

# THE GRACE OF GOD

Purpose: In doing this study, you are essentially helping a seeker to see themselves as our Holy God sees them: utterly sinful and separated from our God. This study helps a seeker understand the biblical picture of sin. Through looking at several Bible verses, we'll see what sin is and what it produces in us. We'll also talk about the source of sin and how God feels about it. Ultimately, God is grieved by sin (Genesis 6:5-6), but He is also moved by His love for us. In this study, we'll will examine the good news of God's love. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."* (John 3:16-17). There is hope for all of us sinners through Jesus Christ! The love of God and the cost for forgiveness of our sins is seen in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. We can be saved by the grace of God through having faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.

## **Psalm 103:1-18**

In this psalm, the psalmist talks about the heart of God towards us as sinners.

Q: How does the psalmist describe God's heart towards us as sinners based on v8-10?

Q: What is God willing to do with our sins (transgressions) based on v12? (God is willing to remove our sins from us).

Q: Are we as sinners deserving of such compassionate, loving and gracious treatment from God? Why?

## **Romans 3:23-26**

Q: Who has sinned? (Everyone.)

Q: How have we fallen short of the glory of God?

We've departed from God's glorious standard for our lives. Because of our sinfulness, we ultimately fall short in our efforts to live the way that God created us to live in the beginning. Each and every one of us is guilty of sin. We're all in this together, and everyone of us desperately needs the grace of God through the redemption that came by Jesus.

Q: Why is the grace of God through the redemption that came by Jesus so important based on v24-26

## **Romans 6:23**

Q: What do you think is meant by the "wages of sin?" (Wages are earnings.)

Q: What did sin earn us? (Death.)

Sin is very costly and reaps no benefits. It is terribly damaging to every area of our lives (our families, communities, relationships, etc.)

Q: In what areas of your life has sin had costly and damaging effects?

## **Mark 7:21-22**

Q: Where does sin come from? What is the ultimate source of our sinfulness? (Sins come from within...so we cannot blame externals.)

Q: What things, people, or externals have you blamed or used as an excuse for past sins? (Despite genetics, parenting, peer pressures, and socio economic conditions, sin comes from within our own hearts and makes us unclean. We are responsible for our own sin. We need to take ownership for our sin!)

Notice how Jesus was very specific in mentioning the sins that come from within and that make us "unclean." Jesus wants us to be able to clearly identify the sin in our lives.

## **Galatians 5:19-21**

Notice the different types of sin in this list: sexual sins, relational sins and sins of indulgence. \*For definitions of these sins, see page 2.

Q: Are there any sins from this list that you've struggled with committing in the past and presently?

Q: What will we not inherit if we live in accordance with with these types of sins? (God's eternal kingdom.)

**Other useful "sin list" passages: Ephesians 5:3-7, Revelation 21:8, Romans 1:21-32, 2 Timothy 3:2-5, 1 Peter 4:4, Colossians 3:8**

## **Romans 7:14-25**

Q: Can you relate to Paul and his struggles with sin?

Q: What is the only sufficient answer or solution to the terrible cost and damaging effects of sin? (Jesus Christ!)

## **Isaiah 52:13-53:1-12**

Written about 700 years before Jesus, this passage predicted what Jesus would experience in the way of suffering because of our sins and why. Jesus was pierced, crushed and punished for our sins. He went through such great suffering on behalf. It was God's will to have Jesus take upon Himself the punishment we deserved to redeem us for God. We are healed by His wounds. The only healing available to us when it comes to our sinfulness is found in Jesus Christ. The only real peace that any of us can find in this life is through Jesus Christ.

Q: How would you describe the magnitude of what Jesus experienced on our behalf because of our sins based on this passage?

## **Mark 14:26-15:41**

Jesus chose to die for us. To help a seeker to better understand the physical torments of the sufferings that Jesus endured on our behalf because of our sins, you may also wish to read "A Medical Account of the Sufferings of Jesus Christ" found in the appendix.

Q: Why was Jesus willing to endure the incredible suffering He experienced?

### **Romans 5:6-11**

Q: What are we without Jesus' sacrifice? (Powerless; ungodly; God's enemies)

Q: How did God demonstrate his love for us? (Jesus died for us while we were at our worst, enemies of God, weak and sinful. He didn't die for us because we are good people! Because of Jesus, we can be justified and saved from the wrath of God – the wrath and punishment that our sins deserve.)

### **Titus 2:11-14**

Q: How ought the grace of God influence us in this present age?

Q: Are you ready to live a life that is influenced and directed by the grace of God?

Q: Are you ready to be a man/woman of God who is eager to do what is good?

Q: What ought to be your motivation for doing what is good? (Jesus who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness.)

### **Galatians 2:20-21**

Q: How did Paul describe his life as a result of the grace of God? (Paul said, "...I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!")

