

RD Norman's work is highly commendable on at least two levels. First, he lays a Trinitarian framework for his teaching. The doctrine of the Trinity is the foundational doctrine of Christianity, and yet too often it is minimised or ignored. Norman sets a good example of seeking to relate all other truths to the self-revealed Trinity of holy Scripture. Second, the book is written with a deep concern for 'applied truth.' The author always points the lesson of how biblical truths are meant to be inwardly digested and practically lived out. As Scripture says, the gospel gives us 'the doctrine which is according to godliness' (1 Timothy 6:3). May the God of truth and holiness bless this book to its readers.

— **Nick Needham**, tutor at Highland Theological College and author of the series *2000 Years of Christ's Power*.

How could we ever exist apart from the grace of God? In his new book, *Phenomenal Grace*, Robert Norman has captured the essence of this remarkable attribute of God. This book is engaging, clear, provoking, and best of all, biblically accurate. I am confident that Robert's careful exposition coupled with his God-honouring content will provide each reader with great hope both for the present and the future as much as it has for me.

— **Dr. Gary Fleetwood**, Professor of Theology, Covington Theological Seminary

# **PHENOMENAL GRACE**

**The God of Salvation**

**R. D. Norman**



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# Acknowledgements

Thank you, Ken Luse, for giving me the idea to write this book. May it serve its purpose.

Thank you, Niamh Shiel, for your critiquing help.

Thank you, Matthew and Cath Hyde, for your relentlessly good editing.

Finally, thank you, Dan Roth and the family, Katie, Jonathan, Essie and Anna, for your wonderful example of missionary work to me and to those you serve on behalf of the Lord in Latvia. This book is dedicated to you.

# Introduction

Grace has often been described as amazing. This is a good word to use, but I do not think it is intense enough. Truly, there is no adjective (or set of adjectives) great enough to describe God's grace. Phenomenal, however, is the best I think I can do within the limits of human language.

Why do I say phenomenal? Phenomenal carries the weight of something exceptional, something we would not ordinarily see. We talk of 'strange phenomena' when we do not fully understand something. It is amazing to look into the wonders of astrophysics and quantum mechanics, but we simply do not fully understand these things. In humility, we are forced to sit back and just be amazed at the awesome phenomena we observe.

It is the same with God's grace. It is a phenomenon which we can make some progress in understanding. Ultimately, however, we can never plumb it to its fullest depths. Why does God make time for sinners? Why does he lavishly give such extravagant gifts when we only deserve the opposite? We are able to get the beginnings to answer some of these questions, but we will never come to the end of understanding them. Grace is simply a phenomenal

phenomenon, something we must eventually simply sit back, worship God for, and enjoy.

When I came to faith, I found myself in the best place I had ever been. Things were changing, life had a new purpose. My very existence became new and fresh; I had been reborn. God's grace had impacted me, and my life began to change in blessed ways. Before that, however, I was in a very dark place filled with sadness, difficulty, and strife. I was a young lad from England, suddenly brought to live in a Scottish village and I was not happy about it. I went to school and tried to make friends but became the 'loser' in all my classes. School was simply miserable as I was bullied and I had very few friends.

When the Lord came to me at 14 years old, putting my life on a new path, everything changed. There was no 'mystical experience' or tingling feelings, but as the days turned into weeks and then months it became clear to me and many others around me that something was different. My life had been transformed and things would never be the same again.

This has been the testimony of my life. Once God changed my life, I have remained on the path of Christian truth. I have never stopped growing and I have certainly never stopped learning. Throughout my life I have had the joy of diving into biblical subjects, like salvation, and who God is. These studies have been very fruitful to my soul, enabling me to understand truth in a fresh light. Increasingly, I want to help others to know the joy of grace all the more as well.

What is it that brings a man, woman, boy, or girl to this place of life-changing joy? How are our lives changed when we come to faith and why? This book is an attempt to answer these questions

biblically. Every Christian has been impacted by God's grace, turning a sinful life into a life of joyful worship. Things are different since their conversion day and nothing will ever be the same again. How we understand God's grace and its effects is often something people tend to overlook.

That brings us to this book.

This book is all about how God saves us, but it is presented with a special flavour. Who is this God who saves us? And what does God do in order to save us? Taking these two questions in tandem, we look at salvation from three points of view — what God the Father does, what God the Son does, and what God the Holy Spirit does. To put this another way, we will look at different aspects of God's grace by linking them with each of the three persons of the Trinity.

- Part 1 discusses the grace of God the Father, especially as seen in his unconstrained decision to save sinners from their terrible sins.
- Part 2 explores the grace of God the Son, especially as seen in the death he died on the cross of Calvary to atone for sin.
- Part 3 reflects on the grace of God the Holy Spirit, especially as seen in how he draws sinners into salvation and keeps them safely on the pathway to heaven.

As we progress, we will cover some controversial issues, but my intention throughout is never to be confrontational or contentious. I would like each chapter to be a constructive invitation to you, the reader, to join me in trusting and admiring the grace of our Saviour. My hope is that this book will be helpful especially to people who are new believers, or believers who would like to deepen their understanding of theology.



