

# Grace

REVIEW: Last week we began a series on grace. Grace is a big topic to take on, and quite frankly, one that we could talk about every Sunday for the rest of our lives and still have unanswered questions about. To be honest, we will only scratch the surface of grace. My hope is that this will whet your appetite for studying and reading about grace on your own.

Last week we looked at the topic of grace from a biblical perspective. But more than that, we looked at it from a word study perspective. I point this out because studying specific words from scripture can be a huge help in understanding the concepts we often think we know. Grace is one of those concepts we use a lot but may not understand the deeper meaning of it without digging deeper. Another example might be the biblical idea of joy, or hope. So, in telling you this, I want you to understand that this is a way of studying Biblical concepts on your own. There are plenty of great word study resources at the Christian bookstore, not to mention books written specifically on different biblical themes.

INTRO: This week we look at grace once again. This time we look at it from a different vantage point. This week we look at grace from the theological perspective.

- I. When it comes to the theological perspective of grace, there are two main, broad categories in which theologians refer to grace
  - A. Before I tell you the categories, let me remind you of what only makes sense - especially after looking at the words for grace last week
    1. Grace by its very nature originates from God
    2. It is not through us, because of us, by us, or really have anything to do with us - other than we are the recipients of God's grace
    3. Grace originates with God
      - a) "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation."
      - b) Grace is all about God giving to us
  - B. The first category is "common grace"
    1. The definition is grace that is common to all mankind
      - a) Easy enough to understand
      - b) It does not matter who you are, whether you have a relationship with God or not, these are forms of grace that God gives to all mankind
    2. One of the ways in which we see this common grace from God, scripture has already showed us - Matthew 5:43-48
      - a) Now the context of this is a great lesson in itself

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- b) Jesus is telling the people that they should not just care for those that are easy to love, but even their enemies
  - (1) They should pray for their enemies
  - (2) If they only stick with the people that are easy to love, only greeting “their kind,” they are no better than the tax collectors or the pagans
  - (3) But right in the middle there, God uses Himself as the example
    - (a) God says that He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, the rain to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous
    - (b) That is an example that God has given us of common grace
    - (c) The reason He gave the example was to show that we should be displaying common grace to others as well
  - (4) And think of this, God is being gracious to those that are in rebellion against Him
    - (a) We think when we have enemies it is bad
    - (b) God is the good, loving God, and He is being spurned by people, yet He still gives graciously without respect to who these folks are
- 3. Another way we see common grace is through God’s divine control over human society
  - a) We live in a time after the fall of man (by the way that would be a fall from grace), and sin entered the world
  - b) Without God’s hand intervening, humanity would implode on itself
  - c) The fact that the world enjoys some measure of harmony in society is simply the goodness of God
  - d) In fact, Paul teaches us that government is ordained by God for justice and peace
    - (1) Resisting the government is resisting the ordinance of God
    - (2) Unless the government is forcing you to do something against God’s will
    - (3) Secular rulers are even called in the Bible, servants of God
- 4. Another form of common grace is that man has a conscience
  - a) We have all been given a conscience by God
    - (1) However, some may have seared that conscience to where its sense of right and wrong is not in line with God’s
    - (2) Everyone has one, and is able to understand that they are accountable to others - and eventually accountable to God Himself
- 5. The fact that “the heavens declare the glories of God” is another common grace

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- a) Mankind is able to understand something of who God is simply by the observable universe
  - b) That is a common grace to all of us
    - (1) The fact we can even see the stars and our position in the universe is a common grace
      - (a) We are in a unique area of the Milky Way galaxy where we can see the stars and universe unobstructed
      - (b) Other places are well blocked but radiations, gases, and other cosmic anomalies
    - (2) The fact that our minds function the way they do to ask the questions of where do I come from, why am I here, how does this work, and how does all of this fit together is all a common grace of God - designed to lead people to Himself
6. Another form of common grace is medical and even technological advancements
- a) If you are here today because you were under a doctor's care that saved your life, please raise your hand
    - (1) It might have been cancer that people faced
    - (2) It might have been heart disease
    - (3) It might have been an accident
    - (4) But the simple fact that we have advanced as far as we have is a common grace to all mankind that we understand what we understand today
      - (a) Yes we could argue about affordability of healthcare
      - (b) But that is not for this platform to get into
  - b) The fact that we are not still living in caves and have the ability to build houses is a common grace
  - c) Any advancement that society makes that improves the life of society is a common grace from God
    - (1) Whether those common graces are always shared might just go back to the conscience and if it is attuned to God or not
    - (2) Just realize that because you can argue that greed took over in the human heart, does not mean that those things are not common graces from God that are available to all - availability may be hindered by our sinful condition
- C. The other broad category of grace is special grace
- 1. Special grace is the grace by which God redeems us, sanctifies us, and eventually glorifies us
    - a) Remember, redemption is the beginning of our new life in Christ
    - b) Sanctification is the process of life of becoming more like Christ

