



*For by grace are ye saved through faith;  
and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:  
Not of works, lest any man should boast.*  
Eph 2:8-9

**T**o many of us, this is a favorite verse, and rightly so. Above all people of any age in history, the church of Jesus Christ today is blessed and favored. Without merit of our own, God has chosen to grant to us pardon, acceptance, and an invitation to enjoy relationship with Him far more intimate than any previous age has known. Ours is the Age of *Grace*, and in these later times this Age of *Grace* happens to co-exist with another age—the Age of Television. Unlike most former generations, every Christian today is confronted with the presence, the attraction, and the influence of television, and the responses of

observation that, where we land with television has everything to do with how we view *grace*. Bear with me a bit as we focus on what the Bible has to say about *grace*, and how *grace* relates to the matter of television.

I'll not hide my own position on television. I am of those radical ones who have chosen complete abstinence, not because of some legalistic church rule, but because of my relationship with God. It was not an easy decision to remove TV from my life. I grew up with it, and did not know anyone else in my circle who abstained from it. Nor was it a sudden

God's people are quite varied.

Some feel complete liberty to watch television with little or no restraint. Others exercise some restrictions to one degree or another, and some take the radical step of complete abstinence. Some churches even make a rule forbidding their members from owning or watching television, which is often viewed as a legalistic tradition of men, a man-made law by which "*faith is made void, and the promise of God made of none effect*" (Rom 4:14). Some would go so far as to say that those who abstain from, or forbid television, have "*fallen from grace*" (Gal 5:4), and will refer such to Paul's declaration: "*I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain*" (Gal 2:21).

*Grace* is a big issue in the discussion of television, as it is in any discussion of the practical matters of life. It has been my

decision, but over time, God impressed me with certain truths that changed my thinking. I wish to share those truths with you, the honest, seeking soul, who wishes to know God's heart on every issue of life.

## The Definition of Grace?

Grace is a big word and carries various shades of meaning throughout the Bible. "Unmerited favor" is probably the most common definition, and, as the word is used in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace are ye saved...not of works...."

"Unmerited favor" is a valid definition. But grace means more. In John 1:14, Jesus (*the Word*) is referred to as being "full of grace and truth." Was Jesus full of unmerited favor? Of course not. His favor was merited, so much that the Father publicly declared: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17). What then was Jesus "full of?" May I suggest that the "grace" that Jesus was "full of" refers to His God-like qualities and abilities, or, as John 1:14 puts it, "...and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." Jesus' glorious God-likeness was such that the writer of Hebrews speaks of Him as "...the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person" (Heb 1:3). That is what the word "grace" is referring to in John 1:14. So then, our view of grace must include God-likeness, the possession of God-like qualities and abilities. More could be said of grace, but for our purposes here let us understand that we are indeed saved by "grace" (*unmerited favor*) and salvation is a "gift," but the work of grace in the life of a Christian is far greater than the simple attainment of "unmerited favor" with God. Salvation is only the beginning of the work of grace.

## The Prerequisite and Objective of Grace

The Age of Law was a necessary age in that it set the stage for the Age of Grace. The law made manifest the righteousness and holiness of God, and His hatred and judgment of sin. Further, the law made manifest our human propensity to sin, even under the threat of harsh punishment. The law also brought to light the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and our helpless, desperate need of a Savior—a reconciler to atone for our sin and bring us into a right relationship with the God against whom we had rebelled and broken all ties. Indeed, "the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal 3:24).

With all of that accomplished, the foundation is now laid for God to build the kind of relationship with man that He has longed for, worked for, sacrificed for, and waited for – a relationship based on gracious love, rather than cold law. It is only after the Age of the Law has done its job that God can now proceed with His task of working in us "both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil 2:13) as we are "conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom 8:29). To this end were we *foreknown*; with this objective were we *predestinated*:

*According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise and glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved" (Eph 1:4-6).*

Take special note of the place of grace here, that our salvation is all about the "praise and glory of his grace." And it does not end with this present age, but, "That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:7). Yes, our acceptance with God is of grace, "unmerited favor." But our conforming "to the image of his Son" is also of grace, as is the "holiness" that we were *chosen* for. All that we can become is of the working of God's grace in our lives, as Paul, the champion of grace, put it:

