

# SAVED BY GRACE

## PERSONAL TESTIMONY

In most ways my grandfather was a very ordinary man. Few people remember him and most people never heard of him. However, on his death bed he taught his children and grandchildren a powerful truth which none of us will ever forget.

When he was dying at the age of 81, grandpa was lying on my parents' bed in our family home. His strength was almost gone. His breathing was shallow and he spoke in little more than a whisper. We all knew that his life was slowly ebbing away. Soon he would be gone from us and at home with the Lord.

The family gathered closely around his bed to hear his final words. As he lay there dying he repeated the same few words over and over again. **ALL BY GRACE. All by Grace.** All by grace. His voice got softer and softer but his words remained the same. He repeated these precious words until his breath was almost gone. And then, with eyes closed and with a final effort he repeated it once more: "It's all by grace." And then he was gone. The gates of heaven were opened and by the grace of His Lord he entered the presence of the One he loved and served so long.

To me as a grandson, this is a very touching story. However, more important than the story itself is the truth my grandfather emphasized: Our salvation, our forgiveness, our confidence of spending eternity with the Lord, our victory and peace in life and in death are all by grace . . . and by grace alone.

There has never been a time or a situation when salvation could be merited or earned by doing good works or by keeping God's laws or by observing His commandments. Salvation was always a gift of grace . . . and so will it always be. By ourselves we will never be "good enough" for heaven and, if we are truly "in Christ," we will never be "too bad" for heaven. God's grace covers all our sins, all our failures, all our imperfections, all our doubts, all our inconsistencies, and all our fears. Salvation is totally and wonderfully and purely a gift of God's grace.

## LESSON ONE

### Introduction

Someone was once asked what he thought was the single most important word in the entire Bible. After thinking for a while, he replied, "I believe the most important word in the Bible is *grace*." You might choose a different answer, but as you study these Lessons you will increasingly understand and appreciate how God's **grace** is truly the source of every blessing we enjoy.

### What is GRACE?

In its simplest form God's grace may be described as ***God's unmerited and undeserved favor toward us***. By ourselves we merit nothing, we deserve nothing, and we can earn nothing. However, ***because of His grace***, God pours out His blessings upon us. God is truly a God of mercy, love, and forgiveness, but unless He chooses by grace to ***show*** His love and forgiveness to us, we would be forever lost.

## HOW DOES GOD DEMONSTRATE HIS GRACE TO US?

God demonstrates His grace to us every moment of our lives. EVERY blessing we receive comes to us because of the grace of God. Every breath we take, every moment we enjoy, every gift we receive, every skill that we possess, every work that we accomplish and every hope we have for the future is ours only because of God's grace. Even the good we do in obedience to God and the love we show to others are possible only because of God's grace. God may reward us for our obedience or for the kindness and love we show to others, but the source of every good thing in our lives is **the sovereign grace** of our Father in heaven.

This is especially true in regard to our salvation. No matter how we live or how much we pray, no matter how much we love the Lord or how diligent we are in seeking to live a holy life, our eternal salvation is based totally and completely on the grace of God. THAT is the main emphasis of this course. We do not minimize the importance of prayer, obedience, Bible study, or seeking to help others, but we must always recognize that we can add absolutely nothing to what Jesus has already done for our salvation.

Since Jesus Christ has done everything required for the forgiveness of our sins and for our eternal life, our part is to BELIEVE in Jesus Christ as our perfect Savior and then seek to live out the salvation He gives us in works of obedience, gratitude and praise. That is what the Bible means when it says that we are saved **by** grace **through** faith **for** good works (Ephesians 2:4-10).

In this course we will study some of the wonderful ways in which God has demonstrated His grace to mankind throughout history. The first Lessons will deal primarily with God's gracious actions and promises in the Old Testament. Later Lessons will focus on the teachings of grace in the New Testament. The last chapters will deal with the subject of Christian Liberty—our freedom in Christ to live without the burden of constantly wondering whether we are good enough or whether we are doing enough to please God. We obviously do want to please God and walk with Him if we are His children, but salvation is truly a gift from our Father in heaven. The way of salvation has always been **By Grace Alone**.

