

**iFocus on Grace**  
**Core Value: *Committed to Grace***

## **Introduction**

This morning we are going to talk about one of our Core Values here at Knollwood: *Committed to Grace*. Let me give you a working definition of grace. It is printed at the bottom of your message outline:

Grace is the free, unmerited gift of God, as revealed in and through Christ, for the purpose of redeeming us; thereby bestowing on us the privilege of access to the Father, and producing in us Christ's own character with a view towards eternity.

I want to use an acrostic to consider the various elements of this doctrine of "Grace." The Biblical text for this subject is Ephesians, chapter two.

### **Gift: The Privilege of Grace**

In principle, grace is always a gift. There is nothing in the recipient that merits it. Paul begins by laying down the marker of our condition before God apart from Christ:

#### **Ephesians 2:1-3**

We are in a broken relationship with God, and we cannot mend it. We are born under God's judgment and we cannot change that fact. We are at war with God and we cannot bring about peace. We are an enemy of God and we cannot reverse that.

We will not understand and really appreciate grace until and unless we understand that there is nothing in ourselves that merits God's favor – that there is nothing we can do to earn God's favor or gain his love or his forgiveness.

Paul then shifts his focus from the helplessness of man to the loving mercy of God – **Ephesians 2:4-5**

This is the marvelous and free grace of God – his love, his initiative, his action. Paul writes about this incredible, unbelievable gift in his letter to Titus:

But when the goodness and lovingkindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. – *Titus 3:4-7*

This is so hard for us to comprehend. We struggle because we just know: “Nothing is for free!” Read the fine print! There is always some catch. It is the old – “If it sounds too good to be true – it probably is!”

We are approaching the season for giving gifts. It really is difficult for many of us to receive gifts without feeling the need to give back.

Let me ask you a couple of questions. If someone gives you a gift, do you feel like you now need to give them something in return? If someone gives you a compliment, is it difficult for you to receive it with just a “thanks,” or do you feel that you need to say something nice in return?

We really struggle with receiving something, which is a gift. We struggle even more when we don’t deserve it, which is the essence of grace.

Paul says it as plainly and clearly as he possibly can – **Ephesians 2:8-9**

Grace: the free, unmerited gift of God. Watch this clip from the Skit Guys; it is the message of the principle of grace.

### **Redemption: The Purpose of Grace**

Paul says, “For by grace you have been saved.” Look over at **Eph. 1:7**.

During the time of Jesus, the Jews were under the dominion of the Roman Empire. It is estimated that one-half of the people in the Empire were slaves. They were either captured from another country – often the result of military campaigns, or born of slaves, or sold into slavery because they were unable to pay their debts.

They were the ones who did the menial tasks and hard labor. Sometimes they served as gladiators to entertain the rich and powerful. They were handled like livestock. They had no rights; they could own no property; they even needed permission to marry.

Here is the picture of redemption:

At the slave market – a person standing on the slave block, being auctioned off to the highest bidder. The buyer, who was redeeming the slave, had to meet three conditions:

- 1) He had to be free
- 2) He had to be willing to pay the price
- 3) He had to be able to pay the price

Jesus Christ redeemed us, purchased us, out of the slave market of sin. He met those three conditions:

- 1) He was free – free of sin
- 2) He was willing to pay the price
- 3) He was able to pay the price, for he was fully human and fully divine

This is redemption; the word means “to purchase, to buy back.”

This redemption is complete – Paul says in Ephesians 2:5 – “By grace you have been saved.” He uses a verbal construction, which conveys the idea of an action that took place in past time and was completed in past time, having results that persist through present time. In other words, Paul is saying that “by grace you have been saved in past time completely, with the result that you are in a state of salvation which persists through present time.”

Your salvation, your redemption is complete! It was also costly. Look what the Apostle Peter writes in his first letter we have in the New Testament:

...knowing that you were redeemed (ransomed) from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious (i.e. costly) blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. – *1 Peter 1:17-19*

Contemplating this wonderful work of grace should leave our minds gasping with amazement. Someone once wrote: “Many Christians are shocked by sin, but they should be staggered by grace.”

Samuel Davies served as the President of Princeton in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. He captures this wonder in these words:

Great God of wonders! All thy ways  
Display the attributes divine;  
But countless acts of pardoning grace  
Beyond thine other wonders shine:  
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?  
Or who has grace so rich and free?

In wonder lost, with trembling joy,  
We take the pardon of our God;  
Pardon for crimes of deepest dye,  
A pardon bought with Jesu's blood:  
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?  
Or who has grace so rich and free?

