

Sunday, March 27, 2022 am

CLOSER TO GOD 2022 (11)

The Grace of God (2)

How is Grace Abused?

As we continue our theme for 2022, Drawing closer to God, we have begun an examination of the grace of God. Last week we defined grace by noting that it is underserved favor. God has done for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Thus, we noted that grace is God's part and the PRIME factor of salvation. We also addressed how grace does NOT mean that we do nothing – God's grace is a gift, but we have to accept that gift and God can set the terms for receiving the gift. BUT, even when we do what He tells us to do, we have not merited (earned) it. It is still His gift to us. And truthfully, virtually everyone says we must do something. The discussion is over WHAT we need to do (in the name of faith) to saved – is it just believing (a mental ACTION), or does it involve more (such as baptism – Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, 22:16, 1 Peter 3:21, etc.)? Clearly, scripture teaches the latter. And just because one is baptized does NOT mean he has merited salvation – it is still a work of God (Colossians 2:11-12) – He accepts it and saves us.

But in this lesson, we want to dig a little deeper and notice some ways that grace can be abused. Originally this was intended to be part of last week's lesson (it is in the online recording), but due to time and further developing it when presented live, this is an enhanced version of the last half of last week's lesson. There are many ways that the Biblical concept of grace is abused. Consider the following:

- I. All will be saved – some contend that all will be saved.
 - a. This is known as universalism. A belief that Jesus died to save everyone unconditionally. As a result, hell is either unreal or temporal (people will be punished, either equally long or based upon the degree of their sinfulness).
 - b. Honestly, if we do NOTHING ourselves to be saved, then this is the ONLY viable option.
 - c. Some verses used to teach this:
 1. Titus 2:11 tells us that the grace of God has appeared to all men.
 2. 1 Timothy 2:4 – God desires all men everywhere to be saved
 3. 1 John 2:2 - *And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.*
 4. John 12:32 *“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.”*
 - d. But far too many passages of scripture contradict that. Any verse that makes a contrast between the saved and the lost, OR that calls for a response contradicts this doctrine.
 1. John 3:16 calls says, “whoever believes” indicating not all will believe. In fact, that is developed as the conversation progresses (John 3:18-19)
 2. Matthew 7:13-14 – there is a broad way that leads to destruction, and a narrow way that leads to life.
 3. Matthew 7:21-23 – not everyone who says “Lord, Lord...”
 4. 2 Thessalonians 1:5-9 – notice everlasting destruction. See also Matthew 25:46 which equates the same amount of time to eternal life and eternal punishment.
- II. Cheap grace –
 - a. A term coined by Dietrich Bonhoeffer – a German Lutheran preacher who opposed Hitler and was executed in 1945.
 1. He wrote a book entitled, “The Cost of Discipleship” in which he spoke of “cheap grace” vs. “costly grace.” “Cheap grace” is appealing to the grace of God without a willingness to pay the price he demands. He described it as, *“cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline. Communion without confession.*

Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”¹

2. He expressed his concerns that the church had become more secularized and willing to accommodate the demands of society in its practice and teachings. Thus, the true sacrifice of the Christian faith is watered down.
 - b. This is the “come as you are” mentality that says you do not have to repent of your sinful condition to be saved – ungodly relationships can remain, sinful behaviors do not need to be addressed, etc.
 - c. We must understand that grace of God, while freely available, is COSTLY – it cost Jesus His life. Romans 5:6-8 – we must NEVER forget what Jesus endured for us (1 Peter 2:24, Hebrews 12:2-3, etc.)
 - d. Receiving God’s grace will cost us EVERYTHING! Matthew 10:32-39, Luke 14:33 – whoever does not forsake all that he has “cannot be My disciple”
 - e. There is NOTHING cheap about God’s grace. But that doesn’t stop men from cheapening it!
- III. Once saved, always saved –
- a. A form of cheap grace – the doctrine that says that once you surrender to Christ (e.g. accept Him as your Savior), you cannot be lost. This declares it is impossible to forfeit your salvation no matter what you do or how you live.
 - b. While some swing to the opposite extreme (declaring or implying that God is waiting for us to stumble so that He can condemn us to hell – and this is a complex subject), to teach OSAS (Once saved, always saved) removes ANY real need to obey God. You can rebel against Him, continue to live an immoral and wicked life, live a mediocre faith, or even curse Him, and you cannot be lost. HOW is that just?
 - c. The Bible teaches clearly that we can forfeit our salvation –
 1. Galatians 5:4 – you have fallen from grace
 2. 1 Timothy 4:1 – some will depart from the faith
 3. 2 Peter 2:20-22 – clearly teaches that one can return to the world
 4. Hebrews 10:26-31 – again speaks of those who abandon God and His brethren.
 5. Hebrews 4:1 – warns that we can come short of the promised eternal rest
 6. Hebrews 2:1-3 – warns that we can drift away
 7. 1 Corinthians 9:27 – even Paul realized he become disqualified (be rejected – ASV, be a castaway – KJV).
 - d. Of course, advocates of this doctrine, if one abandons their faith, might say that he was never saved in the first place. That is a subjective view. And while possibly true of some, there are clear examples of people faithful for years (including preachers) who walk away from their faith and their brethren.
 - e. God’s grace is not a ticket to live any way you want to live.
- IV. License to sin –
- a. Tied to the previous point, and a potential problem as Paul wrote about God’s grace in Romans, some reasoned that because of the grace of God they could continue in their sinful practice. In fact, they contended that God’s grace is so great they can do whatever they want (cf. Romans 5: 20-21) and thereby experience GREATER grace.
 - b. Paul countered this in Romans 6:1-2, we do NOT have permission to keep sinning.
 1. We must never forget that in becoming Christians we put to death the old man – we are NOT to resurrect him. Romans 6:6 tells us we should no longer be slaves of sin.
 2. 1 John 3:6-9 tells us that we cannot continue to live in sin and be pleasing to God.
 3. God’s grace is offered to us, but we are expected to change!
- V. Works can counter grace –
- a. There are some who believe that their righteous deeds will earn them salvation.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Cost_of_Discipleship

- b. Catholicism teaches a salvation largely based upon works. If you sin, you can confess to the priest, he imposes actions that when you do that you are forgiven (that is often what the rosary and quoting the Lord's prayer are about). The history of this system was so corrupt that in times past, men were permitted to "pre-purchase" their forgiveness, or buy the forgiveness of others (even deceased). This was known as the sale of indulgences.
- c. Some believe that as long as their good works outweigh their sins they will be saved.
- d. Among brethren, while we deny we believe this, do we act as if our works will merit our salvation? Do we think of our salvation as a check list? (I do this, and this and this; and I don't do this, and this, and this and therefore God has to save me). Some in doing their works, "go through the motions" but their heart is not in it.
- e. Understand, we MUST obey God, but we CANNOT ever earn our salvation.
 - 1. Luke 17:10 - we are still unprofitable.
 - 2. Ephesians 2:8-9 – *"not of works, lest anyone should boast."*
- f. This is about a mindset – what is the motives behind your obedience?
 - 1. 1 John 4:17-19 – one of the points that John emphasizes, is the reason we love God is because of His love for us. This explains our RESPONSE to God's grace. It also distinguishes between whether serving God is more about being afraid of Him or about loving Him. In other words, is my mindset, "I have to do this" or "I love God, so I WILL do what He says"?
 - 2. John 14:15, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments"
 - 3. 1 John 5:3, *For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.*
- g. What does it mean to be faithful?
 - 1. As I conclude, I would like to revisit what faith is. This past week, in some of my online Bible studies, we have discussed what faith is and what does it mean to be faithful? We often describe faith as "our part" in salvation and it certainly is.
 - 2. But what exactly is faith? I have typically defined it as believing God (as opposed to merely believing IN God) and trusting God. Such describes genuine faith well.
 - 3. BUT, there is another component to faith – faithfulness. The Greek word for "faithfulness" is derived from the word for faith (hence the relationship between the two words). A good way to describe TRUE faith is to find one who is FAITHFUL to God. He believes God and acts in such a way that God can TRUST him! Think of the usage of "faithful" in scripture –
 - i. Matthew 25:23 – well done good and faithful servant...
 - ii. 1 Corinthians 4:2 – it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.
 - 4. HOW can one be faithful if they do NOT act? How can one be TRULY faithful if they do not believe and trust the one they are serving?
- h. When we TRULY appreciate the grace of God, obedience is not an issue!

And thus, we can see what grace is and is not. Grace is God's gift of salvation offered to us. It is something to be fully appreciated. But exactly how has He manifested His grace and how should we respond to that grace? In coming lessons, we will address this. For now, let me simply encourage you to receive His grace on His terms, by obeying the gospel and resolving to faithfully serve Him. How are you doing in this? Think about it!