

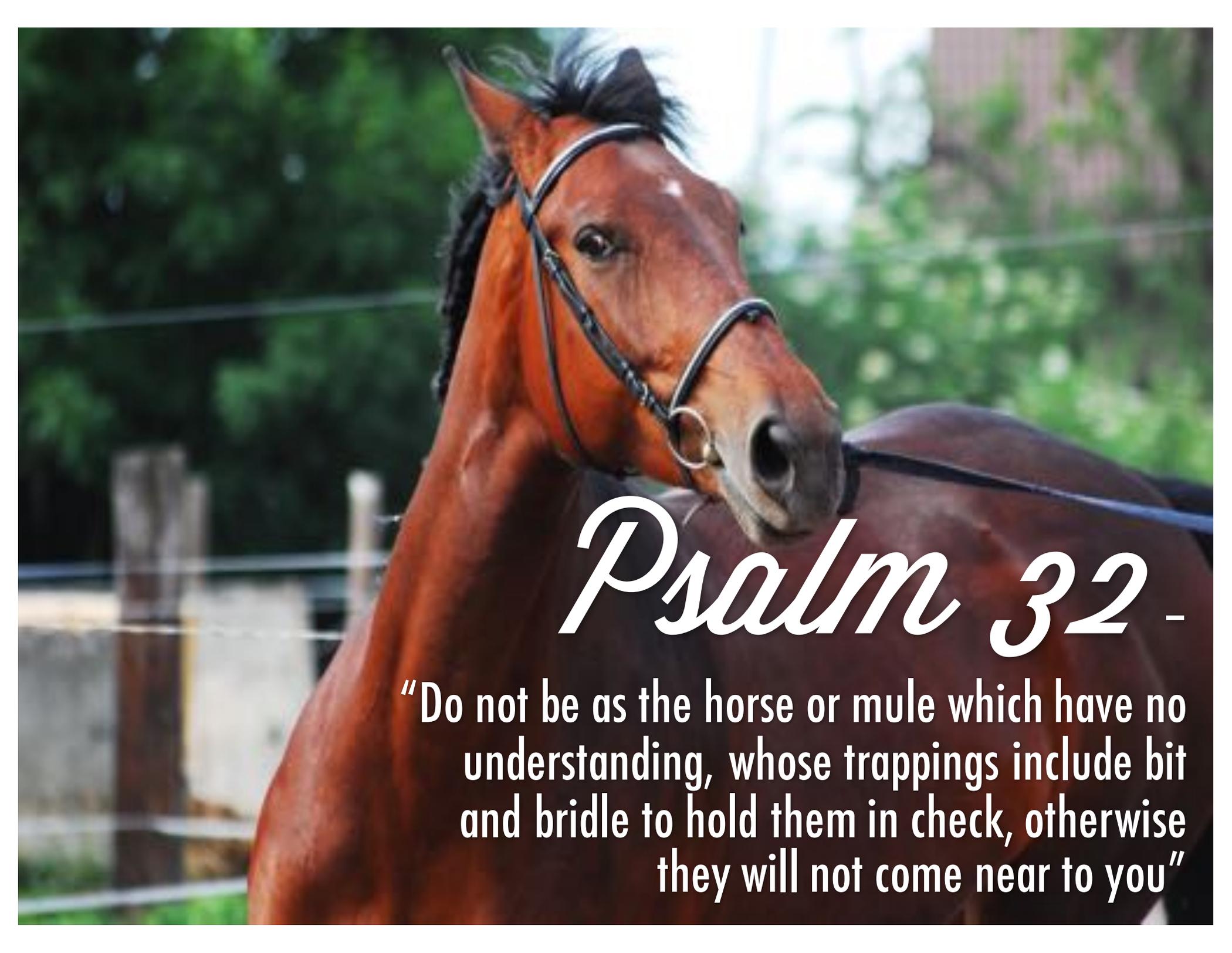
A landscape photograph featuring a brown, grassy hillside in the foreground and middle ground. The sky is filled with dramatic, dark blue and grey clouds, with a bright patch of light breaking through on the left side. The overall mood is somber and atmospheric.

Grace

AND THE GOOD SON

- The story is as much about the “good son” as it is about the prodigal son. In fact, the ending seems to indicate that every “good son” has something to learn from this story.
- He believed that because he followed all the rules and stayed home with his father, he had no need for grace. His merit deserved some recognition!
- Ironically, at the end of the story the “good son” was the only one who had a heart that needed to be changed. He had the unresolved sins of jealousy, bitterness, and self-righteousness. While his younger brother’s sins were more obvious (more public, embarrassing, and materially expensive), his subtle spiritual failure illustrated an equal need for his father’s grace.

