

GRACE UPON GRACE

*“For it is a good thing that the heart be established
with grace...”*

Heb. 13:9

Calvary Chapel has a distinctive position on the subject of God’s grace. We realize that without the grace of God none of us would have a chance. We need the grace of God in our lives. We need it daily. We experience it, and we’re saved by it personally. But we also stand in grace. We believe in the love and grace that seeks to restore the fallen.

There are some churches that are severely lacking in the grace of God. There’s often a very harsh, inflexible, and severe form of legalism that allows no room for repentance and restoration. You would be amazed at the flack that I’ve taken because I want to help restore those who are fallen. Whenever I see a talented servant of God fall to the lures of the enemy, I get angry with Satan who seeks to rip off some of our finest servants.

We have taken a very strong position on grace. We believe that the Bible does teach that God is gracious. That’s one of His chief characteristics in dealing with man. If He wasn’t a God of grace, none of us would stand a chance! We all need the grace and the mercy of God. Whenever I pray, I never ask God for justice, unless I’m praying about somebody else.

Whenever I'm praying about myself, it's always, "Grace!" or, "Mercy, Lord, mercy! Have mercy on me! Deal with justice with that guy that's wronged me, but, Lord, I want mercy."

It's interesting that, having received mercy, having received grace, the Lord emphasizes our need to show mercy and to show grace. He said, "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." (Matthew 5:7).

It's interesting that Jesus seems to equate forgiveness with our being willing to forgive. This is evident in what we commonly refer to as The Lord's Prayer. At the end of that model prayer, He emphasizes only one of the petitions, the request we make concerning forgiveness. "But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:15).

Jesus gave parables that dealt with the necessity of forgiveness. In Matthew 18, we see the master who forgave his servant's sixteen-million dollar debt. But that servant went out to a fellow servant that owed him only sixteen dollars and had him thrown in debtor's prison. The master then called the first servant, and said, "How much did you owe me? And did I not forgive you? How is it that I heard that you've had this fellow servant in prison for his debt?" He rebuked him, and he ordered him to be cast into prison, until he had paid the uttermost farthing." (Matthew 18:23-35).

If we've been forgiven so much, surely we should forgive! Having received the grace of God, we should manifest that grace of God to those who have fallen. I need the grace of God daily. I stand in the grace of God. I've been saved by grace, not because of works, so that the glory goes to God for what He has done. I can't boast in what I've done. I've done nothing. It isn't by works of righteousness, but by His grace, that we are saved.

This is a theme we find throughout the New Testament, and therefore it's a theme we emphasize. The books of Romans and Galatians become very significant because they both set forth the grace of God and righteousness through

faith. This is in direct contrast with the self-righteousness that one attains through the works of the law.

We believe in seeking to restore those who have fallen, as Paul taught to the Galatians, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." (Galatians 6:1). I thank the Lord for the grace that I've received, and having received God's grace, I seek to extend it to others.

I get angry at Satan when I hear of a gifted minister who has fallen. Those that have great abilities and great talents for the Lord seem to be a special target of Satan. I'm just not willing to let Satan have a victory. I try to reclaim these men for the kingdom of God so that they might use their talents for the Lord.

I've done a lot of restoration in my life. It's just something that I love to do. I love to take old wrecks and make something attractive out of them. I've got a 1957 Ford Skyliner. Now, if you had seen it when I first got it, it looked like it was ready for the junk yard. But what fulfillment there is in taking something like that, taking time and working with it, pulling it apart and sanding it, getting the rust out, repainting it, and putting it back together, then finally seeing something beautiful and attractive made out of something that was just a wreck. There's a joy and a fulfillment in it. I also love to do that with old houses. My daughter always buys fixer-uppers, and then says, "Daddy, come over." I love to take these old fixer-uppers, remodel them, and make something attractive, modern, and beautiful out of them. And the same holds true with lives that Satan has really fouled up.

I love to take, develop, remold, and rebuild lives that were a real wreck. Look at most of the Calvary Chapel ministers! Their lives were a real wreck. But look at how God has restored, and look at the wealth and the value that have come out of these lives. It's a beautiful work of God today, to see what the world has cast off and viewed as hopeless wrecks be transformed into glorious vessels of honor.

We believe that having been forgiven, we need to be forgiving. Having received mercy, we must show mercy. Having received grace, we must be graceful. Showing and extending God's grace is an important part of the Calvary Chapel ministry.

In John's Gospel, in chapter eight, we have a very interesting story. Jesus had come into the temple, and in verse two He sat down to teach. Suddenly, His teaching was interrupted by a commotion. There was hysterical sobbing and crying. "And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act." (John 8:3-4).

The enemies of Christ were constantly trying to put His teaching at odds with Moses. People, in general, recognized that Moses was the instrument who brought them the law of God. There was no question about Moses' authority. He spoke for God.

