

How Shall We Then Live: Part 5

The Stabilizing Principle of Grace

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; (Eph. 2:8)

We are going through a societal upheaval that is political, social, technological, religious, and cultural.

It is being said that the way humanity understands authority, knowledge, selfhood, and reality are being forever transformed.

Know what to do, where to stand, where to sit, what to support, and what not to support, is becoming increasingly more complex.

In fact, the society is changing so much that today's children will not be able to fully understand, or comprehend what life was like before the 21st century.

As we have been looking at for the last few weeks ... something of this magnitude has happened about every 500 years.

... and every time this happens it has been pretty traumatic.

However, we need to remember that none of these "upheavals" has ever been able to destroy Christianity ... in fact the opposite is true.

- Every time Christianity has emerged more vibrant than it was before the upheaval.
- Each time the thinking of the church became clearer and less stagnant.
- Every time the Christian faith spread even further.

There is no better example of this than the protestant reformation 500 years ago:

- It prompted the birth to new churches all over Europe,
- It drove exploration of the new world (the Americas) as a place to spread Christianity.

- And the Protestant Reformation ultimately gave way to what we now know as the modern mission movement.

This is exactly what needs to happen now.

As God's church and God's people, we do not have the luxury to plod onward with blinders cursing the confusion...

... we must fight the good fight for a better day.

Rather than follow the lead of secular culture we must meet these new challenges with God's help ...

... we must put off and put on whatever the Lord asks of us ... do what is necessary to spiritually thrive.

The Protestant Reformation of the 1500's produced four distinct groups of Christians who believed in salvation by grace through faith alone.

Lutherans, Calvinists, Anglicans and Baptists

Most of the first members of these groups came out the Roman Catholic church ... and not just for theological reasons ...

... in fact, the common Christian in those days did not own a Bible, and most of them had little to no understanding of Biblical doctrine or theology.

... their reasons for protesting against the Roman Catholic church had more to do with the moral corruption of church leaders as well as the political oppression of church and secular rulers.

Simply put, the Reformation was as much a political and economic revolt as it was a theological one.

- Feudalism had collapsed
- The perpetual reoccurrence of the black plague had killed off as much as a third of the population.

- ... this alone broke family ties and destabilized many communities severing bonds that had been in existence for centuries.
- One consequence was that much of the population was now moving from their native country settings into the cities.

These unstable conditions were even further exacerbated as the people suffered under kings, bishops, and princes who ruled the people by the ever-changing whims of abusive popes.

- Local authorities who did not align with the Papacy were overthrown and their treasures were pillaged and taken to Rome to finance a variety of military ventures.
- The positions of authority in the church were often auctioned off to the highest bidder ... or the most politically expedient personality.
- ... Parishes and Churches were pastored by those people who could afford to buy them.
- Indulgences were sold to raise money to build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.
- Many of the Popes were known to be immoral and cruel ...

... In light of these abuses and others ... the people began to question the theology the church had taught for centuries.

... particularly what the church had been teaching about Grace.

The issue of the role of faith in salvation differs quite drastically from church to church ...

... But every Christian denomination (Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox) claims to believe that salvation is by grace alone.

What really distinguishes one group from another is how grace is understood.

Is grace something the “church “possesses” that it can give/administer to people?

Back during our Sunday Evening teaching series last fall we talked about the churches descent into Sacerdotalism.

... the belief that priest stood above the people and the church's hierarchy saw itself as the purveyor of Grace.

... in fact, there were five common "means of grace" that the RC claimed to have the exclusive rights of for distribution.

- *Baptism*
- *Confirmation*
- *Eucharist*
- *Confession*
- *Last Rites*

Is grace simply God's tendency to overlook our sin, in the way that an overindulgent parent would overlook a disobedient child?

It must be established at the beginning that God does not turn a blind eye to humanity's rebellion ...

God sees our rebellion, our sin, our wickedness ... and he meets it head-on in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

To talk about grace is to talk about Jesus.

The Bible uses the word "grace" over 150 times.

In fact, "grace" not just the word, but the very concept of grace permeates the entirety of the Word of God.

In the stories of the Old Testament and the teachings of the New Testament we see God's **common** grace be showing to all humanity as God restrains evil and allows humanity to flourish, grow and develop.

... And beyond that we can also see God's **special** grace in His saving everyone who sees and believes in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

... And, God doesn't just save us from our sins ... He matures us in the faith and uses us to bring glory to His name while we are here on earth.

Early in the Bible we begin to read that God is "gracious."

Why does the Bible first say it this way?

Because grace is not an attribute of God's nature in the same way that love, holiness, righteousness and purity is.

Love, holiness, righteousness, purity etc ... all exist within the social framework of the trinity.

But in order for God to be gracious then he must be responding to something less than Himself, outside Himself.

In other words grace is how God (because of who He is) has responded to our sin.

Because He is holy, he cannot simply overlook our sin and pretend it doesn't exist.

But, because He is love, he cannot simply turn a blind eye.

Therefore grace ... God is gracious.

This action on God's part toward us is motivated by His love and shaped by His holiness,

Simply put: if the world did not exist and humanity had never fallen, God could not be said to be gracious.

God's grace exists because of our desperate need!

Let's begin by looking at two passages of scripture.

(Heb. 2:14-18) ¹⁴ Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,¹⁵ and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.¹⁶ For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives

help to the descendant of Abraham.¹⁷ Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.¹⁸ For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

1. The only mediator of grace is Jesus

- that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death
- might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery
- He had to be made like us so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest
- He had to be made like us so that he could make propitiation for our sins
- Because of this He is able to come to our aid

Grace is not merely some clinical cure... Grace is the loving heart of God.

Grace is God's sympathy for our struggle.