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- c) Glorification is when we finally reach heaven and receive the rewards of our faith
  - d) This process is graphically illustrated in the life of Paul
    - (1) Paul was saved out of being a persecutor of the church and God's people into being an apostle of apostles
    - (2) And it was a transformative process
      - (a) 1 Corinthians 15:10
    - (3) Eventually, Paul became glorified, like we all will, as we translate from this life into the next life
2. Now under the heading of special grace there are some subheadings - some of which are debated by theologians, but I cover them now for the sake of being thorough
- a) Prevenient grace is a fancy term that simply means that grace came first to us
    - (1) In other words, God takes the initiative toward man, not the other way around
      - (a) Psalm 14:1-3
      - (b) Romans 3:10-12
    - (2) Yet it is only faith that will please God
      - (a) Hebrews 11:6
    - (3) So here we are off in left field searching for something but obviously not God and we need to have faith - so what is the solution?
      - (a) Romans 5:6-8
      - (b) 1 John 4:10,19
    - (4) This is one that we talk about many times around here, and many of us pay lip service to it, but we need to come to terms with it
      - (a) We would never have found God if God did not first come to us
      - (b) Can God be working on our hearts through common grace?
        - i) Certainly
        - ii) I have heard and read multiple stories of sciencey intellectuals coming to Christ and it all started with an observation of nature
          - (1) But who reached out for whom first in that scenario?
          - (2) God reached for him - through common grace - and I'm sure by removing blinders from his eyes to see the same things he was looking at, just with a mind more attuned to God

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- (c) I say we often pay lip service because many of us still feel like we found God
  - i) I struggle with that sometimes
    - (1) I'm smart enough to recognize the truth
    - (2) I have a strong mind for logic and reasoning so I could have figured it out
      - (a) But Keith, who gave you that mind?
      - (b) Who invented the principles of logic that you follow?
  - ii) I think all of us in our pride slip into the idea that we found God
  - iii) The fact is that He found us
- (d) Paul kind of ends the argument when he tells the Ephesians that they were dead in their sins
  - i) How does a human, dead in their sins, impress a living holy God?
  - ii) How does a spiritually dead person do anything spiritually?
  - iii) Ephesians 2:4-9
- (e) That is prevenient grace
- b) The second subheading is called efficacious grace
  - (1) A fancy word meaning effective
  - (2) This one is simple to understand - if God has set His grace upon a purpose, that purpose will happen
  - (3) This one comes more out of the nature of God that His will and purposes cannot be thwarted
    - (a) John 6:35-39
      - i) God's will is that Jesus will receive all of those the Father set out for Him to receive
    - (b) John 10:27-28
      - i) I love these verses
      - ii) We are secure in Jesus hands
      - iii) But if that is not enough for us, "My Father, who is greater than all...NO ONE can snatch them from my Father's hands"
  - (4) The point is this, that redemption has been 100% accomplished for us through Christ
    - (a) Redemption was bought and paid for in Jesus
    - (b) The fact that the grace of God in Jesus is efficacious (effective), set to accomplish redemption now and forevermore,

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should be a source of incredible confidence and security for us as believers

c) The third subheading goes hand in hand with the last one, but is debated by theologians

(1) Irresistible grace - which is grace that cannot be rejected

(a) As it goes, if God's grace, when set out for a purpose cannot be thwarted and will be effective, then logically grace cannot be resisted

