrote *The Gospel of Grace*, my first religious book. For various reasons, this was not published until 2008 by the (now defunct) Religious Supply Center in Louisville, KY. At the time, that book was the best that I could do on a subject that was very detailed, involved, and controversial. The reason why I wrote it in the first place was because there was so little written on “grace” beyond the world of denominational writers and preachers. I felt strongly that Christians—and even non-Christians who are nonetheless seeking the truth—needed a fresh perspective that rested solely on biblical support rather than trying to defend one denominational doctrine or another.

My book was not a big seller, but this was no real surprise. I was a no-name author writing about a subject that most Christians think that they already have figured out. Besides this, I have often said that (most) religious books are in a genre just one notch above poetry in sales and interest. Despite this, my book was well-received by those who read it. Several groups in various churches around the country did in-depth studies on “grace” based upon the content of my work. This was personally rewarding, to be sure, and I am grateful for the many complimentary responses I received.

Even so, I had a nagging feeling early on that I could do better. It was not the subject matter, or my basic approach to it, but it was my writing style that disappointed me. It was wordy, clunky, and a bit unprofessional at times. I did not like the “voice” that I had chosen—one that was intended to be friendly, but that sometimes came across as presumptuous or condescending. Other writing projects forced me to put any further thoughts on *The Gospel of Grace* aside. In the back of my mind, however, I had already decided to one day re-write the book.

What you are holding now is the realization of that back-of-my-mind decision. I spent nearly a year rewriting the entire manuscript of the original “grace” book—every chapter, paragraph, and word choice was weighed, scrutinized, and evaluated. I made many

changes, both large and small. I deleted three chapters from the original layout and wrote two completely new ones in their place. I changed the “voice”—the style and diction that narrates the entire work—to something that was more relaxed with a “come, let us reason together” tone. One of the added chapters (“Calvinism and Christianity”) deals with a technical subject that was sorely missing in the first book. I also changed the title (slightly) to *The Gospel of Saving Grace*, so as to focus the attention more on grace’s role in salvation rather than simply God’s kindness (or, benevolence) that He demonstrates toward all people.

If you read the original book, I am quite confident you will enjoy—and benefit from—this one even more. If this is your first journey into the subject of saving grace, then I am equally confident that this will provide you with a biblical overview of this grand topic and will give you much to think about. Feel free to contact me with any feedback: chad@booksbychad.com.

Sincerely,
Chad Sychtysz
(March, 2020)

Introduction

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. (Rom. 5:1–2)

Grace.” This word conveys beauty, kindness, and spiritual enlightenment. Everyone has heard this word, and virtually everyone has *appealed* to its excellence in some way or another. People use “grace” to convey superior qualities of virtue or elegance. Generally speaking, grace is innately recognized as one of the finest of all human virtues. We all want to be shown grace when we fail others, and in our finest moments is when we ourselves are gracious toward others when they fail us.

We call God’s grace “amazing,” and we are astounded that such a fine gift is made available to us at all. The New Testament in the Bible has a lot to say about divine grace. Preachers regularly cite grace as an essential part of man’s salvation; the greatest theologians in the world have devoted a great deal of time and attention to it. Men include grace as a part of their congregation’s name, and people typically invoke God’s grace as the sole cure for their troubled life. Not surprisingly, then, Christians who have tasted of such divine sweetness write about it, sing about it, and talk about it. As the song says, grace has taken us this far, and grace will lead us home.

With all this pre-existing attention to grace, why then did I feel the need to write a book about it? The short answer is: while many people may understand the basic concept of grace, not everyone understands the theology, dynamics, and implications of it. I speak from experience: I had been a Christian for nearly twenty years before seriously entering into a study of grace. I had never truly understood grace beyond the rather primary definition of “unmerited favor.” Grace *is* an unmerited favor, to be sure, but that short definition is by no means an explanation. “Unmerited favor” is vague and over-simplistic, especially for something as important as what we

are talking about. We ought to be thinking, “What *is* the favor? *Why* is it a favor, and why must it *be* unmerited? And what am I supposed to *do* with it once I have it?”

On the other hand, since the subject of grace seems ethereal and incomprehensible, people may avoid a deeper study of it altogether. Grace is often assigned to a group of mysterious subjects (like the kingdom of God, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, how God answers prayers, etc.) that Christians often avoid because we feel we cannot (or simply do not think we need to) define them *absolutely*. To some, grace is a nebulous, metaphysical abstract which cannot be explained except through one’s own subjective interpretation. Thus, grace is to you whatever *you* want it to be, and it is to me whatever *I* want it to be. Yet, this approach does not work—not simply because I personally dislike it, but because it reduces the reality of God’s salvation to a mere emotional experience. I do not want merely to *feel* saved; I want to know I am saved *in reality*. I cannot teach people my *feelings* about divine grace; I must teach them what God has *revealed* about His grace.

