

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc dantrygg@msn.com Today's Date: September 28, 2008

Grace-filled People Become Gracious, Giving People

by Dan Trygg

"Now... there was a disciple named Tabitha... full of good works and compassionate-acts, which she continually-did." Acts 9:36

"For the grace of God has appeared/become-visible, bringing salvation to all people, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, ...that He might redeem us from (i.e., buy us out of slavery to) every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own, zealous for good deeds." Titus 2:11,12,14

One of the marks of the early church was how committed they were to helping each other. Their care for the poor was a very visible expression of the love which they had in their hearts toward God and each other. It was the indicating sign that Jesus said would identify those who were genuinely following Him (Jn. 13:34,35). Since love is a verb, it is seen in the actions that are expressed in relationship to those we love. If there are no actions, then we may ask, "Where is the love?"

The starting place of our love, indeed the foundation of our very relationship with God, is the grace of God. Without His grace to us, we would still be lost in our sins, and we would remain stuck in our self-centeredness.

God's grace is His favor toward us, which we did not earn or deserve. Sometimes it is difficult to understand what grace is, until we compare it to other qualities:

Justice is when we get what we deserve. Sometimes we think we want justice, especially when we are thinking of those who may have hurt us in some way. God is a just God, and there will be an accounting for what we have done in this life, with corresponding rewards and punishments. However, if God were to relate to us only in terms of justice, ...that is, if He were to give us what we deserve, then we would all be dead, ...because God says that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), and we are all sinners by nature and by choice.

On the other hand, **mercy is when we do not get what we deserve.** When we deserve to be punished or judged, and in compassion the judge simply stays the sentence, or lets us go, we have experienced mercy. God is a merciful God. Many times He stays His hand of wrath on the sinner, and His hand of discipline from the saint, because He wishes to give them more time to discover reality, repent, and call out to Him for deliverance. *The problem with mercy*, as wonderful and appreciated as it is, when we receive it, is that it does nothing to change us. It merely withdraws from us the just deserts of our actions.

Finally, **grace is getting what we do not deserve.** It is receiving favor, love, help, and assistance when we did nothing to deserve them, ...indeed, when we really deserve to be treated with judgment and condemnation. Because of His graciousness and His great love, with which He loved us, **God made the commitment to send His Son** to not only provide an avenue for mercy to allow the justice of His wrath to "pass over" us, but also to provide grace that would enable us to experience an entirely different kind of life, one that goes beyond normal human capacities, one that we did not earn and could not imitate, the indwelling life of His own Spirit. When He sent His Son, we received a visible expression of God's grace which is laid up for the believer, a commitment which the apostle summed up in Romans 8:31,32, "If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" **Grace goes way beyond forgiveness, to offer the power to change in practical ways.** When we have failed through human weakness and temptation, "Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

God's grace is magnanimous. We are not talking about limited human expressions of grace, where we may be kind to someone we don't know, or we may forgive someone who has hurt us even though they have not recognized their fault. No. **We are talking about God-sized grace, ...an undeserved commitment from the Creator of the Universe to step in, pay our debt, make us new, and even make us part of His family to reign with Him as princesses and princes.** Talk about a "rags to riches" story! Clearly, this would not be even a glimmer of a possibility except for the limitless grace of God. Ephesians 2:7 tells us that in the ages to come God will continue to show us the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us. In other words, the favor and help which God has offered to us when we were totally undeserving and helpless is boundless and continues to stretch into the unending future.

God's grace is multi-faceted. This means that it has many expressions. **Grace does not come to each of us in the same way, because we are all diverse individuals.** God respects and wishes to preserve our uniqueness. Thus, His favor and help toward us meet us where we are, and provide different things to us, to enable us to fulfill

different callings and purposes both here, and probably in eternity, as well. I Pet. 4:10 says, "As each of you received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the grace of God."

