

“Grace Abounding”
Ephesians 1:6-8
(Preached at Trinity, November 24, 2013)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Verses 3-14** Paul describes the spiritual blessings God has prepared in Christ. Paul refers to them as, "spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ" They are blessings by God and for God. He alone receives all the glory. Paul writes in **Verse 6**, "to the praise of the glory of His grace"
2. After stating that God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places he proceeds to describe the blessings.
 - A. In **Verses 4-5** Paul states the context of these blessings. He puts these blessings in the context of election and predestination. The Bible here says that God has chosen us that we might be holy and blameless and he has predestined us to adoption.
 - B. Of course Paul has already defined the us to which he is referring in **Verse 1**: "To the saints who are at Ephesus and *who are* faithful in Christ Jesus"
3. In **Verse 7** Paul sets before us the great means by which we share in these blessings. "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses" In Christ God has provided for us our redemption. He purchased our pardon with His own blood. In determining to adopt us as His own children God did not spare His own Son.
4. Then Paul adds the great fountain from which all these blessings flow.
Ephesians 1:7-8 NAU - "according to the riches of His grace ⁸ which He lavished on us."
Charles Hodge called grace, "the grand end of the whole scheme of redemption."
"Predestination, election, and salvation are all intended for the praise of the glory of the grace of God."
5. Paul speaks of grace often in the Book of Ephesians - 12 times.
In **Verse 1** Paul writes of the "glory of His grace."
In **Verse 7** he writes of the "riches of His grace."
In **Chapter 2:7** he ratchets it up a notch: "the surpassing riches of His grace."
6. The word for "riches" is **πλοῦτος** often refers to material wealth. Here it is referring to something of incredible value. Paul is speaking of the infinite wealth of kindness and goodness that God has poured out upon His people – the objects of His grace.
7. What is grace? How do you define it? How do you describe it? And to whom is it given?
Charles Hodge describes grace as "a favourable disposition, or kind feeling; and especially love as exercised toward the inferior, dependent, or unworthy."
Louis Berkhof – "Grace is an attribute of God, one of the divine perfections. It is God's free, sovereign, undeserved favour of love to man, in his state of sin and guilt, which manifests itself in the forgiveness of sin and deliverance from its penalty."
Wayne Grudem – "God's goodness toward those who deserve only punishment."

Eroll Hulse – “Grace is the exercise of God’s free favour. It is an attribute of God, the exercise of which lays hold of sinners and secures their salvation in Christ.”

8. Grace is simply God giving – “For God so loved the world that He gave.”
There are no conditions to obtain this favor. You can do nothing to earn it
- I. First, let me speak of God’s common grace to all men
- A. God’s grace is a glorious display of His goodness
1. Goodness is one of God’s attributes – He takes great pleasure in the display of His goodness. God’s goodness is always dispensed sovereignly.
Exodus 33:19 NAU - "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion."
 2. Every act of God’s goodness upon His creation is an act of grace. Every act of God’s goodness is bestowed simply because it pleases Him to do so.
 - a. At the end of each day of creation God examined His work and “God saw that it was good.”
 - b. At the end of the sixth day when God looked over all that He had created we read in Genesis 1:31:
Genesis 1:31 – “And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.”
Psalms 145:9 KJV - "The LORD *is* good to all: and his tender mercies *are* over all his works."
 3. The conditions of the Garden of Eden must have been breathtaking
Genesis 2:8 – “And the LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden”
 - a. Adam was created in a sinless condition and with immortality
 - b. He would have never known sickness or disease. He would have never known want.
 - c. This is all due to the abundance of God’s grace – in other words, even in his unfallen state, Adam didn’t deserve all of the goodness of the garden.
- B. All of God’s blessings upon mankind are by grace – unmerited
1. In the context of a fallen world we deserve nothing but torment
Grace is God *giving* the sinner what he does not deserve.
Mercy, on the other hand, is God NOT *giving* the sinner what he deserves.
The worst earthly trial is not as bad as we deserve.
 2. We should have awakened to a world of gray – a twilight world void of beauty without color or anything pleasing to the eye.
 - The smell of acrid sulfur should burn our noses. Hell is described as a place burning with fire and brimstone – i.e. molten sulfur.
 - Disease and horrible suffering should be our daily experience.
 - Our daily food should be a vile tasteless sludge that we eat only to sustain life
 - Floods, earthquakes, and violent storms should fill our days along with frigid cold followed by scorching heat.

3. It is by God's grace that we experience beauty, love, the rich bounty of food, medical care, housing, clothes. The pleasure of marriage and the joy of children. These things are all glorious displays of God's goodness to undeserving sinners. This is the outward demonstration of the "riches of God's grace."
 4. Louis Berkhof describes common grace as – "the natural blessings which God showers upon man in this present life, in spite of the fact that man has forfeited them and lies under the sentence of death."
- C. Common grace is not a part of soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) but not entirely separated from it.
1. It is by God's common grace that He restrains sin upon the earth Hell will be an intolerable place of unrestrained evil, hatred, and malice.
 2. The primary purpose of common grace is to sustain mankind for the sake of the elect. God is working out His redemptive purpose. Apart from God's restraining grace humanity would kill itself.
 3. The secondary goal of common grace is to display the goodness of God which is designed to lead men to repentance.
- D. God restrains sin through various means upon the earth
1. God restrains sin through civil government. Paul describes civil authority in **Romans 13** as "a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil."
 2. God also restrains sin as the Holy Spirit applies His Law to the consciences of all men.
Romans 2:14-15 NAS - "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵ in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them"
 3. God often restrains sin through family and the common morals of society.
 - a. Family influence is only effective when the family is ordered by Biblical principles. Most children today are born into single parent homes.
 - b. And the influence of society depends on a moral culture. Berkhof writes, "If *public opinion* is not controlled by conscience, acting in harmony with the light of nature, or by the Word of God, it becomes a mighty influence for evil."
This is what we are witnessing in our generation.
 4. Common grace and the influence of the Spirit upon all men is often resisted and suppressed. The lost man most often acts in a manner consistent with his corrupt nature. Paul writes in **Chapter 2 Ephesians 2:3 NAU** - "we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."
- E. Even common grace is the fruit of the cross of Christ
1. It is through Christ that every blessing upon this earth flows

