

SOTERIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

PART 11

KEY TERMS; GRACE, PART 3

Luke 6:32–34 ³²“If you love those who love you, what credit [χάρις] is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³“If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit [χάρις] is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴“If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit [χάρις] is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount.

It is gracious to love those who don't love you and to do good to those who have never done good to you and to be generous to people who have no capacity to return your generosity. Grace is not a part of doing what you are expected to do and grace is not involved when you expect, even demand, to receive something from someone else. Conditional motivation has no part with grace. Grace goes beyond and is superior to the normal human experience. In a sinful, broken, fallen world, it is not normal for people to give or to receive grace. When Jesus, who is full of grace and truth, appeared in His incarnation He was rejected. People did not comprehend Light, grace, and truth. Those are foreign concepts to a world full of people who walk in darkness and who fail to comprehend grace and truth.

John 1:14, 5 ¹⁴And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.... ⁵The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

Grace should be part of the Christian life and when you act in grace you are acting as an ambassador for Christ should act.

When we understand grace, we have gone a long way towards understanding Soteriology. Those who fail to understand grace inevitably import works of one sort or another in one way or another into the doctrine of salvation. There are some crucial issues involved in understanding grace.

Grace is not withheld because of demerit. Everyone comes to faith in a state of total demerit. Every human being has been declared dead in Adam; no one has any standing or merit before God. If grace was to be withheld while people were in that state, no one could ever be saved. There is nothing man can do to “clean himself up” in order to be saved. We can only be granted His grace just as we are, dead in sin, separated from God, worthless, rebellious, and defiled. This is not popular teaching today in our narcissistic, self-esteem oriented culture but it is the picture the Bible clearly paints of us—all of us without exception. It really can be no other way and still be a

situation in which grace can be exercised. Grace would not be grace if it were withheld because of sin. If any person could possibly possess any merit in the sight of God, then grace would not be an option in that case either. God must deal with the ungodly situation of man just as he is just where he is which is dead and condemned in sin. He did that through Christ who took away the sin of the world. That has opened the way for the exercise of grace. Condemnation is not an issue of personal sins; Christ has borne the penalty for sin. Condemnation now flows from the fact that the remedy for the sin problem is rejected.

Romans 5:6, 8 ⁶For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.... ⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

John 1:29 ²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

Grace cannot be lessened because of demerit. God does not dispense grace in varying amounts according to the level of personal sin in any person's life. All people without exception are dead in Adam and possess a sin nature that is equal in measure to all. In Christ, the problem of sin has been rectified and all of the grace God extends to sinful people is available to be extended to all people. Grace cannot be increased because it is limitless and it cannot be diminished because God is not limited by sin which has been propitiated by Christ on the cross. God is not ignoring sin; Christ has provided the remedy for sin. God's grace is free to be implemented independent of any and all sin. Grace is a God operation that operates independently of what we do or do not do. Grace is completely an act of God.

1 John 2:2 ²and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

Grace cannot incur a debt. If debt is involved, it is no longer grace. We've examined Romans 4:1-8 which presents this truth. Nothing can ever be done to earn grace; working creates a debt that must be paid. Nothing can ever be done to repay grace; that also would defeat grace and change it into something that is owed. Grace is granted solely out of the benevolence of the giver and there can be no thought of repayment or of any effort made to repay it. We cannot work for salvation, we cannot work to keep salvation, and we cannot seek to repay God at some point in the future. By definition, a gift that is paid for by the recipient is not a gift but a purchase.

Romans 6:23 ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift [χάρισμα] of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We must never operate out of any motivation to repay God's grace gift; that would be a grievous soteriological error on our part because that would be an attempt to put God in our debt. On the other hand, service performed in His name and for His glory, the motivation being one's love and gratitude to Him for what He has done on our behalf, is something we are commanded to do. Freely He gave to us; freely we are to give to others. Those are the instructions Jesus gave to His disciples as He sent them out to the lost sheep of the house of Israel to preach the Kingdom of heaven and that command is no less applicable to us today in response to His grace (Mt. 10:1-15). Freely give to people as it has been freely given to you. Don't hoard the good news; give it away. Do good works; produce spiritual fruit. The appropriate response to God's grace is to be gracious.