We are responsible for our responses to God's grace. That last verse from I Pet. 4 referred to a "*stewardship of God's grace*". Inherent in that concept of stewardship is that we are responsible for the use of resources which have been given to us to use according to the desires of our Master. God's grace is provided for us to grow us up into Christ, and to lead us to understand and do His will. **If we do not utilize God's provision as He directs us, then we betray the trust He has given to us, and we are guilty of misusing what He has made available to us.** Like the parable of the talents (Mt. 25:14-30), we are required to take an active role in utilizing the gracious provisions of God to us, and **we will have to give an account to Him of what we have done with what He has made available to us.**

It is possible to "accept the grace of God in vain" (II Cor. 6:1), that is, to accept God's free offer of a transforming relationship with Him, but *never do anything with it*. Paul warns us not to do that. God has given us favor, resources and help which we did not earn, but He *expects* us to *do* something with these things. **He expects us to do the work of His Kingdom, not just to live for ourselves.** Often, like the Corinthians Paul was writing to, we are "restrained by our affections" (II Cor. 6:12) in that we love the things of this world more than the things of God's Kingdom (I Jn. 2:15,16). If so, we have not yet grasped the incredible wonder of what God has for us, and we are settling for something which comes nowhere near what He has prepared for those who love Him.

Gracious is as gracious does. God gives grace *because His heart is gracious*. It is out of His great love that He extends to us His favor, the help of His presence, and His provisions. His grace has come to instruct us. It teaches us to put off old sinful behaviors, and to live according to God's ways. God has sent the gift of His grace, Jesus, to buy us out of those old bondages, every "lawless deed", and to purify us to be a people uniquely devoted to Him, a people zealous for good deeds.

The outworking of grace in our lives is that we ultimately become gracious ones ourselves, people who extend favor and help to other people *who have not done anything to deserve it*. When God's love does its complete work in us, we will no longer be selfish, but will be able to unselfishly give to others. When we grasp the unlimited extent of God's commitment to us, the greatness of His favor and provision to us, we find the freedom to give to others without fear (I Jn. 4:18). **Once we understand how freely we have received, and that the same Gift-Giver is always with us, then we can freely give to others** (Matt. 10:8; I Cor. 4:7). God has expressly told us that He wants to make us like Himself in our character (Rom. 8:29). Thus, we as a people ought to come to be gracious and giving like He is. **We need the grace of His indwelling Spirit to enable us to think and live that way. If we do, however, our lives become very noticeably different from the status-quo selfishness which prevails around about us.**

The "scandal of grace" is when we radically give to someone who does not deserve it, and it seems to have no effect. It seems that we are wasting resources by investing ourselves, our time, and our money, especially if they do not seem to respond to our sacrifices. Paul wrote of the "stumbling block of the cross" (I Cor. 1:23; Gal. 5:11). The Greek word is *skandalon*, which means "stumbling block, offense, or scandal". **It is especially offensive to our flesh when people spurn or misuse our acts of kindness, and even turn against us, or seem even to mock at God.** This is a natural response, one that was not unknown to NT Christians. They were to be on their guard against it, however. We are exhorted to be "watching lest anyone comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled" (Heb. 12:15). Our Father in Heaven, however, causes His sun to rise on the evil *and* the good, and sends rain on the righteous *and* the unrighteous. **In fact, Jesus Himself challenges us, "If you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even tax gatherers do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others?** Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt. 5:43-48). Or, again, in John 1, Jesus Himself, as the Eternal Word, is described as the "light which enlightens *every person*" (vs. 9), and "of His fullness we have *all* received, and grace upon grace." God's magnanimous grace reaches all people. What is significant is not whether or not the person "deserves" to be helped, ...in fact if they truly *deserved* it, then we would be *obligated* to help them, and it would not be grace, but their earned due, their just wages. No. **Grace becomes even more visible when it is undeserved, un-called for, un-earned.** We are called to radical giving and serving simply because it is the heart of our Father to be a radical, gracious giver. If we listen to His Spirit, we *will* find ourselves doing as He does.

Grace will win in the end. We are promised that **we can overcome evil with good**, if we respond in grace (Rom. 12:20,21). "And let us not lose heart in doing good, for *in due time we shall reap*", if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to *all* people, and *especially* to those who are of the household of the faith" (Gal. 6:9,10). **God's grace, expressed through His people, is effective to open hearts and draw them to Jesus.**