

What is Grace?

Grace—part 1

June 30, 2019

DAY 1: Grace and the problem of sin

1. I still remember the first time I ever worked in children's Sunday school. I was twenty-four years old, single, no kids of my own. There were five kids in a large classroom. A hundred toys were within easy reach.
2. What do you think happened next?
3. All five kids all had to have one toy—the same one toy. They were determined, they were adamant, they were complaining when another child had the toy.
4. They voiced "It's not fair." One cried, one pouted, and one felt quite superior. Every time I took the toy away from one and gave it to another, they all changed roles. One was mad. There was outrage. One wanted to get even.
5. Sin was ingrained in their human nature. Nobody had to teach those kids how to hoard, to gloat, or to tempt.
6. What can possibly change human nature? Only something called "grace."
7. What is "grace?" I grew up believing "grace" was what you did before you ate dinner. You "said grace," meaning you prayed before you ate.
8. Grace is something very different and far more wonderful.
9. "Grace" is used over 150 times in the New Testament.
10. As adults we use the grace to describe someone who is poised. "Oh, she is just such a person of grace." I've heard Princess Di and Princess Kate spoken of in this fashion.
11. What is your understanding of Christian grace?

DAY 2: “Charis” – a gift given though undeserved

Romans 5:15 But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

1. Grace comes from the Greek word, “charis.” It means “favor.” Over time, the usage expanded to sometimes mean the gift itself. It is also used to refer to someone’s “gracious” act.
2. But when you think of a “gift” you usually think about Christmas gifts, birthday gifts, wedding gifts, and graduation gifts.
3. With graduation gifts, the graduate accomplished something. He or she would not be getting a graduation “gift” without “earning” a degree.
4. Wedding gifts are similar. The couple to be married has, in theory, brought their relationship to a place where the commitment they built can then be celebrated by gifts.
5. I grew up thinking that Christmas gifts were somehow tied to my performance. Here’s the lyrics to a song I learned as a kid.

Oh, you better watch out!

You better not cry!

You better not pout, I’m telling you why.

Santa Claus is coming to town!

The chorus goes:

He sees you when you’re sleeping.

He knows when you’re awake.

He knows when you’ve been bad or good,

So be good for goodness sake!

6. It seems like we cannot escape the idea of “earning a ‘gift’.”
7. Place a “check” next to the facets of grace with which you most resonate. Grace is:
 Solely a gift.
 There is nothing we can do to merit this gift.
 Further it is a gift we have never sought, nor even thought to seek.
 The gift that overcomes every sin we have committed. Yes, every one.
 Light that shines where we only see darkness in ourselves.
 The gift that continues to pursue us.
 Relentlessly giving, and giving, and giving.
 The gift that never gives up on us, and won’t let us go.
8. What strikes you most from today’s devotional?

DAY 3: Grace is personal!

1. Grace means unmerited favor or kindness shown to someone who deserves nothing of the kind. They deserve the very opposite.

2. The story of grace is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

3. In Greek philosophy, the “Word” (“logos”) meant “THE reason,” for our existence, that which explains the mystery of life, or the purpose for which we live. But the Greeks saw this “word” not as a person but as a purpose written into the fabric of life and existence.

4. In the gospel of John, John uses the Greek idea of “word” and tells us that “the Word” is a person!

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

5. What does John tell us about “the Word?” (Jesus)

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

6. What else do we learn about “the Word?”

John 1:17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

7. What makes “the Word” so special, so different from the Greek concept?

“God always pours His grace into empty hands.” –Augustine

8. What strikes you most from today’s devotional?

DAY 4: What's the difference between mercy and grace?

1. Sometime we get confused between the concept of mercy and the concept of grace. Below are some definitions of both, and some familiar illustrations from the bible.

a. Mercy removes punishment we correctly deserve.

Instead of punishment, grace is that by which God bestows His greatest gifts.

b. Mercy intervened with Abraham as he was about to sacrifice Isaac.

Instead, God provided, by grace a ram for sacrifice. (Genesis 22)

c. Mercy is seen as the heartbroken father runs to his prodigal son.

Grace is seen as the father lavishes gift upon gift on his returning son. (Luke 15:11-32)

d. Mercy stops to care for the man beaten by thugs.

Grace picks up the monetary cost of the man's recovery. (Luke 10:23-37)

e. Mercy ignores the scorn of the thief on the cross.

Grace promises him an eternal paradise in just a few hours. (Luke 23:39-43)

f. Mercy refuses to execute the righteous penalty for our sin.

Instead, by grace, God replaces our sin with the righteousness of Christ!

g. Mercy refuses to punish Saul for his wicked persecution of Christians.

Grace changes "Saul" to "Paul" and gives him a central part in the mission of God.

h. Mercy takes hell off the table

Grace welcomes us to heaven.

2. What strikes you about mercy?

3. What strikes you about grace?

DAY 5: Grace, illustrated by a chasm

1. On the day of Pentecost, Simon Peter gave his first sermon. Three thousand people were converted to Christ.
2. As he was nearing the end of his message he challenged the listeners with these words and the need for action.

Acts 2:38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

*³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and **for all who are far off**--for all whom the Lord our God will call."*

⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

3. The message of the gospel isn't for the "goody-goodys," or for those who consider themselves "good people," or the "highly religious."
4. The message of the gospel rings out for those who are **far off from God**, who have wandered far away from God and His ways. Maybe you've wondered if you've gone so far that perhaps not even God could save you.

5. Imagine a great chasm.

- a. On side is God, His blessings, the real life He wants to give you. On the other side of the chasm is you. For years you might look across the chasm and see something of the goodness of God, but then you'd sneer a word of contempt. "I don't need that religious stuff."
- b. Farther and farther you walked away from the bridge that would take you over the chasm of sin. You didn't care.
- c. Then suddenly you find yourself in a place you never imagined you'd be.
- d. You sense a growing emptiness, a realization that there is something wrong, not just with the world or other people but with you. You've become aware that you have traveled far away from God and have seemed to go so far away that it's hopeless you'd ever find your way back.
- e. You gasp. You've wasted so many years on your pride. Though you may never had said these words, they ruled in your heart. "I know what to do. I don't need any help. I am not like those loser Christians."
- f. Now, suddenly and forcefully, you realize you have been on the wrong side of the chasm!
- g. You wonder, "Have I blown it so bad, been so rebellious, so stubborn, so self-centered that I could ever even find the bridge I once saw?"
- h. The gospel of grace tells you that in all your wanderings away from Him, **He's also used some of His side roads to bring you back to the bridge!**
- i. And there you stand! The invitation to walk across the bridge, to God is still in force.

6. This is a profound image of grace!

7. What strikes you most from today's devotional?