



Lesson 1

RG and WHY STUDY GRACE?

NEWTON'S CRADLE AND GOD'S Story

"Newton's cradle, named after Sir Isaac Newton, is a device that demonstrates conservation of momentum and energy using a series of swinging spheres. When one on the end is lifted and released, it strikes the stationary spheres; a force is transmitted through the stationary spheres and pushes the last one upward. If one ball is pulled away and is let to fall, it strikes the first ball in the series and comes to nearly a dead stop. The ball on the opposite side acquires most of the velocity and almost instantly swings in an arc almost as high as the release height of the last ball. This shows that the final ball receives most of the energy and momentum that was in the first ball. The impact produces a compression wave that propagates through the intermediate balls."¹

BASIC IDEAS:

1. In the absence of God's condescending and unconditional actions toward humanity, there would be no salvation from sin and death and for joy and glory.
2. Creation by a Creator assumes and demands grace.
3. Grace existed before the presence of sin and the fall.
4. All of Creation and Humanity are recipients of God's gracious condescension to act favorably toward His creation.

In shadow form, this illustrates for us the centerpiece of the Gospel for the Christian life. Who Jesus is in His person and work is the red ball. Everything that follows carries the energy of that first strike. Moreover, everything will come back to that first action. We believe the Bible teaches a single *Story* and at the center of this *Story* is JESUS. Everything from start to finish and everything in between is from the gospel, sustained by the gospel, and is the gospel. FOR JESUS IS THE GOSPEL!

Our intent in studying this subject is to show the centrality of the gospel in all the various pieces and stories making up the biblical *Story*. Unfortunately, it is possible to look at various themes and topics that are Bible based and not see how the gospel produces and sustains the parts. Because of this neglect, subjects that are consequences of one's relationship to God because of

the gospel become causes forming the basis of our relationship to God. This is unfortunate. If we do not see the fruit as fruit, it becomes the root and instead of freedom and life, there is bondage and death. Thus, the intent of this study is to celebrate the gospel and the fruit it produces in the life of God's people. With this in mind, let us begin.

AN INTRODUCTION

Charles Ryrie opens his work, *The Grace of God*, with the following thought. "Christianity is distinct from all other religions because it is a message of grace. Jesus Christ is the supreme revelation of God's grace; salvation is by grace; and grace governs and empowers Christian living. Without grace Christianity is nothing."² **In all other religions, the goal is something attained by the individual. Only in Christianity is the goal gifted.** Only in Christianity does the master take the place of the servant, the king its subjects, and the innocent in place of the guilty.

Most all world religions speak of grace, but none is so thoroughly saturated by grace, as is Christianity. All world religions are "auto-soteric" [self-saving] systems. All of them depend on the individual to do their part *before* God will do His. Only Christianity leans fully in the work of another. To eliminate grace from the *Story* is to end the *Story*. In light of our initial thought, we can properly ask, "What is grace?" Grace lives in the arena of need and inability. If there were no deficiency or need, there would be no necessity for grace.

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In light of our initial thought, we can properly ask, "What is grace?"

Jerry Bridges defines grace as follows: "Grace is God's **free** and **unmerited** favor shown to guilty sinners who deserve only judgment. It is the love of God shown to the unlovely. It is God reaching downward to people who are in rebellion against Him."³

Thus, in the absence of God's condescending and unconditional actions toward humanity, there would be no salvation from sin and death and no joy nor glory. Therefore, the study of grace is vital.

- Q1 - What do you believe are the prominent characteristics in defining grace?
- Q2 - What makes Christianity different than all other world religions?

I. THE BIBLE AS STORY

In order to answer the question, it is necessary to consider the Bible as a whole. “Fundamentally, it is just one book written by one author with one main subject.”⁴ The Bible is a *Story*. Identifying it as a story does not mean it’s a fairytale. It is a true and accurate *Story* of a Creator who acts, an Author who writes, a King who rules, and a Hero who wins. It contains villains, wars, defeat, and victory. Inside the biblical *Story* there are six acts or ideas unfolding the person and purpose of God. It will be God’s person and purpose that provide the subject matter or theme of the *Story*. They are as follows.

