

Growing In Grace Series

Lesson # 1

Grace: It's Really Amazing

John 1:14-17

INTRODUCTION

During a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world were discussing whether any one belief was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities. Incarnation? Other religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form. Resurrection? Again, other religions had accounts of return from death. The debate went on for some time until C. S. Lewis wandered into the room. "What's the rumpus about?" he asked, and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity's unique contribution among the world's religions. In his forthright manner, Lewis responded, "Oh, that's easy. It's grace." [Dr. Bruce J. Nichols. "Does It Matter How We Live."]

1. WHAT IS GROWING IN GRACE?

Tonight we begin a series that I have entitled "Growing In Grace." In 2 Peter 3:18 the believer is instructed to "*grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ....*" First we have to understand what *growing in grace*" means. Paul gives us some insight when he explains the working of grace in his life in 1 Corinthians 15: 9-10, "*For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God (10) But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*"

There are three considerations that I want to see come out of growing in grace; 1). God does what He does because of His grace. 2). I am what I am because of God's grace. 3). I let you be what you are by the grace of God. Some believers are downright insulting in their treatment of others. These Christians are sometimes the reason people aren't interested in knowing anything more about Jesus. These believers treat others in the Body of Christ in such intolerant ways that they are offended and will never get pass that offence. All the while they are rationalizing their conduct by quoting Bible verses about rights and wrongs; but there is an absence of grace. They have set themselves up as intolerant judges who think the worst rather than the best of others and justify it all on the knowledge of right and wrong verses in the Bible. I believe that breaks the heart of our gracious God. It is time to stop!

2. WHAT IS GRACE?

You be surprised to learn that Jesus never used the word – Grace, but he did teach it and most of all He lived it! The Bible gives a one-statement definition of it, but is full of it.

Grace is UNDESERVED! Grace is always

undeserved. If it is deserved then it is not grace. A modern example can be seen in British royalty sometimes stoops to bless a commoner. There is nothing in the commoner that deserves to be touched or blessed. But it is grace on the part of the royal family that they reach out. The late bible scholar and pastor Donald Barnhouse once said, *"Love that reaches up is adoration; love that reaches out is affection; love that stoops is grace."*[Swindoll. p. 8] To show grace is to extend favor or kindness to one who doesn't deserve it and can never earn it. Every time grace appears in Scripture it is undeserved.

Grace in the Old Testament.

Hebrew term *chen*: "to bend or stoop" and included the idea of "condescending favor." God first used the word *chen* when *"Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord"* (Genesis 6:8). Jacob was shown grace after he ripped off his brother Esau. Jacob later was shown grace when he and his brother met up in the desert (Gen 33). Joseph showed his brothers grace after they had sold him into slavery when he could have had them killed (Genesis 50:19-21). The Israelites were consistently shown grace over and over again.

Exodus 33:12-19 – *"Then Moses said to the LORD, "See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people!' But You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found grace in My sight.' (13) Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me Your way, that I may know You, and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people." (14) And He said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." (15) Then he said to Him, "If Your presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here. (16) "For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth?" (17) Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight and I know you by name." (18) And he said, "Please show me Your glory!" (19) Then He said, "I will make My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." (NKJV)* Moses was called to lead the Israelites out of Egypt because God found grace (*chen*) in him. Moses asked God to go with them...and if He wouldn't, they would not go. Again, God found grace (*chen*) in Moses. God said, "I will show compassion..." GRACE!

Grace is favor that is undeserved and unearned. It is extended fully and freely to those who won't ever be able to repay it. God gives us grace even when we don't deserve it; we are as a dead man to Him with nothing to please Him.

Grace in the New Testament:

The life of Jesus consistently modeled grace. One example that comes to mind is the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11). They had every legal right to stone her, but Jesus showed her grace. Jesus said in verse seven, "He that is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." When all of the accusers silently slipped away Jesus said to the woman in verse eleven, Since there is no one to accuse you. *"Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."* That is grace!

Another example is seen upon the death of Lazarus (John 11:1-27). Mary and Martha "blamed" his death on Jesus not being there (v.21). Jesus took that accusation with grace when He could have knocked them into eternity. He acted in grace.

Christ also told stories that were full of grace: the stories of the prodigal son and of the Good Samaritan were stories of grace. Jesus told how the tax collector's prayer was favored over the Pharisee's because he had prayed, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner."

In Matthew 9:10-12 we are told, *"And so it was, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. (11) And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, 'Why does your Teacher eat with Tax collectors and sinners?' (12) But when Jesus heard that, He said to them, Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick."* Jesus showed grace while the Pharisees were turning the sinners "off" under the legal right to do so.

Grace is FREE! (Next week's lesson: The Free Gift) You'll never get a bill or be asked to repay it—you can't. We sing in the great old hymn, *"Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace, freely bestowed on all who believe; you that are longing to see His face, will you this moment His grace receive? Grace, Grace, God's grace, Grace that will pardon and cleanse within; Grace, Grace, God's grace, Grace that is greater than all our sin!"* [Julia H. Johnston, *"Grace Greater Than Our Sin" Praise! Our Songs and Hymns.* (w. 1910)]. We sing it—do we believe it? It is difficult to accept that it is free because we work for everything we get! We have all heard the expression *"There ain't no such thing as a free lunch."* But there is in the case of grace, everything about it is absolutely 100% free...it is the love of God.

In fact it is an insult to think that we can pay him back. What an insult to be invited over to someone's home who has prepared you a meal out of kindness of their heart and then, as you are leaving, reach in your pocket and ask them how much you owe them.

