

## Everywhere Grace > Everywhere Sin

What do you see when you look at your neighbor? Do you see his dodgy dealings, his chaotic garage, or his unkempt lawn? Do you see him and his wife yelling at each other in another spat? Do you hear his bad language?

Is that all you see? Is there anything else? What about the time he helped you start your car that icy morning? What about his devotion to his wife, despite their noisy arguments? How about his kindness to your children? Or his devoted service in Operation Desert Storm?

Alright, let's get in your SUV and go to your work. What do you see there? A barking boss, cheating colleagues, complaining customers, and equipment that doesn't work half the time?

Is that all you see? That might be all you talk about when you get home at night, but is that really the whole picture? Is there no one there with any skill, talent or virtue? Does everyone treat everyone like dirt every day? Are there never kind words in the staff room? Are there no generous acts on the floor? Is there never a customer that says "Thank you?" Are there no blessings? Are no benefits?

What do we see when we look at the world? It's possible to look at the world and see nothing but sin, corruption, decay and evil. The world is going to hell in a handbasket.

From a biblical point of view, we do live in a fallen world. The apostle Paul calls our world "the dark world" in Ephesians 6 and says that we live in a "present evil age" in Galatians 1:4. He tells us in Romans 8 that all of creation groans under the bondage of the decay of our sin. If you want proof of everywhere sin, there's plenty of it out there.

Sin leaves its foul stench on everything it touches, and it's touched everything. This is the horror of everywhere sin. It's a pretty ugly picture.

But if that's all we see, we're not seeing the whole picture. We can also see a wonderful world filled with beauty and majesty, a world where the goodness and glory of God are on constant display. Paul writes in Romans 1:20, *"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."*

Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount, *"See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these."* 1 Timothy 4:4 says, *"For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer."*

So, yes we live in a world that is indelibly marred by sin, but it is also a world that reveals the goodness and love of God. When God first created our world, he looked at all that he had made and said it was very good. The scent of that very goodness still lingers.

Sometimes I cook with some freshly minced garlic, or some sauté some chopped onion. The whole house fills the scent of these things, and it lingers long after. If you walk into the house even a couple hours after dinner is over, you can still smell dinner in the air. The goodness of God's creation is like that, even though sin has stolen so much, the goodness of God is still in the air. This is the everywhere grace of God.

What I'm talking about is known in theology as common grace. Common grace is the benefits and blessings that God bestows on all people, whether they believe in him or not. Common grace is common because it is experienced by everyone without distinction. It is grace because it is undeservedly bestowed by God.

### **Everywhere Grace is For Everyone**

God loves everyone so much that he sent his son to die for the sins of everyone— for my sins, for your sins, for President Biden's sins, for the sins of the homeless addict in a dark alley in St. Louis, or the sins of Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the sins of Vladimir Putin. That's what John 3:16 is all about. 1 John 2:2 tells us Jesus *died for the sins of the whole world*. John 1:9 says Jesus is the *true light that gives light to everyone*. God did this before anyone believed in him. God did this for those who would never believe in Him, who would never receive the gift, but He offered it anyway.

Sin has left its mark on all of humanity, but God has also left us with proof of his goodness, his love, and his grace. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:45 that God, "*causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the on the righteous and the unrighteous.*"

Why doesn't the rain fall only on Christian farmers' fields? How are the wicked able to enjoy vacations in Hawaii? In Acts 14, Paul and Barnabas are preaching in the city of Lystra, and they tell crowd in verses 16-17, "*he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.*"

Even the worst of sinners lives in a world filled with glimpses of God's goodness, tastes of God's provision, and reminders of God's love. Every breath, every sunrise is a grace of God. That's common grace. God loves all people and does not wish harm upon any. There is no one in this world and there is nowhere in this world that is lacking in the everywhere grace of God.

So, we live in a world filled with everywhere sin, but also filled with everywhere grace. What you need to know this morning is this. Everywhere grace is greater than everywhere sin. Even in a dark and fallen world, the grace and goodness God will have the final word.

### **If You Look for Good You Will Find It**

If you look for sin, you will find it, but if you look for good, you will find that. We should never deny or downplay sin and its awful impact on our world. Every one of our lives has been

touched by sin and its misery. But our focus shouldn't be constant doom and gloom. When we see everywhere grace as greater than everywhere sin, it will change how we look at everyone and everything.

I say this as a natural born cynic. I can see downside in anything. I can fear the worst in even the best of news. I'm right there with the disciple Thomas in the upper room after the resurrections saying, "I doubt it." Prove it to me. Show me. I want to see the evidence.

And so God has placed that evidence all around. My challenge to you, as well as myself is instead of just looking around for evidence of sin – it's there. It's easy to find – also look for evidence of God's glory and goodness and rejoice in it. You will enjoy life more. You will be less suspicious and doubtful about everyone and everything. You will see more beauty in life and enjoy it more. It will enhance your worship and give you reason to praise.

Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar says, "Every experience of beauty points us to infinity."

