

Grace To Live

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GCBC 2023 Bible Conference

“Is this all there is to the Christian life?” This was a question that I asked myself after about seven years in ministry. I had been “raised” as an Independent, Fundamental, Baptist. I knew all the right names, schools, and mission boards. I had the opportunity to fellowship with the leaders of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship, Bob Jones University, Maranatha, and Ambassador Baptist College. Some of the “big” name evangelists preached in my small church in Middle TN. The families in the church followed the prescribed, rules (unwritten in some cases). Yet, it was empty, never ending, and fairly miserable. We knew doctrine, the current issues, and how to answer the cults. However, over time it became clear that something was wrong. Not just in our church, but in others as well. In three churches, as a Youth Pastor, Assistant Pastor, and Senior pastor, I continued to see “good” kids and families fall apart. More and more I was finding out that behind all of the outward things, something was terribly wrong. Pornography, substance abuse, immorality, and physical abuse described many of these “good” families away from church. Kids raised in church were not only growing up and leaving home, they were leaving church. In addition, I discovered that very few people in “fundamental” churches had any idea what the fundamentals of the faith actually were.

Then, in 1998 I came across a book, *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*¹. So, I had my red pen ready to take this book apart and do a scathing review, but then I found the following quote.

“One basic purpose of this book is help you examine your own practice of Christianity. Are you practicing grace, allowing the Spirit of Christ to live through you in such a way that you help lift oppressive weights off of others and spiritually empower them to live? Or are you trying to force people to live under laws, rules or formulas for spirituality that cause them to feel weighed down, unable to measure up to your standards?”²

That was the “fundamentalism” I was a part of and trying to live. In my time in church the subjects of the Holy Spirit and grace had been virtually ignored, and replaced with “how to” lists of spiritual growth. The Holy Spirit was a subject for theological discussion, and grace was only for salvation.

This paper is more testimony than teaching. I want to share some essential truths that I learned about grace, truths you may know, but I would like to remind you of them. This is something Peter did in 2 Peter.

2Pe 1:12-15

12 Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. 13 Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; 14 Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. 15 Moreover I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.

Grace is not just for salvation, but God has given it to us to help us live and function properly on a daily basis. We cannot live a successful Christian life without understanding how this grace works in

¹ David Johnson and Jeff VanVondeeren, *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*, Minneapolis, Bethany House Publishers. e

² IBID, 25.

us and for us.

Grace- God's unmerited, unlimited kindness and favor.

Practical definition- Empowerment given through Christ, that enables believers to serve on a daily basis. It is the power of Christ doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He gives sufficient amounts for the need.

1Co 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

2Co 9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:

We need this in our lives daily. We can do all things through Christ as He provides his grace to us. In the grace that Christ gives we find:

I. Strength to face the challenges of the day- 2 areas

A. Service- Our service to Christ must be grace empowered, for the simple reason, we cannot please Him in the flesh.

Ro 8:8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God

Heb. 12:28-29 Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: ²⁹For our God *is* a consuming fire.

1 Tim 1:12-14 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; ¹³ Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief. ¹⁴ And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

1Co 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

B. Suffering- A proper understanding of grace prevents us from living life by “pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps” or just “gutting” it out.

Isa 40:28-29 Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. ²⁹ He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

2 Co. 12:9 And he said unto me, my grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

2 Co 4:16 For which because we faint not; but though our outward man perishes, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

II. Grace teaches us to live a Christ honoring life

Many people erroneously argue that grace is simply license to live a life of sin. The Bible shows us that grace always moves us toward Christ like living.

Tit 2:11-12 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, 12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

Titus 3:4-8 But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; 6 Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior 7 That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. 8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

III. Grace produces a sweet spirit

Unfortunately, a distinguishing mark of many believers is their angry, hateful, impatient attitude, and cutting tongues. Grace shows us better way to conduct our lives.

Eph 4:29-32 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. {to...: or, to edify profitably} 30 And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: 32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Col 4:6 Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

2Ti 2:23 But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. 24 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,

IV. Grace defeats bitterness

Often those in performance based systems end up bitter. They find that nothing is ever good enough, that the standard keeps moving. As a result of this they end up in bitterness.

Heb 12:15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

2 Co 12:7-10 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above

measure. 8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

9 And he said unto me, my grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

The Results of Graceless Systems

1. Power Posturing- Distorted image of God, people pleasing, high need for structure, too critical, difficulty saying no.
2. Performance preoccupation- perfectionism, giving up without trying for fear of failure, only doing what you are good at, cannot admit mistakes, procrastinates, more concerned with how you act than who you are, cannot have guilt free fun, high need for approval, demanding of others, full of self-righteousness, demanding on the kids. An expert in; blaming, rationalizing, denying and minimizing your mistakes while maximizing the mistakes of others, a desire to rescue others from their behaviors, difficulty receiving grace and forgiveness from God, and others.
3. Unspoken rules- talks about people instead of to them, saying things in code and expecting others to understand it, reading meanings into the messages of others.
4. Lack of balance- High need to control thoughts, feelings, and actions of others. Subject to stress related illnesses, living in denial and delusion.
5. Paranoia- the sense that if something is wrong or someone is upset it's your fault, if there is a problem you have to solve it, no one else understands like you do, suspicious of and afraid to trust others.
6. Misplaced loyalty- Need to be right, critical of others in different groups, fear of being deserted, possessive in relationships.
7. Code of silence- Self-analytical, rebelling against structure, feeling alone, living a double life, can't ask for help.³

Summary

Here are some final reminders of how great God's grace is.

1. He loves us- 1Jn 3:1
2. He is extravagant with grace- Eph. 1:6-8
3. He is Faithful-Heb. 10:23
4. He has made us new- Ro. 6:6, 2 Co. 5:17
5. He chose us-Eph. 1:4
6. He holds us blameless- Eph. 1:4
7. He gives us an inheritance-Eph. 1:11
8. He doesn't keep score- Heb. 10:17
9. He has given us all we need-Col.2:10, Heb. 7:25
10. He is okay with our struggles, failures, and pain- 2Co. 1:3-4

³ IBID.,188.