

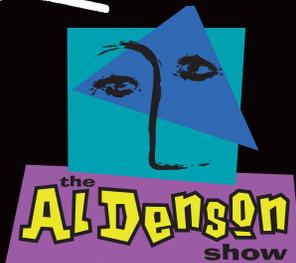
Dear Friends,

Thank you for your correspondence to the Al Denson Show and for tuning in every week to our program. My prayer for you is to be encouraged in your daily walk with God through the words of this booklet. Our hope is that in turn you will tell others of what God is doing through our ministry to youth and parents on TV. I am convinced you will not find another program on any network dealing with the issues today's youth and parents are facing, while providing answers from a Godly perspective.

Please help us with your donation. Your support will not only keep this program on the air, but will allow us to continue providing these materials on a weekly basis to thousands of people as a gift of encouragement. We need YOU to partner with us. All gifts are tax-deductible. Please make your gift payable to Celebration Ministries and mail to the address below.

May God bless you and thank you for watching!

Sincerely,



An Outreach of Celebration Ministries

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The Amazing Graceless



When Al Denson speaks to students—more than 2,000,000 face to face— he comes with his own story of struggle and tragedy. In December 1994,

Al's much publicized, near-death experience in the crash of a small aircraft led him to a rare insight about the tenuous nature of earthly life.

With seven albums behind him and a string of #1 songs and awards that includes a Dove for "Best Praise Album of the Year", Denson's songs and messages to students from junior high through college continue to touch an ever-widening audience. In addition to his own performances, Al has been featured at crusades for Dr. Billy Graham, Franklin Graham, Ralph Bell, and Dawson McAllister. His new TV show, "The Al Denson Show", is seen by millions on TBN. The program targets and involves youth and the issues they face every day.

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The Amazing Graceless

The fallen soldiers in the army of Christ are wounded, not dead, yet most Christians have a tendency to show these brothers and sisters no grace and then bury them alive. Why is that? I believe that there are two reasons we are graceless to one another. First, because we don't really know the nature and character of our Father who is the Source of grace, and secondly, because we don't really understand grace. Oh, we can sing Amazing Grace with a tear in our eye, but most of us are "AMAZINGLY GRACELESS".

The evangelist, Dudley Hall, says that in most religious circles condemnation has been refined to an art form. We use it as a tool to shape the consciences of the young, influence the decisions of adults, correct those we feel are wrong, and bury those who have fallen.

So often today the gospel seems to be presented more as a challenge to "do better", "try harder", and "stop sinning", rather than as "good news". Is it any wonder that the hurting masses of the world, for the most part, have rejected the church entirely? People are looking for solutions for their problems and cures for their pain, but too many times the church has just given them more rules to keep, more expectations to fulfill, and more work to do.

And yet God does have a "good news" message for the world and for the believer, and it is just the opposite of "do better, try harder".

The good news that God sends us through Jesus Christ is the message of GRACE:
**The Gift Of God's Unconditional Love
Freely Offered To The Undeserving And
The Unworthy.**



The biggest ENEMY of GRACE is the performance lie. This lie is the core of the curse. It tries to make us believe that every relationship in life is based on performance, on what we do. It tells us:

- That our relationship to God and our salvation are based on our performance.
- That how we feel about ourself is based on our own assessment of our performance.
- That our relationship with others, our sense of security and belonging depends on how well we perform.
- That our relationship with society around us is totally dependent on our achievement and success.

The basic cause of most of the emotional and spiritual problems that Christians have personally and the basic cause of all dysfunction in relationships is:

- the failure to receive and live out God's unconditional grace, and as a result,
- the failure to offer that same grace to others.

A person who has not received grace, or doesn't understand what grace is, has no grace to give and will be GRACELESS toward others. Performance-oriented Christians are hard on themselves and on other people. We are ALL fallen sinners, both by NATURE and by CHOICE, and stand in need of God's saving grace.

