

GRACE UPON GRACE

- A. Introduction: We are talking about who Jesus is and why He came into this world as part of a larger discussion on the importance of reading the Bible for yourself—especially the New Testament.
1. The New Testament was written by eyewitnesses of Jesus—men who walked and talked with Him, saw Him die, and then saw Him alive again. They wrote the New Testament documents to tell the world what they witnessed. II Pet 1:16; John 1:1-3
 - a. It is vitally important that we know who Jesus is (according to the eyewitnesses). Jesus' return to this world is drawing closer, and He Jesus warned that in the years preceding His return, false christs will abound and deceive many. Matt 24:4-5
 - b. I've been encouraging you to read the New Testament documents from start to finish, over and over, so that you become familiar with Jesus and are equipped to recognize false christs and false gospels.
 1. Far too many Christians believe in Jesus but don't know much about Him. As a result, they are ill-prepared for the increasing challenges in our culture as to who Jesus is and why He came.
 2. The Bible helps us know what we believe and why: All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the faith and correcting error, for re-setting the direction of a man's life and training him in good living. The scriptures are the comprehensive equipment of the man of God, and fit him fully for all branches of his work (II Tim 3:16-17, J. B. Phillips).
 2. John 1:14-17—In the last two lessons we looked at a statement that John (an eyewitness) made about the Lord. He wrote that grace and truth have come to us through Jesus. The words grace and truth help us understand who Jesus is and why He came into this world. We have more to say about grace tonight.
- B. Grace is part of God's plan for man. The Lord created human beings to become His sons and daughters through faith in Him. But all human beings are guilty of sin and fall short of God's standard. The penalty for sin is disqualification from the family and eternal separation from God. Eph 1:4-5; Rom 3:23; Rom 6:23
1. There's nothing humanity can do to fix this condition and free ourselves from the ultimate penalty of sin. Trying to be a good person, doing good works, suffering in this life—none of that pays the debt we owe.
 - a. God, motivated by love, devised a way to do for sinful humanity what we can't do for ourselves. He took on a human nature, was born into this world, and took the penalty for our sin on Himself at the Cross. John 1:14; Rom 5:6-8; Heb 2:14-15; I John 4:9-10
 1. When a sinner acknowledges Jesus as Savior and Lord, the effect of Christ's sacrificial death is applied to them and they are justified—declared not guilty and cleansed of the guilt of sin.
 2. God can then deal with them as though they never sinned, indwell them by His life and Spirit, and make them His holy, righteous son or daughter by both standing and birth. John 1:12-13
 - b. Jesus' incarnation and sacrificial death is an expression of God's grace. Heb 2:9—Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels...is now is crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death for us. Yes, by God's grace, Jesus tasted death for everyone in all the world (NLT).
 2. The word grace is used a number of ways in the New Testament. When it is used in connection with mankind's condition due to sin and God's remedy for it, grace refers to the unmerited or unearned favor of God. Favor means the kindness shown toward another (especially by a superior to an inferior).
 - a. The word emphasizes the disposition of the one expressing grace. Grace is not given because of something in the one who receives it, but because of the character of the one who expresses it.
 - b. God chose to deal with mankind's sin by His grace through faith. Grace is an expression of God's love. Some translations translate the Greek word (*charis*) as loving kindness or gracious kindness.
 1. Eph 2:8-9—God saved you by his special favor (grace) when you believed, and you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast (NLT).
 2. The essence of grace is that God is gracious. We can't earn or deserve our salvation by our

performance. We can only believe what He in His love has provided, and then all the glory and credit goes to Him. We're saved by His grace through our faith. (The word believe and faith each come from the same Greek word. Believe is a verb; faith is a noun.)

