

HOW GOD'S GRACE
CHANGES EVERYTHING

BEAUTIFUL
— AND —
SCANDALOUS

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *HEAVEN*

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Beautiful and Scandalous

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INTRODUCTION

Grace: Beautiful and Scandalous

Grace is a delightful word.

People in hundreds of languages sing “Amazing Grace.” Agnostics, skeptics, and hardened criminals have shed tears upon hearing the song.

Nothing is as stunning or as hope-giving as God’s grace. And nothing more glorious. Jonathan Edwards wrote, “Grace is but Glory begun, and Glory is but Grace perfected.” That’s what makes God’s grace beautiful.

But grace also confounds and even offends our human pride—in this sense, it is scandalous. (How *dare* anyone suggest I don’t deserve grace—and how dare they show grace to those I *know* don’t deserve it?)

During a British conference on comparative religions, scholars debated what belief, if any, was unique to the Christian faith. Incarnation? Resurrection? The debate went on until C.S. Lewis wandered into the room.

“That’s easy,” Lewis replied. “It’s grace.”

Our pride insists we must work our way to God. Only the Christian faith presents God’s grace as unconditional. Other religions insist we must do good to earn God’s favor—and if we stop, we lose it.

But the Bible shows we're unworthy of God's grace and can't earn it. What we cannot earn we cannot lose. We can't *stop deserving* his grace since we never deserved it in the first place.

The Bible makes this astounding proclamation: "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Jesus, the sinless one, willingly gave himself over to be tortured—not for anything he had done, but to save those least deserving. We were not merely misguided subjects; we were rebels and traitors against the King. Yet God adopts us as his children and happily gives us a seat at his table.

If this seems less than amazing, less than wonderful, then we really don't grasp the meaning of grace.

Some people worry that because they've failed God so often, they're unworthy of his grace. But it's that very unworthiness that motivated John Newton, the English slave trader whom God wondrously converted, to compose the classic hymn. And because every Christian heart is touched by grace, "Amazing Grace" still moves us to heartfelt gratitude today.

Charles Spurgeon said something profound and still timely:

Don't buy the lie that cultivating condemnation and wallowing in your shame is somehow pleasing to God... It's just the opposite!... It's only when

we receive his free gift of grace and live in the good of total forgiveness that we're able to turn from old, sinful ways of living and walk in grace-motivated obedience.

Spurgeon is one of many “dead people” (now alive in Christ's presence) that I quote in this book, because insights about grace came long ago in church history, and we need to hear these proven voices who often have far more to offer us than our contemporaries do.

I hope you'll spend time meditating on the brief reflections, great quotations, and Scriptures in this book. God promises that his Word “will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11).

As you read and contemplate and share these insights with others (highly recommended), may you draw closer to Jesus, and may he flood you with gratitude for his magnificent and delightful grace!

Randy Alcorn

“Here then is the scandal. God chose to invade planet earth in the person of His Son, what Christians call the Incarnation—God made flesh. He did so to rescue fallen humans. He became human so we could become holy.” *Chuck Colson*

1

*I do not set aside the grace of God, for if
righteousness could be gained through
the law, Christ died for nothing!*

GALATIANS 2:21

Grace never ignores the awful reality of our sin. In fact, it emphasizes it. Paul said if men were good enough, then “Christ died for nothing.” Benjamin Warfield said, “Grace is free sovereign favor to the ill-deserving.” If we don’t see the reality of how ill-deserving we are, God’s grace won’t seem amazing. If we minimize our unworthiness, we minimize God’s grace.

“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.”

John Newton

2

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18

A.W. Tozer said, “Grace is the good pleasure of God that inclines him to bestow benefits upon the undeserving...to save us and make us sit together in heavenly places to demonstrate to the ages the exceeding riches of God’s kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”

The problem of how to reconcile evil people with a God who hates evil is the greatest problem of history. It calls for the greatest solution ever devised, one so radical as to be nearly unthinkable, and to offend the sensibilities of countless people throughout history—the cross.

“The ultimate test of our spirituality is the measure of our amazement at the grace of God.”

Martyn Lloyd-Jones

3

God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

LUKE 18:13

Sinclair Ferguson says, “The spiritual life is lived between two polarities: our sin and God’s grace. The discovery of the former brings us to seek the latter; the work of the latter illuminates the depths of the former and causes us to seek yet more grace.”