(b) I'll be honest with you, the name of this one rubs me the wrong way

i) It sounds as if God is forcing Himself on humanity

ii) However, the logic is undeniable

(1) If God's plan can be overturned by humanity than He is not God - and not in control

(2) So it would stand to reason that God's grace could not be resisted

(2) When I view this one, I wonder if it is not a case where God comes at the right time, in the right way to people so that the grace that He extends is so overwhelmingly wonderful, they do not want to resist

(a) I have never heard of anyone feeling forced into a relationship with God

i) Other than by parents or pushy people

(b) The reality is that forced relationship is akin to rape - and God is no rapist

(c) So I would imagine that God's grace becomes so overwhelming that they want to give themselves to God

d) The final subheading is sufficient grace

(1) Coming from the goodness of God, it is grace that sustains

(a) From redemption

(b) Through this life of sanctification

(c) All the way to glorification

(2) We understand this area best because of the famous passage from Paul

(a) 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

(b) Paul is battling this weakness in this life which is never fully defined

(c) He cries out to God for help, and God replies that His grace is sufficient

(d) To which Paul then exalts His weakness because he knows that it is the conduit for God's grace

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II. The fact that we needed special grace begs the question of why we needed special grace

A. The answer is not difficult to understand - sin

B. We were created in the image of God

1. We were also created with a state of shalom

a) Now if I say shalom to you, you understand that I mean...(peace)

b) However, the word is actually deeper than that

(1) Shalom was a fullness of peace

(2) The biblical writers would use the word to describe the world of universal peace, safety, justice, order, and wholeness that God intended

2. In one horrific day, the image of God in humanity and the shalom of God in the world were violated

a) Adam and Eve, rather than trusting God's perfect plan, chose their own path

b) This brought a curse on all of humanity and the world as a whole

c) Justin Holcomb puts it best: "When sin is understood as an intrusion upon God's original plan for peace, it helps us see the biblical description of redemption as an intrusion of grace into disgrace, or light into the darkness of sin, or peace into disorder and violence."

C. So the image became marred, and God's desire that we reflect Him was broken because God allowed us the choice to follow Him and we refused

D. The peace that the world should have known was wrecked as well

E. It is into this that God stepped to deliver us, and offer us grace when we were rebelling against Him

III. I want to take this one step further

A. It is one thing to realize what Adam and Eve did, and how sin became part of the reality of life

1. It is one thing to realize the affects it had on the image that God proudly placed upon us, and how that image is incapable of reflecting Him without His help

2. It is one thing to realize that the peace the world would have known was taken away because of Adam and Eve's choices

B. It is a very different thing to look headlong at one's self and realize that we are no better

1. We live in a society that conditions us to believe that we are not bad people, and we do good things

2. But the reality is we are sinners

a) If we had been in that garden we would have fared no better

(1) I think we sometimes get insulted at that idea

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(2)“Well you don’t really know me Pastor! I hate apples, therefore I would not have been tempted!”

(a)Seriously!

(b)There are so many things wrong with that statement we don’t have time to pick it apart

b)If God had given us the choice to follow Him, or follow our own way, we too would have chosen our own way

3. More than just saying we are sinners, we need to come to grips with the fact that that we sin

a) Some people are willing to admit they are sinners

b) Yet when you call them on sin, they make excuses

c) We need to stop the excuse mill, and own up to the things we do that displease God

(1)He knows it

(2)We know it, even if we don’t want to admit it

C. You see, the special grace of God was needed

1. Not just because our spiritual parents sinned and ushered sin into the world

2. We need God’s special grace because we sinned

a) If we had been in the garden, we would have ruined it for mankind

b) The fact is, we prove every day that we would choose our own path over God’s

c) We prove every day why God needed to pour out His special grace in Jesus Christ

d) We prove every day why God’s patient display of grace, reaching to us is an ever present need in our life

CONCLUSION: This gives you a better idea of the nuances of God’s grace to us. Some grace is general and for all mankind, and then that is that special grace that I trust each of us has experienced personally. If you have not experienced that special grace, today can be your day.

Next week, we have the Community Sunday. The following week, Mike Marvin will be here to continue our series on grace by taking you to a wonderful NT example of grace.