Grace is an inseparable part of God’s message of redemption: by it, men are saved; without it, they are lost. This means saving grace must be known absolutely, definitively, and without interfering with or contradicting other aspects of salvation. My personal feelings or convictions concerning grace are irrelevant; what matters is what God has told us in His revealed word (the Bible). Unfortunately, people who write books on grace typically avoid a doctrinal definition and application of it. Many of these merely cater to audiences seeking a particular style of writing—one that gravitates toward heartwarming, sentimental prose rather than an objective exposition of the Scriptures. I have read numerous books filled with wonderful, and often powerful, stories of those who have been deeply affected by God’s grace. Such anecdotal testimonies are inspirational, to be sure, but they cannot duplicate or replace what the New Testament actually *teaches* about grace. I dare not trust my relationship with God (and my soul’s future) to someone else’s subjective experience with grace—nor should you trust yours!

Likewise, a cursory glance into the Scriptures will not do justice in explaining *what grace really is*. One cannot merely cite Eph. 2:8 (“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God”) and say, “Well then, there you have it: we’re saved by grace and that’s all you need to know.” First of all, this passage was never intended to be a comprehensive definition of grace. Secondly, this approach is very unsatisfying for the one who wishes to delve deeper into the mind of God, as we who *seek* Him are anxious to do. Thirdly, a superficial approach to grace does not explain *how* it transforms our lives. Many Christians are not even aware they are supposed to do anything *with* grace, but think grace is only something done *to* them. If “by the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Cor. 15:10), then certainly there must be more to grace than just having it applied to my salvation in some mysterious and inexplicable manner. Grace is a gift of God, but He does not give us gifts to hoard for ourselves or merely file away in our memory. He gives us gifts to *use* in our service to others, to bring Him glory and honor, and to perfect us in the process. What we do with the gift says a great deal about how we regard the Giver.

Many Christians tend to leave spiritual subjects like grace, justification, or propitiation to the preachers, seminary students, and theologians. Often, whatever conclusion the so-called “clergy” comes up with, we nod in approval and recycle it in our group Bible studies. But the New Testament was never intended to be read and studied only by preachers and theologians. Nor was it written for man-made denominational organizations. Nor was it written for *congregations*, meaning any identifiable, established group of Christians. Nor was it written to be left unread altogether. The word of God was revealed and preserved for you to be read *by* you, and by *us*—common, ordinary Christians.

I say that in a tongue-in-cheek way, since there is really nothing common or ordinary about being a Christian. Christians are blood-bought and soul-cleansed people—each one is a “living stone” in Christ’s spiritual temple, His church (1 Pet. 2:5). They have been blessed with a “living hope” (1 Pet. 1:3)—a hope made possible *by*

the grace of God—to stand in the very Presence of God in His own heavenly realm. They also enjoy a fellowship with Him that exceeds all physical explanation and defies all attempts to fully describe it. If *you* are a Christian, then this is how you should see yourself. If you are *not* a Christian, then you have every opportunity to become one. The grace of God can *make* you one. God Himself wants nothing less than this.

The saving grace of God is not something men confer upon other men, nor is it something over which churches exercise control. Saving grace comes from heaven; this is its only source. Things that come *from* heaven are defined and governed *by* heaven. Grace is part of God's truth, which is to say that grace is part of God's authority as revealed to man through Scripture. We are not responsible for creating "truth," but we can speak the truth where God has already spoken it. It is not legalistic to speak of saving grace in the exact manner and context in which it is used in the word of God. It is not legalistic to cite God's *law* about how human souls are made right with God. Salvation is not an emotional or subjective experience; it is based upon a *legal process* of justification which includes both human faith (Rom. 5:1–2) *and* divine grace (Titus 3:7).

The Bible was written and designed so that people might believe in God and secure their salvation through a means which is otherwise impossible (John 20:30–31). God's grace is not just part of that means; it *is* the means. But grace—and salvation itself—must not be limited to only one part of a person's life. The kind of believing that leads to salvation does not end with one's conversion. It continues to draw us closer to God in an ever-increasing, ever-deepening fellowship that transforms everything *about* the believer. Thus, not only is his belief system transformed, but so is his heart, his soul, his life, and all of his earthly relationships (one way or another). So, when we talk about grace, we are really not only talking about what we *believe*, but also what we *become*.

