

Week 8

Chapter 5

“Grace” is great to study today! After last week’s context-lesson, today we need to see God as He is our Father, our Redeemer and our Comforter.

Let’s talk about God as our Father.

15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” (Romans 8:15)

⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” (Galatians 4:4-7)

¹⁴ Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. ¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. (Romans 5:14-15)

Gerhard Kittel, a German commentator writes of this word:

In any case there can be no doubt that the use of the word in the community is linked with Jesus’ term for God and thus denotes an appropriation of the relationship proclaimed and lived out by Him. Jewish usage shows how this Father-child relationship to God far surpasses any possibilities of intimacy assumed in Judaism, introducing indeed something which is wholly new.

The grace of God brought us into a relationship that was far more than something resembling “former enemies” but rather a Father and children,

Now, God as our Redeemer.

8 And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, 9 and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. 10 Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? 11 But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” (Acts 15:8-11)

Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, Philemon and Revelation all end with a benediction resembling, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”

Grace in Christ is the gift of eternal life and the hope of heaven. It is the certain knowledge that the price has been paid and the way has been made.

Finally, God as our Comforter.

31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. (Acts 9:31)

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵ For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too ⁶if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. ⁷ Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. (2 Corinthians 1:3-7)

10 times the word "comfort" is mentioned in these verses. We see that whether we are talking about an intimate family closeness, the certainty of our redemption or very here-and-now presence and comfort, God acts in grace towards us.

It is likely that we "know" this. What will make it more real to us, is keeping grace in its proper **context**.

Luke and I have gone to John Rock up outside of Brevard in the Pisgah forest. We've climbed it, camped it and picnicked on the top. As the days and weeks separate us from our trips there, we forget just how much hard work is required to get to the top. We forget how majestic the scenery and how far down the road is.

We know it's a rock, it's high and it's hard work. But, only going there really gives us the "knowledge."

Let's put "grace" in that kind of light. Because, grace is one of those church words that we are in danger of misunderstanding. If ten church folks and ten un-churched folks were asked to define grace, you'd get a dozen answers. (At least from the church folks we'd probably have *Christ* in there somewhere.)

As the author says, grace is unique to Christianity. All other religions either have no concept of grace or a humanistic-philanthropic view of it.

- Why isn't grace more common?

[It is holy; other-worldly]

[We have no category for gifts to enemies for their joy]

It is a word that tells a tremendous story. What makes it unique is the *content* of that story. Grace is about the story of God. More than that, it is the story of **God serving us**.

First, God serving us in Adam and Eve: Genesis 3:15

Second, God serving us in Noah: Genesis 6:18-22

Third, God serving us in Abraham: Genesis 12:1-2; 15:1-6; 17:4

Fourth, God serving us in David: 2 Samuel 7:9-16

Finally, God serving us in Christ: Mark 10:41-45:

42 And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant 44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

I have outlined for you the progress of what the church has for 1000's of years, called the Covenant of Grace.

- What makes each of these steps of the progress of the covenant of grace so remarkable?

[Adam and Eve: disobedient]

[Noah: among evil continually]

[Abraham: pagan, doubter]

[David: killer, sinner]

God's covenant service to us was always born out of the shadow of our disobedience as a race. We were *always* undeserving. We were *always*, instead, deserving of destruction and justice.

As the author says, grace is not simply "God's Riches at Christ's Expense." *Those* riches and *that* expense are in the context of a much larger, longer lasting story.

READ 2 Timothy 1:8-10.

- What is the story of grace?

[God's eternal decree to give the Son a people]

[God's holy honor being tarnished and threatened by sin]

[God's only Son bearing the brunt of divine justice for those decreed to be His]

[God's offering the payment of that sacrifice for those He calls]

[The reward that comes to those who receive the call]

[The reward having no relation to our efforts]

Farley says

GRACE is God's Riches At Christ's Expense extended to men and women who by nature deserve wrath (88)

He tells us there is no adequate understanding of grace outside of an understanding of our demerit.

- Why is the consideration of our demerit important to our understanding of grace?

[We would stop considering it grace]

[We would begin to see ourselves as worthy of what we've received]

[“The severity of the criminal's crimes would be the measure of the judge's grace” (89)]

[“The knowledge of what we deserve and what it cost God to be gracious is the measure of his fatherly grace” (89)]

Since grace is the story of God serving us, we had better get the details correct!