Let’s face each day and each person we see with humility, as an act of grace, while reminding ourselves that we too desperately need God’s grace—every bit as much as those we’re offering it to. When we’re acutely aware of our own sins, we’ll proclaim and exemplify God’s “good news of happiness” (Isaiah 52:7 *ESV*), not with a spirit of superiority but with the contagious excitement of one hungry person sharing food with another.

“God’s grace is his active favor bestowing the greatest gift upon those who have deserved the greatest punishment.”

William Hendrickson

4

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

HEBREWS 4:16

To a devout Jew, the notion of unhindered access to God was scandalous. Yet *by* his grace and *for* his grace, that access is ours. Because of Christ's work, God's door is always open to us. Let's enter freely and frequently!

"Now I will say this to every sinner, though he should think himself to be the worst sinner who ever lived: cry to the Lord and seek him while he may be found. By simple faith, go to your Savior, for he is the throne of grace."

Charles Spurgeon

5

The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

EXODUS 34:6-7

There's little consolation in knowing God is your Creator unless you know what he's like. A Creator could be miserable, unreasonable, unloving, and downright hateful. Likewise, there is little consolation in knowing God is your Ruler, but great consolation in knowing that God is your sovereign Savior: holy, happy, kind, and full of grace.

"Nothing can alter the character of God. In the course of a human life, tastes and outlook and temper may change radically: a kind, equable man may turn bitter and crotchety; a man of good-will may grow cynical and callous. But nothing of this sort happens to the Creator. He never becomes less truthful, or merciful, or just, or good, than he used to be."

J.I. Packer

6

*From his abundance we have all received
one gracious blessing after another.*

JOHN 1:16 (NLT)

Robert Murray M'Cheyne said, "If grace were at any time an obligation of God, it would cease to be grace."

Deliberately and unceasingly, the tide of God's grace brings us wave after wave of God's goodness. The next wave crashes onto the beach before the previous wave is diminished. God's grace is constant, but it isn't stationary. It keeps moving toward us day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute. It's always there when we need it—and there's never a moment we don't.

Conviction of sin brings us momentary grief. Yet, as Sinclair Ferguson says, "The heart-conviction of sin is the way grace prepares the heart for more grace."

"Between here and heaven, every minute that
the Christian lives will be a minute of grace."

Charles Spurgeon

7

*Yet he gave a command to the skies above
and opened the doors of the heavens;
he rained down manna for the people to eat,
he gave them the grain of heaven.*

PSALM 78:23-24

Louis Cassels wrote, “If God wants you to do something, he’ll make it possible for you to do it, but the grace he provides comes only with the task and cannot be stockpiled beforehand. We are dependent on him from hour to hour.”

As God didn’t allow the Israelites to store up manna, he doesn’t let us store up grace. He always gives us enough, but we can’t deposit it for the future. We have to get it fresh, every day.

“He giveth more grace
when the burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength
when the labors increase;
To added affliction he addeth His mercy,
To multiplied trials His multiplied peace.”

Annie Johnson Flint

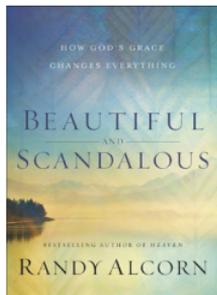


eternal perspective ministries

with author Randy Alcorn

Learn more about *Beautiful and Scandalous*

Randy Alcorn, author of the bestselling *Heaven*, offers daily meditations, Scriptures, and inspirational quotes that will enable you to grasp more fully the grace God lavishes on you. Come explore the many facets of God's grace...and fall more in love than ever before with the One whose faithful love for you is both beautiful and scandalous.



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About Randy Alcorn

Randy is the founder and director of Eternal Perspective Ministries and the best-selling author of over 50 books (over nine million in print) including *Heaven*, *The Treasure Principle*, and the Gold Medallion winner *Safely Home*.



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Eternal Perspective Ministries (EPM) is a nonprofit ministry dedicated to teaching principles of God's Word and assisting the church in ministering to the unreached, unfed, unborn, uneducated, and unsupported people around the world. You can order all of Randy's books and products through EPM's online store at www.epm.org.