

Understanding Grace #1 of 3; The limits of grace. - 20200613

Hi all,

I often say this to understand the differences between judgment, mercy, and grace:

Judgment is getting what you deserve.

Mercy is not getting what you deserve.

Grace is getting what you don't deserve.

Many teach grace is getting what we don't deserve, but that is only the 'warm and fuzzy' part of grace. Love is unconditional, but grace always has conditions. Many don't know or don't teach it, resulting in some very off-balance teaching and understanding in the body of Christ.

People think grace means freedom, and it does. But the freedom of grace doesn't mean free to do anything we like, but rather freedom to serve the Lord. God told Moses to tell Pharaoh; "Let my people go that they may serve me." Not just take them out of slavery to freedom for freedom's sake, but free so they may walk with God. Exodus 7:16

Grace always has conditions. You may love your puppy unconditionally, but your grace to them has conditions. At some point you expect them to stop pooping all over the house, to stop chewing up the pillows, to stop biting the ankles of people who enter your home. Grace expects them to grow up. You may love your child unconditionally, but you expect certain things of them. Love is unconditional, but grace is not. Grace always has conditions.

Grace has limits

In every instance of grace seen in scripture, the conditions and limitations of that grace are stated. The foundation of everything relating to salvation is this truth:

John 3: 16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that all who believe in Him will not perish, but have everlasting Life."

"God so love the world that He gave His only begotten Son" - that is grace - the condition is this: "That all who believe in Him will have eternal life." The consequences are clear; God loves you so He sent Jesus; If you don't receive the grace through believing in Jesus, you won't have God's Life. God's love is unconditional, the grace of salvation is not. There are conditions attached. Salvation comes through Jesus.

Consider that the rich young ruler was invited to become a disciple of Jesus - that was grace. The condition was that he had to sell everything and give it to the poor. He wanted 'warm and fuzzy' grace only, and backed away when the conditions of that grace were told to him.

Grace has expectations

Grace always requires the recipient of grace to responsibly handle the grace offered. There is always accountability within the bounds of grace.

If a parent gives the car keys to their 16 year old, that is grace. Expecting them to be home at 9pm (21:00) with car clean and intact is the purpose and limitation of that grace. Cross that line where grace ends, and the 16 year old will face judgment. Maybe no more car for a week, maybe grounded, maybe worse.

There are expectations within the grace of salvation to grow up in Christ, to want to walk with Him, to get to know the Father, to be morally upright. Grace has expectations attached.

If that 16 year old matches the grace offered with responsible behavior, they will never see the 'angry side' of the parent.

An employee is supposed to be at the office at 8am, but they continually show up around 8:30. The boss and coworkers notice and give grace for a time in the hopes they will change their ways. If they don't, they receive an oral warning, then a written warning which is still grace - so they may know the

time of grace is nearing an end. If they don't accept the grace....they enter into judgment and lose their job.

The writer of Hebrews says in 12:15: "...lest anyone fail the grace of God..." This shows us grace is extended, but it is possible to fail that grace's work in our lives. That 16 year old with the family car can fail the grace shown to them. The employee can fail the grace by refusing to come to work at 8am when everyone else does.

We can fail grace if we do not rise within the boundaries grace offers, and do what is right (which always requires growth as a human being and Christian). If we don't meet the conditions within that grace, we can fail the grace, fail the opportunity for growth, and suffer the consequences as a result. Jesus said of the woman nicknamed Jezebel in Revelation 2:21, "I gave her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling." Consequences followed.

Jude 4 speaks of supposed Christians who: "...have turned the grace of God into a license for evil."

There are many who have turned the grace of God into a license for *sin (*Greek: lewdness, open indecency). Some have used God's grace to proclaim 'hyper-grace'; No sin, no accountability, which is incorrect. They see only the freedom extended in grace without recognizing grace has purpose, boundaries, and consequences.

There is an old error from the 1st century we see also in our day, for people haven't changed and neither have demons. It is called 'gnosticism', which means 'to know'. Early Christians who were faced with their old sinful ways but didn't want to discipline themselves to overcome those sins, started accepting themselves as 'God made me this way' so they felt they could live however they wanted and God was okay with that.