## EARLY DEMONSTRATIONS OF GOD'S GRACE IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS

### Adam and Eve

When God created Adam and Eve, He created them in His own image and after His own likeness. He gave them authority over the earth He had created and told them to rule over it, care for it, and be fruitful and increase in number. He placed them in the beautiful Garden of Eden where everything was peaceful and delightful. They had a wonderful place to live, good minds, loving hearts, meaningful things to do, and a great variety of things to eat and enjoy (Genesis 1:26-30; 2:8-9). There were no arguments, no disagreements, and no frustrations. There were no disappointments or failures, no sickness or pain, no sorrow or death, no guilt and no fear. Everything was perfect.

However, God gave Adam one very clear command--a command not to eat the fruit of one specific tree in the Garden. The penalty for breaking that command, God said, would be death (Genesis 2:16-17).

He did not say or even suggest to Adam in any way that He would Himself provide a way for Adam to escape that punishment. The only message He gave to Adam was this: “You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” The command was simple and the punishment for breaking the command was clear: Eat and you will die. At this point there was no promise of grace if Adam failed.

Later, when the serpent came and tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden, Satan aroused in them a desire for something they did not yet have. He assured them that if they ate the forbidden fruit, they would become as God Himself, gaining a personal knowledge of good and evil. As a result, Adam and Eve questioned God's motive for giving them the one negative command and believed the lie of Satan rather than the truth of God. So they ate. (Genesis 3:1-6)

As a result of their disobedience and sin, their once-perfect bodies immediately became subject to suffering and pain and eventually to death. They also died spiritually and became alienated from the God who created, loved, and blessed them. The once-perfect earth began to produce thorns and thistles and God told Adam he would eat its fruit only through painful toil. They became aware of their physical (and spiritual) nakedness and in their guilt and shame they sought to run away and hide from the God who had created them (Genesis 3:8-10). Adam and Eve also were alienated from one another and began to make excuses for their sin (Genesis 3:11-13).

But God did not leave Adam and Eve alone in their guilt and nakedness. ***In His grace***, He took the initiative and went “looking” for them. He could have let them die in their sin without mercy--but He didn't. Just as Jesus in the New Testament was the Good Shepherd who cared for His sheep (John 10:11-14), so the Father immediately sought out Adam and Eve in their lost and confused condition. He didn't excuse what they had done and He didn't minimize the consequences of their sin, but He immediately “found” them and questioned and challenged them about what they had done. They responded with feeble efforts to excuse themselves by putting the blame on someone else. Their pitiful response simply showed the depths to which they had already fallen. But God, in His grace, responded with a word of hope.

Before pronouncing His judgment on Adam and Eve, God pronounced a curse upon the serpent (Satan) who had deceived them. He graciously promised that some day one of Adam's and Eve's descendants would crush the head of the serpent (Satan) and would thus win a victory over sin and death (Genesis 3:15). God also indicated, however, that this victory would come at great cost to the “seed” (descendant) of the woman. At this point, God's promise of GRACE was veiled in language which Adam and Eve could not begin to understand. However, the promise of grace was there, and this promise would never fail.

Because of God's grace, both Adam and Eve knew that there was HOPE for them and all their descendants. Though the results of sin would be terrible and painful (Genesis 3:16-17), death would not be the final word. Some day there would be a glorious victory! ***That was grace!***

God also demonstrated His grace to Adam and Eve in another significant way before He banished them from the Garden of Eden. He made “garments of skin” for them “and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21). Earlier Adam and Eve had tried to cover their nakedness by sewing some fig leaves together (Genesis

3:7). These fig leaves represented their own efforts to deal with the results of their sin. But God showed them that He alone could provide for their “spiritual nakedness” by taking a “substitute” and using the skin of a sacrificial animal to provide the covering they needed.

This first “substitute” in Genesis 3:21 pointed ahead to the time when God's own Son would come into the world as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Though Adam and Eve could not fully understand all this, God demonstrated that people could never atone for their sins through their own effort. The payment for their sin required the death of a perfect Substitute who would die in their place. And God, in His grace, loved the world so much that He gave His own Son to die so that all who **believed** in Him would not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

### **FURTHER DEMONSTRATIONS OF GRACE IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS**

Some time later, God gave Adam and Eve two sons, Cain and Abel. When Cain killed his brother, God pronounced judgment on him for what he had done. At the same time, God showed Cain special grace by protecting him from those who might want to kill him or hurt him in some way. In order to assure Cain of protection from others, God put a distinguishing mark on Cain so that others would not harm him. Cain lived as a fugitive, but God spared his life so that he did not immediately perish (Genesis 4:13-16).