*"But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor 15:10).*

## The Liberty of Grace

Under the Old Covenant, God's people were under the law, bound to the law, governed by the law, obligated to the law, and related to God on the basis of law. There was nothing wrong with the law in itself, in fact, as Paul explains, "...the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." (Rom 7:12). Yet, because of the depravity of man, no one was ever able to keep the law. Peter calls it "...a yoke...which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" (Acts 15:10). In addition, the law had a number of bad effects on us, such as the increase of sin: "For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth

fruit unto death" (Rom 7:5). Paul continues: "But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead" (Rom 7:8). Again, the problem was not with the law, but with us, our indwelling sin or sin nature or flesh. And as long as we are under law we will always respond wrongly to that law, which is "weak through the flesh" (Rom 8:3). If we are to ever have a right relationship with God, we must be liberated from the law, which is precisely what the New Covenant is designed to do:

*For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom 8:3-4).*

*This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other...But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law (Gal 5:16-17).*

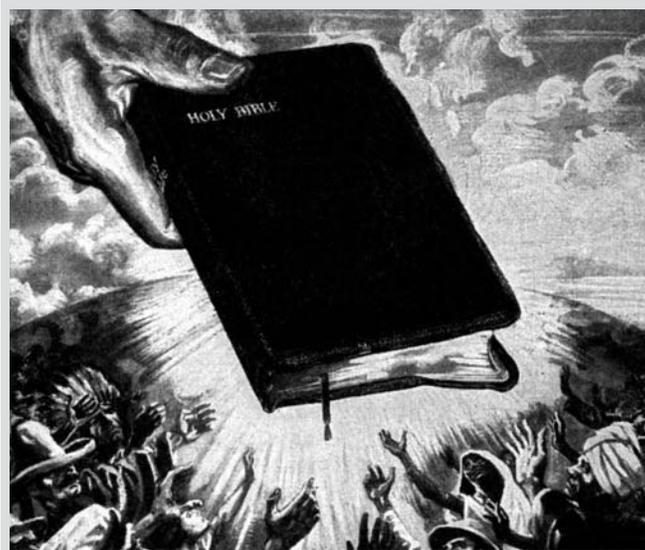
Law and Spirit, as law and grace, simply do not mix; one will always negate the other. To remain under law insures that sin will remain in dominion over us, and we will not be able to fulfill the "righteousness of the law." Paul puts it this way: "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace (Rom 6:14). The obvious implication—to remain under law keeps us under sin. Therefore, by the grace of God, we are "dead to the law" (Rom 7:4), we are "delivered from the law" (Rom 7:6), we are "free from the law" (Rom 8:2). Dead, delivered, and free "to serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter" (Rom 7:6). Hallelujah! Thank God for His amazing grace.

## The Misuse of Grace

How wonderful to rejoice in the liberty offered to us by New Covenant *grace*. However, along with the "New" Covenant, comes a "new" challenge. We must be careful not to misuse this liberating *grace*, as Paul warns:

*For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh.... (Gal 5:13).*

This misuse of *grace* is a very real temptation and danger for us all. The flesh seems to have the ability to corrupt everything good that comes from God, and New Covenant liberty is no exception. It is just pretty easy to stretch our liberty a bit too far, to the point of disobeying God's New Testament commands, and still feel like everything is OK because we are "not under law but under grace." Paul sees it coming, so right in the middle of his discourse contrasting *grace* and *law*, Paul slips in this caution to "use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh." Just several verses later, Paul identifies exactly what the works of the flesh are:



**If we are to ever have a right relationship with God, we must be liberated from the law, which is precisely what the New Covenant is designed to do.**

*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like.... (Gal 5:19-21).*

Does this remind you of anything you have seen on TV lately?

Do you suppose it was in the heart of God to grant liberty to His New Covenant people so they could watch "the works of the flesh" acted out by expert actors, in living color, amplified by dramatic

music and sound effects? Was it in God's heart to liberate His people from law, only to be entertained and amused by *"the works of the flesh?"* Perhaps you have never considered the prevalence of the *"works of the flesh"* in TV programming.

## The Power of TV

Paul also makes reference to the matter of subjecting ourselves to the *"power"* of something, and he states that he *"will not be brought under the power of any."* Does TV exercise *"power"* over us? Consider these statistics:

99% of American households have TV, and 66% have 3 or more (Television...TV Free Am), with 806 TVs per 1000 people (Encarta).