Romans 5:21 says, "...so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also GRACE might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

It is the will of our Father that grace reign in our relationships. The way we love and forgive, the way we resolve our problems, and our response to stressful situations and to life will

all either draw people to the Lord or turn them away.

Just as Ephesians 2:8 reminds us that it is **grace and grace alone** that will ALWAYS be the basis of our relationship with God, **grace and grace alone** must ALWAYS be the basis of our relationships with each other.

Ephesians 4:32 tells us "Be kind and compassionate

to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

Most of us think we understand grace, but do we really? Remember the definition of grace? **The Gift Of God's Unconditional Love Freely Offered To The Undeserving and The Unworthy.** Is this the brand of grace that is displayed in your relationships?

Let's look at 3 characteristics of scriptural grace and compare it to the version you have embraced:

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

The Character of Grace

1. **Grace is undeserved.** Grace has nothing to do with our sinfulness or worthiness. In the second century, a critic of Christianity named Celsus said that the idea of God loving sinners - bad people - was "a thing unheard of in any other religion." He was absolutely right!

That's what grace is all about.

During the Napoleonic Wars, a young, battle-weary French soldier fell asleep while on guard duty. He was court-martialed, found guilty, and sentenced to death. His widowed mother somehow arranged an audience with the Emperor Napoleon himself. Falling at his feet, she begged for her son's life to be spared, explaining that he was her only child and her sole means of support. Napoleon said coldly, "Madam, your son does not deserve mercy. He deserves to die." "Of course sir, you are right," the mother immediately replied. "That is why I am asking you to show mercy on him. If he were deserving, it wouldn't be mercy." Napoleon was so touched by the logic of her statement that he pardoned the soldier.

If you and I were deserving, it wouldn't be grace, either.

2. **Grace is unearnable.** David Semans says, "The last thing that humans want to surrender to God is an admission of our

helplessness to save ourselves. We will give up our sins, ambitions, money, fame, and comfort, but the most difficult and the last thing we will give up is our confidence that there is something we can do which will earn us a right relationship with God."

Many of us **start out** on the road of undeserved grace saying, "Of course God accepts me just as I am. I know I am totally undeserving and have nothing to offer Him but my sins and failures. BUT, from this point on, God certainly expects me to live up to certain standards of performance to stay in His good graces". Wrong. Grace is unearnable at the point of your new birth and will **REMAIN** unearnable throughout eternity.

3. **Grace is unrepayable.** Some people try to turn the gift of grace into salvation by promissory note. We bargain with God, "Lord, if You will forgive me and save me, I promise I'll pay You back someday." There are several ways we try to pay God back:

- a. Self-atonement.** This is where we try to repay God by punishing ourselves. We refuse to forgive ourselves for past sins and failures, or we don't allow ourselves to enjoy life or be happy.
- b. Self-sacrifice.** This is an attempt to repay God by giving up things.
- c. Service.** This is an attempt to pay God back by doing things for Him.

Of course we should respond to grace with obedience and service and sacrifice, BUT we do not do these things in order to repay God's grace, earn His approval, or even up the balance sheet. We do not do these things in order to win God's love, but out of gratitude for His love, not in order to repay His GRACE, but out of **thankfulness for His GRACE.**

Grace is God's love in action toward those who do not deserve it. God does not say,

- I love you **because**
- I love you **since**
or
- I will love you **if**
- I will love you **when**
- I will love you **after**
- I will love you **provided**
- I will love you **presuming**

Any of these statements would make God's love conditional, but God's unconditional love flows out of God because of His nature. His love depends not on WHAT WE ARE, but on WHAT HE IS. He loves unconditionally because HE IS LOVE.

God's love is an action toward us, not a reaction to something good in us. As we have RECEIVED this love, we are ALSO to WALK in it. In other words, we are OBLIGATED to pass it on to others.

