

Session 1 The Gospel of Grace: An Overview

I. THE GOAL OF GOD’S GRACE: TO EXPRESS AND EMPOWER LOVE

A. The Lord has given His people the most amazing gift in the form of the gospel of grace.

²⁴Nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20:24)

B. The foundational truth is that God loves with all His strength as He freely forgives us of our sins and empowers us to love Him with all our strength (Mk. 12:30). Jesus called this the first and great commandment. Our heart cry to Jesus is: “*What is Yours is mine and what is mine is Yours, so let us relate together in love by giving our ‘all’ to each other.*”

³⁰You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. (Mk. 12:30)

³⁷You shall love the LORD ...³⁸This is the first and great commandment. (Mt. 22:37-38)

C. The Lord created us specifically to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

D. Jesus defined loving God in terms of a spirit of obedience. We set our heart to love God on His terms. When we fail, we freely and fully receive His forgiveness and then recommit to love Him with obedience. With confidence before Him, even in our weakness, we ask the Spirit to help us.

¹⁵If you love Me, keep My commandments. ¹⁶And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you...²³If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and...We will come to him and make Our home with him. (Jn. 14:15-23)

II. THE DISTORTION OF THE GOSPEL

A. Scripture warns us not to distort the gospel of grace. It is distorted in two ways: first, by people seeking to earn God’s love and forgiveness; second, by a half-hearted response to receiving God’s grace. In both ways, people can receive the grace of God in vain. To receive it in vain is to receive it in a way that does not produce confidence in God’s love and power, nor a desire to respond with wholeheartedness that seeks to love God with all our strength.

¹We...as workers together with Him plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. (2 Cor. 6:1)

B. Paul feared that some of the believers in the city of Corinth believed a message that presented a different Jesus and a different gospel than what he preached to them.

³I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. ⁴For if he who comes preaches another Jesus

whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it! (2 Cor. 11:3-4)

- C. Paul warned us against receiving a distorted gospel message that is not based on the Scripture.

⁴[Jesus] who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age... ⁶I marvel that You are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel ⁷which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert [distort] the gospel of Christ. ⁸But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. (Gal. 1:4-8)

- D. Howard Pittman testified of the Lord telling him that the church in the West was like the Laodicean church (Rev. 3:14-21). I believe the greatest challenge in the Church today is to expose and resist this wrong way of approaching the gospel of grace.

¹⁶“You are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor...and naked. ¹⁸I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in fire...¹⁹As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten...be zealous and repent. (Rev. 3:16-19)

III. THE BIBLICAL MESSAGE OF THE GRACE OF GOD

- A. Paul’s dramatic declaration that we have become a new creation in Christ, with all things becoming new, has vast implications. The “he” that is a new creation is our spirit man. All things pertaining to our spirit become new. The “real you” is your spirit man, which is alive in Christ.

¹⁷If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away...all things have become new...¹⁹God was in Christ reconciling the world...not imputing their trespasses to them...²¹that we [our spirit] might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:17-21)

- B. Old things passed away: We were under condemnation before God. We were powerless with regard to sin (at the heart level). We were under darkness, lacking ability to understand the Word or receive God’s direction for life. We were destitute, without hope of a good future in God.
- C. All things have become new: We are accepted and enjoyed by God. Our former powerlessness and darkness have passed, and now we have the authority of Jesus’ name and the indwelling Spirit, which enable us to resist sin, sickness, and Satan; walk in victory over sin; and receive understanding of God, His Word, and His will. Now we have a significant destiny in God.

- D. The gospel is the good news of salvation, about receiving God's righteousness (in three tenses):
1. **Justification:** *our legal position—past tense*, focused on my spirit (I have been saved)
 2. **Sanctification:** *our living condition—present tense*, focused on my soul (I am being saved)
 3. **Glorification:** *our eternal exaltation—future tense*, focused on my body (I will be saved)
- We experience the fullness of our salvation over three time frames. One third of our salvation is complete, the salvation of our spirit. Our **spirit** has been created anew in holiness (past tense).
- E. As Jesus stands boldly before God, so do we (1 Jn. 4:17). We are to live with confidence that we are freely enjoyed by God as we dialogue with the Spirit and love and seek God with obedience.
- ¹⁷We have **boldness**...because **as He is**, so are we **in this world**. (1 Jn. 4:17)*