After the death of Abel, God, in His grace, blessed Adam and Eve with another son, Seth, through whom He would carry out His promise to some day provide someone who would be their Redeemer. It was during the lifetime of Seth's son Enosh that people began for the first time in recorded history to call on the name of the Lord (Genesis 4:25-26). In those days people seemed to understand, possibly for the first time, that their greatest need was to live in the grace of their Creator God.

In Genesis 5, we read the “roll call” of successive generations of people who died. The penalty that God had pronounced on Adam and Eve in the beginning was being carried out, even though people in those days lived a very long time. However, in the midst of the somber repetition of the words, “And he died,” in this chapter, there is a wonderful and encouraging sign of God's continued promise and grace. Enoch, one of Adam's descendants, walked with God and did not die but was taken directly to heaven to be with the God he loved and served (Genesis 5:21-24). Here again was a glorious sign of hope and grace in the midst of the despair of death.

### **THE DAYS OF NOAH**

Several generations after the time of Adam and Eve, sin became so deeply entrenched in human life that God decided to destroy mankind from the face of the earth by means of a flood. In Genesis 6:5 we read, “The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.” For most people, God did not matter. Almost all of them had forgotten about God and no one seemed to have any concern about life after death. They lived to be very old and they did what they pleased, and for them this was all that mattered.

Because of this pervasive evil, God pronounced judgment on everyone except for one man, Noah, and his family (Genesis 6:8-9). In His grace God spared Noah and his family because he was considered “blameless” and “righteous” among the people of his time. This does not mean that Noah was without

-5-

sin, but Noah was a man who believed God, trusted Him, and sought to do what was pleasing to Him. We don't know whether or not Noah's family were also “righteous” people, but God in His grace spared both Noah and his entire family because of Noah's “righteousness” (see Genesis 7:1).

Did Noah “earn” his salvation because of his obedience in building the ark God told him to build? Not at all. Noah was far from perfect (see Genesis 9:20-23), but by doing what God told him to do, he demonstrated that he truly desired to serve God and trusted Him to save him from the destruction that was coming.

Though Noah preached for many years, no one believed the warnings God had given to him. No one turned to God in repentance and faith. Noah, however, believed what God had told him and, in spite of the unbelief of the people around him, demonstrated his faith by doing everything God told him to do. The unbelief and disobedience of the people led to their destruction. The faith and obedience of Noah led to his salvation.

After the earth dried up again after the flood, Noah offered sacrifices to God in gratitude for what He had done and as a sign of his commitment to what God commanded him to do. After Noah offered these sacrifices to the Lord, God in His grace promised that He would never again destroy the entire world with a flood (Genesis 9:8-11). He also provided a unique “sign” of His promise by placing a beautiful rainbow in the sky. This rainbow would remind all people of God's gracious covenant promise made initially to Noah (Genesis 9:12-17). Though God would still punish people for their sins, there would never again be a world-wide flood to destroy all mankind. The rainbow provided both a reminder and an assurance that God will provide a way out of destruction for everyone who puts his faith in His redeeming love and grace.

### **THE TOWER OF BABEL**

When the number of people continued to grow rapidly after the flood, the people became proud and soon forgot again about God. They deliberately refused to “fill the earth” as God had commanded in the beginning (Genesis 1:28) and began to build a tower that would reach to the heavens. They said that they wanted to “make a name” for themselves so that they would not be scattered over the face of the earth (Genesis 11:4). In response to their arrogance, pride and disobedience, God confused their languages and scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

With this story of the Tower of Babel we come to the end of God's dealing with mankind as a whole. God did not change His purpose of providing a Redeemer for people throughout the world, but He no longer would deal with all the nations in the same way. From this point on (beginning in Genesis 11:27) God chose to work out His plan of redemption through one man, Abraham, and his descendants. To these people He would give His promises, to them He would give His laws, and through them He would fulfill the promise He made in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15). God's plan of redemption would not fail, but for the next two thousand years, most people would be excluded from the Covenant of Grace He would establish with Abraham and his descendants.