The core belief (which came from pagan cults) was that matter was evil - the natural world was evil. And being spiritual was good. So because Christ paid for sins they were in grace and free to live however they wanted, for the natural world including their earth-bodies, were evil, so passing away. To them, freedom came from 'knowing' their body is evil and their spirit is born again and good, so they were free to live sinful lives because they knew 'the Christ' was in everyone down deep inside, and the natural world would one day pass. Sound familiar? Gnosticism removes the requirement of accountability to our fellow man and to God, because they 'know better'.

Some then and now explain away verses in the epistles and the words of Jesus that tell us to confess (admit) our sins or 'faults' to God and one another, to justify their sinful behavior. Repentance is one of the foundational principles* in the doctrine of Christ and the first word of salvation. To say otherwise is turning God's grace into a license for their sin. *Hebrews 6: 1-2; Acts 2: 38, Matthew 18: 15-16, James 5: 16, I John 1: 7-9.

The failure to understand grace always has limits and boundaries also causes many well meaning Christians to be taken advantage of. They show grace over and over to family or friend, yet the recipient never uses that grace to change their lives, to change their situation - they just keep coming back for more. Christians who don't understand grace think God wants them to give and give until they are broke and exhausted. They feel caught between what they think God wants them to do and their grace abusing friend or family member.

We'll pick it up there next week with the fact that grace is intended to teach and empower us... Until then, blessings.

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Understanding Grace 2 of 3; It's not about you - 20200620

Hi all,

I shared last week that love is unconditional, but grace always has conditions and expectations.

Grace always has boundaries, rules, limitations. Even in the giving to the widows in Ephesus, Paul tells Timothy only give to those widows who have no other family for they are supposed to be caring for them, and that those women are known to have been active volunteering their time and talents serving others. To those who want something for nothing, Paul says refuse. There are qualifications to receiving that grace in the first place, and an expectation upon receiving it. I Timothy 5: 9-13

A Purpose is always attached when grace is given

There is no such thing as a no conditions, no expectations giving of grace. Even when you buy that little puppy or kitten and take it home, you expect to receive emotional benefits from them. When a parent allows their child to get a pet, the child usually recognizes the condition of grace with this plea: "I'll take care of it, I'll feed it, I'll water it, I'll clean up after it, I promise..." :) Sure you will. The parent will use the grace to teach the child responsibility. There is always purpose attached to grace.

In II Timothy 1:9 we find this statement: "He (Father) is the one who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not based on our works, but on His (Father's) own purpose and grace, granted to us in Christ Jesus before times eternal."

Grace is not given with the purpose of a Christian living in continual sin. It doesn't require perfection, but grace expects growth, progress, a maturing process. It is a holy calling, extended with purpose.

That He gave us salvation in Christ before times eternal according to His purpose, show us that God does have a plan for our life, both now and in the ages to come. We are already in eternity even as we live on this earth, so the uncovering of His purpose will take (literally) forever to unfold in our lives.

Failing grace

If a person you've extended grace fails in purpose, there is a point you stop giving the grace. When Israel left Egypt they failed the grace 10 times. When they failed that 10th time, the Lord said in Numbers 14: 21-23 they had crossed into judgment. (Last month's teaching series was about the lessons they should have learned, "Treasures Found in the Wilderness" and has some great lessons for us today)

Jesus told us in Matthew 5: 39-41 that having been slapped once, offer the other cheek- but no more. He said if they take away our coat, give them another one as well - but no more. He said if they compelled us to walk 1 mile, walk it plus 1 more - but no more after that. Grace has limits, after which we conclude; 'no more grace can be extended'.

You've done your part in extending grace. It is now up to them to stand or fall on their own merits. Anything past that is enabling their sin. Where to draw that line differs in each case, and we have to trust the Lord in determining that point.

But I can say from scripture we are not to sacrifice our own family and financial and emotional well being while causing another to be better off. Paul said of giving to others in II Corinthians 8: 12-14: "If a person is willing to give, it is figured according to what they have, not according to what they don't have. For I don't want you to be burdened while easing their need...but now at this time of your abundance you may give..."

