

Growing in Grace

Lesson # 11

“Being Dispensers of Grace”

[Taken from The Grace Awakening by Charles Swindoll. (Dallas: Word, 1990). Ch. 11, pp.213-236]

Not all of the grace killers are on the *“outside”* trying to get people under the law, some of them are in the family trying to do God’s will their way! Tonight I want to examine the characteristics of a person who is a dispenser of grace.

The Five Characteristics of A Dispenser of Grace.

1. Generosity with Personal Possessions – An Unselfish Heart

(Acts 4:32-35)

“Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. (33) And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. (34) Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, (35) and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. (36) And Joseph, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, (37) having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”

Much like today, here was a group of believers struggling to survive in a world whose political system and even its people who are hostile to Christ and His church. They had every reason to be afraid, and yet they were not, why? The text says they were not afraid because (v. 33), *“great (or abundant) grace was upon them all.”* Instead of living lives of isolation and fear they choose to live with a genuine desire to help others in need. A spirit of grace is characterized by a spirit of generosity. It produced amazing results, (v. 34) *“there were none among them that lacked.”*

2. The Ability to Adapt in Changing Situations – A Flexible Heart. (Acts 11:19-20)

“Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only (20) But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus.”

At first the church at Jerusalem reached out to Jews alone, but later they found themselves surrounded by Greeks. They did not simply move on, they did not change their message, but they did change their methods. They changed their target from Jews only to both Jews and Greeks. That took grace. Grace keeps us flexible, willing to adapt.

Tonight we sit in church in an all white neighborhood, but that could change as it has to countless churches around the country. When the community surrounding a church changes, a church has two choices; change to meet the needs of a changing neighborhood or move. Many churches choose to move. I wonder if we are flexible enough to make changes to reach a changing community and world. We recognize that missionaries on foreign fields must be cross-cultural in order to reach the people, but are we willing to change to reach a changing world? Our message should remain the same but our methods can and must change. Grace makes us willing to reach out to those who are different than ourselves.

3. A Willingness To Live Beyond the Letter of the Law – A Teachable Heart.

To remain teachable we must have:

- A Sense of Our Own Inadequacy (2 Corinthians 3:5-6)

“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, (6) who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

It is a necessity as we serve God that we realize that whatever giftedness we have is not to our credit but due to the grace of God who make us sufficient for whatever task he has called us to do.

- Understand the Importance of Transparency. (2 Cor. 2:17)

“For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ”

The important thing here is the contrast that Paul draws between his life and that of some of those who purport to speak the gospel but are in truth only in it for what they can get out of it. He says that this “corrupt the word of God,” suggesting trickery and greed. He says of himself that he speaks with “sincerity” which is a word that literally means, tested by the “warmth and light of the sun.” Sometimes unscrupulous merchants would hide cracks in pottery by using wax to cover over the blemish, but holding it to the light or exposing it to the warmth of the sun would reveal the truth.

- Realize the Significance of Our Personal Walk (3:1-4)

“Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? (2) You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; (3) clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. (4) And we have such trust through Christ toward God.”

Paul says here that his recommendations were not in “letters” but in “lives.” He reminds all believers that they are epistles or authoritative letters of Christ “*known and read by all men*” therefore we need to be careful how we walk.

4. The Absence of Unfounded Expectations – An Accepting Heart (2 Corinthians 3:17)

“Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

Grace gives us the ability to allow the Holy Spirit give each believer his/her convictions and not demand that they be just like us. It is alarming to realize how many believers set up a list of conditions for fellowship that are never outlined in Scripture. They demand that you must dress like me, and agree me on every issue.

We sometime forget how long it took for God to get us to point that we are at spiritually at today. It was a long process in our lives and yet we expect others to be where we are right now.

5. A Sense of Release from Past Failures – A Liberating Heart

(1 Timothy 1:12-14)

“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, (13) although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. (14) And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.”

Grace dispensers do not keep bringing up the past for the purpose of holding it over people’s heads. Paul had every logical reason to be ashamed of his past. He says of himself, I was “*a blasphemer, a persecutor and insolent man...*” then how can he write in (2 Timothy 1:12) “*I am not ashamed* “. The answer is found in verse 14, “*the abundant grace of God,*” allowed him to live without shame of his past.

Unfortunately we as believer’s today sometimes make people ashamed not only of their past, but of their present differences. We make them ashamed for being single, ashamed for being sick, ashamed for being depressed and the list goes on and on.

Shame based Spirituality

1. Having problems is sin.

2. Emotions are sinful.

3. Sickness is a sign of sin.

4. Having fun is sinful.

5. To be Spiritual is to be Perfect.

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.(9) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”

6. Sexuality is sin.

7. Success (sometimes the lack of it)is the measure of spirituality.

8. Becoming a Christian fixes everything.

9. If I am healed it is because of my faith

Grace based Spirituality

1. Having problems is human. I can bring my problems to God and other believer's.

2. Emotions are neutral. They are neither good nor bad. It what I do with them that matters.

3. There is a difference between disease and sinfulness. Although some sins, lead to disease (i.e AIDS) not all disease is a result of sin.

4. There many ways to delight in the Lord.

5. Perfection (living totally without sin) is not possible in human existence. (1 John 1:8-10)

6. Sexuality is a part of who we are as people and should be enjoyed in the context of marriage.

7. Prosperity nor Poverty are, in of themselves, signs of spirituality.

8. Becoming a Christian gives me the resources to face anything that comes my way.

9. Having an illness is not a sign of a lack of faith.

We will end this lesson with a reminder of Paul's marching order to young Timothy given in 2 Timothy 2:1, *“Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”* His words to Timothy should be the marching orders for all who want to demonstrate the five characteristics of those who would be *“dispensers of grace.”*