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

When Adam and Eve were first created, God provided them with wonderful blessings of grace in the Garden of Eden. However, God also gave them a simple command not to eat the fruit of one of the trees in the Garden. If they did eat from that tree, God said, they would be severely punished for their disobedience. Regrettably, they chose to listen to the temptation of the serpent (Satan) and disobeyed

the Lord. The consequences were catastrophic. Adam and Eve gained nothing and lost all that was precious, holy, and valuable. Through their disobedience they “earned” the penalty of death (see Romans 6:23) and all their descendants also shared in that penalty (Romans 5:12, 18-19).

Adam and Eve immediately died spiritually and also began to die physically. However, God **graciously** promised them that some day one of their own descendants would come and provide a way of salvation from the *ultimate* penalty for their sin (Genesis 3:15).

As sin increased in the world, God decided to destroy all living creatures on the earth by means of a devastating flood--except believing Noah and his family. Years later, when sin again increased greatly in the world, God scattered people over the face of the earth. At that time He also began to limit His saving activities for the most part to one man and his descendants. That man was Abraham who later became known as the “father of all believers” (Romans 4:11, 16-17).

In the next Lesson we will focus on God's call to Abraham, the Covenant of Grace, and Abraham's descendants.

-7-

### QUESTIONS FOR LESSON ONE

1. How would you define the word “grace” as it is used in the Bible?
2. Why is grace so important?
3. What does it mean that we are saved by grace **alone**?

4. Fill in the blanks in the following sentence: “We are saved by \_\_\_\_\_ through \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_”.
5. A. How would you describe the life of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before they sinned?
- B. How would describe the life of Adam and Eve in the Garden after they sinned?
6. Did Adam and Eve die immediately after they sinned? Please explain your answer.
7. A. What great promise did God give to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15?
- B. Was this promise given after or before God pronounced the punishment they would receive?
- C. Why is your answer to question “B” so significant?
8. A. What did God do to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve after they sinned?
- B. What was the significance of replacing their fig leaves with animal skins?
9. A. How did God show His grace to Cain after he killed his brother Abel?
- B. Do you think Cain “deserved” to be given special treatment by God? Please give the reason for your answer.
10. A. How would you describe the basic message of Genesis 5?
- B. What happened to the man called Enoch (Genesis 5:21-24)?
- C. After reading all of Genesis 5, are you left with a feeling of hope or a feeling of despair? Please give the reason for your answer.

-8-

11. A. How does the Bible describe the sinfulness of man in Genesis 6: 5?
- B. Do you think that this description also fits our world today? Please give the reason for your answer.
12. A. How does the Bible describe Noah in Genesis 6:8-9?
- B. Do you think this description means that Noah was sinless? Please give the

reason for your answer.

13. A. What promise did God give to Noah and his family in Genesis 9:8-11?
  - B. What sign did God give in connection with this promise?
  - C. Did God's promise mean that He would never again punish the entire world of unbelievers? What does 2 Peter 3:3-7 teach about this?
14. A. Why did the people build the Tower of Babel?
  - B. Why did God punish them for what they were doing?
15. What major difference in God's plan of redemption took place after the events at the Tower of Babel?

### **FOR FURTHER REFLECTION**

1. Please indicate why you do or do not agree with this sentence: "The most important word in the Bible is *grace*."
2. How would you respond to someone who said: "If salvation is all by grace, then it doesn't matter whether I love and serve God or not. It really doesn't make any difference whether I try to obey God or whether I don't."
3. How did God demonstrate His grace in the lives of Adam and Eve after they sinned?
4. What effect did the sin of Adam and Eve have on their future descendants, including you?
5. What practical difference would it make in your daily life if God saved people on the basis of their works rather than through faith in Jesus Christ?



## Grace Lesson One ANSWERS

1. Grace is God's unmerited and undeserved favor toward us.
2. By ourselves we merit nothing, deserve nothing, and can earn nothing. Everything we receive from a holy and merciful God is because of His grace. Without it, we would be forever lost.
3. We can do absolutely nothing to earn our salvation. Jesus Christ has done everything required for our salvation and we cannot add anything to it. Whenever we try to add anything to it (such as our works, our obedience, or anything else) we simply detract from it because we are then indicating that Christ has not really done all that is needed for our salvation.
4. By **GRACE** through **FAITH** for **GOOD WORKS** (or works of love and obedience).
5. A. Before they sinned, their life was perfect in every way. There were no problems, weaknesses, sicknesses, needs, disappointments, frustrations, or failures. They had everything they needed or desired and they lived joyfully in fellowship with God.  
  
