

The Gospel of John Phase II

John 8

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Lesson 4

Homework

GRACE

*“You, therefore, beloved **grow in the grace** and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 3:18*

The great British preacher of the last century, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, known affectionately as the “prince of preachers” admonishes believers with the following wise words:

*“As imitators of Jesus Christ – we his followers should be growing in every aspect of our Lord’s **grace**. This means growing **in faith**, the root of grace. Let your faith grow fuller, steadier, and simpler. Grow also **in love**. Ask God to make your love more extensive, more intense, more practical. Grow **in humility** as well. As you grow downward in humility, seek also to grow upward, growing closer to God **in prayer**. May God’s Holy Spirit also enable you to “grow **in the . . . knowledge** of our Lord and Savior.” We should seek to know more of Jesus, more of His divine nature, more of His human relationships, His finished work of salvation, His death and resurrection, His present intercession for us and His future return as our King, the King of all Kings.” Charles Spurgeon (Morning by Morning)*

Beware of Familiarity

It is sad but true – familiarity causes us not to treasure the precious gospel of Jesus Christ as we should. The recurrent themes of God’s mercy and grace in particular can easily become more and more common that they no longer hold our attention and awe as they once did. When you hear the most well known hymn of all time, Amazing Grace, how often do you simply sing the words with little attention to the incredibly deep meaning of those words that were so long ago written by former slave trader, John Newton, whose life was radically transformed by that grace? When amazing realities of the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ cease to capture your full and undivided attention, lesser things

inevitably fill that gap. When we no longer celebrate the amazing grace of God, we begin to forget just how much we need the grace of God. When we forget how much we need God's grace, we simply stop seeking the rescue and strength that only God's grace can give us. The same is true of God's mercy as we saw from our opening study of John 5 and the healing of the man paralyzed for 38 years. A passive approach to these incredible attributes of our God places us in grave danger of viewing ourselves as more righteous, more competent to handle life ourselves, and far wiser than we actually are in reality. To be dismissive about the extraordinary power of the mercy and grace of God is a set up for deep trouble as we encounter the never ending challenges that accompany every day life. We must pay close attention to the treacherous "slide" that leads to apathy and a deadly devaluing of the beautiful grace of God that first awakened us and brought us to salvation. We must be forever attentive to what is vitally important - to hold close in our hearts with deepest gratitude the amazing gift of God's grace through our Lord Jesus - grace that found us in our sin – grace that gave us new life and purpose, and grace that gifted us with an eternity of enjoying the very presence of a loving Father who graciously provided it. What in heaven's name could be a more precious gift than God's amazing grace in our lives?

NOTE from Mary Ann: Please take the time to meditate upon the thoughts and challenges prepared for you in this lesson. Don't rush! God will richly bless you in this study as you revisit the beauty of your "first love."

Grace: A Definition

Grace: The gift of God as expressed in His actions of extending mercy, loving-kindness and salvation to undeserving people. Grace is the incomprehensible dimension of divine activity that enables God to confront human indifference and rebellion with an inexhaustible capacity to forgive and to bless. God's grace is manifested through action. The doctrine of salvation through God's grace is the foundational thought in both Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament anticipates and prepares us for the full expression of grace that manifests in its fulfillment in the New Testament through the finished work of Christ.

Grace in the Old Testament:

Early in the narrative of the Old Testament, God reveals Himself to Moses through the following words:

*"And the Lord passed before him (Moses) and proclaimed, "the Lord God, merciful and **gracious**, longsuffering and abounding in goodness and truth,*

keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression...” (Exodus 34: 6)

This profound passage is evidence that it is now possible (because of the grace of God) for undeserving human beings to approach a holy God in a spirit of humility, prayer and supplication. What an unheard of concept! God has made the impossible possible! Through God’s divine initiative, human separation from God is turned into a state of undeserved acceptance, thus opening the way for reconciliation and redemptive usefulness along with kingdom impact as well. God’s grace was at work as early as the devastating effects of the fall of Adam recorded in Genesis 2 - only to find God’s promise of redemption a chapter away in Genesis 3:15. Here we find in the promise of God to fallen mankind the remedy for the disastrous effects of sin and separation from a holy God. God speaking to the serpent declares:

“Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go. And you shall eat dust all the days of your life... AND I WILL PUT ENMITY BETWEEN YOU (Satan) AND THE WOMAN, AND BETWEEN YOUR SEED AND HER SEED (Christ); HE SHALL BRUISE YOUR HEAD, AND YOU SHALL BRUISE HIS HEEL. (A picture of Crucifixion and Christ’s victory over death and Satan)” (Genesis 3:15)

God’s call to Abraham was again an extension of His grace as the means of universal outreach to the patriarch’s descendants as well as to all people of all nations. God’s grace through Abraham became the means of blessing “all families of the earth.”

“I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:2-3)

In extending grace to Abraham, God established the channel of redemptive opportunity for all believers from all nations culminating in the New Testament church universal. Thus, God’s “collective community of grace” operates powerfully through a body of believers in what we know and experience today as “The church of Jesus Christ.”

Grace in the New Testament

The book of Hebrews declares that the ordained institutions of the Old Covenant (the Mosaic laws and the sacrificial system) possessed only a temporary purpose that has been superseded by the ultimate manifestation of God’s grace through Jesus and the New

Covenant. At the last supper before Jesus went to the cross, He spoke to his disciples saying:

“Likewise He also took the cup after supper saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you.” (Luke 22: 20)

Consequently the Old Covenant was intended by God eventually to become obsolete and replaced by the New Covenant Jesus mentions to his followers – a covenant that would display the full and completed manifestation of the undeserved grace of a holy God. The concept of divine grace in human affairs receives a much sharper focus in the Person of Jesus who modeled visibly the nature of God’s undeserved favor (His grace) as He fulfilled entirely through His earthly ministry the Old Covenant promises that pertain to God’s gracious dealings with sinful humanity. God’s grace as manifested in his Son makes it possible for sinners to be redeemed and gathered together as a unified, worldwide body of believers, a family called the church of Jesus Christ, the new covenant community.

The Grace of God Revealed in the Person of Christ:

During his earthly ministry, Jesus repeatedly pronounced words of forgiveness and grace upon countless sinners and ministered God’s undeserved favor upon a host of desperate human needs as well. One of the most outstanding is the story found in John 8 and the woman caught in adultery. Jesus made it clear that His purpose for coming was to seek and save the lost, but ultimately it was His redemptive death on the cross that opened wide the gate of salvation by grace to repentant sinners. This grace provided DIRECT ACCESS TO GOD’S FORGIVENESS AND GRACE and the unspeakable blessing of living forever in His presence both now and eternally.

Both Luke 23:45 and Mark 15:38 testify of the dramatic event that demonstrated the access into the very presence of God made possible through Jesus’ finished work through the cross. Both gospel writers record that the sacred veil of the Jewish temple was torn into from top to bottom. It is sobering to learn that Solomon’s temple in which the veil was housed was 30 cubits high according to the writings of Josephus, a renowned first century Jewish historian. It is safe to assume that this veil alone was somewhere near 60 feet high. An early Jewish tradition records the veil to have been at least four inches thick. Exodus supplies details of the veil that this thick fabric was fashioned from blue, purple, and scarlet material and fine twisted linen. The size of the veil and the thickness of it make the events that occurred at the moment of Jesus’ death on the cross far more startling, momentous, and miraculous.