How does the brand of love and grace that you have offered others compare to what God has freely given you? If you love conditionally, and have been "GRACELESS" in your relationships, perhaps it is because you have never

really known experientially the love and grace of your heavenly Father.

We can sing "Amazing Grace" and say we believe in grace, but if that grace is only head knowledge, then we will be driven and frustrated, living with anxiety and condemnation. Grace must be an experience WITH God, not something we believe ABOUT God, or we will become part of the army of the AMAZING GRACELESS.

Romans 6:3-5 says, "Don't you KNOW that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

The Greek word translated "know" in this passage means more than just to be aware of something or to know it theoretically. It means to "KNOW BY REVELATION". Have you noticed when you know something by revelation that your life changes? You can be AWARE of an assortment of facts and still experience no change. But a revelation always changes your life.

What is the life-changing revelation Paul is talking about in this passage? It is GRACE. Just as this GRACE makes it possible for us to have a new life, this same GRACE can give us new relationships.

Maybe you have not been able to offer grace to others because you have never "known by revelation" God's grace in your own life.

As a result, you may be experiencing:

- Continuous feelings of guilt, condemnation, and the judgment and disapproval of God.
- A sense of worthlessness, feelings of low self-esteem, and self-condemnation.
- A sense of phoniness and unreality, a feeling of being empty and fake, of having lost touch with yourself and not really knowing who you are.
- Negative emotions, especially anger and anxiety, irrational fears, resentment, outburst of rage, depression, or excessive mood swings.

You may look pretty good on the outside, but on the inside you're hurting, and you're passing that hurt on to others because HURTING PEOPLE HURT PEOPLE.

It could be that you have never been able to understand or accept God's grace because you've never known what He is really like. What we really believe about the nature and character of God will determine EVERYTHING about us:

- The attitudes we have about ourself and about life in general,
- the way we live,
- the way we relate to other people,
- and even the way we worship.

You see, it is impossible to accept God's GRACE without trusting Him, and in order to trust Him, it is essential that we know the character of our Father.

In his book, *Grace Works*, Dudley Hall gives us an example from scripture of the importance of this principle:

Luke 15 is usually called “The Parable of the Prodigal Son”, but while the younger son, the so-called “Prodigal” gets most of the attention, the real emphasis of the story is on the second boy. It could just as easily be called “The Parable of the Older Brother.”

There is nothing in this life that is more essential to a Christian's spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical health than knowing and trusting God. When we really know Him, we can trust Him completely and live the "GRACE LIFE".

You know the story. The Prodigal Son repents and returns home to the Father. The Father throws a party in his honor. When the older son hears the noise of the celebration and comes to see what is going on, he is told that the party is to welcome his younger brother home. He immediately pitches a fit. The way he responded shows us that he really didn't know his father. His mistaken concept of what pleases his father is revealed by three statements he makes in verses 29-30:

1. **“All these years I have served you”.**
Or, “Look at all I have done for you!”
He was living under the mistaken impression that service is the key to pleasing the Father, but we are created for fellowship, not for service.
2. **“I never transgressed thy commandments at any time.”** He was keeping the rules but missing the party. He had assumed that pleasing the Father was essentially about obeying the rules.
3. **“You never gave me a goat that I might make merry with my friends”.** He didn't understand that all that belonged to the Father belonged to him because he was a son. The Prodigal son took for granted what was his in the Father's house, but the older son was completely blind to what was his in the Father's house.

You and I are no different from the older son.
The way we respond to other people and the circumstances of life REVEAL whether we really know our Father, too.

God is a Father:

- who grieves over and with His children
- who receives us just as we are
- who doesn't rebuke us
- who doesn't say “I told you so”
- who doesn't put us on probation
- who isn't disappointed or angry with us
- who will always treat us as if we've never been away when we come home
- whose attitude of love, mercy, and grace toward us is fixed and established.

Is that the way you see your heavenly Father? Does that describe the Father you know? There is nothing in this life that is more essential to a Christian's spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical health than knowing and trusting God. When we really know Him we can trust Him completely and live the “GRACE LIFE”.