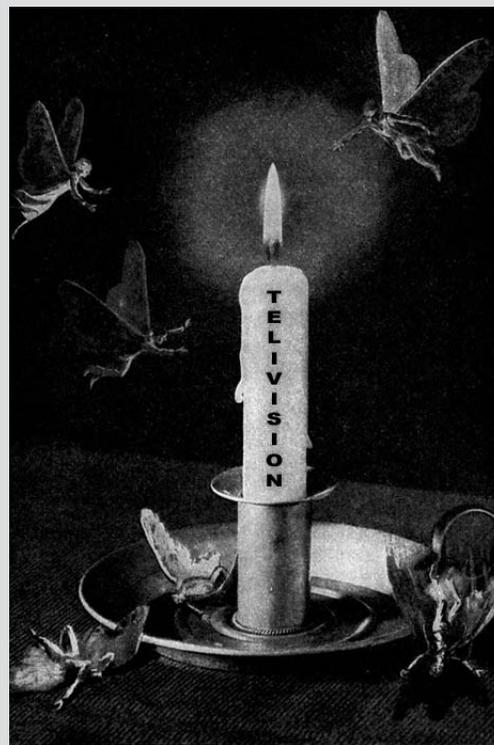
Truly, I know of few things more powerful than TV. It draws like a magnet, it captivates, it holds, it consumes. I have to confess that if I walk into a room with a television on, I have all I can do to avoid looking at it. Though I consciously turn my head away, I soon find myself looking at it again. Though I try to carry on a conversation with someone, I soon find myself tuned into the TV and not hearing a word being said to me. My only options are to shut it off, leave, or give in to its power over me. And even shutting it off is not a good option because once it is off I am strongly tempted to turn it back on. Is your experience similar to mine? And is it God's intent that His trophies of *grace* should be given over to the power of the tube?

Interestingly, 49% of Americans say they watch TV too much, but they keep watching. And 73% of parents would like to limit their children's TV watching, but they don't. The average child will see 20,000 commercials/yr, and by age 65, the number totals 2 million. And 92%

of parents feel that commercials make children too materialistic, but they still let them watch (Television...TV Free Am). Even young people themselves (77% of them) say there is too much immorality on TV (fornication, violence, and profanity). Still, everybody keeps watching. Why? For the same reason that smokers, alcoholics, and drug abusers don't quit, though they know they should. It's called—addiction:

*Millions of Americans are so hooked on television that they fit the criteria for substance abuse as*

*defined in the official psychiatric manual, according to Rutgers University psychologist and TV-Free America board member Robert Kubey. Heavy TV viewers exhibit five dependency symptoms—two more than necessary to arrive at a clinical diagnosis of substance abuse. These include: 1) using TV as a sedative; 2) indiscriminate viewing; 3) feeling loss of control while viewing; 4) feeling angry with oneself for watching too much; 5) inability to stop watching; and 6) feeling miserable when kept from watching. (Television...TV Free Am).*



**Truly, I know of few things more powerful than TV. It draws like a magnet, it captivates, it holds, it consumes. Is it God's intent that His trophies of grace should be given over to the power of the tube?**

Paul's stand is to refuse to *"be brought under the power of any."* And interestingly, his teaching on the sin of fornication immediately follows this declaration, in which he commands: *"Flee fornication"* (1 Cor 6:18). Is it possible for a TV viewer to obey this command in heart while observing 20 scenes of fornication every day? Do we not, in heart, experience the action occurring on the screen? Do we not feel what the characters in the show feel? Their

pleasure becomes our pleasure, their anger becomes our anger, their lust, our lust. When the actors we watch commit fornication, do we not also, at least in heart? Our participation in this sin is, at best, *vicarious*, which means *"enjoyed or felt by a person as a result*



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of his imagined participation in an experience that is not his own;" (Funk & Wagnalls 1454). And how long will it be until this sin is carried out in the flesh? "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications...." (Matt 15:19). Who among us can afford not to "flee fornication?" And what of other such commands:

*Abstain from all appearance of evil (1 Thes 5:22).*

*Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world (James 1:27).*

*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world (1 Jn 2:15-16).*

*And be not conformed to this world.... (Rom 12:2).*

*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing.... (2 Cor 6:17).*

*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. (Phil 4:8)*

Who can obey any of these commands, and many others like them, while watching television? Does such disobedience not constitute sin?

