

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 19 July 2020. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.*

## **The True Grace of God**

### **1 Peter 5:12-14**

In 1732, a young boy named John stood in the doorway of his home in Wapping, England, and choked back tears as he watched his mother being carried off in a carriage to the home of a friend named Mrs. Catlett, who lived in a distant town. John's mother suffered from tuberculosis; and it was hoped that Mrs. Catlett's care for his mother might help to prolong her life. However, this was to be the last time that John would see his mother. She died a short time later.

Now, John's mother had meant the world to him. She was a member of a "Dissenter" church (in other words, a non-Anglican church); and, unlike most of her neighbours, she believed that a person can have a real relationship with God, and have *absolute assurance* of salvation through faith in Christ. Her faith was vibrant. Every day, she taught her son the Bible, and the Gospel of salvation. At age 4, John was reading the Scriptures. His mother also taught him hymns, and immersed him in godly literature.

But then, she went to be with the Lord. After this, young John was under the care of his father, who was a sea captain, and a dealer in the slave trade. Sadly, John had never had a close relationship with his father, because he was at sea for months on end. When his father was at home, he was cold, harsh, and distant. After John's father remarried, and sent John off to a boarding school, John resented his father even more. When John turned 17, his father tried to get him a job at a sugarcane plantation in Jamaica; but John disobeyed his father, and signed up instead for a merchant ship in the Mediterranean. For a while, John merrily went his own way, and did his own thing; but about a year later, he was kidnapped by the Royal Navy, and was pressed into service to the Crown.

Now, by this time, John had become a complete reprobate. At age 17, he had begun to read the writings of an atheist named Lord Shaftesbury; and soon, his life showed that he did not believe himself to be accountable to his Creator. As his conscience became increasingly seared, he became a vile, fornicating, hard-drinking, gambling, foul-mouthed, cursing, blaspheming man. He especially loved to blaspheme God. He was the vilest of them all. He out-cursed and out-blasphemed the other sailors so much, that even *they* didn't like him. At one point, after the captain of John's ship had flogged him for trying to escape from the ship, he was actually thinking of murdering the captain, and then committing suicide!

Eventually, John was transferred to a slave-trading ship called the *Pegasus*; and in time, he became the captain of this ship. However, John was so vile, that his crewmen had no respect for him. At one point, when John was stone drunk, and had fallen overboard, the sailors, instead of throwing him a rope, shot him with a whaling harpoon, and dragged him on board like an animal. (For the rest of his life, he walked with a limp.) Finally, John's crew became so disgusted with him, that they abandoned him! On the coast of West Africa, they left John with a slave trader named Amos Clowe. Now, Clowe had married an African woman named Princess Peye, of the Sherbro tribe; and Princess Peye made John her slave. She abused John horribly, just as she did all her other slaves. John was in this humiliating condition for quite some time. In his heart, he knew that God was breaking him; but he still wasn't ready to repent.

In 1748, John's father sent a captain of a ship named the *Greyhound* to search for his son along the African coast, and to bring him home; and he was successful. He found John, rescued him from slavery, and took him on board the *Greyhound*. Now, it was during this voyage back to England that John's life changed forever. As they were approaching the coast of Ireland, a fierce storm arose; and it looked unlikely that any of them would escape alive. (The captain had actually feared that something like this might happen, as a judgment from God for having a blasphemer like John Newton on board!) As the storm raged for a solid month, and as the fear of death pressed upon John, he began to wonder if his mother's God was real, after all. He began to cry to God for mercy. He also began to read the Scriptures; and as he read the Scriptures, something began to happen inside him. He wasn't genuinely converted yet; but he was much calmer in spirit; and his speech and actions began to change. In time, the Lord allowed the ship to land in Lough Swilly, County Donegal; and soon, John found his way back to England.

This was the turning point in John's life. In time, John wholly turned to the Lord, and believed on Him, and was saved; and the Lord used his life for His glory. John studied for the ministry, and became a pastor. He also became an outspoken voice against the slave trade. However, the thing about John Newton that we remember most are the famous words that he penned, which we still sing today:

“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.”

God's grace truly is amazing! It is only by the grace of God that *any* of us are able to stand before a holy God. As we finish our study of **1 Peter** this morning, we will see what the Apostle Peter had to say about God's grace. The title of this message is *The True Grace of God*.