O may this strange, this matchless grace,  
This God-like miracle of love,  
Fill the wide earth with grateful praise,  
As now it fills the choirs above!  
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?  
Or who has grace so rich and free?

God has purchased us for himself. What a marvelous thought. We see, again, that God is the initiator – the Actor on the stage of history. He bought you for himself.

The purpose of grace is redemption. Let's respond to this wonderful truth by singing *The Same Love*. Look at the words we will sing:

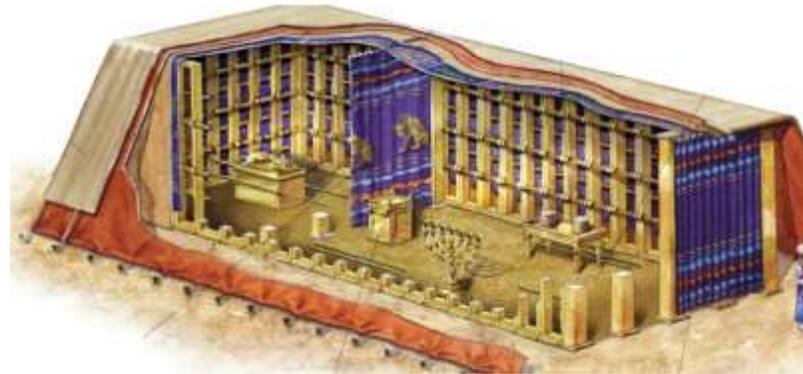
The same love that set the captives free  
The same love that opened eyes to see  
Is calling us all by name  
You are calling us all by name  
The same God that spread the heavens wide  
The same God that was crucified  
Is calling us all by name  
You are calling us all by name

**Access: The Privilege of Grace**

Look at **Ephesians 2:6** Paul is speaking of our position in Christ. Just as we have been crucified and buried with Christ – identified in his experience of death, so we

have been raised up and are seated with Christ. Where is Christ seated? – at the right hand of God. So, where is the believer in Christ positionally? Seated with him in the heavenlies at God’s right hand.

In the Old Testament days, there was no access for the people except through the priests. This was graphically illustrated and communicated through the tabernacle. Look at the diagram of the tabernacle that God instructed Moses to build.



Only once a year – on the great Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16) – did the high priest enter into the Holy of Holies – before the presence of God. There, he would offer the blood of the sacrifice, sprinkling the blood on the mercy seat situated on the top of the Ark of the Covenant.

He would pass through the thick veil into the very presence of God. When the temple was constructed in Herod’s day, the temple that stood at the time of Jesus, similarly, there was the veil. In Matthew’s Gospel we read that when Christ died on the cross, that the temple veil was torn in two, from top to bottom.

The result is that the Holy of Holies, signifying the presence of God, was now open to whom? Everyone? No, just the priests. They were the only ones allowed in the Holy Place.

Now here’s an absolutely amazing New Testament truth:

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.... But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the

excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. – *I Peter 2:4-5, 9*

One of the truths put forth by Martin Luther in the Reformation was the “universal priesthood of believers.” The privilege of that standing is access. Look what Paul says in Romans five:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand.... – *Romans 5:1-2*

When we come to God, for example in prayer, we have access because of our relationship with Jesus Christ. Ron Dunn story – Texas State Fair

### **Character: The Product of Grace**

#### **Ephesians 2:10**

“workmanship” – Greek word *poiema*. This word is used only twice in the entire New Testament. We get our English word “poem” from this. You are God’s poem – his work – his masterpiece. God desires to build character in your life. His desire and intent is to make you more like his beloved Son, Jesus Christ. This is the process of transformation that we have been talking about in this series.

While redemption is instantaneous – defined as an “act,” character-building is a process – an ongoing activity. But, we must not lose sight of the guaranteed goal of God. Paul writes about God’s plan for your life:

And we know that God works all things together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to become conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brethren.... – *Romans 8:28-29*

This is God’s blueprint for your life.

Michelangelo was working on his sculpture “David,” when someone approached him and asked what he was doing. He replied, “I am chipping away everything that does not look like David.”

We struggle with many human obstacles in this process of transformation – like: unbelief, disobedience, desire for control, sin, distractions, misplaced priorities, and the like. So often, it doesn't appear that the process is working. From our vantage point, we are often tempted to doubt God's work in our lives. In reality, we don't have the right perspective.