## Violence

By the time the average child completes elementary school he will see 8,000 murders on TV, and 200,000 acts of violence by age 18, including 40,000 murders. Prime time shows have 3 to 5 violent acts/hr., Saturday morning childrens shows, 20-25 violent acts/hr. Most violent acts go unpunished and are often presented as humorous (Television...TV Free Am).

Why so much violence on TV? Obviously, Americans love it. We find it entertaining, amusing, not unlike the ancient Romans. And we wonder why we have school shootings, mass murders, road rage, and domestic violence in *one forth* of American homes (Gellert 72). Was it in the heart of God to ransom us from the fall, only to be entertained and amused by violence? What is God's heart in the matter of violence? He stated His reason for destroying the ancient world by a flood:

*The end of all flesh is before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them...." (Gen 6:13).*

Again, God reveals His heart toward violence:

*The Lord trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth (Ps 11:5).*

Does that mean what it says, that God actually hates people that love violence?

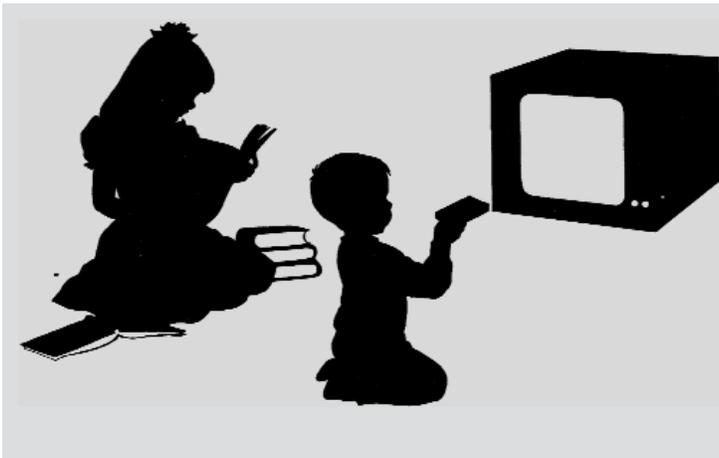
## The Defilement of Children

We have looked only at immorality and violence thus far, and have said nothing of the array of other sinful attitudes, behaviors, and untruth that television promotes, IE: evolution, pride, rebellion, smok-

ing, drinking, suicide, the occult, the general “works of the flesh,” and the overall distorted, anti-Christian views of life. What becomes of the New Testament command to bring up our children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph 6:4)? Who is raising the children of America, parents, or TV? Perhaps you have never compared the amount of time your children spend under the influence of TV, compared with the amount of time under your influence, or their school teachers. While eating dinner, 66% of Americans regularly watch television. On average, children spend 3.5 min/wk in meaningful conversation with their parents, compared with 1,680 min/wk watching TV. The average American youth will

## Effects of Television

Some feel that TV really does not affect human behavior. There have been over 4,000 studies conducted to examine TV’s effects on children (Television...TV Free Am). Long term studies have been done in communities that had no television, such as in British Columbia. In one study, for example, researchers noted the amount of violence of school children on the playground before the introduction of TV to the community. Then, 2 years after TV was introduced to that community, the same chil-



**Who is raising the children of America—parents or TV? Satan wants your children in his kingdom... On average, children spend 3.5 minutes per week in meaningful conversation with their parents, compared with 1,680 minutes per week watching TV.**

spend 900 hrs/yr in school, compared with 1500 hrs/yr watching TV (Television ... TV Free Am). And in the long run:

*By the age of 6, the average American child will have spent more time watching television than he will spend speaking to his parents in an entire lifetime (Eden Communications).*

The stakes are high, and the war is real. Satan wants your children in his kingdom, and one of his most effective drawing cards is the TV. Are you sure you want the TV to be your child’s closest companion and primary mentor? What price will be paid for such a babysitter? At the time of life when a child is most moldable, impressionable, teachable, this is when Americans turn their children over to the TV, the most effective teaching machine ever invented. Just when a child is establishing his value system, his world view, developing his thinking and reasoning skills, we give him over. Yes, we take them to church, send them to Sunday school, and maybe even a Christian school, or even to the extreme of home schooling, but how quickly a TV will undo all of that.

dren were observed on the playground, demonstrating a 160% increase in violent behavior (Gellert, 96). This study, and many others like it, seems to suggest that TV really does affect behavior.

