

Series: **The Scandal of Grace** – week 3 of 11

CDOBC – beginning on 9/10/17

Today's Title: **"If the Church was Graceless"**

September 24, 2017 - John 1:16-17; Eph. 1:3, 6-8; 2:7

OBJECTIVE: To help people understand the grace of God is the greatest truth the Church can give to / display for the world.

Opening Prayer

Celebrating 40 years - it's amazing to see moments in our history through pictures. It's also amazing to see how God has worked through the missionaries the church has partnered with over the years - here's a few more 'greetings' and 'congratulations' from some of our mission partners here in AZ in Venezuela.

Video - 1:16

"What if" - a phrase which haunts so many people.

If you tend to worry about many things in life, then many of your thoughts begin with, **"What if"**

Missionaries often ask:

"What if we don't raise the support we need to stay in the field?"

Here at home, we worry and ask:

"What if the car breaks down."

"What if the hotel gave away our room?"

"What if I get sick."

"What if I lose my job."

“What if our daughter brings this guy home!”

Instead of asking “*What if*” concerning our personal welfare, I want to use this phrase regarding the church.

Let’s imagine a scenario that would be a major crisis for the church.

“*What if* the church was graceless?”

- If the church was graceless, what would it matter?
- If the church was graceless, would the world be any different?
- If the church was graceless, would it change how we worship every Sunday?
- If the church was graceless, what would that mean for my relationship with Christ?
- If the church was graceless, what would we have to offer the world?

We live in a world in desperate need of grace.

Every day we see things which reveal a lack of grace in the world.

Just turn on the news and you’ll to see a world without grace.

Crime and violence is always lacking grace.

War knows no grace.

Terrorism is devoid of grace - it does everything to fight against grace.

Politics and grace? Not.

In every area of life, we exist - sustain - or advance based not on grace, but on merit. We must prove our ability and worth by performing at a certain level.

Grades in school measure our intelligence and attentiveness. Attractiveness is determined by what the culture has deemed as beautiful and sexy.

Pay is determined by your ability to perform and your adherence to the rules of the company.

The Justice department - the courts cannot operate on the basis of grace. On the contrary, they operate on the basis of making sure the punishment matches the crime.

Mortgage companies and financial institutions would go bankrupt if they used grace as their guiding principle.

Beyond the trappings of every human culture, the religions of the world try to deal with sin and guilt - not through grace - but through self-torture as they attempt to make penance for their sins.

Hindu peasants offer sacrifices to their various gods for healing and protection from diseases.

Islamic countries have morals police who patrol the sidewalks with clubs, looking for women whose clothing offends them or who dare to drive a car.

Soviet Communism set up a web of in-country spies who would report to the authorities any speech critical of the

government or promoting ideas declared illegal by the State. Violation meant time in the Gulag or death.

(What's So Amazing About Grace, by Philip Yancey, p. 34)

Every religion in the world preaches the way to heaven is through good works - penance - righteousness - holiness - perfection.

Your faults can only be atoned for through endless cycles of reincarnation until you finally get it right!

Do enough good works, and maybe you'll be good enough.

It's a moving target which is impossible to hit - a standard which is too high to climb.

Like the priests of Baal who competed against Elijah in **1 Kings 18** who danced around, from morning to evening, shouting as loud as they could, cutting themselves with swords hoping their blood would get the attention of their gods.

The sad truth is we don't have to look outside the church for examples of a graceless existence.

At the birth of the Church - and for at least a few hundred years, grace was the prominent teaching and practice. But sadly, at some point, grace was overcrowded and pushed aside by the rules of men and the quest for power and control.

A simple study of the Middle Ages reveals the Church at its worst.

The monks and their monasteries became places not only for seclusion and study of God's Word, but places devoid of grace. Instead of the grace of God in Christ through faith, a non-biblical and twisted theology became normative where physical and emotional suffering became the virtuous way to earn God's favor and purify your soul.

This eventually spread beyond the monasteries into the general public, and soon denying any and all forms of pleasure and enduring things which caused great physical discomfort and pain were applauded - thought to be godly. Lying on a bed of nails, sleeping on cold nights with no blanket, depriving yourself of good food.