## Read 1 Peter 5:12-14.

### I. The grace of God (v. 12)

(**Read verse 12 again.**) Here in **verse 12**, Peter is reminding his readers of a statement that he had made back at the beginning of this letter. He is reminding them of their “standing” as Christians. He is reminding them that their secure position in God's family is based upon one thing, and thing only—**the grace of God**. Let's go back to the beginning of this letter, and remind ourselves of what Peter said about the “*grace of God*.”

### Read 1 Peter 1:8-12.

I would like to direct your attention to **verse 10**. In this verse, Peter says that the prophets of the Old Testament prophesied beforehand of the “*grace*” that would come to us. Now, that is an important statement. Why is it so important? Because most people don't understand how the Old Testament and the New Testament fit together. The reason they don't understand it is that they don't understand how the Law, with its hard penalties against sin, can harmonise with the “*grace*” that we read about in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, God gave hundreds of specific penalties for disobeying His laws. The punishment for various sins was anything from fines, to beating, to the death penalty. Where is the grace in that? How can the Law of the Old Testament be reconciled with the grace of the New Testament?

Well, first of all, we need to realise that “grace” is not something that God has shown only in New Testament times. God *was* very gracious to people in Old Testament times. God gave

the Law so that men could see how serious our sin is; yet, in spite of the severe penalties against sin, God was *very* longsuffering. Many times God, in His mercy, did *not* carry out the punishments that the Law required (at least, not as speedily as He could have done, or to the extent that He could have done). The prophet Joel wrote to the people of Israel, “***Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil***” (Joel 2:13).

God was very gracious to sinners in Old Testament times, just as He is today. Many times God did *not* smite sinners for their sin, when He had every right to do so. Yet, the most important thing of all is that during that time, God *prophesied* of the grace that His Son would one day pour out upon the cross. All along, it was God’s plan to shed His grace upon mankind by sending His Son to die for our sins. God didn’t suddenly say, after 1,400 years of the Mosaic Law, “You know, I’m tired of smiting people for breaking the Law. I think I’ll be gracious now. I think I’ll send my Son into the world to pay for the sins of mankind, so that I can save them by my grace, and not by the works of the Law.” God didn’t have a different plan of salvation in Old Testament times. God didn’t ordain a salvation by good works and Law-keeping in Old Testament times, and then switch to a new salvation by “grace” in the New Testament. No, salvation has *always* been by God’s grace alone. Salvation has *always* been an undeserved, unearned gift of God! In the Old Testament, people were saved the same way that we are saved today. They were saved by God’s grace; and they personally *received* God’s gift of salvation by *faith*. Faith in what? Faith in God’s promise that He would one day send a Saviour into the world to take away their sins.

You see, today, we are looking *back* in history. By faith, we must now look *back* to the cross, and trust in the grace that God poured out there. In Old Testament times, it just was the opposite. In Old Testament times, God’s people looked *forward* to Christ’s coming. However, they were saved in the same way that we are saved—by *faith*. They didn’t understand everything about how God would provide for our salvation; but God did give them many pieces to the puzzle. God gave hundreds of prophecies about Christ’s coming to earth. God foretold the miraculous, virgin birth of Christ; the place of Christ’s birth (Bethlehem); His earthly ministry, and the miracles He would do; His death on the cross for our sins; the very year of His death; His resurrection from the grave; and His ascension back to heaven.

Old Testament prophets had a good understanding of how salvation would be provided. Nevertheless, they didn’t know everything. That’s why Peter says that the prophets “***inquired and searched diligently***” concerning this “***grace that should come***” unto us. They knew (as all believers of all ages know) that salvation is only by God’s grace, and not by our own efforts. However, they desired to know more about *how* God would pour out His grace. Many of them clearly understood that the Messiah would die. On Mount Moriah, God showed **Abraham**, through a hands-on object lesson, that the Son of God would be sacrificed for our sins, in our place (**Genesis 22**). God told **Daniel** that the Messiah would be “***cut off***” (killed) for no crime of his own (**Daniel 9:26**). God told **David** the details of Jesus’ crucifixion—namely, that His hands and feet would be pierced; that He would suffer suffocation and dislocation of His bones; that He would suffer extreme thirst, and that he would be offered vinegar to drink; that he would be surrounded by mocking enemies; and that some of His enemies would gamble over his garments (**Psalms 22**). God told **Zechariah** that the Messiah would be sold for thirty pieces of silver; that He would be “pierced”; and that He would be abandoned by His own disciples (**Zechariah 11:12; 13:7**). God told **Isaiah** that the Messiah