B. After they sinned, their bodies began to die physically, they died spiritually in the sense that they were alienated from God, they became subject to all kinds of problems, challenges, difficulties, and hurts, and they lost the joy they once had in fellowship with God. Even the earth was cursed and would bring forth thorns and thistles and make life difficult and unpleasant for them. At the same time, however, they still were able to enjoy many good on this earth and with each other since God did not utterly destroy the “beauty of the earth.”
6. They immediately died spiritually in the sense that they were alienated from God and were destined for eternal death without Him. They also began to die physically as their bodies became mortal and would ultimately be destroyed.
7. A. God promised them that some day a Savior or Redeemer would come who would crush the head of the serpent (Satan) which had deceived them and led them into sin. This Savior would be born as a human being (the seed of the woman), a future descendant of Eve and Adam.  
  
B. God announced this BEFORE He pronounced the punishment they would receive.  
  
C. This demonstrates God's great GRACE for Adam and Eve and the human race. They could not earn their salvation and they would not have to. God Himself would redeem them! The final word for mankind would be victory over sin and all its consequences in spite of the fact that they would be facing the results of sin throughout their earthly lives.
8. A. God covered them with animal skins.  
  
B. The fig leaves represented man's efforts to “cover” the results of their sin. The animal skins represented two things: (1) GOD'S provision for man's need, and (2) the death of “another” to cover their sins.

9. A. God gave Cain some kind of sign which would show to others that they should not kill him or harm him because he was under God's "protection."
- B. No. Cain had done nothing to merit God's special treatment and he had not even shown sincere remorse for his sin. It was only God's grace that protected him from the attacks of others. (Note: This earthly "protection" did not mean that Cain was "saved" or forgiven for what he had done. However, when God prolonged his life, He gave Cain more time to repent and ask God for forgiveness.)
10. A. Genesis 5 shows that the "death penalty" for man's sin was indeed being carried out. Even though people lived for many years on earth, they all died (except, of course, for Enoch).
- B. Enoch walked with God and was taken directly to heaven without dying.
- C. Students will likely answer this question in different ways. Some may possibly emphasize the solemn repetition of the words "And he died," while others might emphasize the hope found in the example of Enoch.
11. A. Genesis 6:5 contains some of the most awesome words of the entire Bible concerning the pervasiveness of sin in human life. We read, "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time."
- B. Answers will vary here. In general, the statement of Genesis 6:5 would not fit our situation today, since there are millions of believers around the world who are faithfully (though imperfectly) serving the Lord and serving others in His name. Also, there are many adherents of non-Christian religions who are living a life of "external obedience" to the laws of men and of God, even though they do not love and serve God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength or their neighbors as themselves.
12. A. Noah is described as "a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God."
- B. No. No one is sinless or perfect in the sight of God. After the flood Noah got drunk and exhibited some very inappropriate behavior (Genesis 9:21). There were likely other failures in his life as well. However, he definitely was an exceptional person of integrity and faithfulness who walked with God in his daily life.
13. A. God established a special covenant with Noah and his sons and the rest of the created world, promising that he would never again destroy the entire earth with a flood.
- B. The sign of this covenant promise was the rainbow "in the clouds."

14. A. The people built the Tower of Babel “so that they could make a name for themselves “and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.” (Genesis 11:4)
- B. Earlier God had commanded Adam and Eve (and, thus, their descendants) to multiply and fill the earth. In their pride and arrogance and defiance, they deliberately refused to do that. If they continued with their defiance, God said that “nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.” (Genesis 11:6)
15. After the people defiantly tried to build the Tower of Babel, God chose to work out His plan of redemption through one man, Abraham, and his descendants. To these people He would give His promises and His laws and through them He would fulfill the promise He made to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The “other people” in the world would not be forgotten, but they would not receive the same blessings and promises that Abraham and his descendants did.