This is the kind of life that God had in mind for us from the beginning. When God created Adam and Eve, they had completely fulfilling lives as long as they trusted the character of their Creator. They knew that they were loved and accepted by God. As a result, Adam and Eve were able to love themselves and each other unconditionally.

But when they chose to believe the lie that said, **“God's character and His love are flawed, He can't be trusted,”** they sinned, and in doing so, were no longer able to love and accept themselves and each other.

They began to experience guilt, shame, and fear for the first time.

Worst of all, they passed on to all of us the guilt, shame, fear, and all the emotional and spiritual confusion that goes with it. Satan lied to Adam and Eve about the nature and character of their Father and he lies to us today about where true self-worth and security are found.

Satan still says, “There IS something you can DO to become like God, to be in control, to be your own God. Eat this fruit from the performance tree.” Once we do eat that fruit, we never in this life get away from the need to perform.

What is worst is that we not only become “performers”, but judges of the “performance” of others, thereby putting incredible pressure and unreal and unfair expectations on other people. Over and over, we believe the lie that says that we have to perform, “TO DO”, to be accepted, to meet certain standards to have worth and value as a person.

The grace of our Father is truly amazing...

Ever since that day in the Garden, human beings have been trying to satisfy their own desires and cover their own pain with possessions, activities, and experiences. Humans are still buying into the lie that says, "You require something other than God to meet the hurts and unmet needs in your life".

Although the first Adam infected the human race with "performance-itis", "the last Adam", Jesus Christ, modeled with His life the unconditional love, acceptance, and approval of God. For 30 years He never performed a miracle or preached a sermon, but at His Baptism, His Father said, "This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am (already) pleased." Love, acceptance, and approval all in one statement. **God was pleased with His Son without a performance of any kind!** That's the nature and the character of the Father we **MUST** come to know.

Colossians 2:14 shows us what our Father is like. This verse says, "**having canceled the CERTIFICATE OF DEBT with its regulations that were against us and that stood opposed to us, He took it away, nailing it to the Cross.**"

Let me explain. Today the term "CERTIFICATE OF DEBT" is not one that we are familiar with, but if we had lived in Paul's day this verse would have painted a powerful word picture. Back then, whenever a person was convicted in a Roman Court of Law, the scribe of the court would make a written list of all the crimes for which that person had been convicted. That list was called a "CERTIFICATE OF DEBT".

This certificate would be taken along with the criminal to the place of imprisonment and nailed to the large wooden door of his cell. When the sentence had been completed, the scribe would take down the "CERTIFICATE OF DEBT" and write across it the word that meant "IT IS FINISHED", roll it up, give it to the prisoner, and he could never be convicted of those crimes again.

Do you understand what Paul was saying in this verse? 2000 years ago a "CERTIFICATE OF DEBT" was prepared for you and me. A list was made of ALL our sins and that list was nailed to an old rugged cross.

The words Jesus spoke from the cross were not a cry of defeat, but a shout of victory. **IT IS FINISHED! IT MEANT PAID IN FULL!** All our sins, past, present, and future have been paid for and we can never be found guilty of them again.

Because God accepts and approves of Jesus, He **COMPLETELY** accepts and approves of us because we are "IN CHRIST". You and I don't have to perform or meet certain standards to win God's love and acceptance or to prove that we have value and worth. We simply have to be "IN CHRIST". **NOW THAT'S GRACE!**

Romans 8:1 says "There is NOW **"NO CONDEMNATION"** for those who are **"IN CHRIST"**.

As God's children we have one of two choices:

- We can either live with confidence in His GRACE, or
- we can live with condemnation.

Grace cannot be earned. If it is to be experienced, it must be received as a free gift. We have to receive what we don't deserve and can't repay.

The grace of our Father is truly amazing and it is His grace that allows us to grace one another.