would be *“led as a lamb to the slaughter”*; that our sins would be *“laid on him”*; that His back would be beaten; that He would be executed alongside real criminals; that He would be buried in a rich man’s tomb; and that His sacrifice of Himself would “satisfy” God’s wrath on sin, and enable us to be made at “peace” with God (**Isaiah 53**). To **Job, Abraham, David, Isaiah**, and many others, God revealed that the Messiah would rise from the grave! These are only a *handful* of the Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus!

*This* is the *“true grace of God”* in which we stand; and Peter didn’t want his Hebrew readers to forget it. God’s grace wasn’t a new thing. The saints of Old Testament times were saved by God’s grace, even though Christ’s death and resurrection were still in the future. The prophets had prophesied of it since the Garden of Eden; and it is still offered to us today!

Have *you* received the grace of God in salvation? Salvation is not automatically applied to you. It doesn’t come to you by default. Jesus paid for your salvation on the cross; but you must receive His gift by faith and repentance (turning of heart, mind, and will to Christ, from sin). If you want to miss the Lake of Fire, and to see the Kingdom of God, you must humble yourself, admit your need of Jesus Christ, and receive *Him*.

Now, let’s go back to **1 Peter 5:12**, and read it again. (**Read verse 12.**) By whom did Peter write this letter to these churches? He wrote it by the hand of a scribe named **Silvanus**; and Silvanus saw to it that many copies were made of this letter. These letters were delivered, by the hand of trusted messengers, to some key churches in the region of Asia Minor; and these churches were then instructed to make more copies, and to circulate the letter to other churches in their regions. These churches were located in the Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (in modern-day Turkey). Let’s go back to the beginning of this letter, and remind ourselves of the audience to whom Peter was writing.

### **Read 1 Peter 1:1.**

It would have been quite a task to travel from the city of Babylon (in southern Iraq) to the region of modern-day Turkey, and then to make the full circuit through all the provinces, just to deliver a copy of a letter! Just to remind you, they didn’t have mobile phones and email! Silvanus didn’t copy this letter into a pdf document, click a mouse, and instantly send it to all the churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. Nor did he slap it in the post, and send it by airmail. It would have required many months of slow, hard, dangerous travel for the messengers to deliver this letter to the churches! It was a great responsibility.

With this in mind, let us consider the scribe was responsible for all this. We know that his name was Silvanus; but who was Silvanus? Silvanus was none other than Silas—the man who had worked with the Apostle Paul for many years. (Silas is simply the short form of the name “Silvanus.”) Apparently, Silas was now working together with Peter.

Now, this may not mean much to us; but we’ve got to remember that Peter was writing this letter to *Jewish* Christians. Why is this significant? Because years earlier, Silas has been a missionary co-labourer with Paul; and Paul was the Apostle to the *Gentiles*! Silas would have been well-known as an Apostle to the Gentiles. By employing Silas as his scribe, and by mentioning Silas by name in this letter, Peter (I believe) was sending a gentle message to his readers. He was reminding his Jewish brethren that the “grace of God” has been extended to

the Gentiles, as well as to the Jews. God has shown His grace to the Gentiles in salvation; and He has also included them in His institution, the church.

Now, let's rewind the tape. Think back to the Day of Pentecost. What happened on that day? God sent a powerful message to the Jewish people on that day; and He did so by causing 120 Jewish believers to preach the Gospel in *Gentile languages*, which they had never learned. This was a sign. It was a *sign* to the *house of Israel* that they had crucified their own Messiah. It was a sign that they needed to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, before God would send His judgment on their nation. By the way, 3,000 Jews *did* "get the message" on the Day of Pentecost, and *did* believe on Jesus. As the next few decades rolled on, Christ continued to give His followers the ability to speak in other languages, which they had not learned; and as the Jewish people beheld this phenomenon, many of them believed, and were saved. Let's go back to the Old Testament, and look at the prophecy that God gave to the house of Israel concerning this phenomenon of tongues-speaking.

