

Freedom from the Performance Trap

Overview

In our last session, we looked at the new identity we have received as followers of Christ. In addition, we looked at the personal benefits of understanding this new identity, and we learned how that new identity can impact our daily attitudes and actions.

In this session we will cover the meaning of the grace of God, the central theme of the New Testament. We will also look at the impact that God's grace has on us from the moment that we begin a relationship with Christ. In addition, we will contrast God's truth and Satan's lies concerning grace and show how grace can be experienced in our relationships and ministry. Finally, we will make application of one of the truths about grace to a current home, work, or ministry situation.

Gettin'
Started

Bible Memory Verses: **Ephesians 2:8-9**

Review the FAITH Principle

FAITH is living as though the Bible is true, even when I do not feel like it is true.

2 Corinthians 5:7

Hebrews 11:6a

Galatians 3:11b

Romans 14:23b

*We live by **FAITH**, not by sight.*

*And without **FAITH** it is impossible to please God.*

*The righteous will live by **FAITH**.*

*Everything that does not come from **FAITH** is sin.*

Maria's Story

At the age of fourteen Maria came to the realization that she needed to make a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. Maria was overwhelmed by the fact that a relationship with Jesus Christ was a free gift.

She wanted to show Jesus that she was worthy of this free gift. She did everything she could think of to show Christ she was worthy of His gift. This caused a great deal of frustration for her. The harder Maria tried to be worthy, the more unworthy she felt she appeared.

Maria failed to realize something. She would never be worthy enough. In this session we will look at how

unworthy we truly are, but we will also look at the fact that God gives us an opportunity to be absolutely approved by Him even though we do not deserve it.

What Is Grace?

Grace defined: Grace has been defined as the *unmerited favor of God*. This theme of God's unmerited favor runs throughout the entire Bible. It is expressed most clearly in His unconditional acceptance of lost sinners through the sacrificial death of His Son. God's grace is also demonstrated in His continued acceptance of those who come to faith in Christ. God's grace is the believer's only hope for joy and satisfaction in this life and the life to come. And so, understanding, experiencing, and applying the grace of God to daily life is critical if a believer is to live as God intended.

Life Under Grace vs. Life Under The Law

Read Galatians 2:15-21. What do you think the apostle Paul meant by the phrases “observing the law” and “the grace of God?”

The phrase **“life under grace,”** is an apt description of what God wants every believer to experience. We must not seek to earn God's favor by our own good works. We are not justified by our works or by keeping the law (v. 16). Christ paid for all our sin on the cross. We now have right standing with God; we are holy and blameless before Him. We can experience grace only *by faith* in Jesus Christ.

We will refer to **“life under the law”** as “performing to gain God's approval.” Living by the law (or by “works”) means trusting in our own performance or standards in order to gain approval with God. It is the enemy of **“life under grace.”**

We Experience God's Grace From The Moment Of Salvation

When a person comes into a relationship with God through faith in Christ, he or she begins to experience God's grace or unmerited favor. Let's take a look at several Bible passages which will give greater understanding of our need for and our experience of God's grace:

● **We deserve condemnation.**

Read Romans 3:10-18.

According to this passage, what is everyone's spiritual condition?

Also read Ephesians 2:1-3.

According to this passage, what is everyone's spiritual condition?

● **Even though we deserve condemnation, we receive God's absolute approval when we begin a relationship with Christ.**

The Bible is clear that right standing before God comes through faith in Christ, not through our performance or behavior. Let's look at some scriptures which will give us a greater insight into our standing or position before God as believers in Christ.

1. **We are made righteous.** Read Romans 3:21-22. Because we took on the righteousness of Jesus Christ, we are in right standing with God.
2. **We are justified.** Read Romans 3:24. "Justify" is a legal term which means to free from blame or guilt. The charges of our sin are done away with and we are declared "not guilty" and "innocent of all charges."
3. **We are redeemed.** Read Romans 3:24. The word "redemption" literally means to "buy back from the slave market." According to this passage, God has bought each of us back from slavery to the power and penalty of sin and given us freedom to follow Christ.
4. **We are reconciled.** Read Romans 5:10 and Colossians 1:21-22. Though we were at one time God's enemies, we are now His friends.

5. **We are sanctified.** Read I Corinthians 6:11 & Hebrews 10:14. “Sanctification” means “set apart for a special purpose.” Believers have been set apart as objects of God’s love and purpose. Positionally, believers are declared holy.

The believer’s “performance,” however, doesn’t always align with his position. God is in the process of sanctifying believers (that is, making them holy) in their daily living.

God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

— 2 Corinthians 5:21

Discuss: The Bible is clear that Jesus Christ is righteous, holy, sinless, and perfect. The above scriptures also indicate that the person who begins a relationship with Christ is positionally righteous, holy, sinless, and perfect. How should a follower of Christ approach life when he or she understands these truths?

● **We have freedom from the moment of salvation.**

God’s grace allows us to experience freedom in three areas:

1. **We have freedom from sin.**

We now have a choice. Sin no longer has to have control over us. (Read Romans 6:1-3, 11-18).

2. **We have freedom from fear.**

We do not have to live in fear of condemnation. Rather, we can live a life of freedom as we are led by the Holy Spirit. (Read Romans 8:1, 4, 6).

