

"The Mystery of Grace"
Isaiah 60:1-6 and Ephesians 3:1-12

We speak about grace on a regular basis, often in everyday conversation... I for one, know that it is one thing I truly hope for, for all people. It is the deepest longing and desire of my heart that all peoples would come to know and experience God's grace. It is something I speak about often, something I pray for daily, yet there is one question which seems to come up all the time... What is grace? I am sure that we all look at grace in many different ways, defining grace as something specific depending on our own interpretations of scripture, on how it has been defined by others for us or possibly, depending on our own personal experiences. Some of the definitions I have come across include:

- **Grace is the unmerited divine assistance given to humans for their regeneration or sanctification – Ephesians 2:6, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves. It is a gift of God." or 1 Peter 5:10, "And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."**
- Grace is the equivalent of mercy or pardon from ones sins – Ephesians 1:7-8, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us."
- **Grace is God's approval or kindness given freely by God – 1 Corinthians 15:10, "yet, not I but the grace of God within me."**
- Grace is the love of God shown to the unlovely, underserving people – 2 Corinthians 12:9, "But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."
- **Grace, is God reaching downward to people who are in rebellion against him - Hebrews 4:16, "Let us 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."**

Grace, in my opinion, can be any one of these. It could be all of these at different times. It could be all of these at all times. It could be something different for each one of us sitting here today. Yet, there is of course one definition which stands out... One definition that many of us tend to lean away from, but it is one definition which comes to light here in Paul's letter to the Ephesian church... **"Grace is a mystery."** Paul makes two very important statements in the first 6 verses of this section of his letter:

Firstly, he says, "surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to ME for YOU." In the first two chapters of this letter, Paul has already unpacked in part the understanding of God's grace to the Ephesian church. The one verse which always comes to mind first when speaking about God's grace is of course Ephesians 2:6, **"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith..."** Paul also spent a significant amount of time with the Ephesian church prior to writing this letter thus, because of his lengthily visit as well as his notes in the previous chapters, the church should have at least some kind of understanding of the grace of God. But more so, what Paul highlights, is somewhat more astounding, the fact that God's grace was given to him for others. Paul is not suggesting that God's grace is given only to himself for the benefit of others, rather, he suggests that he is an agent of God's grace, part of God's universal plan of grace which, as he says, has not been revealed to generations before this. God's grace is revealed by the Spirit to His people so that they may help others know and understand the mystery of Christ, of which Paul had a significant role to play.

Secondly, Paul says, "This mystery is that through the Gospel..." What we should understand here is that yes, the mystery of God's grace is revealed by direct revelation from His Spirit, yet it is also revealed by the very word of God. **2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."** The word helps us make sense of the mystery of His grace, it

opens our eyes to see the eternal plan and purpose of God, who created all things, is over all things and is in all things.

And it is with this understanding that we get a three part glimpse into what that eternal plan and purpose of God is: As Paul explains in verse 6, **firstly**, he makes the suggestion that there is no distinction now between Jews and Gentiles because of God's grace as the Gentiles are now heirs together with Israel. **Secondly**, that both Jew and Gentile belong to one body being the body of Christ, the universal church of God and **thirdly**, both Jew and Gentile are able to share in the promise in Christ Jesus.

It is clear that all people, regardless of who they are, are in need of God's grace. Not one single person has the right to enter into God's grace or to be an heir of God's grace. Yet it is because of God's plan and purpose, set in motion at the beginning of creation, that all people can become heirs. All people are called to the same faith and to relate to God in faith because faith has a future, and it has a future because of God's grace. This all amounts to the most profound understanding of the implication of God's grace upon His people, in v.12, Paul says, "**In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.**"

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