Chapter 1

Prepared by Patrick J. Griffiths

Why A Study On GRACE?

15 "John *testified about Him and cried out, saying, 'This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'' 16 For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. 17 **For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ**. 18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him" (John 1:15-18).

20 "The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but **where sin increased, grace abounded all the more**, 21 so that, as sin reigned in death, **even so grace would reign** through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:20, 21).

5 "In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice. 6 **But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace"** (Rom. 11:5, 6).

Creation = Grace

AN INTRODUCTION

With all the Bible contains, "Why a study on grace?" Charles Ryrie opens his work, *The Grace of God*, with the following thought. "Christianity is distinct from all other religions because it is a message of grace. Jesus Christ is the supreme revelation of God's grace; salvation is by grace; and grace governs and empowers Christian living. Without grace Christianity is nothing."[1]

Most all world religions speak of grace, but none is so thoroughly saturated by grace, as is Christianity. To eliminate grace from the *Story* is to end the *Story*. In light of our initial thought, we can properly ask, "What is grace?"

Grace lives in the arena of need and inability. If there were no deficiency or need, there would be no necessity for grace. Although we are getting ahead of ourselves, the expression or act of grace did not exist until God created. Once something existed outside of who God is, grace existed. Prior to creation all there was, was God existing in Trinity.

Within the Godhead or Trinity nothing needed grace, for every thought or action was worthy of the thought or action. However, all this changed once God created something outside Himself. In so doing, He condescended. Grace stoops. Grace existed even before the presence of sin and the fall. The created is always in need of grace from the Creator. But as noted, we are getting ahead of ourselves. The initial question is, "Why a study on grace?"

THE BIBLE AS *STORY*

In order to answer the question it is necessary to consider the Bible as a whole. "Fundamentally, it is just one book written by one author with one main subject."[2] The Bible is a story. It is a story of a Creator who acts, an Author who writes, a King who rules, and a Hero who wins. It contains villains, war, defeat, and victory. Inside the biblical *Story* there are six acts or ideas unfolding the person and purpose of God. It will be God's person and purpose that provide the subject matter or theme of the *Story*. They are as follows.

- Act 1 - **God** - "In the Beginning **God**" (Gen. 1:1 [The Power of God – Pt. 1])
- Act 2 - **Creation** - "In the Beginning God **created**" (Gen. 1:1; Col. 1:15-17; 1 Cor. 8:6 [The Mystery of God])
- Act 3 - **Rejection** - "You shall not eat . . . **She** took and **ate and He ate**" (Gen. 2:15-17; 3:6 [The Justice of God])
- Act 4 - **Redemption** – "**The LORD God made garments** of skin and clothed them" (Gen. 3:15-21 [The Grace of God])
- Act 5 - **Re-Creation** – "**You Must Be Born Again**" (John 3:1-21; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rev. 21:1 [the Power of God – Pt. 2])
- Act 6 - **Worship** - "Stop weeping, **the Lion** . . . **has overcome**" (Rev. 4; 5 The Glory of God])

This entire *Story* tells of God who condescends to give humanity the joy of His own internal fellowship within Himself.

"All other religions teach that humans must work their way toward divinity. The truth is Jesus. The truth is a person who dies in our place, for our crimes, and in turn gives us his life. The truth is that God works his way down to humanity and dies for us. That's grace. See, the truth isn't a special prayer or code word we say at the pearly gates. In Christianity, the truth is essentially revealed in a Person, Jesus, full of grace and humility. All other religions God is impersonal, but in Christianity we meet God in Jesus."[3]

THE NEED FOR GRACE

The reader will notice how there is rebellion/rejection and condemnation. We see this in the villain's appearance. As noted earlier, grace exists simply because God created; but its presence becomes even more pronounced with the arrival of the villain. It is "sin abounding where grace will much more abound." "One of the reasons God allows sin is so that He might have this specific opportunity to manifest His grace."[4]

"Unless I realize I'm a sinner deserving of God's just wrath against sin, I cannot experience the richness and fullness of His grace. If I deny my sin, I shut the door on grace. This was Jesus' message to the woman at the well. *Yes, you are a woman who is living in sin. Yes, you are just the kind of person I came to save.* We have to acknowledge both realities. This is why talk of the word, "sin" should not frighten us who believe in the gospel. Because it was not mistakes or missteps or misunderstandings that Christ came to conquer and defeat. He came to defeat sin and sin's awful child: death."[5]