Grace is described in many way in life:

- The coordinated moves of an athlete or dancer.
- The display of good manners—in being polite and considerate of others.

- Beautiful well chosen words—we are said to have words of grace.

Grace Is Appealing

Someone once said, *“You may be able to compel people to maintain certain minimum standards by stressing duty, but the highest moral and spiritual achievements depend not upon a push, but a pull. People must be charmed into righteousness.”*

Is your presence appealing? Does your face smile? Do you give people relief and room to breathe? Is grace in the way you live your life. style?

Some believers are quicker with your lists than with grace. Everyone sitting around you is a sinner, like you, undeserving of the grace of God and they have received it. They do not need our finger stuck in their faces telling them what they should and should not be doing! That’s God’s job.

3. WHAT CAN GRACE DO?

Grace Can Change Us. Dr. Karl Menninger in his book, *“The Vital Balance,”* discusses the negative personality. That the type of person whose first response to everything is “NO” Menninger says that *“These troubled patients have never made an unsound loan, never voted for a liberal cause or sponsored any extravagances; they cannot permit themselves the pleasure of living or giving. They are rigid, chronically unhappy individuals, bitter, insecure and often suicidal.”*[as quoted by Chuck Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening* (Dallas:Word Publishing, 1990), p. 5]

The truth is that we all need GRACE! There is nothing that has the power to change us like grace. It not only changes our hearts but it changes our faces. Some of us need a face change. Did you have parents whose faces said no? teachers, bosses, spouses? If so you find that people are really drawn to those faces invite us in and urge us on.

Illustration: *“One day Thomas Jefferson and a group of other men were fording a swollen stream on horseback. A man on the bank of the river waited until several of the men crossed. Then he waved to Jefferson and asked to be taken across, and the President gladly obliged. When the wayfarer reached the other side, one of the men asked, “Tell me, why did you select the President to ask this favor of?” The man replied, “I didn’t know he was the President. All I know is that on some faces is written the answer ‘No’ and on some the answer ‘Yes.’ His face was one of the latter.”* [Swindoll, pp. 5-6]

Grace will give you a “Yes” face. Jesus had a “Yes” face. He was surrounded by law-quoting men, scribes, teachers whose whole demeanor said “No!” And He changed the course of time forever because He had a “Yes” face. Jesus came full of grace to the chagrin of the Law-quoters and rule-givers.. The apostle John explained how Jesus was different than anyone else (John 1:14-17) *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among*

us, and we beheld His glory..." His uniqueness was his incredible "glory" a glory that represented the very presence of the Father, *"the glory as of the only begotten of the Father."* In addition he was *"... full of grace and truth."* John says that it was this unique mixture of glory with grace and truth that made Him different. Up till now, all they had was a law, rules, requirements, regulations and expectations. Jesus changed that all with Grace. Remembering the uniqueness of Christ, John added in verse sixteen, *"And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace."*

Don't miss the tie between verse fourteen and verse sixteen, John said that because they had *"beheld his glory"* they had *"received his fullness"*. John is saying that because of receiving his grace they became changed men. Grace received made them different. John summarizes in verse seventeen, *"For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."* The Law brings bondage with its exacting demands while Grace makes us want to obey, prompting us to love Him, feeling comfort in His presence.

Illustration: *In his book, "In the Heavens," Dr. Harry Ironside tells the story of an attempted assassination of Queen Elizabeth I. The woman who sought to do so dressed as a male page and secreted herself in the queen's boudoir awaiting the convenient moment to stab the queen to death. She did not realize that the queen's attendants would be very careful to search the rooms before Her Majesty was permitted to retire. They found the woman hidden among the gowns and brought her into the presence of the queen, taking from her the poignard she had hope to plant in the heart of the sovereign. She realized that, humanly speaking, her case was hopeless. She threw herself down on her knees and pleaded and begged the queen as a woman to have compassion on her, a woman, and to show her grace. Queen Elizabeth looked at her coldly and quietly said, "If I show you grace, what promise will you make for the future?" The woman looked up and said, "Grace that hath conditions, grace that is fettered by precautions, is not grace at all." Queen Elizabeth caught it in a moment and said, "You are right. I pardon you of my grace." And they led her away, a free woman. History tells us that from that moment Queen Elizabeth had no more faithful, devoted servant than that woman who had intended to take her life. That is exactly the way the grace of God works in the life of an individual--he or she becomes a faithful servant of God.*

Conclusion

If you commit yourself to a life of grace, you will catch flack! E.E. Cummings once said, *"It sounds strange that a person of grace has to "fight" to be a person of grace."*

Here are some of the things that I hope you will gain from this series.:

1. This series, if it is taken to heart, will transform your life.
2. Your relationships with people will change from intolerant and suspicious to affirming and understanding.

3. Your feelings toward God will change from aloofness & distance to closeness and quiet respect. You'll begin to enjoy the Lord.

4. It will soften your spirit and make you contagious. People who were once repelled by your personality will find themselves drawn to you.

5. We will take a giant step towards maturity.

Are ready to be free?

Are you tired of trying to live up to someone else's rigid rules for living life? Do you yearn to be free from all that? Are you weary from the load of legalistic rules you have been carrying? Are you ready for a rest? Jesus says in Matthew 11:28: *"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

Remember, He died to set us free, not to enslave us. Galatians 5:1 warns believers that it is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

While the world shouts, "You Are Guilty! Guilty! Guilty!" Jesus says, "Forgiven!"