- c. Once saved (or justified) many Christians, who understand that their initial salvation comes through grace, begin to relate to God through their works in an effort to earn His help and blessing.
 1. Let's clearly define works. Works is anything you do that earns you something—good or bad. Note what Paul wrote in the middle of explaining that we are saved by grace through faith.
 2. Rom 4:4-5—When people work, their wages are not a gift. Workers earn what they receive. But people are declared righteous because of their faith, not because of their works (NLT).
 3. Many sincere people have trouble accepting the idea that God deals with us in grace for several reasons.
 - a. Our fallen flesh is naturally self-focused. Fallen flesh doesn't want to be beholden to anyone and prefers to earn and deserve because the credit goes to us. John referred to this trait as “the pride of life [assurance in one's own resources or in the stability of earthy things]” (I John 2:19, Amp).
 - b. Additionally, in this fallen world, love is often connected to performance. When we're children adults tell kids: If you're bad, mommy won't love you; if you're good, you'll get a cookie; if you disobey Jesus He won't love you; etc. Consequently many grow up with a performance mentality.
 1. How do you know if you relate to God through your works? If you wrestle with thoughts like the ones that follow the root issue is likely that you think you must earn and deserve God's help.
 2. God won't answer my prayer because I don't read the Bible as often as I should or because I have a hard time controlling my temper (in other words, I don't deserve His help). Or, I cut the grass at the church, work in Sunday School, always put money in the collection plate, and God still hasn't fixed my situation (in other words, I deserve His help).
 - c. In our culture, value and worth are connected to achievement and performance. And many of us grew up thinking that love is earned and our value comes from what we do rather than who we are.
 1. But true value and worth come from what someone is willing to pay for an item. One man's junk is another man's treasure. (Garage sales are proof of that!)
 2. Our value comes from God's assessment of our worth—Almighty God “paid for you with the precious lifeblood of Christ the sinless, spotless Lamb of God” (I Pet 1:18-19, NLT).
 - d. Matt 8:5-13—Consider this vivid illustration of a man who understood that it's not about our deservingness, but about God's goodness.
 1. A Roman centurion with a grievously ill servant approached Jesus for help. Because Jesus, in His earth ministry, was sent first to the Israelites, the idol worshipping centurion had no standing with or ground to approach Jesus, but he asked for help. I don't deserve it but help me anyway.
 2. Something in Jesus' character convinced the man that Jesus would help him anyway. He realized: It's not dependent on me and my deservingness, but on Jesus and His goodness.
- C. Even after we are restored to God's family through faith in Christ, it's still about grace. Jesus is full of grace, and out of His fullness we have all received grace for grace. John 1:14-16
1. Full and fullness are forms of the same word in the Greek. It means full, abounding. Jesus is full of grace—overflowing with tender mercy (John 1:14, TPT). There's more than enough grace to go around.
 - a. The phrase grace for grace is literally means grace upon grace. v16—We have all received one blessing after another. God's grace is not limited (NIrV); We have all benefitted from the rich blessings he has brought to us—one gracious blessing after another (NLT).
 - b. Everything we receive from God both before and after we are saved from sin is a grace, an expression of grace. Healing, provision, protection, deliverance, strength are all expressions of God's grace, His unearned loving kindness, loving favor.
 2. Consider an example. In II Cor 12:7-9 Paul wrote that he asked God to remove a thorn in the flesh, and

God's answer was: My grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in weakness.

- a. Before we talk about grace, we need to clear up some common misunderstandings of this incident. Some mistakenly say that God gave Paul a thorn in the flesh (possibly an eye disease) to keep him humble, and then refused to remove it (heal Paul). The passage says nothing like that.
 1. Paul identified the thorn as a messenger (angelic being) from Satan who was sent to harass him. When we read about Paul's missionary journeys in the Book of Acts, we see that everywhere he went unbelievers stirred up mobs that attacked him and or tried to drive him out of town,
 2. The devil wasn't trying to make Paul more Christlike through humbling him. He attempted to stop the gospel from advancing by disrupting Paul's ministry so as to weaken his effectiveness.
 3. When Paul asked the Lord to remove the devil's messenger, he was asking God to do something that He has not promised to do yet—remove the devil and demons from contact with humanity and stop the trouble they cause.
 - b. God answered Paul's prayer by informing him that My grace is sufficient (enough) for you. God defined grace as His strength. Grace (in the form of strength to endure) is what Paul needed to help him deal with the chaos caused by the thorn in the flesh.
 1. God told Paul: My strength is made perfect in weakness. Perfect means to make perfect in the sense of bringing to a state of completion or fulfillment. In other words, God said: I can do what you can't. Your weakness is an opportunity for My power to be displayed.
 2. v9—My gracious favor is all you need. My power works best in your weakness (NLT); My grace is always more than enough for you; and my power finds its full expression through your weakness (TPT).
 - c. Paul learned his lesson. Shortly before he was executed for his faith in Christ he wrote these words to Timothy, his son in the faith: II Tim 2:1—So, my son, be strong in the grace that Christ Jesus gives (J.B. Phillips); be strong—strengthened inwardly—in the grace (spiritual blessing) that is [to be found only] in Christ Jesus (Amp).
 3. God relates to us by His grace through our faith. Grace and faith are relational. Grace gives, faith receives. When I receive a gift, the point is not what I have to do to get the gift. The point is that someone has freely given it to me.
 - a. For many, faith has become a technique that we must employ to get something from God. But God works in our lives by His grace through faith, not our efforts to manipulate, earn, or deserve.
 - b. Faith (and believe) come from a word that means persuasion. Faith in God is persuasion, belief, or trust in Him—His goodness, truthfulness, reliability and faithfulness.
 - c. Faith is not something that we conjure up on our own. Faith or trust is the response of our heart to the Lord when we see Him as truly is. Jesus is the source of our faith. Heb 12:2
 1. The Living Word, Jesus, is revealed to us in and through the written Word, the Bible. Faith comes to us through the Word of God because it reveals God to us. Rom 10:17
 2. Ps 9:10—For everyone who knows your wonderful name keeps putting their trust in you. They can count on you for help no matter what. O Lord, you will never, no never, neglect those who come to you (TPT).
- D. We now stand in God's grace—His favor expressed toward us. Rom 5:2—Through faith in Jesus we have received God's grace. In that grace we stand (NIrV). John 1:16—Indeed, everyone of us has shared in his riches—there is a grace in our lives because of his grace (John 1:16, J.B. Phillips).
1. Sadly, people often misunderstand God's grace and favor to mean there will be no more troubles in our lives. And, any problems that do come our way will be quickly resolved. Consider these thoughts.
 - a. There's no such thing as a problem-free life in this fallen world. Jesus said that in this world we'll have tribulation, moths and rust corrupt, and thieves break through and steal. John 16:33; Matt 6:19

