

GROW 201 – What We Teach

Lesson 2

RG² in the NEW TESTAMENT

KEY PASSAGE(S):

“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1).

THE BIG PICTURE – THE *Story*:

It will become evident how the gospel permeates and saturates the entire *Story* running from Genesis through Revelation. No part is left untouched. Our desire is to read the Bible as a single *Story* and at the center of this *Story* is JESUS.

The *Story* God wrote includes a fall into sin and an appropriate but horrific consequence. The sin and its demerit accent humanity’s inability to erase our shame, fear, and guilt. Only God can do it and only God does. **That fact that He did and does is because of grace.** This grace is embodied and displayed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Hero of God’s *Story*. It is now only for us to know who He is, what He has done, and who we are in Him.

INITIAL TRUTHS TO REMEMBER:

1. The *Story* has six acts: (1) God (2) Creation (3) Rejection (4) Redemption (5) Re-Creation (6) Worship
2. This *Story* is the panoramic view for the entire Bible.
3. The *Gospel Story* within the *Story*: God creates each individual, they reject God, and God intervenes to redeem sinners, places within them a new heart, and enables them to worship Him.

OVERVIEW OF THE LESSON:

1. The embodiment of grace
2. The expression of grace

BASIC IDEAS:

1. God did not have to do what He did, but He did what He did not have to do.
2. The favor of God rests upon those who believe because of position, not performance.
3. The grace of God exceeds the need of man because Christ is infinite.
4. The entire Christian life is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

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3. The endurance of grace
4. The example of grace

TODAY'S LESSON:

Regardless of the act God takes toward His creation, grace colors all of it. All acts of God are acts of condescension when directed toward creation in general and humanity in particular. We live, move, and have our being because God is gracious.

When we unpack the *Story* we see how God put in play two vital elements that will control the rest of the *Story*. First, **He made a promise** to the rebel, “The seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent and the serpent’s seed will bruise His heel” (Gen. 3:15). The entire Scripture prior to the fulfillment in Jesus Christ is a keeping of the promise. Second, **He gave a picture**, a visual of what the redeeming of debt and the adopting of sons/daughters will look like in the slaying of an innocent animal, the shedding of blood, and the clothing of their nakedness in the provision of the innocent (Gen. 3:21).

The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Seed promise and His life and death are the completion of the Blood picture. This *Story* is a story of gracious humiliation whereby God would dwell with man in order that man might dwell with God. God’s presence defines paradise. Heaven is heaven because God is there.

This study attempts to help us understand how grace forms the foundation on which the *Story* rests and how Jesus Christ is the fullest expression and embodiment of God’s gracious condescension.

WHAT IS GRACE?

What is grace? What does it mean to be under grace? Are grace and law opposing ideas? Initially we must understand how God is intrinsically gracious. He acts graciously in creating, and in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, grace is embodied. To assist us in understanding the magnitude of this idea we will consider the word itself as found in the Bible.

Several times the word grace (**charis**) is translated with “thank” (Luke 6:32-34), “favor” (Luke 1:30; 2:52; Acts 2:47; 25:3), “liberality” (1 Cor. 16:3), “benefit” (2 Cor. 1:15) and elsewhere with “pleasure” (Acts 24:27; 25:9). Yet apart from a handful of exceptions, the Greek word **charis** is translated as “grace” in English.

What does the word mean and how does it occur? The Greek word **charis** occurs 156 times throughout the New Testament. It has come to mean, “God’s undeserved, unearned, and undesired favor toward condemned sinners.” What this tells us is **God did not have to do what He did, but He did what He did not have to do. There was nothing within humanity moving God to act in a gracious manner toward us. The motive for grace rests solely in God.**

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Although it is difficult to accept initially, when speaking of God's grace, we need to understand how **the favor of God rests upon those who believe simply because of position and not performance. The blessing of God is because of location and not action. The blessing of God upon us is rooted in whom we are in Him, not what we do.** We are not a behavior-based people; we are a belief-based people.

Because this is true, we cannot reverse God's gracious actions toward us. We cannot alter all God has done and is doing in us, for us, and through us.

CATEGORIZING ITS OCCURRENCES:

To facilitate our understanding of grace it is necessary for us to categorize its various occurrences as it occurs throughout the New Testament. There are four primary categorizes.

I. The embodiment of grace occurs in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

In Christ, God's hero arrives and with Him comes a powerful display of grace and truth. With the coming of Jesus Christ, additional revelation will come to the apostle Paul. Paul will become a primary presenter of Jesus Christ.

When the second member of the Godhead became "flesh," we had the greatest display of grace and the greatest embodiment of truth. When speaking of this idea theologically, the *incarnation* is the **product** whereas the *kenosis* of Philippians 2 is the **process** whereby God became man.

When God took on a human nature, He condescended. In the incarnation the second member of the Godhead stooped, He lowered Himself. This is why Paul tells us in Philippians 2:8 "He humbled Himself." **He became what He had created.** At this moment, such a thought escapes us. Yet the Creator became that which He had created. It was not simply an identification or association, but an actual "**becoming**" (Rom. 1:3; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:7 [each uses **ginomai**, "To become"]).

