

Session 1 The Gospel of Grace: An Overview

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

- A. Paul poured out his life as a faithful messenger of the gospel of grace. Those who understand God’s grace the best respond in the most extravagant and sacrificial way.
- 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. Paul warned us against receiving a distorted gospel message that is not based on the Scripture.
- ⁶I marvel that You are turning...to a different gospel...⁷but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert [distort] the gospel of Christ...⁸If we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. (Gal. 1:6-8)*
- C. Scripture calls us to contend for the faith of the apostles. It warns us against those who distort the grace message by making people comfortable in their compromise in the name of living in grace.
- 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)*
- D. The goals for this 12-part teaching series on grace are to equip people:
1. To be messengers of grace, who boldly and clearly speak the truth without being intimidated
 2. To live confident in God’s love that is rooted in truth and without presumption
 3. To walk in victory over sin with a vibrant spirit and ongoing fascination with Jesus
- E. Note some of the issues that will be addressed in this 12-part teaching series. My goal is to equip people to clearly and boldly answer issues like these from God’s Word.
1. Knowing the difference between our **legal position** (what Jesus did on the cross) and our **living condition** (what He requires us to do to grow in love because He went to the cross).
 2. Knowing how **resting and striving** in God’s will work together. Understanding how they relate to cultivating godly zeal, hunger for righteousness, and sacrificing everything for love.
 3. Understanding how the narrow and **difficult road** (Mt. 7:14) is the **easy yoke** (Mt. 11:30).
 4. Understanding how we walk in **joy**, yet with **godly mourning** for God’s fullness (Mt. 5:4)
 5. Knowing the difference between **guilt and shame** and **godly sorrow** (2 Cor. 7:10).
 6. Knowing how to be **confident before God**, based in truth, **without presumption**.
 7. Knowing the difference between **condemnation** and **conviction**.
 8. Knowing the difference between **having all things** in Christ and **being poor in spirit**.
 9. Seeing the difference between **setting our heart** to obey and **fully walking out** our obedience.
 10. Knowing the difference between **earning** God’s love and **responding** to it with diligence.
 11. Having security in our **free salvation**, yet being warned of **suffering loss** (1 Cor. 3:15).
 12. Understanding that while God **loves us all equally**, we experience a **different measure** of grace and varying eternal rewards, with varying capacity to experience God in the age to come, according to our response to Him in this age.

- F. In the end times, many people will not endure sound doctrine. I believe one of the greatest challenge in the Church today is exposing and resisting the distortion of the grace message.
³The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their desires, because they have itching ears...⁴they will turn their ears away from the truth. (2 Tim. 4:3-4)
- G. The foundational truth is that God loves with all His strength and empowers us to love Him with all our strength (Mk. 12:30). The Lord created us to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We distort God's grace when we do not interpret it through the lens of the first 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)
- H. Jesus defined loving God in terms of a spirit of obedience. The Spirit's ministry is to empower us to obey Jesus' commandments which He comprehensively set forth in the Sermon on the Mount.
¹⁵If you love Me, keep My commandments...¹⁶He [Father] will give you another Helper...²³If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word...We will come to him [God's presence] (Jn. 14:15-23)
- I. The grace of God teaches and empowers us to deny ungodliness and to live righteously.
¹¹The grace of God...has appeared to all men, ¹²teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly... (Titus 2:11-12)

II. THE DISTORTION OF GOD'S GRACE: TWO WAYS

- A. The gospel of grace 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. Receiving it *in vain* means receiving it in a way that neither produces *confidence* in God's love and power nor a desire to respond with *wholeheartedness*.
¹We...plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. (2 Cor. 6:1)
- B. Striving has two very different meanings in the New Testament. We are not to strive "***to earn***" God's love; we are to strive in the sense of "***putting effort***" into our relationship with God, similar to how we put effort into our relationships with family and friends, etc. Striving, in this sense, is an expression of love. When we do not strive in this way, and do not put effort into the relationship, we are not loving God with all our strength. Jesus exhorted us to strive, or exert effort, to enter the narrow gate of full love and obedience. We strive to obey God (Lk. 13:24; Acts 24:16; Heb. 12:4) in ministry (Col. 1:29), in prayer (Rom. 15:30) and for unity (Phil. 1:27).
²⁴Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many...will not [enter]... (Lk. 13:24)
⁴You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. (Heb. 12:4)
¹⁶I always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. (Acts 24:16)
¹¹Make every effort to enter that rest so that no one will fall by...disobedience. (Heb 4:11, NIV)

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. **This passage describes our new legal position in Christ.**
¹⁷If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away...all things have become new...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). Much of the misunderstanding about grace can be traced **back** to misunderstanding these truths. One third of our salvation is complete (the salvation of our spirit) the other two parts are not.
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)

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

- A. ***The legalistic believer:*** This person seeks to earn God's love and favor by his diligent obedience. We receive God's righteousness freely, fully (100%), and instantly at our new birth. Everything that could have disqualified us from entering into a new relationship with God has been removed.
¹⁶Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ...for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified...²¹For if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain. (Gal. 2:16-21)
- B. Legalism teaches us that our commitment to God earns His love, forgiveness, and commitment to us. Grace teaches us that understanding God's commitment to us is what **empowers** our commitment to Him, flowing from our gratitude for His extravagant worth and goodness.
- C. ***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.
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)

- D. Howard Pittman testified of the Lord telling him that the church in the West was like the Laodicean church (Rev. 3:14-21). Lukewarm believers often dismiss wholehearted believers by accusing them of 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.
- ¹⁶*As free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. (1 Pet. 2:16)*
- ¹³*You have been called to liberty...do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh. (Gal. 5:13)*
- E. **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.
- ¹⁴*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... (Eph. 4:14-15)*

V. COOPERATING WITH GOD'S GRACE: WALKING 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**.
- B. Romans 6 tells us how to access, or experience, the power of our legal position. This is the main chapter in Scripture that teaches on personal transformation. Paul gives us three main principles.
1. Romans 6:1-10: Our **legal position**—what we received by being united to Jesus
 2. Romans 6:11-13: How to **cooperate with grace**—the three primary principles
 3. Romans 6:14-23: Our **living condition**—what we experience as we cooperate with grace
- C. **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. We are to see ourselves as enjoyed, indwelt, empowered, and commissioned by God, with a relevant purpose.
- ¹¹*Reckon [see] yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ. (Rom. 6:11)*
- D. **Resisting Principle (Rom. 6:12-13a):** We resist sin, Satan, and sin-provoking circumstances. We must choose righteousness. It is our responsibility, by the grace of God, to deny ungodly lusts. God cannot do this for us; though He helps and empowers us when we choose to obey Him. It is an essential part of grace for us to deny lust, but it is in no way “earning His love”; rather, we are positioning ourselves to “experience more” from Him.
- ¹²*Therefore 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)*
- E. **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 loving God by taking time to cultivate intimacy with Him and by actively obeying Him.
- ¹³*But 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)*