In a world which has abandoned grace, beauty and joy also disappears.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) habitually covered his eyes to avoid seeing the beauty of the Swiss Lakes. ([What's So Amazing](#)

[About Grace](#), by Philip Yancey, p. 32-33)

Even beyond the Middle Ages, grace has been a rare find in Christianity.

I came across the story of a country priest in France who decided to *“never smell a flower, never drink when thirsty, never drive away a fly, never complain of anything that had to do with his personal comfort...”*

The mystic St. John of the Cross (1542-1591) taught we should mortify all joy and hope, to turn *“not to what pleases most,*

but to what disgusts, ” and to “despise yourself, and with that others should despise you.” ([What’s So Amazing About Grace](#), by Philip Yancey, p. 32-33)

Even in our world today, devout Roman Catholic pilgrims crawl on their knees for miles reciting prayers as they visit the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico City (Source:

<http://www.uvm.edu/~dstratto/mexico/guadalupe.html>)

Other pilgrims travel to various relics - many of them now located in Rome in or near Vatican City. One such relic is called “The Santa Scala”, which legend/tradition says are the marble stairs which Jesus walked up when He was condemned by Pilate. Pilgrims, crawl on their knees as they ascend “*The Santa Scala, or Holy Stairs.*”

(Source: <http://www.phatmass.com/phorum/topic/69257-would-you-crawl-up-these-stairs-on-your-knees/>)

When they reach the top of the stairs, they are given plenary indulgence of their sins, which means all temporal punishment for their sin is removed. (Source: <http://www.catholic.org/prayers/indulg.c.php>)

Before you get overly critical toward the Roman Catholic Church, may I remind you of similar efforts to motivate and mandate a form of holiness have also found a home in Protestant churches in the United States. Legalism which insisted on ‘proper clothing’, the banning of certain books and certain types of music has been standard practice in some churches. A Pharisaical view of others - especially those outside the Church has not been uncommon. Pastors

and their churches declaring their own moral superiority against the secular culture and railing against the sins of those outside the walls of the church has no connection to the grace of God in Christ. Some of the most evil people seem to be those who brag the most about their high morality.

Mark Twain used to talk about people who were “*good in the worst sense of the word.*” (What’s So Amazing About Grace, by Philip Yancey, p. 31)

English girl quote: “*O God, make the bad people good, and the good people nice.*” (What’s So Amazing About Grace, by Philip Yancey, p. 32)

Grace is often absent from the very places it should be on full display!

The ironic thing is we live in a graceless world - which craves the grace of God, but doesn’t know it.

They crave forgiveness and freedom from their sins, but most of them wouldn’t realize it - or use the same terms we’re using here this morning.

In L.A. and N.Y., I don’t know if it’s still operational, but an ‘Apology (phone) Line’ was launched, giving people a chance to be anonymous and call a 1-900 phone number - In L.A. callers paid \$2 for the first minute and \$.45 for each additional minute. After a short recording, they would voice their apology to relieve themselves of whatever guilt they were carrying for some wrong they committed against another person.

Confessions of burglary, vandalism, adultery and sleeping with a best friend’s boyfriend or girlfriend.

One lady called up sobbing and said, "I just want to say I'm sorry, I just caused an automobile accident in which five people died. I wish I could bring them back."

The world may deny it...

They may reject what they have heard about Christianity and what they have observed in some Christians, but the undeniable truth is the weight of sin is unbearable in the human soul. Throughout human history, man has tried almost every imaginable thing to rid their soul of guilt. Most of the time, they never pause to ask the deeper questions concerning their guilt:

- What are they guilty of?
- Why is guilt a universal human emotion / reality?
- Why is there a universal sense of right and wrong - and who is responsible for planting this ethical radar in the conscience of mankind?

For your entire life, you may have been suspicious and have your doubts about the Gospel of Christ, but if you're honest with history and the human experience, you must admit the human race has been implanted with a generic sense of right and wrong...good and evil, and deep-down we crave forgiveness and relief from the weight of our wrongs.

If the Church was graceless, if all the Church did was give formulas for absolution, what would the world look like?

It would look like it did through the Middle Ages and in the years before the Reformation.

