

## The Grace We Need James 4:6-7a

We sing about it.

We read about it.

We say it before meals.

But what makes grace so amazing?

Is it something we really understand? Can we ever plumb the depths of what grace means or fully understand it as part of the nature of God?

Just before Thanksgiving of each year, about 5,000 logs are cut and stacked to form a huge pyramid that rises some 55 feet above the Polo Field at Texas A&M University. Just before the game with Texas University, the pyramid is ignited into a huge bonfire symbolizing the burning desire of Texas A&M to beat their archrivals. In 1999 as the students were constructing the pyramid, the center pole collapsed causing the logs to fall killing 12 students and injuring an additional 28.

The competitive nature of the two schools has sometimes spilled over into less than friendly behavior. But that particular year, the tragedy brought the two schools together in a spirit of solidarity. At the halftime ceremony, the Texas University band marched out on the field playing the great old hymn 'Amazing Grace'. Witnesses said it was an incredibly moving experience.

It is a hymn that is often played at funerals, so the question comes to mind both for those fans in 1999 and for any who hear those lyrics and may sing along: do they really understand the concept of how awesome and amazing God's grace is manifested in the person and work of Jesus Christ? Whether the term used is worm or wretches, when we sing that song do we consider ourselves in such a destitute and desperate state?

Writing to believers scattered among the nations, both then and now, James reminds us that to live the Christian life is only made possible by grace.

Grace helps us to find joy and even persevere in our trials.

Grace helps us to mature in our faith.

Grace helps us in times of temptation.

Grace helps us to be doers of the Word.

Grace helps us in serving others and in how we treat others.

Grace helps us guard our tongue. (Colossians 4:4-6)

Grace helps us pursue wisdom from above and guides us as peacemakers.

Grace helps us love God more than anything else.

Grace does not come from within us, but is a gift God gives us that enables us to become a Christian and then to live as a Christian.

Grace is given to us and in turn something that we must extend to others with the help of God's Spirit.

Grace is part of our discussion today, but one that we will only scratch the surface of.

At some point in his life, John Newton came to the realization of his depraved nature and that only God's grace could change it. From his experience he gave us what is perhaps the most familiar and just maybe the most introspective and impactful hymn of all time – Amazing Grace.

He once stated that when he got to heaven, he would be surprised by the people he thought would be there but who weren't; he would be surprised by the people he didn't think would be there, but who were; but most importantly he would be surprised that he was there.

That's an understanding of grace. It's realizing that we don't deserve heaven, but instead its antithesis. It's only because of God's grace and James tells us how we can receive it. Note first that we are supplied grace by God for being humble. Let's turn in our Bibles to **James 4:6-7a**.

### I. WE ARE SUPPLIED GRACE BY GOD FOR BEING HUMBLE – v. 6

Quoting from **Proverbs 3:34**, a passage that Peter also refers to in **I Peter 5:5**, James says that God gives grace to the humble but also indicates that God gives what he describes as "**more grace**". You might be asking yourself more than what? Does God give more grace to some people and less to others? Does God give more grace in certain situations than He does during other life events? Does God dole out His grace in measured amounts when we reach certain spiritual milestones?

Is His grace given out on a merit or reward system?  
 Every hundred times you attend church you get another dose of grace.  
 Every time you read through the Bible you get another dose of grace.  
 You get another dose of grace when you witness.  
 Every time you memorize a verse you get another dose of grace.  
 Of course we know that isn't the case at all. We can never earn grace because then it wouldn't be grace. Scripture tells us that grace is unmerited.

### A. Grace Is Unmerited

Simply put, that means grace isn't something we can earn. Paul writes in **Ephesians 2:8-9** that if we could do something to earn grace then we would be able to brag about it. But then the question comes to mind, what do we have to do and how much? If we can earn it, then it's not a gift.

People have tried to put the term into ideas that help us understand grace.

Someone made it into an acronym: GRACE is **God's Riches At Christ's Expense**.

Others just simply say it is unmerited favor.

Some say that grace is God giving us what we don't deserve. This stands opposite of God's mercy, which is God not giving us what we do deserved.

John Newton certainly understood both, especially God's grace. He wrote "**John Newton, clerk, once an infidel and libertine, was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, preserved, restored and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy.**" That sounds a lot like something Paul would say. His hymn is filled with remorse for the greatness of his sin, but also expressions of joy in discovering God's infinite grace. He went on to write "**I was capable of anything, I had not the least fear of God before my eyes...I not only sinned myself, but made it my study to tempt and seduce others.**"

How wonderfully refreshing and reassuring are his words "**Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like, I once was lost but now am**

**found, was blind but now I see.**"

One day Jesus found himself dining in the home of Simon, a Pharisee. We find it in **Luke 7:36- 50**. As they were eating, an uninvited woman came and stood behind Jesus. From the viewpoint of all but one, this woman who crashed the party was unwelcome. She was a woman with a reputation around town. Though most looked at her with contempt, she scanned the room and found the one she was looking for. She was weeping and probably more than that, she was sobbing. Luke tells us that she was crying so much that her tears wet the feet of Jesus. We don't know if they were tears of great remorse or great joy. Having no towel, she did a most undignified thing by letting her hair down and wiping His feet dry with the strands that draped over her shoulders. Then she anointed them with expensive perfume. She was unconcerned by the unspoken criticism she knew had formed in the minds of all the others. Only the thoughts and words of one person mattered to her.

