

Week 12 (11/8) – Embracing Grace Not in Vain

In our study of grace so far we have examined:

- The meaning of Grace = Grace is any action which expresses the love, kindness, compassion, favor, and faithfulness of God.
- Examples of God’s grace which include: forgiveness, our gifts/skills/abilities, our financial/time resources, life itself. When we recognize our life and our gifts/skills/abilities as gracious gifts from God we also recognize that we have no basis for comparing, boasting, or complaining....and we recognize that we need to use these gifts of grace in the work of God’s kingdom.
- Embracing Grace means that we fully trust that God will act in ways that are consistent with his character. He will be both just and merciful. When we encounter suffering and trials, we trust that God’s grace is sufficient for our comfort and happiness, both now and ultimately in heaven. When we suffer injustice from others, we trust that God will judge rightly on the Day of Judgment and we leave judgment, vengeance, and retaliation to God. He asks us to share his grace with others and entrust judgment, vengeance, and retaliation to God.
- Embracing Grace also means that we extend and share the grace God has shown us with others, specifically in the area of forgiveness. God has forgiven us, before we repented, and while we were yet sinners. When we embrace grace we embrace the practice of forgiving others...before the ask...before the root of bitterness begins to grow....without cost to the other. Our grace of forgiveness must be free of charge.

Embracing Grace means letting go of all other ideas of being right with God

Embracing grace fully implies that we let go of all other approaches and ideas of being right with God other than grace. Grace is exclusive. We cannot embrace grace and still hold on to old ways of being righteous in the eyes of God. Embracing grace does not mean adding the idea of grace as an insurance policy to a righteous-by-being-moral, righteous-by-being-committed, righteous-by-believing-in-God, righteous-by-following-patterns, etc. way of life. Grace is all or nothing. (read Gal 5:1-12)

Gal 2:15-21 – “I do not nullify the grace of God...”

The key verse in this passage is the closing remark “I do not set aside (or nullify) the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing.” – I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification were through [the] law, then Christ died to no purpose”

In the letter to the Galatians, Paul is dealing with the issue of righteousness. He is writing to a group of Christians, some of whom have a Jewish background and others a Gentile background. His focus is not on how a person accepts Christ, but rather on how a person lives as a Christian or more clearly, how a person lives *righteously* as a Christian. The only two options Paul sees are (1) by law or (2) by grace. There are two possible ways that a person can “live by law.” The first way is what we call “legalism”, where a person believes that they become righteous in God’s sight by following the law. “If I live right, God will consider me righteous.” The second way is what we might call “religiosity”, where a person believes that they maintain their “righteous status” by following law. “A good Christian (righteous) is a person who does x, y, z.” Paul claims that embracing grace means abandoning both ideas. We neither BECOME righteous people by following law nor do we MAINTAIN our righteous status by follow law. This is the point that Paul will argue in the remainder of the letter. Paul’s last statement, “I do not nullify the grace of God...” indicates that he considers embracing grace to involve letting go of the idea of both legalism and religiosity. Even though the context of this passage implies that Paul is speaking about THE law he never uses the “THE” in this passage, he simply says “righteous via law.” In fact, Paul does not

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make a distinction between pursuing a righteous life using law versus pursuing a righteous life using THE Law. Both are the same in concept (read Gal 4:8-11 carefully)

The Main Point = If we try to pursue a reputation of righteousness using law, we nullify grace and insult the death of Christ.

Discussion

- What does the idea of “following law” look like in a religious setting?
- How does following law oppose the idea of following grace?
- In what ways are we susceptible to “following law” ?

Heb 10:1-31 – “... insulted the Spirit of Grace”

The key verse that catches our attention in this section is Heb 10:29, “...and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?” Insult the Spirit of grace? What is it in our actions, attitudes or beliefs that would insult the Spirit of grace? If we look backward from this verse to Heb 10:1 we can trace the discussion that leads up to 10:29 and gain a good understanding of the author’s point.

Heb 10:1-4 – Compares the old system of sacrifices and the sacrifice of Christ. The old sacrifices for sin did not deal with the problem of Sin it only dealt with sin(s). Those sacrifices did not make the worshipper “perfect” nor free them from the burden of “guilt” associated with sin under the Law.

Heb 10:5-18 – Describes how God is more interested in holy people than in the actual sacrifices. The sacrifices performed under the Law dealt allowed the worshippers to be holy-for-a-moment but they did not make the worshippers Holy. Through the sacrifice of Christ however, we are made holy and perfect. Actually, the text says that we *are being made* (in process) holy. The author then quotes Jeremiah 31:33, which describes God’s new covenant in which God deals with sin by forgiving it.

Heb 10:19-25 – The section begins with a “therefore” marking the transition from the explanation given in 1-18 to the implications in 19-39. The sacrifice of Jesus produces “confidence” which contrasts with the guilt of sin (10:2). This confidence arises from our “full assurance of faith” and “hope” knowing that our hearts and bodies have been made holy by the sacrifice of Christ. Christ’s sacrifice works from the inside out; it works in our heart and conscience. With this new found assurance, hope, and confidence we can live differently. Specifically the text implores us to: draw near to God, live holy lives and, help each other to live properly.

Heb 10:26-31 – Shifts from exhortation to warnings by reminding the readers of the judgment experienced by those who broke the Law. The author then reasons that if that was the judgment they received under the inferior covenant, how much more severe will the judgment be for those that reject the “tramples the Son of God under foot” or “treat the blood that sanctified him as unholy” or “insulted the Spirit of grace.” We need to remember that the author is talking to Christians who have already accepted Christ. Thus the warning concerns how much effect the Spirit of Grace changes who we are.

The Main Point = The expected response to grace is persevering in a holy life, not based upon law, but based upon “assurance of faith”, “confidence” and the “faithfulness” of God. Not responding in this way is an insult to God’s grace.

Discussion

- What is the connection between “assurance of faith”, “confidence” and “faithfulness of God” to how we live our lives?
- What is happening when a Christian “insults the Spirit of grace?”