The leading cause of death in America for teens is auto accidents, many of which are alcohol related. Interestingly:

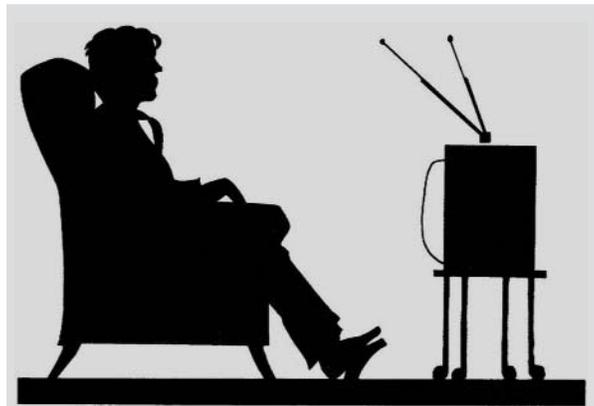
*A young person will see messages encouraging alcohol consumption an average of 75,000 times on TV before he or she is of legal drinking age (Watkins, i).*

Do you suppose there is any connection? And consider the money advertisers spend to sway people’s behavior. In 1993 the leading 100 TV advertisers spent over \$15 billion on commercials (Television ... TV Free Am). Advertisers, obviously, think TV can influence behavior, and even most children agree—66% of children (ages 10-16) say that their peers are influenced by TV, 62% say sex on TV influences kids to have sex when they are too young, and 65% say certain shows encourage kids to disrespect their parents (fornication, Violence, and Profanity). Numerous studies have drawn clear correlations

between TV and its effects such as inactivity and junk food eating contributing to obesity, shortened attention span, negative effects on brain development and academic performance in school, sleep problems due to fear and terror from horror shows, behavior problems, desensitization, etc., etc., etc.

## What about all the Good Shows?

Based on all the numbers we have seen so far, it seems evident that “good shows” must be few and far between. Does the little bit of “good” out there justify, make up for, or shield against the immense amount of bad? Even if a parent tries to control the shows the children watch, you cannot control the 20,000 commercials/yr. that the average child sees, many of which promote ungodliness. And there are few good shows that do not have some bad woven into them. Most nature shows are presented from an evolutionary perspective, and many come uncomfortably close to animal worship with their animal-rights agenda. Other educational shows are presented with immodesty and an assortment of humanistic, anti-Christian values. And even if a parent sets high standards, most commonly those standards are compromised and creep downward as the family searches for more and more shows to watch.



**How do you suppose it sits with our Lord when His New Testament trophies of grace practice such stewardship? In a world overwhelmed with unmet needs, what Christian can afford to spend time watching TV?**

*According to the A.C. Nielsen Co., the average American watches more than 4 hours of TV each day (or 28 hours/week, or 2 months of nonstop TV-watching per year). In a 65-year life, that person will have spent 9 years glued to the tube (Television...TV Free Am).*

Beyond the monetary value, what is the spiritual value of the hours you spend on TV? How many Christians complain that they don't have time for prayer, Bible study, good works, and evangelism? Most Wednesday night prayer meetings draw a pitiful percentage of the congregation because we're

just too busy. Are we not stewards of the time God has given us? How do you suppose it sits with Him when His New Testament trophies of grace practice such stewardship? You know the parable of the talents in Matt 25:13-30. The talents represent all that God has given us. What became of the unrighteous steward who did not use what his master gave him in the way his master wanted? This parable is immediately followed by the story of the separation of the sheep and the goats, the deciding factor being how they spent their time. The sheep, God's trophies of grace, somehow found time to do the good works of meeting the real needs of hurting

people, while the goats did not. In a world overwhelmed with unmet needs, what Christian can afford to spend time watching TV?

## Stewardship of Time

Collectively, Americans watch 250 billion hours of TV/yr. At the low wage of \$5.00/hr., that puts a value of \$1.25 trillion on our TV time (Television ... TV Free Am). What is the monetary value of the hours you spend watching TV? Consider the long-term:

## Conclusions

I have made some unwise decisions in my life, but eliminating TV over two decades ago was not one of them. I have never for a moment regretted that decision, my only regret is that I did not make it sooner. □