Luke describes her as a woman who had lived a sinful life. We can only let our minds wonder as to what he meant. We probably don't have to imagine very much to realize his intention here. Simon who saw all this take place was filled with disdain for her because he knew of her reputation and wondered why Jesus would allow this kind of woman to touch Him if He truly was a prophet of God. In reality it doesn't really matter what she had done. We make the assumption that she was a prostitute. She could have been a murderer or bank robber or any number of things. The point is she was a sinner, and she knew it and she knew about Jesus. Jesus once said it wasn't those who are healthy who need a doctor, but those who are sick. He came to seek and save the lost, those who were spiritually sick, those who knew they were and needed spiritual healing.

Knowing his thoughts, Jesus asked Simon a question about love and forgiveness using an illustration about two men who owed money to a moneylender. One owed 10 times the amount of the other. Both debts were cancelled. Jesus then asked

which man would love the lender more? Simon answered that the one who was forgiven the greatest debt. Jesus then made the analogy that this woman who had the greater debt of sin loved Him more and demonstrated it with her actions. Jesus then told her two important truths: her sins were forgiven, and her faith had saved her. It wasn't what she did but what she believed. She knew how great a sinner she was and came to understand how great a Savior Jesus was. Somewhere she had heard about Jesus and her need to repent and believe. Maybe she had heard it from Jesus Himself, and she believed. She came to express her faith by her actions, to seek Jesus for the one thing, the only thing that she needed most in life. In a moment of vulnerability, she humbled herself in front of all those who looked at her with condemnation. It didn't matter who else was present in the room, ignoring their glaring eyes, ignoring their criticism, she came to the only one who could offer her grace and forgiveness. The others would offer her only banishment or stoning. In their opinion she deserved nothing: not forgiveness, not salvation. She figuratively came to the feet of the cross and Jesus extended grace to her through forgiveness and salvation.

Some people are like the Pharisee and want to automatically condemn others who are worse sinners than they are unmindful of their own guilt and standing condemnation before God. And yet, God in grace, extends forgiveness to any and all who would come seeking it. Those who think they have sinned little don't understand the depth of grace that has been extended to them when they were saved. But those who have sinned much understand, like John Newton, the greater degree of grace and are all the more humbled with gratitude.

If we fail to see ourselves as wretched sinners, deserving of eternal separation from God, then grace won't seem as amazing. We might not even think we need it. As Erwin Lutzer put we will see "grace as nice, helpful – even necessary – but not really amazing."

One author noted that the better we think ourselves to be, the less grace we think we need. That's why

so many think they will gain eternal life because of their own perception of morality in view of the immorality of others. They have come to believe that grace isn't necessary if you are good, that being good is good enough. They neglect to see that one sin creates enmity with God that is condemnable and can never be matched by any good we think may erase our guilt. Paul reminds us in **Romans 11:6** that if salvation came by works then grace is not grace. Some believe that grace isn't necessary, except by those who see themselves as greater sinners. They fail to see that grace is unmerited and can't be earned. Some day instead of being welcomed into God's kingdom, they will only hear the words to depart.

*With the Olympics well under way, eyes of the watching world were on Simone Biles, the darling of women's gymnastics. But sadly, her efforts weren't good enough to get her back to the top podium, so she withdrew from competition.*

Some believe their past efforts will get them to heaven's podium, but they will be denied because good isn't good enough. People have their hopes pinned on so many things other than the grace God offers as a gift for salvation. But here's the thing about receiving this grace. James tells us what is required. Grace is given to the humble. It's a term the Bible describes as meekness, lowliness, and absence of self. It's used in verses like **Philippians 2:3** where we are told to consider others before ourselves in lowliness of mind. It's also used in **Colossians 3:12** where it is to be part of the clothing or characteristics that the Christian is to put on. When we come to Christ, we must come in humility. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said it was the poor in spirit who would inherit the kingdom of God. We must recognize that apart from Christ, in our current condition as a sinner separated from God that we are spiritually bankrupt. Being humble before God in coming to Him for salvation requires that we put away any pride we have thinking we have something to offer toward our salvation. We must put aside any assertion in thinking that we can have any part in our salvation aside from faith believing Jesus did it all.