We give what we can, and we don't get a loan to give beyond what we have on hand, for giving should never burden the giver while enriching the receiver. That's not grace, that's well meaning hearts acting unwisely. God must be their source, they must stand on their own two feet, or fall. You've done your part at that extra cheek, extra coat, extra mile. Now it is their turn to rise up in maturity. If they don't, it's their fault not yours.

Grace is holy

Notice also that Paul said He has called us "with a holy calling, not according to anything we've done, but according to His own purpose and grace."

The grace of our salvation is holy - meaning it is something special. In the natural, when you give or loan money to your family or friend for a purpose, that relationship between you and them is special, holy, in a word. There is a purpose to the grace you've given them, and you expect them to recognize and value what you've done as special - that is holiness. It is a unique relationship you have with them

and you expect them to esteem that, to value it. The same is true of us and our salvation, which came at such a great cost. It is holy, grace is holy, grace has a holy purpose. Grace is not extended that we might say 'free to sin', but rather 'free to do what is right, free to grow'.

When someone you extend grace to abuses the grace, never entering into the purpose for which it was extended, they demonstrate they do not value what you've done, it's nothing special to them their actions have proven. They don't understand your relationship as 'holy', special, unique. At that point they cross the line to judgment - you cut them off. No more grace can be extended because of their actions. They did it to themselves.

Grace has nothing to do with you; it's not about you

Notice that the Father gave us Christ before times eternal. His grace was given before times eternal. That means grace is 100% dependent on the giver of grace. The receiver of grace has nothing to do with it. The receiver of grace can't influence the giver one way or the other because the grace is in the heart of the giver. The grace to forgive you for next year's sin was already given before the world ever came into being. The cross is the legal way He did it 2000 years ago - but His heart that forgave us was already settled before Genesis ever opens up with 'In the beginning'.

Whether it be the love for a child, pet, or something you collect, you can't explain why you love them, you just do. The grace you have in your heart towards them is totally within you - even if that child or pet does the worst thing imaginable, you still love them because it is just within you to love them. That's grace. They have nothing to do with your grace and love for them - it's in your heart and nothing can ever change that.

God gave us grace with purpose according to Him and only Him. It is totally dependent on Him and there is nothing you can do that would separate you from that love. Neither can you improve on that grace and love.

You can't fast enough, give enough, live holy enough to impress Him because grace was given to you before creation happened. You can't fail enough to cause Him to have regrets even when He has to clean up your messes repeatedly because the grace was in His heart before creation came into existence. **It's not a religion, it's a relationship.** Relationships empower, religion restricts. Amazing grace...we'll pick it up there next week, until then, blessings,

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Understanding grace 3 of 3, Empowering grace - 20200627

Hi all,
I've shared how grace carries an expectation, a purpose, and has limits. Grace is completely within the heart of the giver of grace, and is holy. But wait, there is more!

Grace is also empowering. God loves us, and within that grace is empowerment to be all we can be as human beings and human beings in Christ.

When Paul told Timothy in II Timothy 2:1 to 'be strong in the grace found in Christ Jesus', he wasn't telling him to be strong in unearned favor. He is saying to receive the grace given you for this life, and be strong in that grace.

Paul wrote to the Romans in 12:3; "I speak according to the grace given to me...to each is given the measure of faith (according to the grace)." The faith you have is directly connected to and proportional to the grace you've been given in life. Don't try to live someone else's grace and their measure of faith. There is all the empowerment you need within the grace and measure of faith you already have.

If you've ever seen a pastor preach someone else's sermon and fail, and you've wondered why that sermon didn't have the same anointing on it that it did when you heard it from the original teacher, here is why: When so and so first taught it, it was their own revelation, their own grace, their own faith.

The pastor took the same message but never made it theirs, never lingered to allow the Father to give personal revelation to them about it - they just spoke from the soul someone else's grace expecting the same impact and anointing as the other person's message. Nope. You can only speak and live according to the grace given you, and with that grace comes the appropriate measure of faith.

Grace always empowers the recipient of the grace. When you bring home that pet, you empower them by the food and shelter you provide. Your child is empowered in your grace as well, in different ways and at different levels of maturity as the grace you empower them with guides them into adulthood and being capable of living on their own as a productive young adult. That object you collect is empowered to be among the collection of special items you love so much. Grace always empowers. With purpose. With limitations, expectations, and boundaries. In holiness.

