

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Kelvin Langford's Message of August 2, 2009
"Grace: It's For You Too!"**

[Today's message is about grace, but from an aspect that we may not have thought of for a while, or maybe not at all.]

[Topics: Grace; Head Knowledge; Heart Knowledge; Unworthiness]

Excerpt: [A short video clip of John Newton, composer of "Amazing Grace," was played at the beginning of this message.]

This morning we're going to talk about grace – but perhaps from an aspect that we may not have thought of for a while, or maybe hadn't thought of at all. First let's review what grace is. We hear so much about grace in our Christian walk. We hear that we are saved by grace. We hear we are to grow in the grace and knowledge.

Here's the definition of grace: "It's the freely given, unmerited favor and love of God." It's freely given. Now we don't get much for free these days. Nothing any of us can do can earn us grace from God. We can't work for it. God gives it freely. It's a gift to every human being, whoever lived, whoever is alive now and whoever will live.

Grace goes to the heart of the Christian faith. It's one of the cornerstones of Christian believers. Grace makes Christianity unique. Other religions say that if you try hard enough, if you work more, if you become more enlightened, then you can achieve a higher level.

Christianity is unique in that the very being who created us loved us so intently before we were thought of, emptied himself out for you and me. And if you were the only person that was ever created, Christ would have emptied himself just for you. He does that for each of us individually. No other religion does that.

Now let's look at **Ephesians 2:8-10. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – 9) not by works, so that no one can boast."**

You see, if it was by works, we could boast, "Yahoo, look what I have done! Look at the grace I have earned." Nope, grace doesn't happen that way.

10) "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Kelvin was talking to a friend of his last week and he gave him this analogy about what grace is like. Let's say a policeman pulls you over for speeding on the freeway. . He gives you a ticket because you have broken a law – **that is justice**. You broke the law; you got a ticket; justice has been served.

Now let's say he pulls you over, knows you have broken the law but doesn't give you a ticket and lets you off!! – **that is mercy**. When he pulls you over, writes you the ticket for breaking the law, but then he goes and pays that ticket for you – **THAT IS GRACE**. Not only is Jesus merciful to us, but he has also taken care of all our sins – infractions of the law. Jesus paid the price – that's the grace we're talking about.

Now what are we supposed to do with grace? How do we respond to grace? If you look on our denominational website, Grace Communion International, for the topic grace, here is one of the things you find.

In one article, they pose the question, "How should we respond to the grace of God?" Their answer – "with grace, of course." How many of you thought of grace this way? It's logical when you think about it – we are to respond to grace with grace.

We find that grace has various components. It has the component of mercy. It has the component of forgiveness. Grace has the components of mercy, forgiveness, and also giving and serving. They are all bundled up in one package.

So we are to be merciful, even as God is merciful. **Luke 6:35-36, "But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."**

We are to forgive others, just as we have been forgiven. We are to respond to grace with grace. We are to serve others, just as we have been served. We are to be gracious toward others, giving them favor and kindness.

Our words are to be full of grace as it says in **Colossians 4:6. "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."**

So here's the point to all of this. Sometimes in our life, it's easier to respond with grace to other people than to yourself. The question is: Do you treat yourself with grace? We often think others are worthy of grace and yet somehow we don't accept that God's grace is for us too. Do you treat yourself with the grace God has granted you?

Do we extend mercy to ourselves? Do we forgive ourselves? Or do we hold on to our sins? Are we kind to ourselves? Do we actually think we're OK? Now we're not talking about pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps strategy or some kind of self-help program. We can't offer ourselves grace.

But do we accept God's grace for ourselves? So that when we do stumble, are we able to accept God's graciousness and forgiveness so that we can move forward and not have this anchor weighing us down thinking, "I'm not good enough"?

That's the ultimate question – Do we allow God's grace to apply in our lives?

Now let's look at some of the things that might sabotage our accepting of grace for ourselves. This sabotage comes from our old enemy Satan because he doesn't want us to be feeling that we are in a state of grace. So when we mess up again, he wants us to feel that anchor

and feel weighted down. And that's because in that state of mind we are not as close to Jesus Christ as we should be and we are not in a place to accept God's grace.

Satan loves it when we trip up and don't forgive ourselves. He loves it when someone hurts us, and then we hold on to that little bitter seed and let it grow. That separates us from God. That drives a wedge between us and God.

The first thing that might sabotage our acceptance of grace for ourselves is the battle between our head and our heart. In the small group Kelvin and Karen attend, they are reading a book by Drs. Cloud and Townsend titled, "How People Grow."

In one of the chapters, it talks about how we can only have head knowledge about grace. Kelvin is certain that Pastor Glen has dealt with many people who say, "I know in my head what grace is. In my head, I can recite the Scriptures about what grace is."

But our head simply accumulates and assimilates knowledge. So intellectually we can know about grace, but yet not experience it. For example, Kelvin knows about skydiving. You go up in a plane, you jump out of the plane and float to the ground. Now Kelvin hasn't personally experienced skydiving, but his wife, Karen, has. While knowing what skydiving is intellectually, he can't tell you what it feels like falling out of the sky at terminal velocity at over 120 miles per hour.

Kelvin also knows what it takes to raise a child. He's read books about it. It's easy. He's got it all sorted out, because the books say you feed the baby when he's hungry, you change them when they poop, you wipe up the dribble and when they're 18, you push them out the door. Kelvin then made the comment that those in the audience who laughed the hardest about what he said were parents. In Kelvin's mind, he knows that you provide for your children, you give them food, clothing, shelter, etc, etc. But, he hasn't experienced it.

Likewise, with just head knowledge, we may understand God's grace, but unless, we allow ourselves to accept it and experience it, there's a little disconnect. Without experiencing it, we really don't know what it feels like.