The study of divine grace is admittedly an involved one. But, instead of being intimidated by a little extra reading and meditating, you would do well to approach this wonderful gift of God with great

anticipation and eagerness. This subject is not beyond us—and it is not beyond you. We are not talking quantum physics here, and you do not need a college degree or seminary ordination to understand it. You just need to approach it God’s way, without clinging to pre-conditioned pathways of thinking or pre-formed conclusions. In fact, having an objective approach that is open to new ways of thinking, observing, and implementing is probably the hardest part of the study. The doctrine itself is not terribly difficult. Regardless, saving grace directly affects your eternity; that fact alone makes it an extremely important study.

God wants us—*all* of us—to learn about His grace. More emphatically, He desires that we hunger and thirst for His grace, embrace it fully and completely, and allow it to flood our entire being. Virtually everyone seeks forgiveness of their sins, but many fail to realize that forgiveness is a path, not a destination. You should not seek God’s grace merely so that you can be forgiven; you should seek His grace so that, once you *are* forgiven, you can become more and more like Christ. First things first, of course: you cannot become more Christ-like *until* you are forgiven, and you cannot be forgiven until you are “in Christ”—i.e., in a covenant relationship with God *through* Christ. “In Christ” is where God’s saving grace and “every spiritual blessing” are found (Eph. 1:3); the doctrinal teaching on this will be explained in the following chapters. The immediate point is: God always operates according to a logical and progressive order of things, and thus we ought to learn to *think* in this same manner.

Christ challenges every person to leave himself (or herself) behind to follow Him (Mat. 16:24). This is a radical and transcendent message, one that is (sadly) foreign to many members in so-called “Christian” churches. Christ’s invitation is not one that ought to be taken lightly; He will not accept those who reject it, which is to say that He will not *save* such people. In fact, Christ—not me, and not Christians—divides all of humanity into two groups: those who believe in Him, and those who reject Him (in one way or another) (Mat. 7:13–14). Another description of the two divisions is: those who are saved by grace, and those who have rejected that grace.

Everyone who has sinned is in need of grace; the entire message of Christ's redemption is all about this grace that we so desperately need (Rom. 3:23–24). His gospel is inseparable from and impossible without grace, and vice versa. It is, in a very real sense, the gospel of saving grace.

The gospel of saving grace. This gospel is a message from God overflowing with all kinds of good things, like an armful of beautifully-wrapped packages given to you from a very kind and benevolent admirer. Or, it is like a treasure chest filled with the wealth and secrets of some extremely powerful and wise king, and you are allowed not only to open it, but are permitted to keep whatever is inside—and *no one can take it away from you*. This is how the gospel of grace ought to be appreciated; this is the context in which it must be understood. The apostle Paul actually calls his message “the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24); he also uses “the grace of Christ” and “the gospel of Christ” interchangeably (Gal. 1:6–7). The gospel of God's saving grace is not only a fine subject, it is one worthy of our time and investigation.

In preparation for your venture into the subject of saving grace, I strongly recommend that you read the books of Luke and Acts in the New Testament. This reading will provide you with the historical and biblical context of Jesus' teaching to His apostles and their implementation of this teaching in the early church. When it comes to the teaching on a biblical subject, I do not have any special information that you cannot have: we can all read the same verses in the same books in the same Bible.¹ I also strongly recommend that you read through *my* book without stopping to look up every biblical citation or endnote. After this, I recommend that you read through it again, and this time *do* look up every citation and endnote. The citations and endnotes are there for a reason, but I do not want you to miss the flowing progression of thought being developed throughout this book.²

In order to approach the subject of grace in an organized manner, this book has been divided into three major sections. **Section One** deals with the doctrine of saving grace, where we will examine grace

as it is defined and expounded upon in the Bible. I make no apology for appealing directly to Scripture, but I am also sensitive to how people will react when coming face to face with the word of God for what may be the first time. You may even find some disagreement between what you believe personally, or what your church teaches, and what the Bible actually says. Nonetheless, this study regards the Bible *as* the revealed word of God, and (therefore) as our sole and final authority for all matters of salvation.

Section Two deals with the problems people have with grace—what I refer to as people’s *resistance* to grace. Just because God offers us something as wonderful as saving grace does not mean everyone approaches it with the proper perspective. Those who resist God’s grace will most certainly not benefit from it. The gospel itself is salvation to the one who believes it, but condemns the one who refuses it (John 3:36, 2 Cor. 2:14–16, et al). This section offers an overview of some of these problems, as well as proposed solutions to them.