When we begin to look for it, we begin to find glimpses of God everywhere, even in the unlikeliest of places. Like a lovely flower blooming in the crack in the concrete, divine beauty is there.

A few years ago, I went to visit someone in Mercy hospital. In my memory, it was Kathryn Gage in the final days before she died. If I'm getting that wrong and it was you, let me know.

But here I am in the hospital with that antiseptic smell that all hospitals have. It's clean, but it's like it's hiding a much darker reality. I'm trying to bring just a touch joy and faith to what seems like a story with no happy ending, but heaven. When I begin to hear the sweetest sound, a hint of beauty, a whisper of joy. "Am I imagining that? No. It's getting louder. Where is that coming from? Soon I recognize the melody, "How Great Thou Art."

Soon we stop talking, and just listen. The song ends, and shortly another hymn of praise starts up again just outside of door. It's a harpist. She's got this full-sized harp and she's just going up and down the halls of the hospital plucking the strings of her instruments spreading praise, love, and joy. Before I left, I stopped to talk to her, and she comes in every week to play her harp. Beautiful glory and majesty in the halls of a hospital. It's there. You just have to look

I love pictures of space, but let me show you one of my favorite space pictures ever taken by our beloved Hubble space telescope. I know the new James Webb telescope is getting all the press, but until we start getting pix like this, I'm still giving kudos to Hubble.

This is a picture taken with Hubble's Ultra Deep Field. I know we can't see it very well in here with our projector, but every spot of light in this picture is a different galaxy. Some of them are spiral arm galaxies that look very much like our own, but there's galaxies of all shapes and sizes. About 10,000 of them in just this one picture.

David sings in Psalm 19,

*The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.  
2 Day after day they pour forth speech;  
night after night they reveal knowledge.  
3 They have no speech, they use no words;  
no sound is heard from them.  
Yet their voice[b] goes out into all the earth,  
their words to the ends of the world.*

Much more recently a teenager at summer camp who'd been shown these pictures from Hubble was overheard echoing David's praise to one of his friends, "God is huge." We walk, sleep, eat and breath under those stars every night, but how often do we truly see the hugeness, the beauty, the majesty of God in them? It's there if you only look.

### **Everywhere Grace Is not Saving Grace**

Common grace is not the same thing as saving grace. God's everywhere grace is for everybody everywhere, but saving grace is very specific and only applies to those who receive Jesus' death and resurrection on their behalf in faith. Saving grace is reserved for God's people alone and results in their salvation and sanctification.

Common grace bestows significant benefits and blessings for everyone, but God's everywhere grace will not save you. It will not make you a better person. Everywhere grace is evidence that God loves you and He wants you to be saved. It is intended to call you to salvation, to draw you to God, but it is not sufficient to save you.

God displays his everywhere grace, because he wants people to see and know His love. God's desire according to 1 Timothy 2:4 is for "*all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*" Common grace is evidence of that fact.

God's everywhere grace tells you that God loves you and He wants to save you, but it's not enough to save you. You must come to Him for that. You must find his saving grace through faith in His Son Jesus. If you don't know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, don't take God's everywhere grace for granted. It won't last forever.

Paul talks about this very issue in Romans 2. In verse 4 he says,

*Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?*

God's everywhere grace should lead you to salvation, but it doesn't save you.

### **Everywhere Grace Deepens Our Worship**

Everywhere grace isn't just for non-believers though. Remember, it's for all people. What about those of us who already love Jesus, belong to Jesus and follow Jesus? What does

common grace mean for us? One of the most important things is that it deepens our worship.

Our worship shouldn't be confined only to our personal devotions and our church services. We can find reasons to celebrate and praise the majesty of our God and Savior everywhere with anyone at anytime.

The great thing is that as Christians we have this whole world of goodness and grace open before us. It is ours to not only enjoy, but to understand and appreciate. We stand with empty plates before the full buffet of the goodness of God in everything around us.

The depraved mind of sinful man is often dulled to these things. Though surrounded by the good things of God, they are limited in their ability to fully enjoy them.

A Christian and a non-believer can both walk through the decorated halls of a fine art museum or the ivied stately columns of a forest. They both can enjoy and admire the delicately placed brush strokes, the carefully chiseled marble, the playing with color and light that makes it look almost real, the sun streaming through the leaves, the wildlife in its natural habitat, but the Christian can appreciate it on a whole different level.

The beauty is more than just human skill and dedication. There is more than just natural beauty, and the marvels of science on display. They are all reflections of the glory of God. We create because He is Creator. Nature is beautiful because He is beautiful.

There is something in each of us that longs to discover and know the source of all true beauty. C.S. Lewis speaks for all of us in his book *Till We Have Faces*, "The sweetest thing in all my life has been the longing ...to find the place where all the beauty came from."

The greatest joy is discovered when we discover that the place where all the beauty came from is not a place at all. It is a person. It is not a what or a where. It is a Who. God is more than just the measure of beauty. He is beauty.

He's like the sun. When you buy paint colors for your home, you're advised to look at the paint samples in the sunlight. Why? Because if you want to see the true color, you have to place the paint chip in the sun. The sun is the source of light, and it's rays reveal the true colors, the true beauty in everything else. As Christians we get to see all of the beauty in the world in the light of true beauty.