Max Lucado in his work, *Grace: More Than We Deserve, Greater Than We Imagine,* offers the following thought:

"Grace is simply another word for his tumbling, rumbling reservoir of strength and protection. It comes at us not occasionally or miserly but constantly and aggressively, wave upon wave. We've barely regained our balance from one breaker, and then, bam, here comes another. God's grace dethrones your fears. Anxiety still comes, for certain. The globe still heats up; wars still flare up; the economy acts up. Disease, calamity, and trouble populate your world. But they don't control it! Grace does."[6]

Grace is the kind action of God toward those who deserve destruction and damnation. This action on God's part will bring Him glory. Grace is the platform through which God administrates His love, acceptance, forgiveness, favor, and kindness/mercy.

All that He is and all that He does is from Him, through Him, and for Him.

> 11 "Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O LORD, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. 12 Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. 13 Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name. 14 But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? **For all things come from You**, and from Your hand we have given You" (1 Chron. 29:11-14).
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> "For **from Him and through Him and to Him are all things**. To Him be the glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36).

> [5] "For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, [6] yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things**, and we exist through Him**" (1 Cor. 8:5, 6).
>
> [15] "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. [16] For **by Him all things were created**, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--**all things have been created through Him and for Him**. [17] He is **before all things**, and in Him **all things hold together"** (Col. 1:15-17).

Every action of God is marked by a gracious condescension on His part to interact with what He creates. "There is no division of doctrine that is not related in some way or another – often vitally – to the concept of grace."[7]

THE STORY'S HERO – JESUS CHRIST

> [25] "And He said to them, 'O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! [26] Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?' [27] Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures . . . [44] Now He said to them, 'These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' [45] Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, [46] and He said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, [47] and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem'" (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47).

As the Bible is read as *Story* it becomes apparent from the very start of the *Story* everything will revolve around one primary and central figure. This person will be foretold and imaged so precisely that all who look for Him will find Him (Matt. 2:2). Jesus Christ, the second member of the Trinity, is the hero of the *Story*. He is **the promised seed** of Genesis 3:15 and **the blood picture** of Genesis 3:21. All of the chapters point to Him. The storyline has meaning only as it is sourced in and flows from Christ.

> The relationship of Jesus Christ to the word of God in Scripture is that he sums it up, brings it to fulfillment and interprets it. Thus, the *Word of God* is Jesus Christ. Every word in Scripture **points to Jesus and finds its meaning in him**. The significance of this is worth repeating: Jesus Christ in his life, death and resurrection is the fixed point of reference for the understanding of **the whole of reality**.[8]
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> The apostolic way of reading and preaching Scripture is to see Jesus Christ as the subject of the entire Bible, the subject of all history. He is the single overarching story of all time. He is the meaning of the entire narrative of human history.[9]

> The centrality of Christ to all of history and to the meaning of human existence invites us into Jesus Christ, through whom we read the entire Bible from beginning to end.[10]

The Hero's arrival in human flesh is the greatest embodiment of grace by God and His obedience to His Father in life and in death is the greatest display of grace for all times. Nothing else can match who He is and what He has done.

When Adam and Eve rejected God and chose their kingdom and their will over His, they immediately began to "feel" the impact of their decision. This consequence is notable by the attempt to cover their nakedness with vegetation. God could have allowed them to continue in their rebellion, but He once again condescended and provided atonement for their transgression. Two elements are notable in the unfolding of the *Story*. The first element is **God's pronouncement** to those who rebelled against Him (Gen. 3:15). The second element is **God's picture** of what His atoning work will look like. (Gen. 3:21). Thus, the promise and the picture become the defining elements within the larger narrative of history. Jesus Christ is the promise fulfilled and the picture completed.

When we embrace this idea, we can appreciate Dudley Hall's observation.