- Act 1 - **God** - “In the Beginning **God**” (Gen. 1:1 [The Power of God – Pt. 1])
- Act 2 - **Creation** - “In the Beginning God **created**” (Gen. 1:1; Col. 1:15-17; 1 Cor. 8:6 [The Mystery of God])
- Act 3 - **Rejection** - “You shall not eat . . . **She** took and **ate and He ate**” (Gen. 2:15-17; 3:6 [The Justice of God])
- Act 4 - **Redemption** - “**The LORD God made garments** of skin and clothed them” (Gen. 3:15-21 [The Grace of God])
- Act 5 - **Re-Creation** - “**You Must Be Born Again**” (John 3:1-21; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rev. 21:1 [the Power of God – Pt. 2])
- Act 6 - **Rest** - “Stop weeping, **the Lion . . . has overcome**” (Rev. 4; 5 The Glory of God])

This entire *Story* tells of God who condescends to give humanity the joy of His own internal fellowship within Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This entire *Story* tells of a God who condescends to create in order that His creation might know and experience the joy He has within Himself and this joy is only known and experienced in His presence.⁵

Q3 – What is humanity’s greatest fault and need?

Q4 – How does God address humanity’s deficiency?

II. THE NEED FOR GRACE

Prior to creation, God existing in Trinity was all there was. Within the Godhead or Trinity nothing needed grace, for every thought or action was worthy of the thought or action. However, all this changed once God created. In creating, He condescended. Grace stooped. Grace existed even before the presence of sin and the fall. The created is always in need of grace from the Creator, for the created is always dependent on the Creator.

The biblical reader will notice how there is rebellion/rejection and condemnation. We see this in the villain’s appearance. As noted earlier, grace exists simply because God created; but its presence becomes even more pronounced with the arrival of the villain. It is “sin abounding where grace will much more abound.”

Unless I realize I'm a sinner deserving of God's just wrath against sin, I cannot experience the richness and fullness of His grace. If I deny my sin, I shut the door on grace. This was Jesus' message to the woman at the well. *Yes, you are a woman who is living in sin. Yes, you are just the kind of person I came to save.* We have to acknowledge both realities. This is why talk of the word, "sin" should not frighten us who believe in the gospel. Because it was not mistakes or missteps or misunderstandings that Christ came to conquer and defeat. He came to defeat sin and sin's awful child: death.⁶

Grace is the kind action of God toward those who deserve destruction and damnation.⁷ In mercy, God withholds from us what we justly deserve. And in grace, He gives us what we cannot earn. Listen to the graphic language of Pastor / Theologian C. Samuel Storms.

The first and possibly most fundamental characteristic of divine grace is that it presupposes sin and guilt. Grace has meaning *only* when men are seen as fallen, unworthy of salvation, and liable to eternal wrath. . . . Grace does not contemplate sinners merely as *underserving* but as *ill-deserving*. . . . it is not simply that we do not deserve grace; we *do* deserve hell (emphasis his)!⁸

This is seen in Romans 5:6, 8, and 10. Humanity is weak, wicked, and at war with God and yet Jesus dies for them even while they are rebelling against Him. The same is true in Ephesians 2:1-10 where we read of God's great intervention in verse 4, "But God." This action on God's part brings Him glory. Grace is the platform through which God administers His love, acceptance, forgiveness, favor, kindness, and mercy.

Q5 - How is the mercy of God seen in His actions toward humanity?

Q6 - How is the grace of God seen in His actions toward humanity?

III. THE ROYAL GIFT COVENANT

When God moved forward on making good His promise to Adam and Eve, He used a ROYAL GIFT COVENANT.

There are various types of Covenants in the Ancient Near East.