Matthew 10:8⁸...Freely you received, freely give.

Ephesians 2:10¹⁰For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Titus 2:14¹⁴who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

Faithfulness and obedience are never conditions for the bestowal of God's grace. We are not saved based on any thought of doing something for God. Good works and the production of spiritual fruit are obviously part of the sanctified life but the lack of them does not negate the free grace gift that was freely bestowed while we were ungodly sinners alienated from God and in open rebellion against God. The gift of grace cannot be conditioned on anything we do or promise to do past, present, or future. Promising to be good or to do good do nothing to save anyone; salvation is based on belief alone and that alone results in the bestowal of God's grace. Anyone who promises God they will do something for Him in exchange for justification is at the least misunderstanding the grace orientation of the offer and at the worst remaining unsaved because they refuse to trust in God for the supply of the free gift. Offering to do something is, in effect, saying to God that the person and work of Christ is insufficient to save and that the individual person must do that something to help God save them. That defeats grace.

Grace is not operative in the just payment of a debt. The payment of something that is owed to someone is to do what is expected and right in light of an obligation that has been incurred. There is no obligation or expectation in grace. Grace is a totally free gift bestowed by the Giver who is under no obligation to give it. If merit is involved, then grace is not involved. Since there is an equal and absolute sentence of death against every human being because all possess a sin nature in Adam, no person has any

meritorious standing before God. God is free to exercise grace on any and all people. The human race died in Adam's rebellion and all are condemned in him. Christ paid the sin debt on the cross; therefore, condemnation is the result of the rejection of His work.

Genesis 2:17 ¹⁷but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."

John 3:18 ¹⁸"He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Romans 5:12 ¹²Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—

Romans 11:32 ³²For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.

Galatians 3:22 ²²But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

The point I'm making here is that everyone is under sin in Adam and is therefore eternally separated from God. No person possess any merit or has any standing whatsoever that would render them acceptable to God. God is free to offer His grace gift of eternal life to any and all who would accept that gift. The only requirement is to believe in the person and work of Christ Jesus and that act of belief is not a work nor is it meritorious in any way; therefore, it does not place any obligation on God in the form of debt for what is owed. Faith is the channel through which the grace gift is granted.

Nothing can be combined with grace in order to complete the justification transaction because that defeats grace and turns the transaction into one of works. There can be no bartering or trading involved in a free grace gift transaction. No matter how benevolent the works, no matter how righteous they are, no matter how Christian they look, no matter how good they make a person feel, they defeat grace. The kinds of things that are added to grace are frequently couched in terms of salvation by grace alone through faith in Christ alone but then something else must accompany belief in order to prove that a person is truly saved. There is always a qualifying factor that is inserted after the gospel such as you are saved by grace alone through faith alone BUT you must surrender all to Him and make Him Lord of your life. You believe in Jesus BUT you must forsake all to follow Him whether it is fame or fortune or family or even life itself that you must give up. You believe in Jesus BUT you must do good works and be

obedient to biblical commands. You believe in Jesus BUT you must exhibit some sort of evidence you are actually saved. IF you are really saved THEN, you will join a particular church and be baptized according to their baptismal formula or else you cannot be saved. Whatever it is, qualifications are added to grace alone.

Each of these qualifications to grace alone defeats grace and in its place produces a false gospel of works. These additions are a proclamation that Christ's work is insufficient to save and we must help Him save us. God's grace cannot be earned or bartered for and without His grace justification is absent.