Yes, Athanasius and Anselm were both correct when they wrote that Jesus had to take on flesh because humanity had sinned in the flesh...

... but the writer of Hebrews makes it clear that it is much more than this

... Christ needed to be a sympathetic high priest, so He took on flesh to know what we know in the same way we know it.

... Jesus now knows from a human perspective of what it is like to be human.

THIS MEANS that we can be confident that we are represented before the Heavenly Father by someone who know and understands ...

... by someone who has shared in our human existence

... someone who intimately understands what it means to live in a world of contradiction and pain.

To have Christ as our sympathetic high priest is the ultimate grace ...

... it shows us that God means to relate to us, not merely as creator-god, but as a struggler alongside of us.

When we pray ... when we call out to Jesus, he doesn't just see our need ... he knows what we feel and how we feel it.

However, we need to remember two things ...

... first, that prayer is not a conversation between equals.

... second that God will hear us regardless of who we are or what we have done.

Throughout the Bible prayer takes the form of desperate people calling out to God and asking Him to be the gracious God He has promised to be.

In 1215 at the 4th Lateran council the Pope declared that all Christians were obligated to confess their sins to a priest in order to be forgiven and for 300 years that was the practice of the church.

Look at what the reformer John Wycliffe had to say about this practice.

This doctrine is a manifold blasphemy against Christ, inasmuch as the pope is extolled above his humanity—pretensions which, according to the declarations of the apostle, agree with the character of Antichrist;...No one can believe that a man may not be saved without confession to a human priest for, otherwise, all the dead from Christ's ascension to the time of Innocent III are lost—a horrible thing to believe. —John Wycliffe

The new religion of “wokeness” says that we must atone for the sins of previous generations and keep atoning ...

The New York Post recently ran an article entitled: **Watch out for “Coerced fearful kneeling in fealty,” being demanded by the high priests of the left.**

The article was responding to an incident involving a Georgia State Trooper, named O’Neal Saddler ... who when the protestors demanded that he kneel responded:

“I was supposed to be out of town this weekend with my wife,” O’Neal explained. “I took off today, this weekend, but I’m out here to make sure y’all are safe. ... I have much respect, but I only kneel for one person: God, God, God.” –O’Neal Saddler

Whether it’s a church, political movement, or even a fraternal order ...

... We do not bow or pray to anyone but Jesus because He alone is the mediator of grace.

(Heb. 7:24-28)²⁴ but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently.²⁵ Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.²⁶ For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens;²⁷ who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.²⁸ For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.

2. The hope of grace is transformation

- Organizations, nations, and movements come and go but Jesus continues forever
- Human priests and preachers die, Jesus is permanent the eternal high priest
- No church can save, but Jesus can save everyone who draws near
- What Jesus did on Calvary will never have to be done again

I love the phrase in verse 25, *“He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him.”*

At the time of the reformation the Roman Catholic church declared that it had the power to let people, or not let people, go to heaven.

... In fact, the church declared their “ownership” of heaven would allow them to get somebody out of hell ... if you would give them enough money.

Every false religion claims to be the doorkeeper to eternal bliss.

I came across this question yesterday on a Baptist group FB page: *“If someone speaks hateful and mean, or is devise, does Jesus love them?”*

I don’t normally respond to those things but since the “love of Jesus” was in question I did ...

... simply to say. *“The love of Jesus is not dependent upon our behavior, it is only dependent upon the character of God and God is love.”*

That was my entire response and I went about my work... a couple hours later I went to my computer and saw that I had 8 responses to my comment.

I was called a universalist, racist, idiot, unloving ... oh yeah ... and a dinosaur?

The mentality of “cancel culture” is that if you have ever said or done anything that is perceived as wrong by the culture police, then that is who you are, that is who you will always be, and you should be punished.

... That is the opposite of what GRACE says.

Now hold it ... I’m not saying that my sins aren’t horrible ... they are.

... I’m not excusing my sin.

All Sin is violent, lethal rebellion against God; but biblical grace is God’s violent, raw, and bloody response in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for us.

Grace says that we are the undeserving recipients of God’s transformative favor.

No one but God has a monopoly on grace and He means to use it for our good and His glory.

Back in 1994 the band **The Kinks** released a song entitled “Nobody’s Fool.”

“Nobody pleads for me, nobody bleeds for me, I’m nobody’s fool and I’m nobody’s friend.”

That is simply not true for the child of God.

We can know by grace that we are never alone, that Jesus has not only bled for us but he pleads for us ...

... and we know that because of Grace what we were is not who we are, or who we are going to be.

For no other reason but God.

The hope of grace is that we will all be made better because of what someone else has done.

(Heb. 4:14-16)¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.¹⁶ Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

- Let us hold fast our confession
- Let us draw near with confidence

The grace of God here is not simply the fact that God set forth his own Son to be our sacrifice...

... It is that even now Jesus continues to intercede for us on the basis of his sacrifice

God is breathtaking and awesome in his absolute holiness ... and yet because of His grace we are urged to approach Him with confidence.

Grace is not merely the unmerited favor of God ... it is the greatest act of bringing creator and creation in to fellowship and relationship.

(Heb. 10:19-22)¹⁹ Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God,²² let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

- Let have confidence to enter into the holy place

- Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith
- Let us have our hearts sprinkled clean

I hope you noticed the many times today that we saw the phrase “let us” and the pronoun “we” used in all these passages.

The writer of Hebrews wants us to understand that the ultimate blessing of grace is that we live in it together ...

3. The platform of grace is community

(Heb. 10:24-25) And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Five Characteristics of a Grace Alone Church

- Take sin seriously
- Love Christ supremely
- We pray faithfully and confidently
- We are steadfast and certain in Christ the hope of our salvation
- We do this is together as a church