So, how do we allow ourselves to accept that grace? God uses everyone in this room to be vessels of his grace. We can experience grace through the Christian body. And that is offering forgiveness or asking someone to forgive you. God uses other people as vessels of his grace.

Now let's look at **1 Peter 4: 10**. "**Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.**" God has given the body gifts. And so sometimes, we have to accept the gifts of others. That is an aspect of accepting God's grace. No one of us can be a spiritual island. That's not how it works. To experience grace, sometimes we have to be available to accept that grace from other people.

In **2 Cor 6:11-13**, we read about an example of this. "**We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. 12) We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us.**"

The Corinthian people were missing out on a huge opportunity to experience and accept God's grace. As this congregation continues to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus

Christ, be open to the fact that there are people to share your Christian walk with. Be willing to offer yourself to others, sharing God's grace with them.

In **James 5:16** we read, "**Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.**"

Let's consider a word of caution about confessing – do it with people you trust. When you can find a group of people you can trust and share with in a small group setting, it's amazing how you experience grace. You can share your difficulties with them. They aren't judging you, but lifting you up to God in prayer and because of that you get that sense of experiencing grace.

The point is that grace can be available to us, but we might not be available to grace. We need to be available to grace. Here's the second point that might sabotage our accepting of grace for ourselves – thinking we are unworthy of grace. Too often we think everyone else is worthy of accepting God's grace, but not us. We think we're not good enough.

The danger of this thinking is that Christ's death and resurrection wasn't good enough for you. Don't get caught in that trap. Accept the grace that is offered to you. It's easy to fall into the trap of, "I'm not good enough." That's the wedge that Satan wants you to have to separate you from God.

Titus 3:3-7, "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. 4) But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5) he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6) whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7) so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."

When you stop and think about what those verses say, it's so profound. It's so comforting to know that it doesn't matter what we have done in the past. And when you accept Christ and live in grace, you don't want to continue living in your old ways of sin.

How many of you heard the phrase, "I've sinned too much"? Or "I can't be forgiven, grace can't be applied to me, because I've done too many things." That kind of thinking is just a lot of old RUBBISH.

Look, we have all fallen short of the glory of God. And if you think that you carry around one or two horrible sins such as, "I struggle with accepting Jesus" or "I struggle with a sexual sin" or "I struggle with an addiction" or "I struggle with a lack of faith" that you can't accept God's grace, you are mistaken.

Now King Solomon, who is known to be one of the wisest men to ever live, wrote in **Ecc. 1:9-10, "What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun."**

So if you think that you are the only one who has carried around some special sin, we've got news for you. You're not that special. It's been done before. And it's going to be done again, when you are long gone.

10) "Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new"? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time." So, none of us can use that excuse that we're not good enough because of the type of sin we've committed is unique.

Let's look at some examples out of the Bible. Here is Peter, who walked and lived with Jesus and saw all his miracles, yet denied him three times. Do you think Peter forgave himself as Jesus forgave him? He did, because he went on to do marvelous works in Jesus' name.

King David, a man after God's own heart, had committed adultery and was forgiven. So the denial of Christ has been done before. Committing of a sexual sin has been done before. We have to be available to accept God's grace for us. There is no sin that exempts us from his grace.

Speaking of King Solomon, he pursued materialism to the ultimate. So if your thing is chasing after materialism, don't think that will stop you from God's grace. It's been done before and it will happen again. What about persecution and being nasty to people? The apostle Paul once raged against Christians with murderous intent before God's calling. Did he accept God's grace and then forgive himself? Absolutely.

Now some have said, I've been born again. Isn't that enough to accept grace? Isn't the rebirth process of being born again into the body of Christ enough? While being born again is a great step, we know that it's not the end, but rather the beginning.

Now, as a baby, you're not able to help out anyone else until you grow up. Rebirth is an event. Growth is a lifetime. With accepting grace and the application of grace in our life is where we start to grow. By accepting that we are available and that we are open individually to grace, that gets us going.

Now if our heart doesn't feel it, or we have a negative self-image, or we don't believe we're worthy of grace – all that stunts our spiritual growth. Some use the excuse that they've come from a dysfunctional family. Part of our human experience is that we are dysfunctional. Now granted, some are more dysfunctional than others. But letting yourself available to grace is a huge part of the growth process so that you can become mature to further the work of Jesus Christ.

It does not matter who you are or what you have done. In **2 Peter 3:18**, it says, "**to grow in the knowledge and grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**" That means we can grow in God's grace. God's grace is available to you and everyone. That is why Jesus gave himself for our sins so we could experience grace in its truest form.

And we need to realize that grace comes from God and it's available to us and when we allow ourselves to accept his grace, we begin to grow in our spiritual walk. It's available freely and is accessible to us. We need to allow ourselves to be available to God's grace.

Let's just conclude by reading **2 Corinthians 9:8**. **"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."**

All grace – not just part of grace is made available to you. God's grace is available in all things – not just in some things in your life. God's grace is available at all times – not just 8:30 on a Wednesday morning. God's grace is available to you every moment of every day. God gives you his grace in all that you need. God gives us all grace, in all things, at all times, all that we need.

Key Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:8, **"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."**

General Group Question: What's the difference between justice, mercy and grace?

Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other's needs afterwards.

1. How would you define grace?
2. Why is grace one of the cornerstones of Christianity?
3. What are some of the components that comprise grace?
4. What role does the battle between our head and our heart play in our accepting of God's grace for ourselves?
5. How have you experienced God's grace first hand?
6. Is there anything wrong in thinking that you are unworthy of God's grace because of some horrible sin you've committed? Please give an example to support your answer.
7. How can you let yourself be more available to God's grace?