1. Covenant among equals - marriage
2. Royal gift covenant - unconditional agreement of a superior to their inferior [the Abrahamic Covenant].
3. Vassal treaty - a conditional agreement between the superior and the inferior. The benefits of the treaty are only possible through obedience and conformity to the treaty. Violation of the treaty brings condemnation [The Mosaic Covenant].

The initial command given to Adam and Eve in the **Garden of Eden is a Vassal Treaty**. Adam and Eve failed to obey. As a consequence, they die in their relationship with God. God, however,

condescends and gives them the **Royal Gift**. He will provide an offspring from the woman who will destroy their enemy. And He provides a blood sacrifice that atones for their sins. The **Mosaic Covenant is a Vassal Treaty** with Laws and Stipulations, Blessing and Cursing. **God's Redemptive Purpose is a Royal Gift**.

Why is this important? First, God's redemptive purpose is a gift. Second, God's governance of the Nation of Israel is a Vassal Treaty. Grace always operates in the arena of relationship. **Law governs the horizontal, not the vertical**. The two are not the same. God is not saving Israel in the Mosaic Code or the Law. God is governing Israel in the Mosaic Code. God saves Israel as a Royal Gift. Thus, to impose redemptive purposes onto the vassal treaty leads to heresy. Is there continuity between the two? Yes.

Look at Galatians 3:16-29 and notice with me the relationship between the ROYAL GIFT and the VASSAL TREATY.

¹⁷ What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. ¹⁸ **For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.** ¹⁹ Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made (Gal. 3:17-19).

Jesus fulfills both covenants. When you make the Vassal Treaty redemptive, you end up with the problems Paul addressed in Galatians! Now let us continue to explore the greatest embodiment of grace in God's Story.

Q7 - Why is keeping these two covenants separate in our thinking important?

IV. THE STORY'S HERO – *Jesus Christ*

²⁵ "And He said to them, 'O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?' ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures . . . ⁴⁴ Now He said to them, 'These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' ⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and He said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem'" (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47). [cf. Acts 24:14, 15; 26:22-29; 28:23]

As the Bible is read as *Story*, it becomes apparent from the very start of the *Story* that everything will revolve around one primary and central figure. This person will be foretold and imaged so precisely that all who look for Him will find Him (Matt. 2:2).

Jesus Christ, the second member of the Trinity, is the hero of the *Story*. He is **the promised seed** of Genesis 3:15 and **the blood picture** of Genesis 3:21. All of the chapters point to Him. The storyline has meaning only as it is sourced in and flows from Christ.

The relationship of Jesus Christ to the word of God in Scripture is that he sums it up, brings it to fulfillment and interprets it. Thus, the *Word of God* is Jesus Christ. Every word in Scripture **points to Jesus and finds its meaning in him**. . . The significance of this is worth repeating: Jesus Christ in his life, death, and resurrection is the fixed point of reference for the understanding of **the whole of reality**.⁹

Think of how atonement happens through the death of the innocent. What was the impact of the first sacrifice to Adam and Eve? After all that, they would be asked to wear the skins of this dead animal. When a mother cow gives birth to a stillborn calf, she mourns over her loss. Sometimes a mother cow will reject their calf. In such cases, the farmer will take the skin from the dead calf and place it on the live calf. The live calf will wear the skin and hopefully be adopted by the mourning mother cow. Farmers call this adoption. In Jesus, the alienated are adopted and the rejected are restored.

The Hero's arrival in human flesh is the greatest embodiment of grace by God and His obedience to His Father in life and in death is the greatest display of grace for all times. Nothing else can match who He is and what He has done.

When Adam and Eve rejected God and chose their kingdom and their will over His, they immediately began to "feel" the impact of their decision. This consequence is notable by the attempt to cover their nakedness with vegetation. God could have allowed them to continue in their rebellion, but He condescended and provided atonement for their transgression. Two elements are notable in the unfolding of the *Story*. The first element is **God's promise** to those who rebelled against Him (Gen. 3:15). The second element is **God's picture** of what His atoning work will look like. (Gen. 3:21). Thus, the promise and the picture become the defining elements within the larger narrative of history. Jesus Christ is the promise fulfilled and the picture completed.