3. **We have freedom from performance.**

We cannot gain anything through our works. God gives us His complete acceptance when we receive Christ. Therefore, we no longer have to try to earn His acceptance by performing. (Read Romans 3:27-28; 4:4-5).

Discuss: How would living according to performance have a negative impact on your life?

Experiencing Grace In Our Daily Lives

Because of the grace that God has extended to us, we can now experience grace in our daily lives. Grace can affect how we view ourselves when we sin, why we serve God, and how we relate to others.

● A Biblical Story of Grace

One of the greatest stories of grace in the New Testament is found in Luke 7:36-50. Read the passage, then answer the questions in the following chart. Place an “X” in the appropriate box.

QUESTIONS	PHARISEE	WOMAN
1. Who gave freely: (v.44)		
2. Who loved openly? (v. 45)		
3. Who served joyously? (v. 46)		
4. Who received forgiveness?		
5. Who was freed to love others?		

● Grace in relation to sin.

God's grace affects how we view ourselves. We either believe God's truth or Satan's lies. According to God's Word, He loves us unconditionally, completely, and perfectly. We are accepted by Him. When we have confessed our sin to Him, He forgives us and we do not need to feel guilty (Romans 8:1). Satan wants us to feel guilty and condemned when we sin. He wants our sin to become a barrier between us and God. Another lie of Satan is that forgiveness is a license to sin; of course, it is not. The best way to counteract Satan's lies is to immerse yourself in the truth of God's Word and to believe and act on these truths by faith. As you read, study,

NOTE: *The greatest barrier to experiencing God's grace in our daily lives is that we buy into the lies of Satan. Satan wants us to feel the constant pressure of an inadequate performance. God, on the other hand, wants us to constantly remember that our acceptance is not based upon our performance. He wants us to know experientially what is already ours positionally through Christ.*

memorize, and meditate on God's Word, you will increasingly learn to choose to believe what is true, which will affect how you view yourself and how you view sin. As a result, you will begin to choose righteousness more often than sin.

*Expect great things
from God. Attempt
great things for God.*

—William Carey

● **Grace in our motivation.**

God's grace affects how we view Him and why we serve Him. We can either be motivated by grace or by guilt or by some combination of the two.

Grace motivation means that our service to God is based on His unconditional love and acceptance of us. As a result, we have the freedom to take steps of faith because we have the freedom to fail. Since God's love for us cannot be affected by our "performance," we don't have to worry about how we'll look if something doesn't go well. Life becomes an adventure of walking in God's path for us and becoming who He created us to be!

Guilt motivation means that we are serving God in order to gain His acceptance. As a result, we focus on ourselves and on our performance rather than on God and His truth. We believe Satan's lie that we need to perform well in order to receive God's approval. If we attempt something and it does not go well, we can become humiliated because we failed (i.e. we looked bad) and then re-double our efforts to avoid looking like a failure the next time around.

● **Grace in our relationships.**

God's grace affects how we view others. We will either unconditionally accept them through God's grace, or conditionally accept them by placing them under the law. The more we understand and appreciate God's grace in our own lives, the more willing we will be to forgive others who hurt us.

Grace relationships: If we experience God's grace in our daily lives, we can accept people as they are because God accepts us as we are. We will not hold grudges when wronged. Our acceptance of others will not depend on their meeting our expectations. In this kind of relationship people will be free to share their joys as well as their weaknesses and faults. (Read Colossians 3:13.)

Law relationships: If we choose to believe Satan's lies, we'll extend limited acceptance in our relationships. We will view every hurt as a personal attack. We will be demanding of those around us. Acceptance of others is dependent on our personal experience of God's grace. If we haven't personally experienced God's grace, limited acceptance of others will typify our relationships.

Summary

- At the moment of salvation we experience the grace of God in our lives.
- We do not get what we deserve (condemnation), but we get what we don't deserve (acceptance).
- Experiencing God's grace will enable us to view ourselves as God views us, even when we sin. Immersing ourselves in God's Word will renew our minds so that we can think properly about who God says we are.
- As we focus on our unconditional acceptance by God, we are freed from the need to perform for God. We then can live and minister for Him in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- As we experience God's grace in our lives, we will extend His grace to others.

Application

Choose a situation in one of the areas below in which you're tempted to believe Satan's lies:

- My view of myself
- My motivation.
- My relationships with others

Using the chart on the next page, answer the following questions:

- What does God's word say about my situation?
- How has Satan lied to me about my situation?
- How would choosing to believe the truth of God's Word change my actions in that area?

APPLYING GOD'S GRACE TO MY LIFE

Area of Temptation	God's Truth	Satan's Lie	My Action
<p>Example: Grace in relationships; a friend wronged me.</p>	<p>Forgive others just as the Lord forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32)</p>	<p>I don't have to forgive my friend; he doesn't deserve to be forgiven.</p>	<p>Confess my anger and forgive my friend. Demonstrate forgiveness by showing kindness and love.</p>
<p>I do not feel righteous.</p>	<p>The Bible says that I am righteous. (2 Cor. 5:21)</p>	<p>I'm not righteous because of my past behavior and sin.</p>	<p>I choose by faith to believe 2 Cor. 5:21 over every past experience and accusation from Satan.</p>
<p>I feel guilty much of the time.</p>	<p>The Bible says that I have been justified, and I am not condemned. (Romans 3:24; 8:1)</p>		
<p>I need to perform to receive God's acceptance.</p>			