



WEEK 5 - Grace

INTRODUCTION - Donald MacPhail's story

The definition of grace in the Bible has been the same for 2,000 years. It's a Greek word χάρις (charis), that simply means favor. But when you place it in the center of the gospel, it means unmerited favor, unearned favor.

This is no small matter. Is salvation God's mercy plus your good works? Is salvation information about Christ plus your decision to believe it? If you can add anything to what Christ has done it is no longer grace.

In Reformation theology there is a little slogan that highlights the crux of what Martin Luther found in his study of the book of Romans — by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

- Can you make a decision for Christ without understanding grace?

The default mode of humans is self-justification. We are always finding ways to justify ourselves.

There is a terrible deficiency in the church's understanding of grace.

According to one survey by George Barna, 35% of America's evangelical seminary students agreed with the statement, "God will save all good people when they die, regardless of whether they've trusted in Christ."

It has been said that Protestants today have a weaker view of grace than Catholics did in the middle ages, which is what gave birth to the Reformation.

The word grace can only be understood in the context of the gospel. This is why in

exploring grace today we must begin with the law.

Now, I know that sounds counterintuitive, but the gospel is counterintuitive.

- **The Law is our teacher.**
- **Many see grace as the avoidance of the Law, whereas you don't get to grace without the Law of God.**
- **The Law shows us our need of grace.**
- **The Law leads us to grace.**
- **"When someone finally understands the law, he ceases to speak about goodness."**
- **The Law takes you down a road without compromise. It doesn't bend or shake in the least. It walks in you down and says, "Now, remember, you must be perfect."**
- **The Law shows you you are helpless.**
- **And helplessness is your introduction to grace.**

Grace is meaningless without understanding, without knowing and without feeling the depths of your rebellion against God. **Until your mindset is to justify God in His condemnation of you, you are not yet on the track to understanding grace.** To actually put

the adjective amazing in front of grace, you first have to be convinced that you deserve God's wrath, not His favor.

John 1:14-17

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,

1 Point #1 God initiates grace.

That's why it's by grace alone. God's not responding. He's initiating. Grace is election.

God took initiative that we did not deserve. It is not required that God display His grace to rebels.

ILLUSTRATION

If you commit a crime, do you not deserve the punishment that fits your crime? Going against the word of the Infinite God deserves an infinite punishment. If you're not convinced of that, the Law will continue down the road with you.

Are we imperfect and just need a little help? Do we just need a little nudge in the right

direction? If that's what you think of humanity, then you're holding onto the Law to be declared good in God's sight.

Grace is not an infusion that gives you a little boast in the right direction. Grace is not spiritual caffeine. Grace is an attribute of God.

Psalm 24:3-4

3 Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?

And who shall stand in his holy place?

4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart,

who does not lift up his soul to what is false
and does not swear deceitfully.

What makes you worthy to stand before the God who created you? What makes anyone worthy?

"The Scriptures tell us that if he looks within, he will find that his heart is more deceitful than all else and is wicked beyond comprehension. If he turns to consider his own mind, he will find that there are wicked thoughts lodged within. If he listens intently to his speech, he will become aware that it is full of deceit, cursing, and bitterness. If he gazes upon his hands, he will see that they are stained with the residue of countless

misdeeds. If in desperation he seeks to cover his shame by dressing himself in his most righteous deeds, he will find that he is clothed in the filthy rot of a leper. Although he washes himself with lye and uses much soap, the stain of his iniquity remains. Everywhere he turns, he finds himself accused, condemned, and without hope.”

Washer, Paul. *The Gospel's Power and Message* (p. 14). Kindle Edition.

- The illustration of fake money

Don't confuse being unworthy with having no worth? Unworthy means in your present state you are unsuitable for heaven. That's why forgiveness is not your only problem.

- The illustration of The Godfather Part 3

Worth means you have importance to God. You can be important to God and yet be unsuitable to enter His presence. That's the dilemma that the gospel addresses. That's why “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

and we have seen his glory,

The grace of God displayed in Jesus Christ is historically verifiable. It is not, as it's been so often mischaracterized, just something you're asked to believe. They saw His glory. They reported His glory. We have evidence of His glory.

glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

2 Point #2 The grace initiated by God is only available through Jesus Christ.

That was one of the great cries of the Reformation — grace is God's favor on account of Christ.

What is the glory that the Apostle John is referring to here? What glory of Christ did John and the others see?

The power Jesus displayed in His ministry equaled, by everyone's admission, the very power of God.

- He calmed the sea on command — Jesus had power over the material realm.
- He commanded demons to flee — Jesus had power over the spiritual realm.
- He healed people of their sicknesses — Jesus had power over the physical realm.