Both the **incarnation** and **crucifixion** are expressions of God's initiation toward man's inability and rebellion. Both acts on His part are gracious.

Q8 - Where do we see the greatest embodiment of grace?

Q9 - Where do we see the greatest display of grace?

CONCLUSION

"Why study grace?" Because without it there is no *Story*. God created and in this simple sentence grace was born. Everything that happens after this initial act will be platforms for God to act graciously toward those He loves for the purpose of bringing them into His presence so that they might enjoy Him forever.

As the Bible is read, it becomes apparent from the very start of the *Story* everything will revolve around one primary and central figure, the hero who will rescue humanity from their sin. This person will be foretold and imaged so precisely that all who look for Him will find Him (Matt. 2:2). Jesus Christ, the second member of the Trinity, is the hero of the *Story*. He is **the promised seed** of Genesis 3:15 and **the blood picture** of Genesis 3:21. All Scripture points to Him. The storyline has meaning only as it is sourced in and flows from Christ.¹⁰

Q10 - What application can we make from this chapter?

Q11 - What does this study cause you to change in your thinking and/or actions?

NEXT LESSON - The occurrence of the word *grace* in the New Testament.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newton%27s_cradle

² Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Grace of God* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963), 9.

³ Jerry Bridges, *Transforming Grace*, (NavPress: Colorado Springs, 1991), 21, 22

⁴ Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (IVP Books, 2002), 16.

⁵ "All other religions teach that humans must work their way toward divinity. The truth is Jesus. The truth is a person who dies in our place, for our crimes, and in turn gives us his life. The truth is that God works his way down to humanity and dies for us. That's grace. See, the truth isn't a special prayer or code word we say at the pearly gates. In Christianity, the truth is essentially revealed in a Person, Jesus, full of grace and humility. All other religions God is impersonal, but in Christianity we meet God in Jesus."

<http://www.gospelproject.com/2013/10/25/what-is-unique-about-christianity-among-the-world-religions/>

⁶ <http://www.danieldarling.com/2013/02/if-there-is-no-sin-there-is-no-grace/>

⁷ "Grace is simply another word for his tumbling, rumbling reservoir of strength and protection. It comes at us not occasionally or miserly but constantly and aggressively, wave upon wave. We've barely regained our balance from one breaker, and then, bam, here comes another. God's grace dethrones your fears. Anxiety still comes, for certain. The globe still heats up; wars still flare up; the economy acts up. Disease, calamity, and trouble populate your world. But they don't control it! Grace does."

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/articles/spiritualformation/grace-more-than-we-deserve-greater-than-we-imagine.html> *Grace: More Than We Deserve, Greater Than We Imagine*, Max Lucado explains why we must embrace the whole truth about grace. An interview with Max Lucado.

⁸ C. Samuel Storms, *The Grandeur of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), page 124.

⁹ [Emphasis added] Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (IVP Books, 1991), 59, 60.

¹⁰ "The relationship of Jesus Christ to the word of God in Scripture is that he sums it up, brings it to fulfillment and interprets it. Thus, the *Word of God* is Jesus Christ. Every word in Scripture **points to Jesus and finds its meaning in him**. The significance of this is worth repeating: Jesus Christ in his life, death and resurrection is the fixed point of reference for the understanding of **the whole of reality**" [Emphasis added] Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (IVP Books, 1991), 59, 60. "The apostolic way of reading and preaching Scripture is to see Jesus Christ as the subject of the entire Bible, the subject of all history. He is the single overarching story of all time. He is the meaning of the entire narrative of human history" Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God's narrative* (BakerBooks, 2008), 119. "The centrality of Christ to all of history and to the meaning of human existence invites us into Jesus Christ, through whom we read the entire Bible from beginning to end" *Ibid.*, 121.

RG and Why Grace?