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GRACE

NOTES FROM VIDEO



SECTION ONE: SYSTEM FAILURE

We live in a world that rewards performance. It's ingrained in us from an early age. Answer the test questions right and you pass. Answer them wrong and you fail. Score the most points and you win. Score one point less than the competition and you lose. Do well in school and you'll get a good job. Do well at work and you'll get a promotion. Granted, it doesn't always work that way. But there's no denying that performance matters.

This performance orientation has the potential to shape our assumptions about God. When you ask people to describe what they think they have to do to *get on* or *stay on* God's good side, you get a list of behaviours—religious performance. Just about every aspect of life works that way. Why wouldn't it be the same with God? After all, if God created the world, shouldn't we assume he created the way the world operates? If that's the case, then isn't the cause-and-effect relationship between our performance and our value a reflection of some divine design? While it would be easy to make that assumption, there are exceptions to the performance-valuation rule. A student fails an exam by two points, and the professor finds a way to give him a passing grade. A sales associate makes a less-than-stellar sales

presentation, loses an account, and her manager responds by giving her another opportunity. A motorist is rear-ended and upon discovering the challenging circumstances of the careless driver, decides not to make an issue of it. Every once in a while, people get exactly what they don't deserve.

But even when we're the ones being let off the hook, we feel like something is wrong. It's great not to suffer consequences for what we've done, but it also feels like we've violated the system. Shouldn't people get what they deserve? Isn't that just?

Grace is the face that love wears when it meets imperfection.

 **Joseph R. Cooke**

It's not about my performance. It's about Jesus' performance for me. Grace isn't there for some future me but for the real me. The me who struggled. The me who was messy . . . He loves me in my mess; he was not waiting until I cleaned myself up.



Jefferson Bethke



SECTION ONE: QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 Where do you feel the effects of a performance-based world most?
- 2 How does this influence your view of God?
- 3 When is a time that you have been let "off the hook"? How did you feel about it?

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal dotted lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a guide for handwriting practice. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

There is nothing we can do to make God love us more. There is nothing we can do to make God love us less.

Philip Yancey



SECTION TWO: UNDESERVED FAVOR

In Chapter 5, we discussed forgiveness. We discovered that Jesus' death paid for all our sins—past, present, and future. As the apostle Paul stated, through Christ, God

... canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us. - Colossians 2:14

In other words, through Christ, God removed all the barriers to us being adopted into his family. Here is where the confusion often begins for many Christians. Having initiated a relationship with God by faith rather than by performance, their inclination is to manage their relationship with God according to the old system—the performance system. Before they know it, they're making assumptions about God's

The dying Jesus is the evidence of God's anger toward sin; but the living Jesus is the proof of God's love and forgiveness.

 Lorenz Eifert

attitude toward them based on how well they perform. They attempt to earn what he's already given: favour. They quit thinking like family and begin performing like contracted labor. Old habits die hard.

Do you ever bargain with God? You know, "God, if you will [blank], I promise I will [blank]." Or, "God, if you will [blank], I will never [blank]." Think about that. Bargaining is based on two assumptions. First, someone has something the other party wants or needs. Second, the other party isn't about to do anybody any favours.

Do you believe you have earning potential with God? Do you believe you have something God wants or needs? Seems kind of silly when you stop to think about it. Don't feel bad. Most religious systems foster a bargaining mentality, and understandably so. That's how the world works. But remember, those who knew Jesus best made it remarkably clear . . . with God, grace is the rule, not the exception.

We're not the first generation of people to wrestle with this tension. The apostle Paul addressed this issue in several of his letters. To the Christians in the ancient city of Colossae, he wrote:

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord . . . - Colossians 2:6

That phrase alone deserves a comment. Based on our previous discussion, how does one receive Christ Jesus? *By faith.* What was it that compelled God to make salvation and forgiveness available to you in the first place? Grace. Undeserved favour. Nothing about you compelled him to. He just wanted to.