Grace involves receiving something from someone. In that sense, without knowing the context, grace and wages could be similar.

- But what is the difference between grace and a wage?

[The context]

[My work for = context for wage]

[My work against = context for grace; its context is always one of opposites]

- What is an example of wage-based parenting?

[My child behaves, I am kind]
[My child listens, I don't explode]
[My child does well, I don't criticize]
[My child obeys, I love]

- What is an example of grace-based parenting?

[My child explodes, I behave]
[My child doesn't listen, I am kind and patient]

Remember the context for grace is when someone works against us.

If one has merit or value and receives good from another, that's not grace *but* a wage. If I work for you and do what you ask and you pay me, that's not grace, that's a debt you owe me.

Grace is always against merit. Grace is always about overcoming a contrary condition. Grace is always costly. In the chapter, he has five propositions that he uses to explain grace. Let's open our Bibles to Matthew 18 and find those principles at work.

In this parable (18:21-35), we find Jesus using "forgiveness" as the content of the object lesson. Forgiveness is grace in relationships; we'll use them interchangeably.

READ Matthew 18:21-35.

1. 18:21 – the question indicates Peter's perspective on the nature of grace / forgiveness.

- What was his perspective?

[Something I do in return for what someone else does]
[Worthiness is part of the equation: worthiness = forgiveability]

2. 18:22 – God's perspective on the nature of grace / forgiveness: lavished, exceeds the debt. The parable will bear this out.

God is Free.

3. 18:23 – The King (God usually in these parables) wishes to settle accounts.

The point the author makes is that God is not obligated to be gracious (91). Just as we'll see in the King's actions, God's condescension in goodness is by His choice.

God has no needs.

Acts 17:25 makes it clear that God has no need; see also Psalm 24:1, 50:8-12.

Farley says

This presents finite, needy creatures, like us, with a problem. We cannot understand action, especially infinitely costly action, that is not driven by need" (92)

- Why does God do what He does?

[Because He wants to]

[WSC Q/A 20: Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery? God having, out of his mere good pleasure from all eternity elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer]

The text (Matt 18:23) says he “wished” to settle accounts with his stewards. There is no hint of “need” in this text and, as we’ll see, the king has enough sustenance that he can forgive an enormous debt.

Think of that: His mere good pleasure. He has no needs. He has no reason to act (from our perspective). Yet He acts – in a way that is outrageously sacrificial. God’s love drove Him to act in grace when His justice did not require it.

Sin is Infinitely Offensive.

If there is *any* demerit present, God is our enemy. There is no sense in trying to quibble over whether we are “good enough” for Him since the presence of any little *un*-goodness alienates us from Him.

The monetary example from the parable illustrates something beyond the inordinate size of the debt (which it does).

4. 18:24 – 10k talents:

“Estimates in modern currency range from several million to one trillion dollars. The “talent” was the highest known denomination of currency in the ancient Roman Empire, and ten thousand was the highest number for which the Greek language had a particular word¹

- The amount owed is so large. Can the servant possibly have acquired such a debt?

[He cannot]

- But he owes it; how *can* he owe it then?

[It is not about the debt but about the One to whom it is owed]

[The nature of the One sinned against: small debt against a Holy God]

[E.g., drop of blood on a lace veil]

We have seen this already: because sin is an affront to Him He is An Eager Judge (Psa 99:4; Isa 30:18). He is also a Perfect Judge and so justice is either *coming* perfectly or *has come* perfectly.

How is your doctrine of hell? I would say that the strength of your understanding and love of grace is conditioned by two things: how much you consider and think about the work of Christ, and how much you know about hell.

Hell as unquenchable fire: Mal 4:1, Matt 3:12, Luke 16:23-24, John 15:6

Hell as fiery furnace: Psa 21:8-9; Matt 13:42, 50, 22:13-14; Mark 9:43-49; Luke 16:23-24; Rev 14:10, 19:20, 20:10-15, 21:8ff

Hell as eternal fire: Matt 25:41

Hell as eternal conscious torment: Mark 9:48, Luke 16:23-24

Hell as everlasting destruction: 2 Thess 1:9

Hell as eternal punishment: Matt 25:45-46

Farley says,

¹Blomberg, Craig: *Matthew*. electronic ed. Nashville : Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1992 (Logos Library System; The New American Commentary 22), S. 283

Although unredeemed sinners suffer forever, their sin is so serious that their suffering never atones for their sin. No matter how long one stays in hell, the person can never suffer enough to balance the scales of justice and work his or her way back to heaven (94)

We are Helpless.