II. The expression of grace as seen in the area of salvation.

In the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Creator would "become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8). **The giver of life would offer up His life in behalf of the dead.** The Lawgiver would be delivered into the hands of those who are without law (Acts 2:23 ["wicked hands"]). At the hands of warmongers, the prince of peace dies. The creation of His own hands would entomb the Father of all things.

III. The endurance of grace as seen in the perseverance of the saints and progressive sanctification.

In Galatians 5:1, Paul uses the word "**stand firm**" as a present active imperative.

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“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore **keep standing firm** and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1).

As a command, it speaks of an appeal to our will/volition to continue in standing fast in grace. “[The present tense] indicates a continual and habitual action.”¹ The idea of standing fast is that of persevering. **We must be determined to live and thus rest in grace.**² Paul suggests that both liberty and freedom are synonymous with grace. The word “liberty” and “freedom” come from the same root word. It occurs in Galatians 2:4 of those who would seek “to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order that they might bring us into bondage.” We are also exhorted not to use the idea of grace for “an occasion to the flesh” (Gal. 5:13).

“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13).

Notice the contrasting idea to grace. It is that of bondage. **The opposite of grace is bondage.** To remove oneself from grace is to “be entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” **Any biblical exposition leading to bondage is the preaching of a false grace.** The easiest thing to do is to make a Christian feel guilty; the hardest is to make them feel free.

Paul’s exhortation to Timothy is “to be strong in grace” (2 Tim. 2:1).

“You therefore, my son, **be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus**” (2 Tim. 2:1).

He uses “be strong” and, like the word for “standing” in Galatians 5:1, it is a present active imperative. This pattern is consistent throughout the New Testament. We as believers are to persevere in grace. We are not to go back to a work mentality nor are we to leave the umbrella of God’s grace. In our desire to obey, please, and serve the Father, there is a natural tendency to see such actions on our part as being meritorious, as if to say, “Look what we have done.” Yet our “working” is the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22) and generated solely by our identification in Christ (Gal. 2:20) and thus our abiding in the vine (John 15:5).

IV. The example of grace as seen *in His service rendered through His saints.*

The work of grace by Jesus Christ and through His people is truly unprecedented. First, note a handful of passages exhibiting what His grace toward the undeserving looks like.

- A. The cross (Rom. 5:6, 8, 10).
- B. The forgiving of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1ff).
- C. The forgiven woman who washed His feet with her tears (Luke 7:36-50).
- D. The father’s reception and warmth toward his two prodigal sons (Luke 15:11-32).
- E. The healing of the ten lepers and the ingratitude of the nine (Luke 17:11-19).

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All of these passages speak to the abundance of God’s grace -- a grace that loves without condition, accepts without requirement, forgives without limit, favors without merit, and serves without reward.

Now notice how this grace comes through the believer. Ministry/service/good works are an expression of the grace of God (Acts 14:26; 15:40).

“From there they sailed to Antioch, **from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished**” (Acts 14:26).

“But Paul chose Silas and left, **being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord**” (Acts 15:40).

The words “commend and commit” are the same in both passages and mean “to surrender, to yield up.” It most often occurs as the English word “betray.” It has the strong idea of “being given over to.”³ Paul and Barnabas had been “given over to” the grace of God for the work of the ministry. As servants of God, we are recipients of God’s grace, thus stewards and administrators of the same. If God’s grace is not operative in ministry, we will fail. Grace keeps us faithful. We are to be ministering grace to others (Eph. 4:29).

“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, **so that it will give grace to those who hear**” (Eph. 4:29).

CONCLUSION:

Paul’s gospel was of the grace of God (Acts 20:24). Paul recognized that his ministry was given to him by grace and enabled by grace (1 Cor. 15:10; Eph. 3:7, 8; 1 Pet. 4:10). Paul never lost sight of his grace-based ministry (2 Cor. 1:12). We must never forget that all we have and enjoy is a result of grace and empowered by grace. **Grace does not exclude our participation. Yet such participation is not viewed as an independent contractor, but rather a tool used by the Master artisan.**

BASIC APPLICATION	
1. What did you find helpful from today’s lesson?	7. Why is Christianity distinct among world religions?
2. What did you find confusing from today’s lesson?	8. What is grace? What are some of the prominent features of the definitions for grace?
3. How does this lesson help you in thinking through the gospel?	9. Is there anything we can do to undo what God has done? Please explain your answer.
4. How does this lesson help you in how you view yourself?	10. What will the enemy tempt us to work to become?
5. What was your “aha” moment?	
6. How might this text challenge you in your daily activity?	

¹ Rogers and Rogers, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key*, 430.

² “Our hard word, therefore, means coming to a greater understanding of *his* work.” Tchividjian, *Jesus*, 96.

³ BAGD, 614.

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