Paul continues:

. . . So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him. - Colossians 2:6

His point? Continue the way you started. Your relationship with God was initiated by faith in his gracious, undeserved offer of forgiveness. So, approach God every day from that same vantage point. Your life with Christ began in grace and it should continue in grace. Listen to how he concludes this passage:

. . . rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. - Colossians 2:7

Did you notice what he said about bargaining? No? It's not there, is it? But look again at what he says about thankfulness. The Christian life is characterised by an overflow of thankfulness. You thank someone for what he's done. You bargain with someone for what you want him to do. God doesn't need anything *from* you, so you have no leverage with him. But he wants something *for* you, so you don't need any leverage.

In his letter to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul wrote:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. - Ephesians 2:8–9

You have been saved “by grace.” God's forgiveness was, or hopefully soon will be, received as a gift. God does not view you through the filter of your performance. He views you through the filter of a father-to-child relationship. You didn't earn your way into God's good graces. You don't have to perform to stay there.

No matter how many good deeds we perform, they aren't the ticket to earning God's favor. God graces us in spite of what we do in this life, not because of.

 Bill Courtney



SECTION TWO: QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 Is the idea of a relationship with God absent of performance a new idea to you? Explain
- 2 How do bargaining-based Christainity and grace-based Christianity look different?
- 3 How would you explain the grace of God to someone else?

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The gospel declares that no matter how dutiful or prayerful we are, we can't save ourselves. What Jesus did was sufficient.

 Brennan Manning.



SECTION THREE: THE REASON FOR OBEDIENCE

Think back for a moment to a time when someone extended grace to you. Try to remember the most extreme case—an event where you received something so undeserved and unexpected you weren't even sure you could accept it. Have you ever been embarrassed by the gravity or significance of a gift or favour? If so, you can probably remember what you felt. If not, you can imagine what you would feel.

Now imagine if the person who bailed you out, forgave a loan, or gifted you unexpectedly said, "I don't want anything in return. This is a no-strings-attached gift. But if you feel the need to thank me, simply do for someone else to whatever degree you can what I've done for you." Chances are, you would look for an opportunity to do just that.

With that in mind, read how Jesus instructed his closest followers to live:

"As I have loved you, so you must love one another." - John 13:3

Therein lies the basis and motivation for all the New Testament *"thou shalt"* and *"thou shalt not"*. We are to behave out of the overflow of our gratitude for how God

through Christ behaved toward us. We don't obey to gain anything. We obey because of all we have already gained. For Jesus' followers, obedience is not a bargaining chip. It's a voluntary response of gratitude for what's already been given. Paul echoes that same sentiment when he writes:

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. - Ephesians 4:31-32

These imperatives are not presented as means to an end. Paul didn't instruct his readers to be kind and compassionate so that God would be kind and compassionate back. He commanded them to embrace these virtues because God had already exhibited those very things toward them. What comes next is even more extraordinary:

The knowledge of God is very far from the love of Him.

 **Blaise Pascal**

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. - Ephesians 5:1-2

Again, no bargaining. No begging. We are to do for others what God in Christ has already done for us. One hundred percent of the "to dos" related to the Christian faith are a response to what God has "to done" for you. As the apostle John put it:

We love because he first loved us. - 1 John 4:19

Grace is not a license to sin, but to walk in humility in the sight of God. Grace frees us to be active in the works of God. We are not tied up with how much we have done, or not done, but we learn by the grace of God to rest in His love.



Curt McComis

SECTION THREE:
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 What has characterised your exposure to or experience with Christians? WHy do you think that is?
- 2 What should a Christian characterised by love and motivated by gratitude look like?
- 3 How would your life change if you viewed obedience to God's rules as opportunities to express gratitude?

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To be grateful is to recognise the Love of God in everything He has given us - and He has given everything ... Gratitude, therefore, takes nothing for granted, is never unresponsive, is constantly awakening to new wonder ...

Thomas Merton

BOTTOM LINES FOR PART 6

- People often relate to God on a performance basis.
- With God, grace is the rule, not the exception.
- One hundred percent of the "to dos" in the Christian faith are responses to what God has "to done" for us.

I do not at all understand the mystery of grace - only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us.

● Anne Lamott