**Read Isaiah 28:11-13.**

**Read 1 Corinthians 14:20-22.**

Who was "*this people*" to whom God said that He would speak in "*another tongue*"? It was the Jewish people—the house of Israel! Tongues-speaking in the early days of the church was a sign from God to the Jewish people, to show them that judgment was coming upon their nation because of their unbelief. He was warning them that they needed to repent, and believe on Jesus as their Messiah. And notice what Isaiah prophesied about this. He said that because the house of Israel would *not* hear God's message to them in "*another tongue*," they would "fall backward, be broken, snared, and taken." In other words, Isaiah was foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies in A.D. 70. Because the Jewish nation, as a whole, did not heed God's sign to them on the Day of Pentecost, and continued to reject their Messiah, God eventually allowed their nation to be destroyed by their Gentile enemies.

However, tongues-speaking was more than a sign of judgment upon Israel; it was also a sign of His plan for His church. By speaking to the Jewish people in Gentile languages, God was showing them that very soon, He would include the *Gentiles* in His new institution, the church. God caused this phenomenon of corporate tongues-speaking to happen four times in the early years of the church; and on 3 of these 4 occasions, it happened to groups of *Gentile* believers! It happened with the Samaritans; then with the Romans; then with the Greeks.

Let's examine one of these occasions. In A.D. 41, God used Peter to baptise a household of Roman believers. This was the *first time* that full-blooded Gentiles were accepted into a local church. And how did God reveal to the Jewish people that He had accepted these Gentiles? By causing them to speak in other languages, which they had not learned!

**Read Acts 10:34-48.**

God was sending a message, loudly and clearly, to the Jewish believers. God was saying that He had fully accepted Gentile believers as members of His church. There was no longer any distinction between Jews and Gentiles in the churches. There was no wall between them. They were all "one" in Christ Jesus. Now, by the time Peter wrote this letter, all these things

were common knowledge. It had been decades since God had revealed to Peter that the wall between Jew and Gentile had been broken down. Jewish and Gentile believers everywhere knew this truth. Why, then, would Peter need to send this gentle reminder to his Jewish brethren that God had accepted the Gentiles? Surely they had all learned this lesson by now, right? Well, not necessarily. You see, prejudice is a deep-rooted thing; and it sometimes takes a while (even for Christians) to overcome prejudice. Peter himself had to learn his lesson the hard way. Years earlier, Paul had to rebuke Peter publicly for his prejudice!

**Read Galatians 2:9-14.**

Can you imagine if something like *this* happened at a church fellowship? Apparently, Paul didn't know that it isn't polite to rebuke someone in public. However, Paul *did* know about the grace of God. He knew that God, in His grace, had accepted the Gentiles; and he knew that by separating himself from his Gentile brethren, Peter was sinning against God! We who are saved are all one in Christ! At the cross, the walls of ethnic division are broken down.

Are you getting more of an appreciation for this "grace of God"? I hope you are. God has extended His incredible grace to us. He has provided salvation from death and hell through His Son, Jesus Christ. It is this grace in which we "stand." We who are saved *know* that we have passed from death unto life, because we are trusting in God's grace, which He poured out on the cross of Calvary. Praise God for His marvellous grace!

**II. The greetings in Christ (vv. 13-14)**

**(Read verses 13 and 14 again.)** We have now come to Peter's closing salutation. By the way, you'll notice that Peter wrote this letter from a church in the city of Babylon. The city of Babylon was still in existence in the first century. It was not nearly as huge and magnificent a city as it had been centuries earlier; but it was still around. (And there was a church there.) Peter is sending kind greetings on behalf of this church in Babylon (of which he, apparently, was the pastor) to all the churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

We will look more closely at these greetings in a moment; but first, there is something else that I'd like to point out. You'll notice that Peter included personal greetings from one of his assistants, whom he names as "*Marcus my son.*" Now, just who is this "*Marcus my son*"? This is none other than John Mark the Evangelist, the nephew of Barnabas, and the author of the Gospel of Mark. Apparently, Mark was the spiritual "son" of Peter. Either he was personally led to the Lord by Peter, or he spent a lot of time under Peter's mentoring. This probably happened during the early days of the Jerusalem church, when Peter was the pastor.