IV. THREE RESPONSES TO GOD'S GRACE THAT MUST BE CORRECTED

- A. In this series, I will highlight three responses to the message of God's grace that need correction.
- B. ***The legalistic believer:*** This person seeks to earn God's love and favor by his diligent obedience. We received God's righteousness freely, fully (100%), and instantly at our new birth. Everything that could disqualify us from entering into a new relationship with God was removed by the cross.
- ¹⁶Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified...²¹I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain. (Gal. 2:16-21)*
- C. Legalism teaches us that our commitment to God produces, or earns, His commitment to us. The grace of God teaches us that understanding God's commitment to *us* is what produces our commitment to *Him*, flowing from our gratitude for His extravagant worth and goodness.
- D. ***The lukewarm believer:*** This person seeks teachers and scriptures to validate a lifestyle that allows them to neglect the call to love, seek, and obey Jesus with all their strength. Jude writes of those who distort the grace message by seeking to make people comfortable in their compromise.
- ¹¹The **grace of God**...has appeared to all men, ¹²**teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly...** (Titus 2:11-12)*
- ³I found it **necessary** to write to you exhorting you to **contend earnestly** for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. ⁴For certain men have crept in **unnoticed**...**ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny...our Lord Jesus Christ.** (Jude 3-4)*
- ²Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. ³For the **time will come** when they will not **endure sound doctrine**, but according to their **own desires**, because they have **itching ears**, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴and they will **turn their ears away from the truth**, and be turned aside to fables. (2 Tim. 4:2-4)*

- E. Lukewarm believers often dismiss wholehearted believers by accusing their passion of being legalism. Zealous believers make them feel convicted and uncomfortable. The lukewarm see liberty as the freedom to do whatever they like and to neglect what they don't like.

¹⁶As free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. (1 Pet. 2:16)

¹³You have been called to liberty...do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh. (Gal. 5:13)

- F. ***The confused believer:*** These sincere believers are easily swayed by the last argument they heard. They are not grounded in the Word and are easily tossed by various waves of doctrine.

¹⁴That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men...¹⁵but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ. (Eph. 4:14-15)

V. GOD'S FREE GRACE EMPOWERS US TO WALK IN VICTORY (ROM. 6)

- A. Romans 3-8 is the most complete presentation of the gospel of grace. Paul describes “who we are in Christ” in our new ***legal position*** and how we are to respond in our ***living condition***. Romans 6 tells us how to access or experience the power and privileges of our legal position. It is the main chapter in Scripture that outlines the principles for our personal transformation.
- B. Romans 6:1-10: Our ***legal position***—what we received by being united to Jesus
- C. Romans 6:11-13: How to ***cooperate with grace***—the three primary principles
- D. Romans 6:14-23: Our ***living condition***—what we experience as we cooperate with grace

VI. COOPERATING WITH GOD'S GRACE: THREE PRINCIPLES

- A. ***Knowing Principle (Rom. 6:11):*** We must know who we are in Christ. To *reckon ourselves* is to see ourselves in the way that God sees us and according to what the Word says about us. We must see ourselves as those who have died to the reign of sin and are alive to God. The knowing principle includes knowing God's majestic nature and His heart as a Father and Bridegroom.

¹¹Reckon [see] yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ... (Rom. 6:11)

1. We see ourselves as enjoyed, indwelt, empowered, and commissioned by God with a relevant purpose. Being alive to God is synonymous with being under the reign of grace.
2. We are dead to the reign of sin (Rom. 5:21; 6:2). We are dead to—permanently separated, freed, or removed from—our former position, where we were ***condemned, powerless*** before sinful promptings in our heart (anger, lust, etc.), in ***darkness*** without the ability to understand God and His Word, and ***destitute***, without a lasting purpose in God.

- B. **Resisting Principle (Rom. 6:12-13a)**: We resist sin, Satan, and sin-provoking circumstances. We must choose righteousness. It is our responsibility, in the grace of God, to deny ungodly lusts. We cannot abdicate this responsibility to God. It is an essential part of grace for us to deny lust, but it is in no way “earning God’s love” but positioning ourselves to “experience more” from Him.

¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. ¹³And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin... (Rom. 6:12-13a)

- C. **Pursuing Principle (Rom. 6:13b)**: We pursue *relating to* and *servicing* God and people with love. This speaks of loving and serving people (family, church, neighbors, and the nations, etc.) in righteousness. Our first call is to love God and seek to grow in knowledge of Him. We pursue God by taking time to cultivate intimacy with Him and to actively obey Him.

¹³But present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members [your body, time, money, abilities, etc.] as instruments of righteousness to God. (Rom. 6:13b)