Section Three reveals where grace is supposed to lead us and what we are supposed to do with it. The ultimate objective of grace is not just to deal with sin (atonement), but to bring us into an ever-deepening, holy relationship with God the Father (consecration). This last section is perhaps the most practical and rewarding of the entire book. It is necessary, however, to first lay the groundwork with the other sections before leaping ahead, just as a chess player does not jump into tournaments before devoting himself to the moves and strategies of the game and its masters.

Our Master in this case is Christ Himself, and He has so much to teach us.

Section One:

The Doctrine of Saving Grace

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Chapter 1

≡ *The Saving Grace of God* ≡

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus . . . (Rom. 3:21–24)

Grace” is not necessarily a *religious* word. It only becomes **G**one when it is used in a religious context. But it certainly is a very *positive* word. In its ultimate sense, it appeals to a certain attribute, quality, or state of being that is altogether uncommon and transcendent. Grace is never used in a derogatory manner, except in sarcasm or irony. When a girl trips over the carpet or stumbles over her own two feet, someone is bound to say, “Way to go, Grace!”—which means she has performed in such a way that is anything but “graceful.”

Grace often implies a connection to the divine—there’s that *transcendent* aspect—or speaks to a spiritual quality of the thing or person being described. Thus, people in centuries past hailed kings and queens as “Your Grace,” with the understanding that there was some divine conferment or endorsement in their having obtained such royal positions. Historically, grace has been invoked in songs and national anthems in which people sought a higher blessing from God than what they could have produced themselves.

The word “grace” is derived from the Latin *gratus*, meaning “pleasing,” and then later *gratia*, meaning “a pleasing quality.”³ It refers to the beauty of thought, form, or expression; or, that which is elegant, refined, or attractive. In a moral context, it refers to that which is right, proper, or decent. When we talk about graceful motion, for example, we think of ballet, figure skating, or synchronized swimming. When we talk about graceful talents, this

calls to mind people with artistic ability such as painters, poets, musicians, and the like. When a person is gracious, we understand him or her to be generous, well-mannered, and considerate. Grace is positive, warm, gentle, and courteous. Whether or not we manifest grace to others, we certainly welcome others' grace to us.

The Grace of God

When we talk of God's grace, we imply these same positive, virtuous characteristics, but on a much deeper and more substantive level. God is not merely "nice" or "courteous" to us; His grace extends far beyond such mild or generic definitions. God is not just elegant or refined; while someone may use these terms to describe Him, such words do not fully convey what He does for us. God's dealings with us are gracious, to be sure, but this does not mean He is merely well-mannered and well-pleasing. It hurts our understanding of God and His grace by using limited meanings or inferior definitions to describe them. It would be good for us to allow God's revealed word to define His grace in its rightful and appropriate context.

The word originally translated "grace" from the Hebrew Old Testament usually means "favor," as when one extends kindness to another. It is derived from a root word (*chanan*) meaning "to stoop down."⁴ An adult, for example, may literally stoop down to the physical height of a small child in order to speak with him face-to-face. The adult does not do this to belittle the child, but to better relate to him. This is the literal meaning of the word "condescend" [lit., *con-* ("with") + *descend* ("to lower")] and describes what God does to us—He stoops down or condescends to our level. He does not do this to patronize or belittle us, but so that we can have *fellowship* with Him. For example, God came down (or, descended) upon Mt. Sinai for the people of Israel's first meeting with Him (Exod. 19:18). Since there was no way they could have gone up to heaven to meet with Him, He had to come down to them.⁵

This "stooping" action also implies that the one in need of favor is lacking in something that the other (condescending one) possesses. The one who lacks cannot achieve this favor on his own; it must be given to or conferred upon him. Without such favor (or grace) being

granted to him, he remains in a deficient or negative light. Apart from the bestowal of grace, he remains inferior to what he *could* be. With this favor, however, he is able to enjoy whatever the giver already possesses. The ultimate “giver” of all good things is God: “The LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD gives grace and glory; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly” (Psalm 84:11). He is willing and able to give to *us* who are lacking what *He* already enjoys.

Traditionally, “favor” is often linked with life, while the lack of favor is associated with death. In ancient Oriental empires, such as Persia, if one approached an emperor without having been summoned by him, or in an offensive manner, that person lost his life since he did not find favor with (or, receive grace from) the emperor. However, if the emperor were to “dip the scepter” toward his guest, then favor (grace) was extended toward that person and he lived (e.g., Esther 4:11, 5:2). This is very similar to what believers find in approaching God—or in being denied such approach, as in the case of unbelievers. Again, to approach God in His favor is to enter into fellowship with Him. No one can achieve this fellowship, however, unless God (the “emperor,” in this case) grants it to us through His own graciousness.