If Jesus said something that was contrary to the law of Moses, then Jesus couldn't claim to be of God. That was the whole issue on divorce. They questioned Jesus about whether a man could put away his wife for any cause. Jesus answered, "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." (Matthew 19:9). They responded by saying that Moses said they could divorce by just writing a bill of divorcement. They thought they had trapped Jesus. Jesus then went back before Moses and said that in the beginning it wasn't so. Moses, because of the hardness of the people's hearts, gave the woman a writing of a bill of divorcement, but in the beginning it was not so.

So, here again they were seeking to pit Him against the Mosaic Law. "Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him." (John 8:5-6). This was very obvious. But Jesus didn't say anything.

He just stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground as if He didn't even hear them.

Now what did He write on the ground? I don't really know. Maybe he wrote, "Where is the man?" They had said, "We caught her in the very act." Well, they couldn't catch her in the act without catching the man too. According to Moses' law they were both to be stoned. So if they were really interested in keeping the Mosaic Law, they would have been dragging the guy there, too. Maybe the guy was a friend and they let him go. This wasn't really justice.

Jesus' enemies were upset. He was just writing on the ground as though He was ignoring them. So they pressed the question. Finally, He stood up and said to them, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." (John 8:7). Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. This time I think I know what He wrote. He very well may have written the names of the men that were standing there ready to condemn, probably starting with the oldest. I think He began to write a lot of sins that the oldest man had been committing, maybe a girl friend that he had, and Jesus started detailing some of the activities that they had been engaged in. Then finally this man said, "Oh, I remember my wife told me to get home early today, fellows. I have to go." After he took off, Jesus wrote down the name of the next oldest, and began to write down a few things that he had been doing until that man took off. One by one this continued, from the oldest to the youngest, until finally there was no one left. Jesus then stood up, and looking at the woman, said to her, "Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?" She said, "No man, Lord." Then Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." (John 8:10-11).

What a beautiful response of Jesus. "Neither do I condemn you; go your way, and sin no more."

When there's a serious accident and cars are banged up and people's bodies are battered, cut, bleeding, and lying there in the street, there are two types of emergency vehicles

that arrive on the scene. The first to arrive is usually the police, and their job is to develop a safety zone to control the traffic. Then they get out their pads and look at the positions of the cars. They measure the skid marks and start interviewing witnesses.

Their job is to find out who violated the law. Who's to blame for this tragedy? Their chief concern is to determine what laws were violated and who is at fault for what happened.

The second type of vehicle contains the paramedics. They could care less who is to blame. There are people bleeding in the street. Their job is to minister to those bleeding people, check the heart monitor, put bandages on them, look to see if there are broken bones, get them on the stretcher, and lift them into the ambulance. They're not thinking about whose fault it is. They aren't there to cast blame. They're there to help those who are hurting.

Now, there are also two types of ministries that I've observed. Those that take the attitude of the policeman. They come upon the tragedies, the broken lives, and they get out the code book. They're going to read you the law. *"You have the right to remain silent, but anything you say may be used against you."* They're on the scene in a very legal way trying to find out who's at fault, who's to blame, and to read the law.

But then there are those ministers who are more like the paramedics, and who aren't so concerned with who broke the law, but how they can heal. How can we help? How can we minister to the broken body, this broken life? How can we put things back together? How can we bring healing?

Now here in the account in John 8 are the Pharisees. They have the code book out. *"Our Law says stone her. What do you say?"* But Jesus was interested in ministering to her, helping her, putting her life back together, not condemning. *"Neither do I condemn thee."* His desire was to put her back on the road again.

We seek to minister to the hurting people. Our desire is to see them restored, back on their feet, functioning again. John tells us that the Law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. If I am to be a minister of Jesus Christ, then I must be ministering grace. As we look at churches, and as we look at ministry, we see many who are principally ministers of Moses. They are very harsh and legalistic. The Law has been broken, and they will tell you exactly what the Law says. And, yet, we find Jesus saying, *"Whoever is without sin first cast the stone...neither do I condemn thee."*

It's been our joy and our privilege to be able to restore many who were condemned by the law. I do believe that before restoration, there must be true repentance. I believe that the Law was intended as a schoolmaster to bring people to Jesus Christ. Those who have not come and repented need the Law, thus there is a place for the Law. It is holy, righteous, and good, if used lawfully. But I think sometimes we go beyond and want to exact the penalties of the Law after there has been repentance. We aren't willing to restore. Jesus stood for grace and truth. We should always seek restoration, but let us not forget that repentance is necessary.

It's wonderful to see a life that's been battered and bruised become fruitful again for the kingdom of God. But grace is not without risk. I may make a mistake in forgiving and showing grace to some people. It may be that their repentance isn't genuine. It may be that they still have a hidden agenda. I have shown grace to people who did prove to still be involved in sin, and who, later on, did damage to me. I'm not perfect. I've made mistakes in judgment and I've shown grace to those who had not truly repented of their evil.

