

# American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org

Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts

September 2009

## What is Grace?



The cost of redemption cannot be overemphasized. Christ took the hell He didn't deserve so we could have the heaven we don't deserve.

If you're not stunned by the thought of grace, then you aren't grasping what grace offers you, or what it cost Jesus. ...

Before I spoke at a conference, a soloist sang one of my favorite songs, "Amazing Grace."

It was beautiful. Until she got to the tenth word.

"Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a *soul* like me!"

My heart sank. The word *wretch* had been edited out! I thought about John Newton, the songwriter.

This former slave trader, guilty of the vilest sins, *knew* he was a wretch.

And that's what made God's grace so "amazing."

M i n d - b o g g l i n g . Knockdown awesome.

If we're nothing more than morally neutral "souls," do you see what that does? It guts grace. The better we are, the less we need it. The less amazing it becomes. ...

The Bible makes an astounding proclamation: "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

*When you cut wretch out of the song, you shrink grace.* You reduce it to something more sensible, less surprising. If we weren't so bad without Christ, why did He have to endure the cross? Paul said if men were good enough then "Christ died for nothing" (Galatians 2:21).

Grace never ignores the awful truth of our depravity. In fact, it emphasizes it. The worse we realize we are, the greater we realize God's grace is.

Grace isn't about God lowering His standards. It's about God fulfilling those standards through the substitutionary suffering of the standard-

setter. Christ went to the cross because He would not ignore the truths of His holiness and our sin. Grace never ignores or violates truth. Grace gave what truth demanded: the ultimate sacrifice for our sins.

For some, human depravity may be an insulting doctrine, but grasping it is liberating. Why? Because when I realize that the best I can do without Him is like "filthy rags" in His sight (Isaiah 64:6), it finally sinks in that I have nothing to offer. Salvation therefore hinges on His work, not mine. ...

What relief to realize that my salvation cannot be earned by good works - and therefore can't be lost by bad ones.

If we see God as He really is, and ourselves as we really are, there's only one appropriate response: to worship Him.

[Taken from *The Grace and Truth Paradox* by Randy Alcorn, 2003, Multnomah Books, Colorado Springs, CO Used by Permission]

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What is Truth?



Godly living centers not on what we avoid, but on whom we embrace. Anytime we talk more about dos and don'ts than about Jesus, something's wrong.

The Christian life is far more than sin management. *Behavior modification that's not empowered by God's heart-changing grace is self-righteous, as repugnant to God as the worst sins people gossip about.* Children who grow up with graceless truth are repelled by self-righteousness and attracted to the world's slickly marketed grace-substitutes.

The world's low standards, its disregard for truth, are not grace. The illusory freedom, however, *feels* like grace to someone who's been pounded by graceless truth - beaten over the head with a piece of guardrail. ...

But properly understood, biblical truths are guardrails that protect us from plunging off the cliff. A smart traveler doesn't curse the guardrails. ... He looks over the cliff, sees

demolished autos below, and is *grateful* for guardrails.

The guardrails of truth are there not to punish, but to protect us.

Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17).

Truth is more than mere facts. It's not just something we act upon. It acts upon us. We cannot change the truth, but the truth can change us. It sanctifies (sets us apart) from the falsehoods woven into our sin nature and championed by the world.

God has written His truth on human hearts (Romans 2:15). Shame and twinges of conscience come from recognizing that truth has been violated. When people hear truth spoken graciously, many are drawn to it because of the moral vacuum they feel. Hearts long for truth - even hearts that reject it.

We are to walk in the truth (3 John 1:3), love the truth, and believe the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10, 12). All truth has a center of gravity: Jesus Christ, who declared, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). He didn't say He would show the truth or

teach the truth or model the truth. He *is* the truth. Truth personified. He's the source of truth, and the reference point for evaluating all truth-claims. ...

All of us have a theology. The only question is whether it's true or false. Much teaching today is popularity-driven, not truth-driven. "The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their ears want to hear" (2 Timothy 4:3).

Some pastors and television preachers are well paid to play fast and loose with truth. But Charles Spurgeon said, "Christ's people must have bold, unflinching lion-like hearts, loving Christ first, and His truth next, and Christ and His truth beyond all the world."

We should take our cues from the Berean Christians, who "received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day" to determine whether what they were being taught was true (Acts 17:11).

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