In the New Testament, the word most often translated “grace” is from the Greek *charis*, which refers to a benefit (of any kind), gift, or unmerited favor.⁶ It is often used in reference to what God gives us through Christ (1 Cor. 1:4, 2 Tim. 1:9, et al). In light of this, some mistakenly teach that “grace” is only a New Testament subject and “law” is only an Old Testament subject. This has led some to the false idea that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament could not possibly be the same God, since they come across so differently! Some of this misunderstanding is based upon passages such as John 1:17: “For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.” Yet, in the Old Testament, divine grace most certainly existed, as exemplified in God’s gracious dealings with Israel and other nations, though the emphasis of the Law of Moses was to codify law in order to

define *sin* (Rom. 7:7, Gal. 3:19). God's sovereign authority needed to be established up front; law and order among God's people are contingent upon that authority.

In the New Testament, law continues to exist—it is impossible for *sin* to exist apart from *law* (Rom. 4:15, 5:13)—but the emphasis of the gospel is to save *sinner*s, not merely define their sins (1 Tim. 1:15). God worked through Moses to bring about an understanding of *law*, but not to the exclusion of *grace*.⁷ God worked through Jesus to bring about an understanding of *grace*, but not to the exclusion of *law*. Different emphases in different contexts must be taken into account in order to know accurately what is being taught. God will not confer saving grace upon those who willfully and impenitently defy His laws. There would be no *need* for divine grace if there were no laws to break, for then no one could be charged with *sin*, and therefore no one would need to be saved from anything.

God the Father, like Christ, does not change: He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow (Heb. 13:8). The gracious God of the New Testament is also the gracious God of the Old Testament. Different stages of human history, human knowledge, and human spiritual development required God to respond in the way He did in ancient times, just as it requires Him to respond in a certain way in our contemporary world. God is not two-faced, nor did He soften His image in the New Testament. Those who stubbornly remain in rebellion to God today will face the same wrath as was displayed against the stubbornly ungodly nations of the Old Testament. Those who stand in favor with God today, having submitted to His gospel, will enjoy the same unfathomable grace and kindness as He bestowed upon faithful men and women in the pre-Christian era. “Behold then,” says Paul, “the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you [believers], God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off” (Rom. 11:22, bracketed word added).

In what way or manner has God “stooped down” to us? According to the apostle Paul, He did so through His Son, Jesus Christ: “For the grace of God has appeared [in the form of Jesus Christ], bringing

salvation to all men” (Titus 2:11, bracketed words added). Jesus is the “Word” who was with God the Father, who *is* a Personage of the Godhead, and who “became flesh [or, human], and dwelt among us” (John 1:1–2, 14). Jesus referred to Himself when He said, “For the bread of God is that which *comes down* out of heaven, and *gives life* to the world” (John 6:33, emphasis added). Jesus *came down* to save us, since there is no way that we could *ascend upward* to Him on our own merit or power (Rom. 10:6–7). He had what we desperately needed—*life in His name*—and therefore came down out of heaven in order to make this available to us.

We will discuss all of this in more detail later, but for now it is important to know that God *did* “stoop down”—He *has* made divine grace available to all men. God did not just talk about stooping down; He did not send a heavenly committee or delegation of angels to represent Him stooping down. Rather, His Son—“the radiance of His [the Father’s] glory and the exact representation of His nature” (Heb. 1:3*a*, bracketed words added)—became like us, lived among us, suffered alongside us, and died *for* us so that we might be rescued from our self-inflicted spiritual demise. All this, whether in its parts or its entirety, is nothing less than an act of divine grace.

Something We Do Not Deserve

Someone has defined mercy as God sparing us from what we rightly deserve, whereas grace is God giving us what we do not deserve. This succinct perspective seems most appropriate. When we sin against God—for all sin is truly against God, not merely against (a) law—we fall from innocence and are unable to justify ourselves any longer (Rom. 3:23). Having sinned, fallen, and rendered ourselves unfit for fellowship *with* our Creator, we are condemned to be separated *from* our Creator. We will never *deserve* to be freed from this condemnation—even if someone else does indeed free us. And, we who have sinned against God will never *deserve* to have our fellowship with God restored—even if someone else does indeed restore it. We should not confuse opportunity (to be freed or restored) with *merit* (as if we deserve or have earned something). Simply put, sinners deserve to be destroyed, not saved.