### **Additional verses:**

**Romans 1:18-32** – The progression of sin throughout the existence of mankind.

**Ephesians 4:17-19** – The damaging effects of sin.

**James 4:17** – Sins of omission.

**John 3:19-20** – Facing our sin honestly can be painful.

**Proverbs 28:13** – He who confesses and renounces his sin finds mercy.

**James 5:16** – We are called to confess our sin to one another.

**Philippians 2:1-11** – Jesus' death was an act of great humility.

**2 Corinthians 5:16-21** – God made Jesus our sin offering on the cross.

**Galatians 3:10-14** – The righteous are justified by faith.

**1 Corinthians 15:3-8** – The resurrection was witnessed by hundreds.

### \*DEFINITIONS

#### **Galatians 5:19-21**

**Sexual immorality:** Fornication, any sexual union outside of marriage. Denotes ungodly sexual acts and relationships—prostitution, rape, homosexuality, petting, adultery, child abuse, bestiality.

**Impurity:** Any sinful thinking, vulgar thoughts, which cause lusting, masturbation, impure motives; watching pornography cause us to be impure and prompt sexual fantasies.

**Debauchery:** Any misuse of the body. Usually referring to sexual excesses, but in general refers to a readiness to indulge in any pleasure (indecent, lewd dancing, anorexia and bulimia). There is no respect for self or anyone else. In this state, man is at the mercy of his passions, impulses, emotions, etc. He is completely undisciplined (i.e. gives in to gluttony, laziness, smoking, cravings, masturbation, unlimited pleasure).

**Idolatry:** Worshipping anything other than God. Giving or devoting one's time, substance, talents, and/or self to anything that keeps one from obeying and following God in every way (i.e. status symbols, investments, engrossing sports or hobbies, selfish ambitions, relationships, property, possessions, pleasure and wants, school, work, pride). Also includes praying to anyone other than God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit.

**Witchcraft:** Seeking or being involved in any spiritual realm other than God's. Includes astrology (i.e. the stars control; consequently, saying God does not rule), horoscopes, Satan worship, the occult, magic spells, good-luck charms or pictures, praying to saints, drug use, tarot cards, palm reading, channeling (the New Age movement), Ouija Board, etc.

**Hatred:** Wishing ill or harm on anyone, looking down on anyone, bitter feelings, resentment, wanting revenge, murder.

**Discord:** Anything that breaks up relationships, stirring up trouble, an inability to get along with people, arguing, slander, gossip, malicious talk, criticalness.

**Jealousy:** Possessiveness, not sharing.

**Fits of rage:** Uncontrolled anger, losing your temper, temper tantrums, quick temper, angry shouting, cussing, profanity, fighting.

**Selfish ambition:** Living to please self, wanting one's own way, getting what one wants at any cost, desiring to be first at any cost, overly competitive spirit. Not willing to do menial or demeaning tasks, refusing to admit being wrong, arrogance, doing things for honor or glory, wanting to look good for others, refusing to compromise, pride, selfishness and independence.

**Disension:** Rebelling against authority, not submitting, habitually disagreeing, arguing, causing division, starting arguments, stirring up trouble.

**Factions:** Feeling superior to others, cliques, refusing to associate with anyone because they are different or for any other reason, wanting to be with "own" kind, prejudice, bigotry, racism.

**Envy:** Desiring something another person has while wishing that they did not have it at all (i.e. wealth, status, ability, physical features, spirituality, relationships).

**Drunkenness:** Anything that causes one to lose control—intoxication, alcohol, drug abuse.

**Orgies:** Living without restraint. Includes partying, sexual parties, unrestrained sex, vandalism, carousing.

And the like: others sins like the above; in any form or degree.

## **A Medical Account of the Sufferings of Jesus Christ**

Hanging, electrocution, knee-capping, gas chamber: these punishments are feared. They all happen today, and we shudder as we think of the horror and pain. But as we shall see, these ordeals pale into insignificance compare with the bitter fate of Jesus Christ: crucifixion.

No one is crucified today. For us the cross remains confined to ornaments and jewelry, stained-glass windows, romanticized pictures and statues portraying a serene death. Crucifixion was a form of execution refined by the Romans to a precise art. It was carefully conceived to produce a slow death with maximum pain. It was a public spectacle intended to deter other would-be criminals. It was a death to be feared.

### *Sweat like blood*

Luke 22:24 says of Jesus, "*and being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*"<sup>b</sup> The sweat was unusually intense because his emotional state was unusually intense. Dehydration coupled with exhaustion further weakened him. (Note: the scriptures nowhere say that Jesus was sweating blood.)

### *Beating*

It was in this condition that Jesus faced the first physical abuse: punches and slaps to the face and head while blindfolded. Unable to anticipate the blows, Jesus was badly bruised, his mouth and eyes possibly injured. The psychological effects of the false trials should not be underestimated. Consider that Jesus faced them bruised, dehydrated, exhausted, possibly in shock.