Now, there is something about Marcus' past that is important to know. You see, Marcus had not always been a strong and faithful minister of the Gospel. Years earlier, Mark had gone with Paul and Barnabas, to assist them in their missionary work; but after a time, Mark left Paul and Barnabas, and went back home to Jerusalem. He found out that the missionary life very difficult and dangerous; and it was hard work! And so, he quit. Let's take a look at this.

**Read Acts 15:36-41.**

Mark's limited commitment to the Gospel work sounds very much like the limited commitment of many Christians today! What would Paul have to say if he were in *our* midst today? Would he have some words of rebuke? He certainly had some words of rebuke for John Mark. Paul said, "We can't rely on him"! However, the good news is that it didn't stay that way. At some point, Mark got serious about serving God, and became very profitable in his service to God. Years later, Paul urged Timothy to "***Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry***" (2 Timothy 4:11). Apparently, Mark was profitable both to Paul *and* Peter! He served God faithfully under both these Apostles!

Perhaps there has been a time in *your* Christian life when you really "dropped the ball." Maybe that's the spiritual position that you are in at this very moment. If so, don't remain in that position! Repent of your unfaithfulness, get right with God, and start working for Him! After Mark got right with God, he stayed faithful from then on. He wrote the Gospel of Mark. Eventually, he was reconciled to Paul, and worked under him. And here he is, years later, assisting Peter in winning souls and building churches in the far-away country of Babylon.

Now, let's get back to the churches. Notice the greetings between the churches. (**Read verse 13 again.**) What we see here is one church (the "***church that is at Babylon***") sending greetings to Christians in other churches. They were not all part of a big, "universal Church"; they were completely separate churches. This idea of churches being "independent" of each other, and not mere "branches" of a big, "universal church," is not a Baptist idea. It's a Bible teaching. Churches *should be* independent from each other. This is the way that the early churches viewed themselves. Theophilus, the pastor of the church of Antioch, wrote in A.D. 180 that the churches in his day were like "so many islands."<sup>1</sup> Honest historians, such as the 18<sup>th</sup>-century historian Johann Mosheim, agree that "each Christian assembly [in the first and second centuries] was a little state governed by its own laws."<sup>2</sup>

Churches should be independent of each other. Yet, at the same time, we should fellowship with each other, pray for each other, and support each other. That is exactly what Peter is doing here. He is extending the "hand" of sincere love, fellowship, and encouragement, to these churches. And notice what he tells them to do. He says, "***Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity.***" Now, don't get nervous, here! It was an ancient Hebrew and Near Eastern custom to greet each other with a quick peck on the jaw. (Men greeted men with a kiss, and women greeted women.) Peter is not saying, "You *must* greet each other with a kiss, and nothing else. This is for all times and cultures!" In our culture, we might greet each other with a handshake, or a light embrace, or a pat on the back; but however we greet each other, we should do it in the spirit of true Christian love, and not just as a ritual. When you come to church, don't just come in, sit down, and keep to yourself. Fellowship with God's people! We need each other! Greet each other in true love, and talk with each other. Get to know each other. Find out how you can pray for each other, and bear each other's burdens!

**Conclusion:** Peter ends his letter with these words: "***Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus. Amen.***" You know, the world talks a lot about "peace"; but it does not know true peace. *True* peace comes only from being "in Christ Jesus." *True* peace comes only by trusting in the grace of God for salvation (just as old John Newton did). Christ is the Prince of Peace; and He imparts true peace to all

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Armitage, *A History of the Baptists* (New York: Bryan, Taylor, and Co., 1890; reprint ed., 2 vols. Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc.), 1: 159.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

who will repent of their sins, and trust in Him. Do *you* know Him? If you have never trusted Christ as your Saviour, won't you believe on Him today?

If you do know Christ already, are you serving Him with all your heart? Or are you often floundering and failing in your Christian life, as John Mark did? If so, go to God for cleansing, and start serving Him! Perhaps you feel battered by trials in your life, just as the people in Peter's audience did. If so, Peter has given us the remedy. He says, "***Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you***" (1 Peter 5:7).