



GRACIOUS

The attributes of God: Gracious

Taught at our Sunday evening service, 25th September 2022 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: 1 Peter 2:1-3

Series introduction

In this series we are considering some of the attributes of God, a task that is more than challenging, because it impossible for any of us to adequately describe or understand an infinite, omnipresent and omniscient creator-God.

Yet it's important that we attempt to do so for our God is not unknowable, or evasive. In fact, He *wants* us to know Him. He *wants* us to know what He is like. He has revealed Himself to us, and He has given us His Word.

So what is God like? That's what we're trying to answer in part. In part, because we're going to look at just 7 of God's attributes - there are certainly more that we won't get to. But the hope is that by the end of this series, we each have a better understanding of who He is, and, what He is like. Over these weeks, we'll look at these attributes - that God is...

- Loving
- Holy
- Merciful

- Gracious
- Sovereign
- Faithful
- Infinite

As we continue to study, we'll see that these attributes are not isolated from each other. For example, it is precisely because God is loving, that He is also gracious. It is because of His grace that He can show mercy. And indeed we should note that His attributes are not in conflict with each other, nor does He show one attribute at one moment, and a different one at another time. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. What a reassurance that is!

The dictionary defines an attribute as a quality or feature regarded as a characteristic or inherent part of someone or something. And all these things are integral to who God is, they are part of His nature. And all that He is determines all that He does. So it's good we consider them.

But, as with any Bible study, the consideration, the thinking through what we're hearing, what we're reading, will only do us good if it makes it from the head to the heart - that is, we need to apply what we learn. This is not an academic exercise to learn what a historical figure was like, but hopefully an eye opening insight into the the living God who can be known, and wants to be known by you and I. And if learning more of his nature and character doesn't change us one bit, I once again suggest we're not really listening, and that we're certainly not applying.

So, simply put; How do we describe God? What is He like? What are the implications of that?

The more I think about this, I wonder if we've forgotten what He is like. Because when we look at His amazing, wonderful attributes, shouldn't we be more in awe, more reverent, more thankful, more willing to give Him our all? That's something for each of us to ponder.

Study introduction

Now tonight, we're going to consider that God is **gracious** - just as we read in Psalm 145:

Psalm 145:8-9

The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, And His tender mercies are over all His works.

And in doing so, we'll tackle 3 questions:

- What is grace?
- How is God gracious?
- What should our response be?

So then, let's start with that first question... what is grace?

What is grace?

At its most simple, grace is unmerited favour.

Compared to mercy which is not getting what we deserve, grace is getting what we don't deserve - in a very good way! And if we think about it, we don't deserve God's mercy, so I don't think it's unreasonable to say that it is only His grace that affords us even mercy.

The first mention of grace in the Bible is significant, as often the first mentions of words are... we read in Genesis chapter 6:

Genesis 6:5-8

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

We read that Noah was perfect in his generations, but he also know he was not perfect. He was still a sinful man. How do we know? Well for one, he died! And many other scriptures that speak of all mankind being in sin, none seeking after God and so on. Yet Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. I guess we often don't think of it, but it's remarkable that God saved Noah. It wasn't deserved. It wasn't earned. God has never saved anyone on the basis that they are the best of a bad bunch. He's saved them through His grace. That unmerited favour.

Another way of describing it is an often used, but very helpful way of remembering what Christian grace comes down which is the acronym **G.R.A.C.E. - that is, God's Riches At Christ's Expense.**

Because what we have received through grace is far more than even our salvation. We have an eternity with Jesus to look forward to, we have an inheritance in Him, we are joint heirs with Him! These are riches to which *nothing* in the world can compare. And all of it has been accomplished through His death on the cross, in our place, that we might be saved and have all these blessings.

And so we should note that **grace comes through Jesus alone.** We read in John chapter 1:

John 1:17

For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, we read in Romans chapter 3...

Romans 3:23-24

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

So we should also note that **the grace of God is free.** In fact, if it were not free, it would not be grace. That's the exact point Paul makes in the very next chapter:

Romans 4:1-4

What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.

Think of it like this - if you go to work, do your job, and at the end of the day, week or month your boss says "I'd like to give you a gift... here's your wages" you'd be entitled to say, "hang on! I've earned those wages, they're not a gift"!

In the same way, if we could somehow earn our salvation, it would not then be by grace. Rather, God would be our debtor - He'd owe us something! But God is in debt to no-one. He doesn't owe you or me anything. And there is nothing we can do to earn our salvation. No amount of doing good will ever make up for our doing wrong in the sight of a just and holy God. As we read, the wages of sin is death. That's what we deserve, and not reward.

In the letter to the Ephesian church we read some of the most famous verses on grace which say:

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Oh, we should want to tell people about our salvation. But since it's not achieved by us or deserved by us, we can take no credit for it - rather we can only delight in the grace of God in saving us, and sing God's praises because of it. That's why songs like Amazing Grace have been written.

So grace is...

- Unmerited favour (we do not deserve it)
- Free. It is God's gift (we cannot earn it)
- Ultimately, God's riches at Christ's expense

Why would anyone not want that? Well the problem is the grace shown through the cross is actually offensive - it makes too much of God, and too little of us for our own egos. As such, the religions of this world focus on what we can do to become right with or at one with God. The focus is on us, and our efforts. And there are even those within churches who will try and bring us back under the law of Moses, whereby we must earn our salvation. But Paul warns sharply about that in the opening chapter of his letter to the Galatian churches:

Galatians 1:6-9

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

Let us not lose sight of what grace is.