What do you think of the following statements? As I read these, keep in mind the context is justification and not sanctification. "The goal is the unfamiliar one of sorrowfully acknowledging sin, of submission and sacrifice. If we're not willing to separate from our families, separate from the world, separate from material things that we possess, then Jesus isn't valuable to us. It's an all-or-nothing proposition [p. 9] [notice the if/then qualifier]...If you try to hold onto you, your plan, your agenda, your success, your self-esteem, you lose forgiveness and heaven [p. 11]...If you want to follow Christ right into heaven, here's the message: Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow him [p. 11]...there are plenty more lists of human sins that keep people out of heaven. Who gets in, then? The few who truly repent of their sins [p. 118]...It's pretty simple. Anyone who wants to come after Jesus into the kingdom of God—anyone who wants to be a Christian—has to face three commands: 1) deny himself, 2) take up his cross daily, and 3) follow Him" [p. 6] [John MacArthur, *Hard to Believe: The High Cost and Infinite Value of Following Jesus*].

Not one of these statements relates to the biblical definition of justification salvation. All of these issues defeat grace when they are linked to justification doctrine. According to MacArthur we must do these things in order to experience justification salvation, and, additionally, to prove we have actually been saved. He will, over and over again, say we are saved by grace alone, however, he adds conditions such as those quoted above that ultimately defeat the grace he preaches. This whole book, *Hard to Believe*, was written to show people how incredibly difficult it is to become a believer in Christ Jesus. None of the above quotes say anything about belief; it is all about what he says we have to do in order to be justified. The three things he says are necessary to be a Christian are all sanctification salvation issues. Where is grace in all this? It's really sad to say the name of his ministry is Grace to You.

Properly understood, grace is the bestowal of unmerited and unearned favor given only out of the generosity of the giver who is under no compulsion or obligation to offer the free gift in the first place. Grace can be resisted and rejected. Grace is God's free gift to all who believe and they can do nothing to earn it or to keep it. Once given, it is

a permanent gift that can never be revoked for any reason by either party. God will never revoke it because He has promised not to do so. We cannot give it back of our own accord.

2 Timothy 2:13 ¹³If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

This verse is simply saying that even a born again person who walks away from the Lord and rejects all that he formerly believed is still eternally saved and secure. He will lose rewards at the judgment seat of Christ but he will be saved. This verse is actually addressing an issue that is worse than it seems in the English translation. "If we are faithless" is probably better translated, "If we are unbelieving." It is not about individual acts of unfaithfulness; it is about rejecting the faith and the Lord of that faith that one once held. In other words, it is about apostasy. Yet, even such a one as this remains eternally secure and saved because God cannot renege on a promise He has made. That would violate His character and that cannot happen. The promise is that the moment you believe you pass from death to life and it is a state that can never be altered by anyone or anything. Some people want to deny that Paul is referring to born again believers here but the "we" of this verse is no different than the "we" of vv. 11-12. Clearly, believers are the subject of this unbelieving or faithless state.

Romans 8:38–39 ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The truth is that nothing can separate a person from God once they believe and are granted eternal life. Many people will say, "Well, perhaps nothing can tear me away from God but I can tear myself away from God and lose my salvation." But that is not true. Every person is a "created thing" and no created thing can defeat the promise of God to save all those who come to faith. One commentator put it this way: "Paul concludes the list with the phrase nor any other created thing, which includes both the devil and the believer, who at times might not be able to keep his own shoe tied or balance his checkbook, could undo the eternal purposes of God that include His foreknowledge and their glorification. The believer is not nearly that powerful, nor the Spirit and the Savior so incompetent" [Michael G. Vanlaningham, "Romans" in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, p. 1759].

The Bible makes it so very clear that eternal life is a completely free grace gift bestowed on us by God. We arrive at that destination through faith/belief/trust in the gospel of grace that is provided in and through the person and work of Christ Jesus. It is truly free.

Isaiah 55:1 ¹“Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost.

Revelation 21:6 ⁶Then He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost.

Revelation 22:17 ¹⁷The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.

Romans 3:24 ²⁴being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;