> The central figure of all biblical history is Jesus. He is the sum of all spiritual goodness – the fullness of the Godhead – incarnated in natural, physical form. As a result, those who are going to perceive life as it really is must see it by embracing Jesus as the Substance of every shadow of revelation. He must be allowed to interpret all the shadows that point toward him.[11]

Both the **incarnation** and **crucifixion** are expressions of God's initiation toward man's inability and rebellion. Both acts on His part are gracious.

"During a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world were discussing whether any one belief was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities. Incarnation? Other religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form. Resurrection? Again, other religions had accounts of return from death. The debate went on for some time, until C. S. Lewis wandered into the room. 'What's the rumpus about?' he asked, and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity's unique contribution among world religions. In his forthright manner, Lewis responded, 'Oh, that's easy. It's grace.'"[12]

SUMMARY

"Why study grace" because without it there is no *Story*. God created and in this simple sentence grace was born. Everything that happens after this initial act will be platforms

for God to act graciously toward those He loves for the purpose of bringing them into His presence so that they might enjoy Him forever. It is to this task of discovery we now turn our attention.

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[1] Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Grace of God* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963), 9.
[2] Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (IVP Books, 2002), 16.
[3] http://www.gospelproject.com/2013/10/25/what-is-unique-about-christianity-among-the-world-religions/
[4] Robert A. Pyne, "Humanity and Sin," in *Understanding Christian Theology*, ed. Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 811.
[5] http://www.danieldarling.com/2013/02/if-there-is-no-sin-there-is-no-grace/
[6] http://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/articles/spiritualformation/grace-more-than-we-deserve-greater-than-we-imagine.html *Grace: More Than We Deserve, Greater Than We Imagine,* Max Lucado explains why we must embrace the whole truth about grace. An interview with Max Lucado.
[7] Pyne, "Humanity and Sin," 10.
[8] [Emphasis added] Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (IVP Books, 1991), 59, 60.
[9] Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God's narrative* (BakerBooks, 2008), 119.
[10] Ibid., 121.
[11] Dudley Hall, *Grace Works* (Multnomah Pub., 2000), 60.
[12] http://www.christianity.co.nz/grace-13.htm

Chapter 1 - "Why A Study on Grace?"

[20] "The Law came in so that the transgression would increase;
but **where sin increased, grace abounded all the more**,
[21] so that, as sin reigned in death, **even so grace would reign** through righteousness to eternal life
through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:20, 21)

Creation = GRACE

Key Passage(s): Genesis 1:1; 3:15, 21; Luke 24:25-27, 45-47

Basic Review of Chapter 1 – "Why A Study on Grace?"

"Why study grace," because without it there is no *Story*. God created and in this simple sentence, grace was born. Everything that happens after this initial act will be platforms for God to act graciously toward those He loves for bringing them into His presence so that they might enjoy Him forever.

Basic Ideas from Chapter 1 – "Why A Study on Grace?"

1. Grace lives in the arena of need and inability.
2. Creation by a Creator assumes and demands grace.
3. Grace existed even before the presence of sin and fall.

Basic Outline from Chapter 1 – "Why A Study on Grace?"

1. An Introduction
2. The Bible as *Story*
3. The Need for Grace
4. The *Story's* Hero – Jesus Christ
5. Summary

Basic Questions from Chapter 1 – "Why A Study on Grace?"

1. Is the Bible a *Story*? If so, what does this mean for the reader of the Bible?
2. What six parts make up the storyline of the Bible?
3. What does it mean when we say, "God wrote the *Story*?"
4. What does it mean when we say, "God is primary and humanity is secondary?"
5. Why is the idea of transgression a mystery?

6. Around which figure does the *Story* revolve?
7. Where do we see the greatest embodiment of grace?
8. Where do we see the greatest display of grace?

Basic Application from Chapter 1 – "Why A Study on Grace?"

1. If all of God's dealings with us flow from grace, what should be our response toward Him?
2. If all of God's dealings with us flow from grace, what should be our attitude toward others and ourselves?
3. Where should our focus be when reading our Bible?
4. What application can we make from this chapter?
5. What does this study cause you to change in your thinking and/or actions?

Basic Homework for Chapter 2 - "GRACE in the New Testament."

Please familiarize yourself with the Study Questions for next week. I would encourage you to look through the next chapter in preparation for the week's study.