How is God gracious?

Now, I've kind of let the cat out the bag already here - that is, I've already started sharing what the Bible says God has done for us. So then, let's answer the question more fully - how is God gracious?

Our salvation

First, God intervened on our behalf, when we didn't deserve it. Grace stepped in. God showed us entirely unmerited favour in sending His Son to die in our place, for our sin, without which we were fully deserving of His wrath as a holy, just and righteous God.

God is merciful because He is gracious. And He is gracious because He is loving. And He has shown such in-comprehensible love toward us. Why? God cannot act apart from His loving nature. He doesn't merely have love. He is love. And likewise grace and mercy are His attributes. We didn't catch Him on a good day when He send Jesus to earth. No, no. This is who He is! He *is* gracious.

We read in Ephesians...

Ephesians 1:3-6

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

It is only by His grace that we are found acceptable in His sight.

I like this comment from a pastor in the US:

We will be stunned in Heaven when we find out how much wrath we actually deserved and how much grace was required to bring us to God.

Grant R Castleberry

Our eternity

Beyond the forgiveness we have received in and through Christ, God has also shown incredible grace to us in the future we have in Him. We read Jesus' words in John chapter 14:

John 14:1-3

Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

We have an eternity to look forward to in the presence of our Saviour! That's an eternity in the presence of the one who loves you the most.

Our position in Him

Beyond forgiveness, and an eternity in Heaven, we have also received, through His grace, an incredible position in Him, for we read in Romans that we are joint heirs with Christ!...

Romans 8:16-17

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs —heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

God looked on His Son as if He were you, so that He could look on you as if you were His own Son. Oh, what a wonder this is!

Our inheritance

Yet He has given us yet more through His grace. We read in Acts:

Acts 20:32

So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified

So we have an inheritance in Him, because of our position in Him, because of our Salvation in Him - all to enjoy in an eternity with Him. We read in Ephesians:

Ephesians 2:4-7

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

If this doesn't astound you, do you not believe it, or are you not listening? It's no wonder Paul also wrote this in Romans chapter 8:

Romans 8:18

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Grace, now

Yet, God's grace isn't only found in what happened on the cross, or what riches He'll pour out on us in Heaven - even right now we have such hope, confidence, guidance, wisdom through His Word. We read...

2 Peter 1:2-4

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

And in our times of need, we can go to Him - to His throne of grace. We read in Hebrews:

Hebrews 4:15-16

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

What should be our response?

What then should be our response to all this (assuming we have accepted His grace)?

We should be thankful

God's grace should lead to thanksgiving. We should be in such awe of His grace that we can't do anything but be thankful. We read in 2 Corinthians...

2 Corinthians 4:13-15

And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

So, do our thanks abound to the glory of God? I know I have room to grow in this.

Our praise of Him should be passionate. How can we sing "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found... was blind, but now I see." with apathy? We should hardly be able to contain ourselves as we sing "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found... was blind, but now I see."

We should complain less

Second, we should complain less. May God's grace truly be enough for us. It's not that we are to abandon any hopes or desires in life, but that no lack, no difficulty should cause us to lose sight of the wonder of God's grace. Paul wrote:

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

We should lay aside our sin

Next Sunday morning, we'll study these verses that instruct us to lay aside our sin:

1 Peter 2:1-3

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

But if God is gracious, if He is willing to forgive, doesn't our sin provide further opportunity for His grace to be demonstrated? No. We are told clearly not to approach grace like that:

Romans 6:1-2

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

We are told to walk in newness of life. That is a life that runs away from sin, not pursues it. Later in this same chapter we read:

Romans 6:12-16

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?

We should not forget that God's riches came at Christ's expense. That is, grace is free to you and I, but it came at a great price to Jesus Christ. So, instead of seeing how much we can get away with because God is gracious, we should seek to please Him in all we do *because* of the grace He has shown. Paul wrote to Titus, saying:

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

Chuck Smith wrote a book titled "Grace changes everything". Even the title alone is a good reminder that we should not be the same as we were or would be without Christ.

Conclusion

Are there more things the Bible says about grace? Yes. Are there more ways God shows us grace? Yes. I know there are many ways in my personal life in which God has blessed me beyond what I deserve. What we've looked at this evening is only the tip of the iceberg.

I'll let AW Tozer summarise this topic tonight, from his book "the attributes of God":

Grace is God's goodness, the kindness of God's heart, the good will, the cordial benevolence. It is what God is like. God is like that all the time. You'll never run into a stratum in God that is hard. You'll always find God gracious, at all times and toward all peoples forever. You'll never run into any meanness in God, never any resentment or rancor or ill will, for there is none there. God has no ill will toward any being. God is a God of utter kindness and cordiality and good will and benevolence. And yet all of these work in perfect harmony with God's justice and God's judgement. I believe in hell and I believe in judgement. But I also believe that there are those whom God must reject because of their impenitence, yet there will be grace. God will still feel gracious toward all His universe. He is God and He can't do anything else.

AW Tozer

Application questions

In the week ahead I encourage you to think on these things:

- When was the last moment you paused to consider the magnitude of God's grace?
- When was the last time you thanked Him for His grace?
- In what way has His grace changed you? How will it change you this week?

Let's pray.