- It would be a place where effort must be endless (and useless!)
- A place where failure means certain death or damnation.
- A place where the weaker or the lesser are run over by the strong like a small rodent on a busy city street.
- A place where there is no rest, and never a chance to simply enjoy life - enjoy each other - or look past our deficiencies.

But the grace of Christ blossoms where there is failure. The grace of Christ not only calms our fears, it erases our fears, uplifts the weak and provides our soul with eternal rest in the living God.

Grace turns failure into perfection!

But perfection is only part of our hearts desire.

The other eternal question that rests in each person's heart is if God wants me...does He accept me!

“Lewis Smedes, a professor in psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary writes, ‘What I felt most was a glob of unworthiness that I could not tie down to any concrete sins I was guilty of. What I needed more than pardon was a sense that God accepted me, owned me, held me, affirmed me, and would never let go of me even if he was not too much impressed with what he had on His hands.’”

(What's So Amazing About Grace, by Philip Yancey, p. 36)

If the Church was graceless, the world would have no hope.

But, the good news is: This church is not graceless!

(Begin slide show pics CDOBC ministry & people - 1:25)

This church has proclaimed the grace of God in Christ for the past 40 years!

We certainly haven't been perfect in dispensing grace, in our teaching of grace or our practice of grace, but we have been a lighthouse of grace!

For the past 40 years, we have proclaimed the grace of the Gospel.

We must learn what grace is...but we must move beyond the definition and cognitive knowledge of grace. Grace must be a relational experience - it must be a verb - we must 'grace' each other! That's why I'm showing these pictures of the people in this church over the years - because grace is more than just a theological and biblical truth - it must be a verb - it must be experienced in loving relationships.

Turn to John 1:16

Christ came to give us unending grace *John 1:16*

John 1:16

“And from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

“from His fullness” - points to the deity of Christ - the fullness of God in Christ.

Greek: *pleroma* - 'everything in God'

Jesus was not just another teacher - not just a popular figure with a following - not just a moralist or a revolutionary. He was fully God - and fully man.

Colossians 1:19 (see also 2:9)

“For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell...”

Jesus came to earth - in human flesh - born of a virgin - but He was also the fullness of God in bodily form.

His physical body did not detract in any way from His deity. He was not a lesser god - He was the fullness of God - nothing lacking.

“we have all received” - Jesus came for every single person. This doesn't mean everyone will be saved - only those who put their faith in Christ will be saved - but His invitation is to “all” humanity.

- What a tragedy - a divine affront if a church is selective about who they will love with the Gospel.
- What an insult to the person and work of Christ who came for “all” people, if we limit the Kingdom based on some criteria we invent.

Maybe you're here this morning and you've always felt on the 'outside' - like the grace of God is for other people - that somehow you have forfeited your chance to receive God's grace and forgiveness.

Know this: Jesus Christ loves you - He died for your sins - He offers you His complete and eternal forgiveness - but you must put your faith in Him - you

must **A**dmit your sins...and **B**elieve in Jesus as your Savior.

You are included in the “all” of vs. 16!

“grace upon grace” - what a marvelous phrase!

Lit. = ‘*grace instead of grace*’

It’s an unusual phrase with a wonderful and refreshing meaning.

It has the idea of the escalation of God’s grace in our life.

His grace is ever-increasing.

It’s a picture of an overflowing fountain of grace - which never runs out of grace. God never has a drought of grace - there’s always more grace!

Ephesians 1:3, 6-8

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...”

6 to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved.

7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace,

8 which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight...”

Ephesians 2:7

“...so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

This is not the common view of God. So many cower in fear of God - their view of God is an angry, vengeful

God who takes pleasure in judging. But that's not the God of the N.T. or the O.T.

Psalm 103:8, 10

“The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

10 He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.”

Do you have a biblical view of God?

Is your understanding of who God is influenced by the culture - your own experiences - or by the inspired, authoritative, infallible Word of God?

In Christ, we are governed by grace and truth. *John 1:17*

In the O.T., the Jewish people were governed by the Law of Moses. 613 commands to obey, which could never be obeyed. The Law was not given to make us perfect, but to prove we couldn't be perfect.

But in Christ, we have His grace and truth.