1. You must understand that troubles and trials do not come not from God. They are part of life in a sin damaged world. God is good and good means good. Jesus (God Incarnate) shows us what God is like. If Jesus didn't do it, then God doesn't do it. (For a detailed discussion of God's character revealed in Jesus, read my book: *God Is Good And Good Means Good*).
 2. You can't fully trust (have faith in) someone you think has wronged you in some way. The eyewitness accounts of Jesus in the New Testament will persuade you that God is truly good.
 - b. Unfortunately, a lot of preaching and teaching over the past several decades has left people with the idea that if I do my part (say the right words, pray the right prayers, give enough money, work in the church) God will give me what I want. That's not grace; it's works. God asks us to believe what He says and trust Him and His Word. (You can't do this if you don't know what He says.)
 2. For many of us, the grace we want from God is for Him to fix our circumstances and solve our problems. And we are disappointed—and even get mad at God—when that doesn't happen.
 - a. The Bible is clear that God's primary goal is not to make this life the highlight of our existence. We are only passing through this world as it is in its present sin damaged condition.
 1. God's primary goal is to bring people to saving knowledge of Jesus so they can be part of His family and have life after this life. When Jesus comes again, the earth will be cleansed of all corruption and death and restored to a fit forever home for God's family. Rev 21-22
 2. Because of God's grace expressed through the Cross of Christ we have a hope and a future that will outlast this life. All loss and pain is temporary. Restoration awaits us in the life to come.
 - b. God is able to use the harsh realities of life in a fallen world and cause them to serve His ultimate purpose for a family on this earth, when life will finally be all that it was meant to be.
 1. All things work together for good to those who are called according to His purpose; His purpose is a family. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn with many brothers and sisters (Rom 8:28-29, NLT).
 2. He gave us this purpose before the world began: (He) saved us and chose us to live a holy life. He did this not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan long before the world began—to show his love and kindness (grace) to us through Christ Jesus (II Tim 1:9, NLT).
 3. This is why understanding the big picture (God's overall plan) is so important. In the midst of challenging circumstances, instead of getting mad at God, we can be grateful that He is able to use troubles and cause them to serve His plan for a family. He can bring good out of the worst circumstances and, by His grace, He will get us through until He gets us out.
 - c. What does this look like in the real world? What if you were the men who were with Jesus the night He was arrested and turned over to be crucified? Your reaction might be: We've got to stop this! Lord, make it stop!
 1. This looked like the worst thing that could happen. If it were stopped, it may have brought temporary relief, but at the cost of long term eternal results—no salvation for humanity.
 2. The grace we need in the midst of most of life's challenges is hope and peace of mind in the midst of it. His grace gives us strength and joy that sustains us.
- E. Conclusion: This kind of confidence and trust in God's present and future help, available through His grace, comes from looking at Jesus, the source of faith, as He is revealed in and through the pages of the Bible.
1. Regular Bible reading will help you know what God has and hasn't promised to do for us in this life. It will give you an eternal perspective which lightens the load of this life. It will work in you and reveal attitudes and thought patterns that need to change so that you can grow in faith and trust in God's grace.
 2. Note what Peter, another eyewitness of Jesus wrote: My purpose in writing is to assure you that the grace of God is with you no matter what happens (I Pet 5:12, NLT). Much more next week!!