

Is forgiveness really free?

And other questions about grace,
the law and being saved



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Introduction



Juliette had grown up in church, and never doubted the existence of God. She'd thought about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and decided that she believed it.

But something was just not right.

She couldn't shake the feelings of guilt she had from her years of living with her boyfriend. He wasn't a Christian, and for a long time Juliette had stopped going to church altogether. Even though that was long in the past, nothing could shake the nagging sense that there was something that God still had against her—despite the fact that she had gone to him in prayer many times to seek forgiveness.

Matt, on the other hand, had never wavered from his faith. He was a well-read Christian, and had even considered studying at Bible college. However, he confessed

to me, his pastor: “My heart is cold towards God”. He explained that while he knew the *facts* of the gospel, he could feel no affection for God. Nothing made him feel really *alive* to Jesus.

Perhaps you can relate to one of these experiences, or even both. The funny thing is that for both Matt and Juliette the answer is the same.

They need to understand grace.

Grace is amazing

The most famous hymn ever written is about this special idea—grace. John Newton, the former slave trader, called it *Amazing Grace*. And what makes it amazing?

The key line of the hymn is the most shocking one:

that saved a wretch like me

A wretch?

In the 21st century, we are brought up to have better self-esteem than that. To call yourself “a wretch” means that you don’t think you deserve anything at all. That you are helpless.

And yet, if we don’t see this, we won’t be able to see what grace is, and what it achieves. Grace is simply defined as “undeserved favour”. It can’t be earned: it must be given.

That’s a description of what God has done for human beings in creating a beautiful and good world, filled with pleasure and delight. We didn’t do a single thing to purchase the world we live in, or to make it. And yet we are here to enjoy it every day.

And “grace” describes what God did in sending his Son, the man Jesus Christ, to live among us as one of us, and to die for us on a bloody cross.

In 2 Corinthians 8 v 9, the apostle Paul writes:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

That’s a good explanation of what grace is. Jesus, as the Son of God, rich with all the unimaginable wealth of heaven, embraces the poverty of human life so that we have a share in the riches he left behind.

The purpose of this book

My aim in writing this book is to help you plunge into a deeper and richer experience of God’s grace, so that it may make a huge difference in your life. It might be that you have never understood grace before. But it might be that you have forgotten what it means, too.

Matt didn’t really understand the depths of his wretchedness before God—so he couldn’t begin to grasp grace. Juliette had feelings of wretchedness, but refused to believe that God’s acceptance of her was complete in Jesus.

Both of them needed to know God’s grace not simply as an idea or concept—but personally, emotionally, and at the core of their being. They needed to know God’s grace as you might know of a parent’s love. It’s the difference between knowing something is true, and knowing something is true for you.