17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

William Barclay says: *“It is through Jesus Christ that God the law-giver has become God the Father, that God the judge has become God the lover of human souls.”*

(The New Daily Study Bible, The Gospel of John, volume one, by William Barclay, p. 85)

The Law was impossible - nobody could keep the Law. But the grace and truth of Jesus is accessible to “all” - it's within everyone's reach! *(through faith!)*

But how will everyone know about it?

According to **Romans 1** there is a general awareness of God ingrained in humanity, but the details of Christ and the specifics of the Gospel of grace are not commonly known.

So how does the world - which is so desperate for grace - learn of God's grace?

The Church's job is to share and teach the grace of God in Christ. *Eph. 3:1-2*

Look what Paul says:

Ephesians 3:1-2

"For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles --

2 assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you..."

Galatians 2:7

"...when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the Jews..."

Paul's ministry was to take the Gospel to the Gentiles (non-Jews). However this wasn't a ministry restricted to Him alone - it's the ministry of every believer - to bring the Gospel to those who don't know the grace of Christ. Paul was a steward of God's grace - we are stewards of God's grace.

Paul's charge...Peter's charge...is our charge.

God saves us - not only so we can be saved, but so we can save others.

The vehicle...the means by which God has designed for the Gospel to be spread, is through the Church - the Body of Christ.

Ephesians 1:22-23

“And He (the Father) put all things under His (Jesus’) feet and gave Him (Jesus) as head over all things to the church,

23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

This takes me right back to **John 1:16** - “And from His fullness we have all received grace upon grace.”

We...the Church...are the Body of Christ.

We are His physical manifestation in this world.

As He fills us with His truth and grace - we must take that fullness and share it with the world.

We must not hoard it - hold onto it for our own joy - but we must take the grace He has lavished upon us - and share it with those who so desperately need His grace!

Apply it...

Grace swims against the flow of the human experience.

Grace is uncommon beauty and comfort in a world of judgment and pain.

Ernest Hemingway once told a story about a Spanish father who decided to reconcile with his son who had run away. The father takes out an ad in the newspaper: *“Paco,*

meet me at Hotel Montana at Noon on Tuesday - all is forgiven, Papa.” Paco is a very common name in Spain, and on Tuesday when the father goes to the hotel, he finds 800 young men named Paco waiting for their fathers.”

(What's So Amazing About Grace, by Philip Yancey, p. 37-38)

There is a great need for reconciliation - forgiveness - love - acceptance.

The best way for people to learn about grace is when we grace them.

God's supply of grace is unending

Grace must be more than a definition. It must be more than a theological term, it must be alive in us - in everything we do!

Grace is not limited to church, it's meant to be shared and experienced every day of our life!

Live in the grace and truth of Christ

Legalistic attitudes and cultures do not promote the grace and truth of Christ.

Moses gave us the Law - Jesus gave us His grace and truth.

Law doesn't save - it only condemns.

The grace and truth of Christ bring life - hope - joy - forgiveness - acceptance - and reconciliation.

Our job is to bring the grace of God in Christ to the world.

We are the Body of Christ - We have His fullness - His grace and truth.

He expects us to share these eternal blessings with those who don't know Him. He blesses us not simply for our own joy and pleasure, but so we can be a blessing to others!

What will CDOBC be known for in the next 40 years?

Will we have a reputation as a place of grace - a place of rest for hungry and hurting souls?

Will we have compassion and love for those without Christ?

Will we have joy in our worship of the God of all grace?

Will we be 'good people' who are kind to all others?

The legacy of the last 40 years is not perfect, but it's a glorious gift of imperfection - and of grace.

Those who have gone before us have by God's grace, made it possible for us to even be here today.

As we cherish the past, may we look forward to what God will do in and through us.

My prayer - my hope - and I dedicate myself to leading you - the church - in the wonders and joy of God's grace in Christ.

But you must follow.

I can't do this on my own.

We can't do this if only a small group says "Yes".

All of us must commit to celebrating and sharing the grace and truth of Christ!

You must get rid of any and all “un-grace” that is in your life - any remnants of legalism and religion that puts grace on the shelf - and commit each and every breath to living in the fullness of God’s grace given to us in Christ Jesus.

This is my prayer - and it’s our calling - it’s our glorious future as His church!

By God’s grace.

Closing prayer