

NORMAL CHRISTIAN LIFE 1

Abounding Grace

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” – Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)

“Under law the formula is: ‘If you do good, I will bless you.’ Under grace it’s: ‘I have blessed you; now do good.’”¹

“‘I will love them freely,’ is a condensation of the glorious message of salvation which was delivered to us in Christ Jesus our Redeemer. The sense hinges upon the word ‘freely.’ ‘I will love them freely.’ Here is the glorious, the suitable, the divine way by which love streams from heaven to earth. It is, indeed, the only way in which God can love such as we are. It may be that he can love angels because of their goodness; but he could not love us for that reason; the only manner in which love can come from God to fallen creatures is expressed in the word ‘freely.’ Here we have spontaneous love flowing forth to those who neither deserved it, purchased it, nor sought after it.” – Charles Spurgeon²

Pre-Article Questions:

1. How would you define Grace?
2. What Analogy would you use to describe Grace to someone else?

Grace. In the Christian tradition, grace is a commonly used word meaning undeserved mercy, favor, or good will that is freely given. Yet, if asked, many Christians struggle with what undeserved grace tangibly looks like in their own world. The thought of something undeserved in our society is difficult to grasp or comprehend. Isn't it true that we "get what we deserve", both good and bad? If you work hard, you expect to be paid what you deserve. If you commit a crime or take a life, you will ultimately get what you deserve. And yet, here is this word grace that has absolutely nothing to do with what we deserve, but contains the very essence and foundation of our relationships with Christ. It is no wonder that in our culture, Christians often have a difficult time understanding the practical implications of grace in their lives.

In the Old Testament, God gave the Law to the Israelites as the way to know and please him through acts of obedience. It was generous and kind, but if left with only the Law, salvation could only come through perfection and sacrifice. We would have to be perfect in order to experience intimacy with God and be in right relationship with him. But thankfully, John 1:17 says, "For the Law was given through Moses; [but] grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Jesus united grace and the Law for us. He made the way for us to be in right relationship with God by fulfilling the requirements of the law through his own perfect life of obedience and sacrificial death. He was the Perfect Sacrifice for sins. We no longer need to perform sacrifices on our own; we can simply receive his pure, spotless sacrifice in our place. We are able to come to God, not with sacrifices in an attempt to make ourselves presentable in our own strength, but as we are – sinful and in need of mercy. The blood of Jesus alone enables us to stand in the presence of God Almighty and come to his throne of grace.

We must realize that it is not because of anything we do or do not do that God loves us. His love is unearned and freely given. He loves you because you are his creation, made in his image, and he desires you. There is

1. Narramore, Bruce and Bill Counts. Good Ole Grace. Cru Press, 2007. Retrieved from:

http://crupress.campuscrusadeforchrist.com/green/_assets/crucomm/narramoreandcountsgoodoldgrace.pdf.

2. Spurgeon, C.H. "Grace Abounding." The Spurgeon Archive. 1863. Retrieved from: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/10/>.

nothing that you can do to make Him love you less. But this reality – the truth that God loves us because he is love and can do no less – can be hard to grasp at deep, life-changing levels. It is easy to say and believe in our heads; it is not so easy to know and receive in our hearts. We love to work hard and feel we have accomplished something. We naturally lean towards entitlement and earning favor. Yet these are the very things that will keep us from receiving God's grace. Grace can only be accepted by the lowly and broken who understand they do not deserve it and cannot earn it. It is only when we realize we need a Savior and humble ourselves, that we will be able to accept God's lavish grace with a joyful heart. Philip Yancey writes, "Our wounds and defects are the very fissures through which grace might pass. It is our human destiny on earth to be imperfect, incomplete, weak and mortal, and only by accepting that destiny can we escape the force of gravity and receive grace. Only then can we grow close to God."³

Only in Christianity – only through Christ – can we be our messed-up selves and find perfect love. This great gift of grace demonstrates the character of God; he is not a monstrous, unknowable God. Rather, he desires that we know him intimately, his hand of invitation stretched out to us in the form of his Son on the cross. In Jesus and the grace made available through him, God gives us himself.

But God does not pour out his unmerited favor on us simply to save us. His plans are much bigger, his desires much greater. He extends his grace to us in order that we might become co-heirs with his son, Jesus. Romans 8:15- says, "...but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and join heirs with Christ." God's graciousness has not simply made us better servants or more upstanding citizens – that we could attempt on our own – but it has made us heirs of a holy kingdom, brothers and sisters of the King, and sons and daughters of God.

So... we are left with this divine and eternal gift that we do not deserve, and yet freely have through faith and confession in Jesus Christ as Lord. As we are overwhelmed with the grace of God and see it at work in our own lives, we begin to see differently in the light of it. We are able to see the people around us as individuals in desperate need of grace, and we realize that we are to extend grace to those around us, just as it has been extended to us.

Sometimes this feels easy; other times it is ever so difficult. Others do not necessarily deserve it, nor have they earned it by merit. But we did not deserve or earn it either, and in extending our own, small examples of grace, we really extend God's immeasurable grace and unending love. In doing this, we demonstrate that there is a God who sees us in our sin, desperation, and selfishness, and extends His hand. He then lifts us up, cleanses our hearts with the blood of His Son, and calls us His own.

3. Yancey, Philip. What's So Amazing About Grace? Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1997.

Scripture Questions:

1. What do you think are the differences between the world's concept of grace, and Christianity's? How is that demonstrated?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 12:8-9. Discuss your observations in group.
3. How do you think grace was shown in the Old Testament?
4. Read and discuss Hebrews 4:14-16. What does this tell us about the character of God? Why should it encourage us in our relationship with Christ?
5. "Under law, the formula is, 'If you do good, I will bless you.' Under grace, it's, 'I have blessed you; now do good.'" Discuss this quote from the beginning of the study. According to this definition, how can we understand and explain grace?

Application Questions:

1. If God is truly gracious, what are the implications for your relationship with Him?
2. What are some ways that God's grace has impacted you, and can still impact you now?
3. Are there any areas of your life that you need God's grace in?
4. What has been your biggest misconception of grace?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for your grace so that is so freely given. Thank you that I do not have to earn your affection or my salvation. Thank you for sending Jesus to be the perfect and final sacrifice for sins, enabling me to receive your grace and know you intimately. Teach me how to receive your grace and not strive in my own strength to win your love. Help me not to abuse your grace, but instead live a life pleasing to you as a sign of my gratitude and worship.

Prayer Partner Assignment:

Memory Verse:

Ephesians 2:8-9, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast."

Please meet with your prayer partner to read the additional scriptures and discuss the the importance and power of grace in our lives for this week.

Additional Scripture:

Romans 6:14

2 Timothy 2:1

2 Corinthians 12:8-9

Hebrews 4:16