

The Most Beautiful Word in the English Language

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Ephesians 2:1-10

- Turkey – I know you were concerned about safety... thank you for your prayers

Still suffering jet lag – want to process my thoughts a bit more before I share them with you...

- A particular word has been on my mind – I believe it to be the most beautiful word in the English language – the word “grace”

Some know it to be a woman’s name...

Some think of it as an adverb, describing something that is done with “smooth agility.”

I think of it as a word that best describes what the Christian gospel is all about:

Grace: “the unmerited, unearned favor of God.” It is God’s love for undeserving people.

- Listen to one of the most wonderful description’s of God’s grace in all of scripture – from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Ephesians:

2 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. ¹

The heart of the gospel is this: though we were once far from God and therefore spiritually dead – lost in our worldliness and in our sin and selfishness.

¹ *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996 (electronic ed.) (Eph 2:1–10). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

God, chose to bestow his favor upon us anyway: *“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.”*

So important is this concept of grace, that Paul repeats himself: *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith –and this is from yourselves –it is the gift of God.”*

God’s love – God’s favor – God’s grace for the undeserving. And what a gift it is!

- It is this concept of God’s grace for the undeserving – that makes Christianity distinctive from other religions.
- A conversation with Ramazan – reaching Turkish people – hard for them to understand “grace.”

Islam – Allah is merciful, but to obtain his mercy you must deserve it - you must earn his favor... you must live a life of obedience to the dictates of the Koran – heed the call to prayer, make a pilgrimage to Mecca if it is within your power to do.

Islam: “submission.” You must submit to the will of Allah. Salvation is something you must achieve.

Islam – God is distant/ Emphasis on what you must do to win his favor

No concept of the forgiveness of sins, no concept of the unmerited favor of God...

Have trouble with the parable of the prodigal son... the son should have been punished...

You work your way to heaven. In my opinion: a certain grimness in Islam.... Joy is missing.. always needing to measure up, to be good enough

- Christianity: you can’t win God’s favor – we could never be good enough . . . we all fall short of the glory of God – not one of us is righteous – no, not one...

[Story]

There is a story about one fellow, a pillar of the church, who died and went directly to the pearly gates.

St. Peter met him and said, “It takes a thousand points to get in, so tell me something about yourself.”

The man confidently said, “Well, until I was twenty-one years old, I never missed Sunday School, unless I was sick in bed. I have a string of perfect attendance medals that almost reaches the floor. I was an acolyte, active in the youth group, and I often worked around the church, cutting grass and doing other odd jobs.”

St Peter said, “That is extremely good. Congratulations! That gives you one point. Tell me something else about yourself.”

The man said, “I am 75 years old. I attend church regularly, served on the board many times, sang in the choir, and was a speaker on Laymen’s Sunday one year. I always give 10% of the income that you gave me

to your church, and was a life-long member of the church. I even was commissioner to the national church meeting a few years ago.”

St Peter said, “That is truly remarkable. That gives you another point. Tell me something else about yourself.”

The man, growing a bit concerned, said, “I tried to live the Christian life. I lived by the Golden Rule, do not believe I had an enemy in the world, obeyed the Ten Commandments, was truly concerned about my neighbor, and always welcomed strangers.”

St Peter said, “That is truly wonderful. That is another point. Tell me more about yourself.”

By this time the man was becoming desperate, and if the truth were known, a little irritated, and he blurted out to St Peter, “Look, at this rate the only way I’ll ever get into heaven is by the grace of God.”

St Peter said, “That is worth one thousand points, and with the three you earned, it makes one thousand three. Would you like to come in now?”

Grace is what Christianity is all about. And when you experience God’s grace, nothing is more liberating. You can’t earn it, can never deserve it. Heaven is a gift from God – it not something that we achieve... It is a gift we unwrap by faith

Turkish people – when they get it, they experience joy like they have never experienced before...

Doesn’t mean that we are not called to do good works. No: *“We are God’s workmanship, created in Jesus Christ to do good works, which prepared in advance for us to do.”* But the good we do, we do not do out of grim obedience to win God’s favor, but to show our gratitude to God for the “incomparable riches of his grace” toward us.

God loves us as we are, and as we turn to him in simple faith and trust, he forgives our sins and makes us alive in Christ Jesus. The spiritually dead are raised!

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us come to the Lord’s table now and receive his love and mercy...