Consider the poem – **The Weaver** – by Grant Colfax Tullar:

My life is but a weaving  
Between my Lord and me,  
I cannot choose the colors  
He worketh steadily.

Oftimes He weaveth sorrow,  
And I in foolish pride  
Forget He sees the upper  
And I, the underside.

Not till the loom is silent  
And the shuttles cease to fly  
Shall God unroll the canvas  
And explain the reasons why.

The dark threads are as needful  
In the Weaver's skillful hand  
As the threads of gold and silver  
In the pattern He has planned.

We should often remind ourselves of the truth of Philippians 1:6 –

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

There is a truth that we must grab hold of. It was by Grace that God has saved us; and it will be by Grace that God will sustain us. All of life is to be understood as gained by, maintained by, sustained by, and guaranteed by the grace of God.

A life that is being conformed into the image of Christ will be a life filled with the good works which God prepared beforehand that one might walk in them. Godly

character leads to godly conduct. Grace is about what we believe and how we live. It is a focus of salvation and sanctification.

Not only must we be committed to grace in a salvation sense, but also in the way we conduct our lives and relate to each other. Unfortunately, there are often times and in many churches where a strong emphasis is put on grace in being saved, but which are very grace-less in the way we live.

Chuck Swindoll writes about this danger in his book *Grace Awakening*.

There are killers on the loose today. The problem is that you can't tell by looking. They don't wear little buttons that give away their identity, nor do they carry signs warning everybody to stay away. On the contrary, a lot of them carry Bibles and appear to be clean-living, nice-looking, law-abiding citizens. Most of them spend a lot of time in churches, some in places of religious leadership. Many are so respected in the community their neighbors would never guess they are living next door to killers.

They kill freedom, spontaneity, and creativity; they kill joy as well as productivity. They kill with their words and their pens and their looks. They kill with their attitudes far more often than with their behavior. There is hardly a church or Christian organization or Christian school or missionary group or media ministry where such danger does not lurk. The amazing thing is that they get away with it, day in and day out, without being confronted or exposed. Strangely, the same ministries that would not tolerate heresy for ten minutes will step aside and allow these killers all the space they need to maneuver and manipulate others in the most insidious manner imaginable. Their intolerance is tolerated. Their judgmental spirits remain unjudged. Their bullying tactics continue unchecked. And their narrow-mindedness is either explained away or quickly defended. The bondage that results would be criminal were it not so subtle and wrapped in such spiritual-sounding garb.

Grace received but unexpressed is dead grace. To spend one's time debating how grace is received or how much commitment is necessary for salvation, without getting into what it means to live by grace and enjoy the magnificent freedom it provides, quickly leads to a counter-productive argument. It becomes little more than another tedious trivial pursuit where the majority of God's people spend days looking back and asking, "How did we receive it?" instead of looking ahead and announcing, "Grace is ours...let's live it!" Deny it or debate

it and we kill it. My plea is that we claim it and allow it to set us free. When we do, grace will become what it was meant to be – *really amazing!*

We want to be a church noted for its commitment to grace. Grace never negates truth. Biblical truth is foundational to all we do. Our first Core Value is *Passionate about Truth*. But in the context of truth, we want grace to be prevalent. You can see that message in the words of the song *Here and Now*.

Finally, this morning:

### **Eternity: The Prospect of Grace**

**Ephesians 2:5-6** God’s plan for us has as its perspective: eternity. In view of your complete redemption, God begins his eternal plan in your life. In a moment, we will sing those words penned by John Newton, an 18<sup>th</sup> century slave trader, drunkard and blasphemous sailor, who was converted to Christ and then served his new master as a minister of the Gospel:

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.

Then, this verse:

When we’ve been there ten thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun;  
We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise,  
Than when we first begun.

God is not pressured by time to complete the product. He does not work under time constraints. We are so limited in how far we can see. We need to lift our eyes beyond what we can see and take in the perspective of eternity. The destiny that awaits us is eternity with Christ. But eternal life is not just “pie in the sky when you die.” It starts now! In his High Priestly prayer to his Father, Jesus said: “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”– *John 17:3*

**Gift** – the Principle of Grace

**Redemption** – the Purpose of Grace

**Access** – the Privilege of Grace

**Character** – the Product of Grace

## **Eternity** – the Prospect of Grace

Grace – the free, unmerited **gift** of God, as revealed in and through Christ, for the purpose of **redeeming** us; thereby bestowing on us the privilege of **access** to the Father, and producing in us Christ's own **character** with a view towards **eternity**.