

UK BIBLE STUDENTS NEWSLETTER

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THAT AMAZING GRACE

All Bible references are to the Anglicised New International Version (NIV-UK)

Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

— Romans 5: 1, 2

IN THE MONTH OF MAY 1748 a young English seaman, captain of his own vessel engaged in the slave trade, was faced with a crisis.

Although he had had some early religious instruction from his mother, who had died when he was a child, he had long since given up any religious convictions. However, on a homeward voyage, while he was attempting to steer the ship through a violent storm, he experienced what he was to refer to later as his 'great deliverance'. He recorded in his journal that when all seemed lost and the ship would surely sink, he exclaimed, 'Lord, have mercy upon us'. Later in his cabin he reflected on what he had said and began to believe that God had addressed him through the storm and that grace had begun to work for him. (www.ccel.org/n/newton/)

That young man was John Newton, author of *Amazing Grace* and other much-loved hymns.

In young manhood he had become an atheist, licentious, dissolute, blasphemous. Sunk to the depths of depravity, he became an outcast from decent society. Yet God rescued him from certain death many times and stirred up in him the remnants of conscience and little by little brought him to repentance, salvation and faith. And so he later wrote:

*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.*

What is this Grace?

The Apostle Paul took great pains to impress upon the early Christian converts the immensity of such a gift from a God who actually loved sinners — yes, *sinners!* Concerned especially for the young church in Rome, he wrote to them at length on some of the deeper doctrinal matters that were immersing following the advent of Israel's long-promised Messiah.

The Roman church comprised both Jews and Gentiles. Probably a few of the Jewish converts had been in Jerusalem on that day of Pentecost when the Apostles, in the power of the holy spirit, preached in all the languages of the people, who then carried the Gospel to their own communities ([Acts2: 1-12](#)). Schooled under the Mosaic Law, without further enlightenment the Jewish disciples and their Gentile converts would make but little progress in their understanding of the Divine purpose revealed by the Messiah. Thus the Lord prompted Paul, a master in the presentation of reasoned and logical concepts, to provide not only the Romans, but Christians worldwide for cen-

turies to follow, a vision of the amazing grace of God toward sinners.

In [Chapter 5](#) of his epistle to the Romans, the Apostle presents a convincing argument which counterbalances sin and death with righteousness and life, discussing Divine love, reconciliation and justification, and most crucially, the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus he stirred the minds and touched the hearts of countless numbers of sinners, wretched in greater or lesser degree, who learned of that amazing grace by which they might be saved, and whose wretchedness was by the exercise of faith turned to glory.

The Pathway to Grace

St. Paul summarises in simple terms the steps that are taken. Addressing believers, he tells us that we have been *justified through faith*, a reassuring thought even before we begin to understand what it signifies. The word justification has various definitions, but from the Biblical standpoint two closely related meanings fit well the Apostles thought: one is *to prove that something is right*, the other *to make a thing right which is wrong*. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word *justify* thus: **1.** ‘Show or prove to be right or reasonable’; **2.** ‘Declare or make righteous in the sight of God.’

Justified by faith, freed from guilt, made righteous! This astonishing transformation in the life of Newton and many others like him, pursuing a dissolute course, underlines the all-inclusive depth of God’s love, and the utter faithfulness of the Son He sent into the world to pay the price of sin.

Not all believers have been afflicted by a deep sense of guilt. Brought up in the Christian faith, some have never known doubt and have perhaps been scarcely aware of their own need to be ‘made righteous’. Lest any should underestimate their need of a Saviour, St. Paul reminds the Roman church that ‘sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned. . . . Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men’ (Romans 5: 12, 18).

The *faith* of the individual is the basis on which justification is granted. That faith is not a feeling or an emotion, but a belief in, a *conviction* of, the absolute trustworthiness and love of God, and in the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice for sin. The exercise of faith is the first step of the sinner toward reconciliation with God. Some may have walked in faith from childhood, while others, dismissive or oppositional as regards Christianity, have found their lives revolutionised by an unexpected encounter with Divine love, and faith is awakened. So it may appear that the greater the sin, the more amazing the grace.

Saved By Grace, the Gift of God

Being made right with God — being justified — does not bestow upon us instant perfection of character. Rather, we become more painfully aware of our shortcomings, our failure to attain the perfect standard of godliness seen in our Lord Jesus Christ. Though on becoming justified the slate is wiped clean, so to speak, our inherited depravity wages a constant warfare against the new mind, heart and will.

Paul himself agonised over his own sinful predilections, describing his struggles in some detail and exclaiming in apparent despair: ‘*What a wretched man I am!*’ ([Romans 7: 18-25](#)). In declaring that Christ died for the ungodly, he spoke from personal experience, knowing that faithful justified believers in future generations would suffer the same trials and misgivings. In the school of Christ there are many hard lessons to be learned, and we are being sanctified, made holy — the working of salvation at the

present time. We do have something to boast about, but nothing of ourselves, as Paul told the Corinthians: 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord' (1 Cor. 1: 31).

Two once-wretched men, saved by grace, knew assuredly near the end of their earthly course that they had kept the faith.

The Apostle Paul:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing (2 Timothy 4: 7, 8).

John Newton:

Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

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In the Rear-View Mirror

The growth of the United States is a process that has no precedent in the world's history; it is a new kind of occurrence. Such a community could not have come into existence before, and, if it had, without railways it would certainly have dropped to pieces long before now. Without railways or telegraph it would be far easier to administer California from Peking than from Washington. But this great population of the United States of America has not only grown outrageously; it has kept uniform. Nay, it has become more uniform. The man of San Francisco is more like the man of New York to-day than the man of Virginia was like the man of New England a century ago. And the process of assimilation goes on unimpeded. The United States is being woven by railway, by telegraph, more and more into one vast unity, speaking, thinking and acting harmoniously with itself. Soon aviation will be helping in the work.

This great community of the United States is an altogether new thing in history. There have been great empires before with populations exceeding 100 millions, but these were associations of divergent peoples; there has never been one single people on this scale before. We want a new term for this new thing. We call the United States a country just as we call France or Holland a country. But the two things are as different as an automobile and a one-horse shay. They are the creations of different periods and different conditions; they are going to work at a different pace and in an entirely different way. The United States in scale and possibility is halfway between a European state and a United States of all the world.

— *A Short History of the World*, H.G. Wells (Published by William Heinemann Ltd., London, 1933), 308.

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