## PHENOMENAL GRACE

When we realise that all of salvation is a trinitarian work, the gospel truth of salvation shines brighter in our view and consumes us with even more passion for God's holy truth. Sent by the Father and equipped by the Spirit, the Lord Jesus Christ came and lived the life we never could, and died so we could be free. It is this which we find to be the most beautiful depth of God's phenomenal grace.

## ~ Part 1 ~

# God the Father: Power and Grace

To begin with, in Part 1 we will think about God the Father. We will reflect on some of his attributes and some of his works and how they show us his grace.

It was God who made the world and it is God who keeps all things in existence moment by moment. But his interest in us did not begin at creation. From all eternity he has had a plan of sheer grace towards immeasurably guilty sinners.

This should leave us thirsty to enjoy him and worship him for his grace.

# CHAPTER 1

## Who is Like Our God?

Adam breathed his first breath as he opened his eyes to see God's creation. Who knows exactly what he saw? Did God manifest himself somehow to Adam, or was Adam guided by his voice alone? The reader of Genesis is not informed, but it is clear later on in Genesis that God 'walked' in the garden with Adam (Genesis 3:8). Adam and God had a relationship (a good relationship) in a good place called the Garden of Eden. We imagine Adam opening his eyes for the first time, having just been brought into existence. Looking around at the creation in the Garden of Eden would have been something spectacular, but even more incredible would have been hearing the voice of his God. Many questions may have been in Adam's mind, but likely none of that would have mattered at the sound of his God's voice echoing out from the heavens.

This would have been a beautiful and everlasting communion, a relationship vastly superior to even the closest of husbands and wives. But Adam cut himself (and the rest of us) off from that amazing and good relationship with God when he rebelled in the garden. Since then, only a few people, such as Abraham, Moses,

Samuel and Isaiah, have had the privilege of audibly hearing God speak.

While we may not have heard the voice of God audibly speaking to us today, we can still understand what he has to say to us. When we open his Word, the Bible, we can learn many great and wonderful things about God.

The book of Genesis describes him as the Creator, creating good things. The books of law (Leviticus to Deuteronomy) show us that he is a God of order. The books of 1 and 2 Kings show us that, despite human institutions, God is still *the* King above his creation and that all other leaders are sub-leaders to him. The prophets of the Old Testament and the Psalms show us a sovereign God who causes his plans to succeed and come to fruition exactly as he planned.

This barely even scratches the surface. Our creator God is holy, all powerful, always present, never ending, and unconquerable, yet these terms do not even begin to exhaust him. Who can exhaust something which never ends? Our minds are so limited. We cannot even begin to fully understand these things. Yet God has allowed us insights into who he is so we can get a sufficient picture of himself. Enough is revealed that we can be saved for eternity, but not so much that things get more complicated than an ordinary person can understand. Only a loving, caring, and thoughtful God would do this for a fallen creation.

In this chapter, in order to learn more, we will study what the Bible tells us about our God in his Word. This will be in no way exhaustive, but I hope that by the end of this chapter you will see some glimpses of the awesome splendour of our amazing God, and why he is worthy of our worship.

## **God's Creating Power**

In Genesis 1–2 we learn that God created the universe using nothing but words. He spoke things into existence and the atoms he created speedily bonded together to form the things which he was speaking into existence. The light which he gave the sun and the moon then shone on the beautiful and lush new planet, which had everything it could possibly need for good sustenance. All of this, yet it took just God's voice to bring it into existence!

In the newly formed universe, God then created animal life. Living, breathing things walked, scurried, ran, and moved about on the face of the earth.

Still, this was not yet the end of creation. God wanted something that would actually be in his likeness, and bear his image. Creating a man, and then a woman, God created humankind — creatures who would be uniquely able to commune with and live under the direct ruling of God.

You and I are descendants of the original couple, Adam and Eve. All began in Genesis and has continued down through time until the present day. As long as this world remains, God continues to knits new people together in our mother's wombs (Ps. 139:13–14).

Even where men and women display their human creativity and are given credit for inventing things, God still stands as the Creator. He has created you and me for the purpose of sincerely worshipping him. He deserves all the glory, honour, and praise. Nobody and nothing is like him. May we bask in this truth, and worship.

## **Creation from Two Different Points of View**

There is so much to learn in the Bible, but always so little time and space to be able to cover everything in depth. We will just look at two passages of the Bible which we can study to further learn about the Creator. First, we will see God telling one man about his power. After this, we can turn to the Psalms for man's words of praise to the Creator.

### *What God Says to Job about Creation*

God himself tells one man, Job, about his awesome creative power in Job 38:4–10. Job had been complaining about his circumstances and desperately wanting God to respond to his cries. Yet when God finally answered him, it was as if he was showing Job a brick wall instead of his smiling face. He confronted Job starkly with Job's smallness, his ignorance, his powerlessness, and the fleetingness of his existence. Job was not there at the beginning, he did not measure out the limits of creation, or put the stars in their place. Job was powerless in these things and now he was face to face with the truth. He had no right to complain about his circumstances when God had such powerful care for his creation.

We should take these verses very seriously when we consider how we think about and speak to God. None of us were present when God laid down the foundation of the earth. We do not have understanding like we think we do and we could not even begin to create as God has created. Sure, we can do things with God's creation — we can build massive skyscrapers, dive to the depths of the sea, and invent renewable energy sources out of wind and waves. But no human created the materials that enabled those things. We create nothing, but God created all.