### *Flogging*

In the previous 12 hours Jesus had suffered emotional trauma, rejection by his closest friends, a cruel beating, and a sleepless night during which he had to walk miles between unjust hearings. Despite the fitness he must certainly have gained during his travels in Palestine, he was in no way prepared for the punishment of flogging. The effects would be worse as a result.

A man to be flogged was stripped of his clothes and his hands tied to a post above his head. He was then whipped across the shoulders, back, buttocks, thighs and legs, the soldier standing behind and to one side of the victim. The whip used – the flagellum – was designed to make this a devastating punishment, bringing the victim close to death: several short heavy leather thongs, with two small balls of lead or iron attached near the end of each. Pieces of sheep's bone were sometimes included.

As the scourging proceeds, the heavy leather thongs produce first superficial cuts, than deeper damage to underlying tissues. Bleeding becomes severe when not only capillaries and veins are cut, but also arteries in the underlying muscles. The small metal balls first produce large, deep bruises which are broken open by further blows. The fragments of sheep's bone rip the flesh as the whip is drawn back. When the beating is finished, the skin of the back is in ribbons, and the entire area torn and bleeding.

The words chosen by the gospel writers suggest that the scourging of Jesus was particularly severe: he was certainly at the point of collapse when he was cut down from the flogging-post.

### *The mocking*

Jesus was allowed no time to recover before facing his next ordeal. Made to stand, he was dressed in a robe by jeering soldiers, crowned with a twisted band of thorny twigs, and to complete the parody, given a wooden staff as a king's scepter. "Next, they spat on Jesus and struck him on the head with the wooden staff." The long thorns were driven into the sensitive scalp tissue producing profuse bleeding, but even more terrible was the re-opening of the wounds on Jesus' back when the robe was torn off again.

Further weakened physically and emotionally, Jesus was led away to be executed.

### *The crucifixion*

The wooden cross used by the Romans was too heavy to be carried by one man. Instead the victim to be crucified was made to bear the detached crossbar across his shoulders, carrying it outside the city walls to the place of execution. (The heavy upright portion of the cross was permanently in position here.) Jesus was unable to carry his load – a beam weighing around 75 to 125 pounds (approximately 35-55 kg). He collapsed under the burden, and an onlooker was ordered to take it for him.

Jesus refused to drink the wine and myrrh offered him before the nails were driven in. (It would have dulled the pain.) Thrown down on his back with arms outstretched along the crossbar, nails were driven through Jesus' wrists into the wood. These iron spikes, about 6 inches long and 3/8 inch thick, severed the large sensorimotor median nerve, causing excruciating pain in both arms. Carefully placed between bones and ligaments, they were able to bear the full weight of the crucified man.

In preparation for the nailing of the feet, Jesus was lifted up and the crossbar fixed to the upright post. Then with legs bent at the knee, a single nail was used to pierce both feet, one foot being placed over the other. Again there was severe nerve damage and the pain caused was intense. It is important to note, however, that neither the wounds to the wrists or feet caused substantial bleeding, since no major arteries were ruptured. The executioner took care to ensure this, so that death would be slower and the suffering longer.

Now nailed to his cross, the real horror of crucifixion began. When the wrists were nailed to the crossbar, the elbows were intentionally left in a bent position so that the crucified man would hang with his arms above his head, the weight being taken on the nails in the wrists. Obviously this was unbearably painful, but it had another effect: It is very difficult to exhale in this position. In order to breathe out, and then take in fresh air, it was necessary to push the body up on the nailed feet. When the pain from the feet became unbearable, the victim would again slump down to hang by the arms. A terrible cycle of pain began: hanging by the arms, unable to breathe, pushing up on the feet to inhale quickly before again slumping down, and on and on.

This tortured activity became more and more difficult as Jesus' back was scraped against the upright post, as muscle cramps set in because of the inadequate respiration, and as exhaustion grew more severe. Jesus suffered in this manner for several hours before, with a final cry, he died.

#### *Cause of death*

Many factors contributed to Jesus' death. A combination of shock and suffocation killed most victims of crucifixion, but in Jesus' case acute heart failure may have been the final trauma. This is suggested by his sudden death following a loud cry, after only a few hours: a quick death, it seems (Pilate was surprised to find Jesus already dead). A fatal cardiac arrhythmia, or perhaps cardiac rupture, are likely candidates.

#### *The spear wound*

Jesus was already dead as the executioners broke the legs of the criminals crucified alongside (in order to speed their deaths). Instead, we read that a soldier pierced Jesus' side with a spear. Where on his side? The word chosen by John suggests the ribs, and if the soldier intended to make Jesus' death certain, a wound to the heart was the obvious choice.

From the wound came a flow of "blood and water." This is consistent with the spear blow to the heart (especially from the right side, the traditional site of the wound). Rupturing the pericardium (the sac surrounding the heart) released a flow of watery serum, followed by blood as the heart was pierced.

#### *Conclusion*

The detailed accounts given in the gospels combined with the historical evidence on crucifixion bring us to a firm conclusion: modern medical knowledge supports the claim of the scriptures that Jesus died on the cross.