He kept all the rules



Psalm 32 -

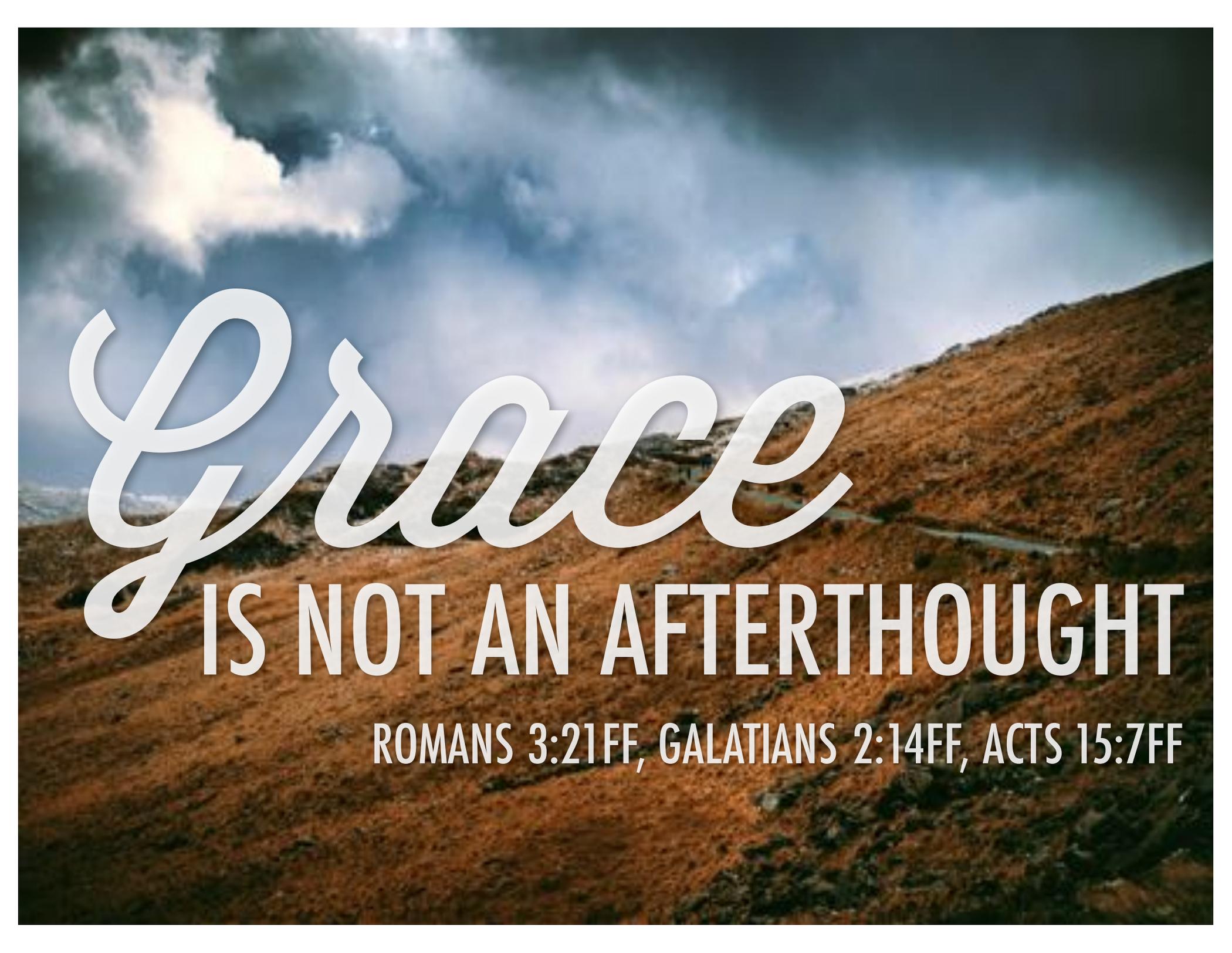
"Do not be as the horse or mule which have no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, otherwise they will not come near to you"

- So, the prodigal son broke many, many rules, but eventually aligned his heart with his father. He was welcomed home and celebrated.
- The older son kept all of the rules, but only in form. His heart was far from the mercy, goodness, and optimism of his father.
- This isn't the only time Jesus went out of His way to promote the power of a contrite, tender, God-directed heart: The parable of the two men praying in the temple, the conversion of tax collectors like Matthew and Zaccheus, mercy shown to the woman caught in adultery, His general appeal to masses of uneducated peasants, as well as His frequent confrontations with the elite rule-keepers of His day. Of course, the important question must be asked, "So, what is the point of keeping the rules at all? What good did it do the prodigal son's brother?"

A Matter Of The Heart

But first...

- One of the more frequent complaints I hear from disenchanted young people (often those who have fallen away, but not always) is that they were raised always hearing sermons about obedience, rule-keeping, doctrine, etc. They feel like they were taught grace as an after-thought, and that salvation depended primarily on how perfectly they could maintain some kind of “Church of Christ Standard.”
- Grace, supposedly, was just the last little bit they needed to get over the spiritual hump into heaven, as if God expects us to be as close to perfect as possible and grace is there for us just in case we fall short.
- It’s hard to comment too much on this assessment because everybody’s personal experiences are so different. Was the preaching really like that? Or is there some selective memory that happens to confirm a bias that makes it easy to leave the faith?



Grace

IS NOT AN AFTERTHOUGHT

ROMANS 3:21FF, GALATIANS 2:14FF, ACTS 15:7FF

Grace is the starting point

- Rather than seeing grace as the last little nudge we need to be saved, after tremendous effort on our part, we should see grace as the starting point – with every bit of effort we have to give springing from there! This is seen in passages like Ephesians 2:1-10.
- Actions must reflect the grace into which we have been born again (Titus 2:11-14, 2 Timothy 2:19, Romans 6:1ff, Luke 1:74-75).
- Put another way, salvation by our own merit is a complete misunderstanding of the New Testament. We are saved by grace, but condemned by works (when we do those works as if our own merit or effort earns salvation).
- I can't do ANYTHING to EARN grace, but my actions can keep me from receiving it! This brings us back to the prodigal son's brother...

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