We cannot be good enough – in life or death. We will never meet God’s standards. The choice for us is only hell unless someone does something for us.

“Trying harder” more “good works” won’t cut it. Or, to use banking terminology: loan restructuring, paying off a credit card with another for a lower rate or more borrowing won’t work.

Self-reliance is sin. Self-reliance is a statement to God of the unnecessary nature of the life, death and resurrection of His Son. It is our statement of the *stupidity* of God’s redemptive plan – look at the amazing quote on page 97

In fact, our reliance on our virtues is not a neutral issue. It is deep sin. It makes God angry. Why? Attempts to be “good enough” reject Christ, his cross and his atoning work. If you sent your soon to be tortured to death for friends because their situation was helpless and they said, “Thank, but no thanks. I can work it out on my own,” how would you feel?

The only way out is an admission of spiritual **bankruptcy**. Which is to say, being honest about reality: He is holy and we are not. We are just like Isaiah. The servant saw this clearly and his response reflects it:

5. 18:26 – The servant was broken (in the moment) over what his debt would cost him; so he implores the king making a promise he cannot ever keep

He knew the only way to deal with the debt was to throw himself at the mercy of the one to whom he owed.

The Cost of Grace.

We don’t often consider what we ask when we plead with the Lord to cover our sins with the blood of Christ. Grace is costly. But God is both **rich** and **gracious!**

6. 18:27 – King felt “compassion” on him and did what was unconscionable then: released him *and* forgave the debt.

He absorbed what was considered an infinite debt and rather than exacting what he was owed, he acted as if it was never owed. He is such a gracious Father that we went:

- Major (-) through 0 to major (+): debtor to freeman

Farley writes:

The Father paid this price in the absence of any obligation to us, in the absence of any need in himself, despite infinite enmity toward us and despite our utter helplessness. He did it because he loves us (99).

7. 18:28-30 – We begin to see just how remarkable this master’s act of grace / forgiveness really was:

The servant went out, found a debtor and began to treat him harshly

He was petitioned in the same way he petitioned the king, “Have patience with me and I will pay you”

Estimates of the value of a talent range from sixty to ten thousand denarii, so that the ratio of one hundred denarii to ten thousand talents could be anywhere from six thousand to one to one million to one.

The servant refused his debtor’s plea and acted **exactly the opposite way** the master had:

- Major (-) to greater (-): debtor to jail
- Why is his response so outrageous?

[So out of proportion to the grace he was given]

[Amount so paltry compared to what he was forgiven]

[Seems like this happens immediately after he was shown such grace]

In this story, usually the focus is on the wicked servant who acted out of such evil. But, for our purposes, consider instead the king’s action.

Remember that we only really see grace’s full glory in light of its opposite.

- How does the wicked servant’s action magnify what the king did in forgiving his debt?

[We see what kinds of men God forgives]

[We see the depth of the king’s love; he knew what his servant was like but he did it anyway]

God’s Grace Means Something

8. 18:31-34 – We see part of the king’s intent to was to **model**.

Life in the era of the covenant of grace is defined by that covenant. It has a certain character. In other words, God acts with grace towards us in Christ and He basically defines how we are to act with each other: with grace.

“I acted in grace; all your actions must be characterized by grace.”

What happens in these last verses is very significant and subtle. The servant was a business man himself. People owed him money. It seems that these transactions weren’t directly related to the king. The servant’s business was his own, not an extension of the kings.

Like when we have second jobs: how we conduct that business isn’t usually the business of our first employer.

Or is it? The king called his servant to hold him accountable for the way he was conducting his business. He held him accountable using the way he was treated as the standard. I call this the “foundational relational character.” All of our conduct rests on the foundation of grace. Grace should seep into every interaction we have with everyone we meet.

- Why? (Only one reason)

[Because God acted in grace towards us.]

In the face of opposition, when we have every reason to exact justice, we can either act with grace or with law. That is, be good to people when they’ve met our conditions.

Grace is God serving us; part of His serving us is giving us the Holy Spirit who provides the strength for us to be serving others.

9. 18:35 – the stakes are high for us.

Acting with grace to others is not optional. The king – our Heavenly King – watches to see how we are conducting our business here.

We prove whether we are His or not which will determine whether we are blessed with Heaven or condemned with Hell.