Grace teaches

As if we need something else to tell us grace empowers us to live holy lives, Paul reinforced that truth with this:

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this life, as we look for...Jesus." Titus 2: 11-13.

Grace teaches - but what? To deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. The Greek word translated here as 'teach' is actually a word that means to 'tutor children' or 'train children' and carries with it the idea of discipline, and correction if the child needs it. (paideuosa)

Grace is our tutor. Amazing. Not the law, not legalism. Not if we do x then God will do y. Grace teaches. When we mess up and He forgives us, that grace empowers us and teaches us to do better the next time around. That is why Paul wrote that he gloried in the difficulties in life, for it is within those difficulties the depths of grace is found. In the midst of difficulties a person finds empowerment in Christ.

I've heard many testimonies of people who have been bed-ridden or greatly slowed by injury or sickness testify they've had a wonderful season in the Lord during that time - that when the flesh is weak the spirit man is noticed and responded to more quickly. That is the attraction of fasting, for in the shutting down of the digestive processes we forget the flesh's needs to focus on the spirit.

Grace teaches: We have to learn the grace of flowing in love, joy, peace, gentleness, patience, meekness, kindness, which are fruit of the spirit/Spirit within, in any situation.

The heart is established with grace

The writer of Hebrews says in 13:9: "Do not be carried away by strange teachings, for it is a good thing the heart is established with grace, and not in sacrifices which have not benefited those who offer them."

Because he sandwiched grace in between 'strange teachings' and 'religious legalism' we must consider those 2 errors as the most threatening to establishing the heart with grace. The heart is established with grace.

The Greek word 'established' here is 'bebaioo' and means 'to walk where it is solid', therefore solid, confirmed, established. Grace is 'walking where it is solid'. It is a good thing the heart is established, made solid by grace. In other words, getting off into strange teachings and legal works is not walking where it is solid.

Strange teachings don't establish the heart

James wrote in 3: 14-17 describing earthly wisdom (strange teachings) as producing confusion, emotions of strife, envy, bitterness, and causing divisions due to the selfish ambitions of those who teach such error (They're using you). He said that wisdom is earthly, of the sense realm (fleshly emotions), and demonic.

By contrast he says God's wisdom is holy in its purity of motive, produces peace, is reasonable and gentle, full of mercy, and producing good fruit of the Spirit/spirit, is unwavering and not hypocritical.

That is the contrast between teaching from a demon which is clothed to sound like it came from God, and teaching from God which produces peace in your spirit. One produces confusion (fear is attached to confusion) and strife, the other produces peace. The writing of Hebrews 13:9 said not to get 'carried away' with wrong teaching - the heart is not established by error which only produces fear, confusion, strife, and other unrest.

Legalism doesn't establish the heart either - only grace establishes the heart

The other comparison mentioned in Hebrews 13:9 is sacrifices made to God within a religious system. They don't establish the heart either. They are fleshly works a person gets caught up in thinking if they do 'x thing' God is more pleased with them, or that is what God wants, or God is more inclined to answer the 'big' prayer request. And sometimes people go back into the law because it is secure and they've been hurt in the charismatic world where there sometimes seems to be no rules, ethics, common sense, or morals as long as someone says 'it's of God'.

Paul rebuked the Galatians in 3: 1; "Who has bewitched you...having left grace to obey the works of the (Mosaic) law? The Greek word for 'bewitched' is 'baskaino' and means: "To cast an evil spell (over someone), to exercise power over someone with evil or impure motives, to put them under a spell, to appeal to someone's vanity or need in order to manipulate and control them." It is associated with envy.

He asks them how having begun in the Spirit with grace and seeing the miracles of God in their lives, they could go under legalism, for under the law they don't see miracles, don't see the grace of God - it's all about their works and effort. The heart is not established by that.

The heart is established with grace. Grace teaches. Grace empowers. Grace has purpose. Grace is 100% in the heart of the giver of the grace. Grace has expectations and boundaries for the recipient of grace.

Man tends to leave grace for legalism because grace means taking responsibility for one's life, whereas religious legalism puts all the effort on performance based living dictated from the outside, with a promise that if you do x then God will do y. And that starts a new series next week, asking why did God give the law in the first place?

Until then, blessings,

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