2. It is in this sense that the cross of Christ is applied to all
1 Timothy 4:10 NAU - "For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers."
3. It is by common grace that Jesus is the light to every man as the Law is graciously displayed before them
John 1:4-5 NAU - "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. ⁵ The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."
4. Although Common Grace is a wonderful blessing of God's goodness it does not save and it doesn't carry the particular blessing of God's covenant love

II. The primary display of God's grace is in the context of our salvation. This is the meaning of grace in **Ephesians 1**

- A. Grace describes that glorious favor given to God's elect people
 1. The LBC describes it as "Special grace."
 LBC 10:2 – "This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, nor from any power or agency in the creature co-working with His Special grace, the creature being wholly passive therein, being dead in sins . . ."
 2. Paul describes this special grace as rich, a wealth of abundance
 He says that God has "lavished" His grace upon us. The word means "over and above." It describes abundance.
 3. God has shown infinite favor towards us. He has chosen to love us and He has chosen to display this love through the death of His own Son.
- B. Few truly understand the sinfulness of sin
 1. Sin has caused a terrible separation from God. Few understand what it means that God is infinitely holy. They think little of sin. They compare themselves with other men and think they are good people.
 2. God would be perfectly just to send every human being to hell but instead He has chosen to pour His love out upon His elect people.
 By God's grace He has chosen to deliver us from the ravages of sin – completely apart from anything in us.
Romans 5:8 NAU - "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."
 3. Salvation is a system of grace. We often refer to the doctrines of salvation as the Doctrines of Grace.
 God blesses men in a free and sovereign manner without any consideration of any good thing in them. There is no good. Even our good deeds are polluted by sin and vile in God's sight.
Isaiah 64:6 – "But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags"
 4. Our salvation is all by God's sovereign goodness and love.
 God enables us to believe imparting faith within our hearts.
 He enables us to turn from our sin in repentance and to have our affections turned towards Him and to have a desire to love and please Him.
 This is all by grace.

Ephesians 2:8-9 NAU - "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is the gift of God*; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."

5. All of this is by God's free sovereign choice. He was not obliged to do anything at all. He could have allowed us to continue to our eternal doom.

C. Grace has always been a most difficult doctrine to accept

1. Paul described the preaching of the cross as foolishness

1 Corinthians 1:18 NAU - "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

Why do men see the cross as foolishness?

a. Because they don't see themselves as being wicked people under God's wrath and condemnation. The self-righteous see no need for a bloody cross. And they have no desire to humble themselves before Christ.

b. And even if they come to an understanding of their sin and guilt they can't conceive of being made right without human effort.

2. Most religious people insist that they must earn their way to God

a. They can't imagine salvation apart from human works

b. Muslims today cannot believe in salvation without merit. They say it doesn't make sense that we can rest in the merits of someone else. They cannot understand the love of God under the New Covenant. Islam has no concept of grace. The favor of Allah must be earned.

c. Many people today who call themselves Christians believe they have to earn their way to God.

3. Many suffer with doubt and a lack of assurance because they cannot accept God's abounding grace that He has lavished upon His people.

III. God is continuing to lavish His grace upon us

A. Your progress in the Gospel is by God's grace

1. By His grace God sent His Spirit to indwell us

2. You are continuing to increase in holiness. God is continuing to transform your appetites—all by His grace.

a. He is continuing to increase your love for Christ. This is at the heart of the Christian life. You are becoming more and more Christ-centered. This is your highest aspiration—and it's by God's grace.

b. God is continuing to make you more gracious and forgiving—further evidence of His grace upon you.

c. He is continuing to give you greater and greater understanding of His Word. Knowing our dependence upon His grace in our knowledge of Him we pray teach me, try me, give me understanding.

Psalm 19:7-11 NAU - "The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. ⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. ⁹ The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. ¹⁰ They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. ¹¹ Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward."

d. It is by God's grace that we are kept from sin

Psalm 19:12-14 NAU - "Who can discern *his* errors? Acquit me of hidden *faults*. ¹³ Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous *sins*; Let them not rule over me; Then I will be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression. ¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer."

2. God's blessings upon our church are by His grace.
 God makes His Word effectual by His grace.
 Our members will prosper under the Gospel by God's grace.
 God will add to our number by His grace.
 God provides our every need His grace.

Conclusion:

1. God's grace should humble you. Why did you believe? It was God's grace working powerfully in you. He lavished His grace upon you.
 This should fill you with pity upon those still unbelieving.
2. Why do you have any knowledge of Biblical truth? It is by God's grace. You have nothing of which to boast.
3. God's people above all people should be gracious. How do you respond when you get poor service at a restaurant? How do you respond to the telemarketer? How do you discipline your children? How do you treat your husband or your wife?