I have taken chances, brought fellows on staff who had supposedly repented and later on, the same traits were still there. I've erred. And I probably will make mistakes in the future. But I will tell you this, if I'm going to err, I want to err on the side of grace rather than on the side of judgment.

In Ezekiel 34, the Lord spoke against the shepherds in Ezekiel. They had let the sheep go astray and didn't go out to seek the lost ones. The Lord had some pretty heavy things to say against those shepherds who weren't really concerned in seeking and restoring the lost ones. I believe God will be far more lenient with me and my errors of grace than He will be if it is the other way around and I condemn someone that He has pardoned and forgiven.

There are a several Scriptures that warn us against judgment. "Judge not, that ye be not judged." (Matt 7:1). We set the standard for our own judgment when we judge others. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand." (Romans 14:4). I would hate to err on the side of judgment, to judge someone falsely who had truly repented. I would hate to be in that position of making a mistake in my judgment. So again, if I err, I want to err on the side of grace because I know that God will be much more gracious towards me than if I err in judging a person wrongly. I don't want to be guilty of that.

It's easy to fall into legalism. We need to beware of this temptation. Beware of taking the hard stand. I have found, for the most part, that when a person gets heavy into '*Reformation Theology*,' they usually get heavy into legalism. They want to make sure the 'T's' are crossed and the 'I's' are dotted just right. '*Reformation Theology*' has some good points, but so does a porcupine. When you embrace it too forcefully, then you're going to get the points.

Some people object because they feel that I gloss over certain passages of Scripture, and they're correct. But glossing over controversial issues is often deliberate because there are usually two sides. And I have found that it's important not to be divisive and not to allow people to become polarized on issues, because the moment they are polarized, there's division.

A classic example is the problem in our understanding of the Scriptures that refer to the sovereignty of God and

the responsibility of man. The Bible actually teaches both, but in our human understanding they're mutually exclusive. People who become divisive on this issue claim that we can't believe both, because if you carry the sovereignty of God to an extreme, it eliminates the responsibility of man. Likewise, if you carry the responsibilities of man to the extreme, it eliminates the sovereignty of God. This mistake is made when a person takes the doctrine and carries it out to its logical conclusion. Using human logic and carrying divine sovereignty out to its logical conclusion leaves man with no choices.

So, how are we to deal with rightly dividing the Word on the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man? We need to believe both of them through faith, because I can't keep them in balance by my understanding. I don't understand how they come together. But I do believe them both. I believe that God is sovereign, and I also believe that I'm responsible and that God holds me responsible for the choices that I make. I simply trust God that both assertions of Scripture are true.

There's a pastor who recently came out with a little pamphlet on Calvinism, and on the front cover, there's a balance scale with John Calvin on one side and John 3:16 on the other. Which side would you rather stand for?

Don't get polarized. Don't let the people get polarized. The minute you do, you've lost half your congregation because people are split pretty evenly on this issue. So if you take a polarized position you'll lose half of your congregation. Do you really want to lose 50% of your congregation?

You know the beautiful thing about being called Calvary Chapel? People don't know where you really stand. Put Baptist in your title, and people know where you are, and half the people will never come because it's a Baptist church. Put Presbyterian in your name, and they know where you stand, and half the people will never come because they know what the Presbyterians believe. Put Nazarene in your name, and

immediately they've got you pigeon-holed. They know who you are, and they don't need to go.

But Calvary Chapel has a sort of mystique about it. *"What do these people believe?" "I don't know, but let's go find out."* And the whole field is ours. You want to fish in as big a pond as you can find. When you're marketing something, you want the largest market appeal possible. So don't chop up the market and say, *"Well, we're just going to fish in this little market here."* Keep the market broad. Fish in the big pond. Fish where they are biting.

THE PRIORITY OF THE WORD

"Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine."

1 Tim. 4:13

Another primary distinctive of Calvary Chapel is our endeavor to declare to people the whole counsel of God. We see this principle illustrated when Paul met with the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. As they were on the shore of the Aegean at Miletus, around the coastal area of Ephesus, Paul said that he was innocent of the blood of all men, *"For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."* (Acts 20:27).

Now, how is it possible for a person to claim to have declared, *"the whole counsel of God?"* The only way a person could make that claim to his congregation would be if he taught through the whole Word of God with them, from Genesis to Revelation. Once you've taken your congregation through the Bible, then you can say to them, *"I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God."*

This can't be done with topical sermons. Topical sermons are good, and they have their place, but when you're preaching topically, you're prone by nature to preach only those topics that you like. And there are topics in the Bible that aren't very inspiring. They don't excite the people, but they