People toil over the belief that work of some kind on their part is required to merit God's favor and it brings them no peace because there is the constant uncertainty of what to do or how much needs to be done to fill the gap between them and heaven. They fail to realize that grace has made it possible through the finished work of Christ on the cross to pay the debt we could never pay in a million lifetimes. Jesus stood in between the sinful gap of humanity eternally destined for separation from God and a holy God who demands payment and justice. In that gap Jesus took our punishment allowing the grace of God to be extended to those who by faith believe that Jesus bore their sin. Our greatest need is to know and receive the grace God made known to us in the work of Christ on the cross. To receive the gift of grace we must come in humility because He only gives grace to the humble, who bring nothing to God.

August Toplady puts it in perspective in his hymn Rock of Ages. Sadly, this stanza has been omitted in our hymnal.

Nothing in my hands I bring,  
Simply to Thy cross I cling;  
Naked, come to Thee for dress,  
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly;  
Wash me, Savior, or I die!

Grace is unmerited and every person needs it.

Something else we learn from our passage is that grace is unlimited.

## **B. Grace Is Unlimited – Romans 5:20; 6:1-2**

James says that God **“gives more grace”**.

Paul describes it as being abundant. If you look at the term in the Greek, it literally means grace upon grace. It is an unlimited supply. Think of it in terms of wave upon wave upon wave that will never run dry. God's grace is a spiritual artesian well that will never end. An artesian well is any well where water pressure from the source causes water to rise in the well bore to a height above the top of the source. Pressure forces it out and up.

If your sin is here, God's grace pours out over it.  
If you sin is here (higher), God's grace pours out over it. Grace is more than the need.

Paul wrote where sin abounds, grace super abounds or abundantly abounds. He came to understand that grace supplies in abundance more than our sin. He considered himself to be the chiefest or greatest sinner and yet he believed and experienced that God's grace was greater than his sin.

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,  
Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt,  
Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured,  
There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.

Sin and despair, like the sea waves cold,  
Threaten the soul with infinite loss;  
Grace that is greater, yes, grace untold,  
Points to the refuge, the mighty cross.

Dark is the stain that we cannot hide –  
What can avail to wash it away?  
Look! There is flowing a crimson tide;  
Whiter than snow you may be today.

Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,  
Freely bestowed on all who believe!  
You that are longing to see His face,  
Will you this moment His grace receive?

Grace, grace, God's grace,  
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within!  
Grace, grace, God's grace,  
Grace that is greater than all our sin!

Paul saw the grace offered by God at the cross through the shed blood of Christ. He believed and received grace through his faith and was granted the gift of eternal life. He came to know that God's grace was unlimited and would cover his sin and the sin of all sinners. God's grace is greater than our sin because it is unlimited. No matter what sins we commit, no matter how much sin we commit, no matter how long it takes before we seek God's grace through faith, no matter what sins we commit in the future, there is enough grace to pour out over us and cover our sin. It should be mentioned as well that grace isn't limited to just a few. Because it is

unlimited, it is available for all. If you haven't yet, seek His grace. It is unlimited and it is free.

Paul also came to understand that God's grace wasn't just unlimited when it came to salvation, he also came to understand the unlimited power of God's grace when it came to trials.

## II Corinthians 12:7-10

To recognize one's weakness is to come in humility understanding that in our own strength we cannot long endure the trials, the thorns, the temptations that come our way apart from God's grace. Paul describes this unlimited grace as being sufficient. That doesn't mean just enough, but rather again the idea that it is more than we need, given in abundance. It's grace upon grace to strengthen us along this journey of faith no matter what we encounter. Paul delighted in his weakness so that the power of Christ might rest on him. It is a power that comes through an infinite supply of grace given to the person who humbly comes asking for it.

**What trial are you facing today?**

God's grace is there in unlimited supply.

**What health concern are you facing?**

God's grace will see you through it.

**What temptation seems so strong you aren't sure how much longer you can resist?**

God's grace is there to pull you from it.

**What hardship, weakness, persecution, insult, or difficulty are you going through?**

Grace doesn't mean God will remove the trial or temptation or remedy what you are going through. Grace gives you the confidence to rest in God's unlimited power as you stand in your weakness.

**"For when I am weak, then I am strong."** That's God's grace at work in you. It will sustain you and supply you with strength as you go through each and every life event. His grace is sufficient.

I believe that James introduced the idea of grace here because his readers needed to understand that apart from grace a Christian cannot live a godly life, something that he points them to throughout this letter. I think they also needed to know that grace was necessary to bring them back from worldliness and necessary for faithfulness to God. Humility

moves us toward God, while pride moves us away from God in pursuit of worldliness.

Grace is unmerited.

Grace is unlimited.

Grace is unfathomable.

