

Grace: The Only Way to Fly

In this chapter we will be looking at one of the most meaningful concepts in all the Scripture: The grace of God. But before we do, we must look at the context in which that grace is brought into our lives.

Take a few moments to think how you would define “sin.” Then look up the word “sin” in a Bible dictionary and compare your findings.

Your thoughts:

Definition from the Bible dictionary:

Comparison between the two:

I. The Condemnation That Comes from Sin

Read Romans 3:10-18 and Ephesians 2:1-3. What do those passages have to say about man's sinful condition?

Romans 3:10-18 *As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips." "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know." "There is no fear of God before their eyes." (NIV)*

Ephesians 2:1-3 ¹ As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. (NIV)

Theologians use a concept called “total depravity” to describe man’s condition prior to salvation. Briefly, it means that man is totally unable to please God in His unregenerate condition. Isaiah 64:6 says that even the (humanly) righteous deeds we do are offensive to God. This inherent corruption extends to the whole of our natural nature: intellect, emotions and will.

Ephesians 2:12 says that we are alienated from God and His blessings, without hope, and without God in this world. Popularly stated, total depravity says that though man is not as BAD as he can be, he is as BAD OFF as he can be.

II. The Freedom That Comes From Grace

Read Romans 6:23. What did we deserve? What did God give us?

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NIV)

Read Romans 8:32. Knowing that God gave us His only Son to die in our place, what should be our attitude?

He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (NIV)

Read Romans 4:4-5. What is the nature of the grace of God?

⁴Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. ⁵However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. (NIV)

Read Ephesians 2:8-9. Where does grace originate?

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast. (NIV)

Though many Christians understand the grace of God that brought salvation into their lives, they fail to understand that this grace is also the sphere of life in which they now live and walk.

Turn to Romans 5 and read verses 1-11. Let's do an analysis of this paragraph to see what we can find.

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. ⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (NIV)

In the space below, record all of the benefits of the grace of God as they relate to you.

III. Choosing to Live by Grace

When we focus on ourselves, our failures and inadequacies, we swim in the swamp of self-effort. Author Ray Stedman calls this the “Great Masquerade.”

In order to be liked or accepted we must appear capable or successful. . . . [But God's way] is if we will admit our inadequacy, we can have God's adequacy, and all we have sought vainly to produce is given to us at the point of our inability. (Authentic Christianity, p. 47.)

There is a dramatic difference between living “under the law” and living “under grace.” The law is harsh, demanding, rigid. Grace is loving, enabling, freeing. Trying to live up to the requirements of the law by our own energy and strength will result in guilt, failure and frustration. But when we live with a grace perspective, we respond to the enabling power of God's Spirit, producing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23) in our lives on a continuing basis.

Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 3:4-6, 17-18

And such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. . . . Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (NASB)

Take a moment and read that passage again. This time, answer the following questions:

- a. What does this passage have to say about the way I ought to approach life?
- b. What does this passage have to say about the way I ought to approach the ministry?
- c. What changes must I begin to make to live out this passage of Scripture in my life?

We need to understand the difference between operating *under the law* and living *under grace* . . . and constantly maintain a *grace-orientation* in our lives.

How we think about God, how we think about ourselves, and how we treat other people are all affected by whether or not we grasp this concept of grace.

Are you understanding the grace of God in increasing measure? If not, pick up one of the following books. You may find them very helpful. And today, focus on this grace that has been freely given to us. It is how God sets us free to become all that He wants us to be. It's the only way to fly!

Suggested Reading

___ *The Grace Awakening*, Charles R. Swindoll (Word Publishers)

___ *When Being Good Isn't Good Enough*, Steve Brown (Thomas Nelson Publishers)