When we see or hear beauty even it's from the canvas of an unbelieving artist, or from the keys of a non-Christian musician or in the face of an unconverted model, we see it in the light of the one who in the words of Asaph in Psalm 50 is the perfection of Beauty and worship Him.

When we see power, even when exercised by a non-Christian president, our bursting from the powerful legs of a world class athlete, or in the majesty of an eagle's wings spread in flight, we see it in the light of the Powerful One and worship Him.

When we hear wisdom, even when it is written by an atheist journalist, or spoken in a TED talk by an unbeliever we hear it in the harmony of the one Paul calls in Romans 16:27 the only Wise God and worship Him.

When we see love, even an imperfect love in imperfect relationships, in our unbelieving children, or our unbelieving spouse, or in a soldier sacrificing his life for his comrades, we see it in the light of the one who is LOVE, and worship Him.

When we see loyalty, in a 40 year employee, even if she isn't a Christian, or even in a dog faithful to its master, we see it in the light of He who remains faithful, and will never leave us nor forsake us and worship Him.

When we see patience in drivers stuck in traffic on 44, in the irreligious nurse who cares for our loved one, or in the hardware store employee who answers our stupid questions, we see it in the light of God who is patient with us, not wanting us to perish, but to come to a knowledge of the truth and worship Him.

When we see humility in the janitor, or the men collecting your garbage, or the assistant who answers your customer service telephone call, we see it in the light of the one who emptied himself and took on the very form of a servant and we worship Him.

Are you seeing how this works now? Whenever we see mercy, or truthfulness, or creativity, or diligence or any virtue, wherever we see it, we use it to rise up to its ultimate source and worship Him. These everywhere graces reveal so much about our everywhere God.

The temptation is to take it for granted, to overlook it, to focus only on the negative, or give all the credit to a person or to nature, but that's not what the Psalms to do.

The Psalmists opened their eyes and saw evidence of the everywhere grace and goodness and wonder of God everywhere. Wherever the Psalmist found it –in the field, in the sky, in the seasons, in the animal kingdom, in people, anywhere and everywhere, they turned that into praise for God.

Steve DeWitt has a wonderful book called *Eyes Wide Open: Enjoying God in Everything*. He writes,

Since everything God created is theology (God-knowledge), all creation is a treasure hunt in which God has left clues—essentially pictures of Himself...like a breadcrumb trail, earthly beauty chaperones us on a path to see the beauty of Christ, for His beauty to lead to wonder, and for wonder to lead us to a life of worship.

We cannot deny the terrible damage that sin has done both in our world and in our lives. But we have a choice. We can obsess over how bad everywhere sin is, or we can recognize that everywhere grace is greater.

In the United States, the average size of a home has doubled in size over the last 50 years from

1,200 square feet to 2,500 square feet. Fifty years ago there was one car for every two licensed drivers. Now there are more vehicles than drivers. Fifty years ago, only one out of five kids went to college. Today, one out of two.

By every measure, not just in the United States, but in all developed nations, and even in most of the world life is better now than it has ever been. And yet studies have found that in most countries we are no happier than we were 50 years ago. In fact, in several countries, people are less happy. Sadly, being a Christian doesn't make any difference.

The exact opposite should be true. We should see the everywhere grace of an everywhere God all around us. Once our hearts are alive to the goodness of Christ within us, we should also be alive to God's goodness all around us. When we look at our neighbors, when we look at the world around us we need to look with the eyes of grace. Wherever our feet take us. Whenever our hands reach out or withdraw from another human being, let them do so with the same goodness that God shows to all people. Let us see, let us hear, let us taste, let us feel the beauty of good and merciful Creator.

Clyde Kilby was a former teacher at Wheaton College and a passionate student and correspondent with both C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. He is responsible for collecting and preserving many of their writings. Kilby made some interesting personal resolutions that bear repeating when it comes to seeing the everywhere grace of God is greater than everywhere sin.

- At least once every day I shall look steadily up at the sky and remember that I, a consciousness with a conscience, am on a planet traveling in space with wonderfully mysterious things above and about me.
- I shall not fall into the falsehood that this day, or any day, is merely another ambiguous and plodding twenty-four hours, but rather a unique event, filled, if I so wish, with worthy potentialities. I shall not be fool enough to suppose that trouble and pain are wholly evil parentheses in my existence but just as likely ladders to be climbed toward moral and spiritual manhood.
- I shall open my eyes and ears. Once every day I shall simply stare at a tree, a flower, a cloud, or a person. I shall not then be concerned at all to ask what they are but simply be glad that they are. I shall joyfully allow them the mystery of what Lewis calls their "divine, magical, terrifying and ecstatic" existence.
- I shall bet my life on the assumption that this world is not idiotic, neither run by an absentee landlord, but that today, this very day, some stroke is being added to the cosmic canvas that in due course I shall understand with joy as a stroke made by the architect who calls himself Alpha and Omega.