## C. Grace Is Unfathomable

We will never be able to understand the extent of God's grace. We'll never know it, because we will never know the extent of His wrath poured out on Jesus for our sin. If we could be given just a taste of hell we would have a better understanding of the unfathomable riches of His grace. If we had a glimpse of what we deserve, we would have a greater appreciation for what riches God has given us that we don't deserve. If we had a glimpse of that we would have a better appreciation of the woman wetting the feet of Jesus and respond just like her. Grace doesn't give us what we deserve, it gives us what we need and we receive it in humility.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century two influential preachers occupied pulpits in London. On one occasion Joseph Parker commented on the poor condition of orphans who entered an orphanage run by the church Charles Spurgeon pastored. Spurgeon was told that Parker had criticized the orphanage itself. Spurgeon was a man of fiery temperament and blasted Parker from the pulpit. The verbal attack was printed in the London paper and it became the talk of the town. People flocked to Parker's church the next Sunday to see how he would respond. He said "I understand Dr. Spurgeon is not in his pulpit today, and this is the Sunday they use to take an offering for the orphanage. I suggest we take a love offering for the orphanage." The crowd was delighted and the ushers had to empty the collection plates three times. Later that week there was a knock at Parker's study. It was Spurgeon. He said "You know, Parker, you have practiced grace on me. You have given me not what I deserved, you have given me what I needed."

Spurgeon had to humble himself in going to Parker because he understood what had been offered Him. To receive God's grace we must come in humility.

When we are humble, God supplies us with grace. This passage also shows us that we suffer grief from God for being haughty.

## II. WE SUFFER GRIEF FROM GOD FOR BEING HAUGHTY – v. 6

Among the characteristics or activities that God hates recorded in **Proverbs 8:13** pride is listed. It's different than feeling some pride for a job well done or pride in the accomplishments of a child. The kind God hates stems from selfishness or conceit. This kind of pride is sin. Pride puts self first and is a characteristic that keeps us from seeking God. Pride is what creates a spiritually adulterous heart that puts other things, including self above God. **Psalm 10:4** says that the proud are so consumed with themselves that their thoughts are far from God. The humble person recognizes that he is spiritually bankrupt and needs God's grace. The proud person on the other hand, thinks he doesn't need God at all. The proud person might even think they deserve God's acceptance of them just as they are. God should be glad to have someone like them on His team. Pride is a person's exaggerated opinion of himself which includes disdain for others, scornful speech (**Psalm 17:10; 119:51, 69, 78**) and is evident in their behavior at times even violent behavior (**Deuteronomy 17:12; Psalm 10:2**). It is giving ourselves credit for something God has done. It's taking glory that rightly belongs to God. Pride is worship of self and is what James would call spiritual adultery.

Scripture is clear about the consequences of pride. **Proverbs 16:18-19** says that pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. **Isaiah 14:12-15** reminds us that Satan was cast out of heaven for his pride. **Verse 22** notes that there is nothing but destruction ahead for the proud.

Our verse says that God opposes the proud or resists the proud. He stands against them. It is a word that means He is hostile towards that person. It literally means that God will set Himself up against the proud. Lucifer, Haman, Nebuchadnezzar and Herod come to mind. **Obadiah 1:3-4**

The remedy for pride is humility. Paul describes it in **Romans 12:3** as not thinking of yourself more highly than you should. The proud person fights a losing battle when God is opposed to them. But God in grace can restore the proud heart. Think about the arrogance of Peter to say He would never deny Christ but then did that very same night. Yet Christ restored Peter because he repented in humility.

We suffer grief from God for being haughty.

There is one more thing to point out from James. We are to submit to God through being humble.

## III. WE ARE TO SUBMIT TO GOD THROUGH BEING HUMBLE – v. 7a

Submission is a word many in our culture don't like to hear. They want to be the master of their own destiny, the one who calls the shots, the person who is in control. An unwillingness to submit is nothing more than a prideful heart. If we would experience God's grace then we must submit to God. The word is an imperative which means it's a command. It's a word that describes living in an established order. It is a military term meaning to put yourself under or to put yourself in rank. You won't last very long in a job if you go off and do your own thing. You won't make it in the military if you ignore the commands of a superior officer. The Christian life will be difficult if we don't submit to God.

In the context, we are to submit to God or put ourselves under God who is sovereign, to give up our will in obedience to His will. The proud puts himself above God or in place of God while the humble puts himself under God. It comes down to a matter of will. Submission is to surrender my will to the will of God. The word is also in the aorist tense giving it a sense of urgency to the command. We are to submit right away. We can't be saved and we can't live the Christian life without submitting to the grace of God. Submission to God shows we love Him. It is not done out of a sense of obligation or duty, but out of devotion to and delight in the One who has given us His grace. The choice is clear. Submit in humility and receive grace or be haughty and receive grief from God who will oppose you.