Only One who has God as His actual Father could do such things. That is the glory they saw, but they also glimpsed the transfigured Jesus. They saw His glory and what that meant.

Mark 9:2-8

2 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3 and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. 4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. 5 And Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” 6 For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7 And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” 8 And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.

The grace initiated by God is only available through Jesus Christ.

But Peter doesn't yet understand that Jesus is the tabernacle. That his incarnation is in fact the glory of God tabernacling with his people: "And the Word became flesh and dwell" — (literally, *tabernacled*) — "among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

The last verse of the Transfiguration scene (**Mark 9:8**) is very important. Moses and Elijah in effect disappear. And only Jesus is left. As Moses and Elijah are representative of "the Law and the Prophets," who individually and collectively have all pointed to Jesus, this moment in the transfiguration event is emblematic of Christ as summation of all the Old Testament expectation. Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. He is the embodiment of the transition from old covenant to new.

We have the transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Law leads to grace.

Jared Wilson says it this way:

- He is the great high priest, surpassing all priests.
- He is the good shepherd, surpassing all shepherds.
- He is the great judge, surpassing all judges.
- He is the king of kings, surpassing all kings.
- He is the lord of lords, surpassing all earthly masters.
- He is the bridegroom, surpassing all husbands.
- He is the Rabbi Christ, surpassing all preachers.
- He is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, surpassing all the best of everybody ever.

15 (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) 16 For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

You want to continue with the law and try to be accepted by God because you’re good enough and smart enough and people like you? Or would you rather have grace?

3 Point #3 God shows you grace and then He shows you more grace.

“Faithfulness to the gospel requires more than doctrinal purity in our churches. It also requires relational beauty in our churches. But it is possible sincerely to preach true doctrine while, at the same time, utterly deny that doctrine by an ugly anti-gospel culture.” (Ray Ortlund Jr.)

We receive grace upon grace. That gospel truth should transform us and how we relate to others. But somehow we all have qualifiers for others. We expect God to show us grace, somehow feeling entitled to grace, but somehow we all have qualifiers for showing grace (undeserved favor) to others. That is an example of having a correct doctrinal understanding of grace, but then denying it in practice. “Well, you don’t know what they did.” No, I don’t. And I don’t need to know. What I do know is what Jesus Christ has done for you and yet you demand payment from your brothers and sisters. Hypocrite.

“The deal-breaker in a gospel culture is not sin, failure and weakness but words or behavior making the church unsafe for other sinners. The greatest threat to a typical church is not the adulterer but the gossip, who may be outwardly blameless but is inwardly ravenous. It is the sexual sinners who are commonly disciplined by the elders, while the gossips get a pass. But churches rarely go into meltdown through an adulterer, while they easily go into meltdown through a gossip.”

J. Edwin Orr quote - “We trust God with our eternal salvation, but we don’t trust Him with next week.”

Here’s the Lord who pours out grace upon grace upon us, but we’re like, “No thank you. Just one helping please. I’m afraid if you give me more You may ask more of me.” Or maybe it’s, “Thanks for the helping, but I got the rest of this.”

God hasn’t shown you grace so you can feel better. He has shown you grace because He has chosen you. Now, when God chooses you that is meaningful. It means He has chosen you for Himself. He wants you to find

your greatest delight in Him. John Piper has this slogan: “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”

Do you have sins that are troubling you? Grace will cleanse you.

Do you feel like you’re drifting away? Grace will keep you.

Do you feel like you’re nobody? Grace will set you apart.

Do you feel like a failure? Grace will perfect you.

Do you feel like an outsider? Grace will take you in.

“Whosoever cometh unto him, he will in no wise cast out. Though dishonest as the thief, though unchaste as the woman who was a sinner, though fierce as Saul of Tarsus, though cruel as Manasseh, though rebellious as the prodigal, the great heart of love will look upon the man who feels himself to have no soundness in him, and will pronounce him clean, when he trusts in Jesus crucified. Come to him, then, poor heavy-laden sinner.” (Spurgeon)

God saves us by himself. God saves us from himself, through himself, to himself, by himself, for himself. (Jared Wilson)

Grace is a fountain we need to drink from daily.

As we sin daily, so he justifies daily, and we must daily go to him for it. Justification is an ever-running fountain, and therefore we cannot look to have all the water at once. (Puritan William Fenner)

**To all who are weary and need rest,
To all who mourn and long for comfort,
To all who feel worthless and wonder if God cares,
To all who fail and desire strength,
To all who sin and need a Savior,
This church opens wide her doors with a welcome from Jesus Christ, the Ally of his enemies, the Defender of the guilty, the Justifier of the inexcusable, the Friend of sinners. Welcome!**