“And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain (the veil) of the temple was torn into from top to bottom.” (Matthew 27:50-51)

This tearing of the veil at the moment of Jesus’ death was a profound symbol that His sacrifice, the shedding of Christ’s own blood, was the sufficient atonement for the sins of all mankind. It signified that now- **by the grace of God** - the way into the presence of a holy God (signified by the Holy of Holies) was open for all people, for all time, both Jew and Gentile alike. God moved out of that place, never again to dwell in a temple made with human hands. God was finished with that temple and its empty religious system, thus the temple and the city of Jerusalem were thereafter left “desolate” (destroyed by the Romans in AD 70) precisely as Jesus had prophesied in Luke 12:35. As long as the temple remained standing, it signified the continuation of the Old Covenant. Hebrews 9: 8-9 refers to the age (of the Old Covenant) that was passing away as the New Covenant was being established through the death of our Lord. Jesus Christ is now our superior High Priest, and as believers in His finished work, we partake of His better priesthood. We can now enter the Holy of Holies (the presence of God) through Him (Hebrews 10: 19-20). In this remarkable event of the tearing of the Temple veil, we find an image of Jesus’ flesh being torn for us just as He was tearing the Temple veil for us – opening access into the very presence of a holy God. The things of the Old Testament Temple were only shadows of things to come – all of which pointed to the life and death of Christ – the final and ultimate fulfillment of all the symbols. He was the veil to the Holy of Holies and through His flesh being torn for us, the faithful now – through His **grace alone** – have free access (though undeserving) to the divine presence of a holy and just God.

In another sense, the veil was symbolic of Christ himself being **the one and only way to the Father**. This is indicated by the fact that the High Priest likewise had to enter the Holy of Holies one way - through the veil. This profound truth is articulated by Paul in his explanation of the doctrine of justification by faith through GRACE found in Romans 3: 23.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His GRACE through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, who God set forth as a propitiation by His blood through faith to demonstrate His righteousness because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

NOTE from Mary Ann: Paul writes like an attorney therefore we must read every word and phrase very slowly and carefully in order to receive the depth of insight he imparts. Once again – don’t rush through your reading – ponder and meditate on his profound understanding of God’s grace in Romans 3: 23.

God’s gracious provision of the substitutionary death of Jesus, his only son, enabled Him to pronounce the verdict of “NOT GUILTY” (JUSTIFIED) upon repentant sinners like you and me, and to remarkably include us in His eternal purposes. As a result, we, the grace filled believers, enter into the realm of God’s gracious activity enabling us to enter into the life long process of becoming “sanctified” in cooperation with the empowering of the very spirit of God - the Holy Spirit. (Sanctification: the lifelong process of becoming more and more like Jesus).

Our divine acceptance on the basis of God’s grace gives us a brand new status as children of God. We are members of the household of God, and as family - we relate to God as a personal Heavenly Father. Consequently we become members of a community where race, class and sexual distinctions are irrelevant since we all become equal inheritors of God’s age- long promise to Abraham of universal blessing.

The Holy Spirit graciously energizes believers with a variety of spiritual gifts - given by God to strengthen and edify the body of Christ’s church. Because the riches of God’s grace are freely lavished upon believers in their community life upon earth, the church demonstrates by its very existence the immeasurable riches of God’s grace that are now available to any and all through a personal relationship with Jesus, our Lord and Savior and head of the Church.

Humility and the Grace of God

As a result of the grace given us as God’s children, we are to likewise reflect this grace in our own Christian character and relationships. The condition for receiving God’s grace is a humble spirit and surrender to the authority of Almighty God. Such humility in relation to God enables the believer to likewise practice humility in regard to others. Because of God’s grace extended mercifully to the believer, the one who belongs to Christ can thus set aside selfishness, superiority, pettiness, and conceit in order to treat others with compassion and grace in an attitude of mutual servant-hood, respect and forgiveness. Because we have been forgiven, we too must forgive (forgiveness is not an option – it is a command!) extending that grace to others. As children of the God of Grace, we are commanded to grow in this same grace of our Lord (2 Peter 3:18).

Remarkably, God's grace is fully accessible to all humans with no other precondition except that of a repentant desire to receive it. As a result the human condition of alienation from God and His purposes is replaced with freedom to approach the otherwise unapproachable majesty of a holy and righteous God. It is God's grace freely extended to sinners that cancels out and annihilates any tendency for boasting. Freely we receive it – freely we are to give it.

The above thoughts are deeper than the ocean floor –so let's come back to the surface to examine the application for our lives. We need to admit it! We are all still a mess! Aren't we? We need God's grace today just as much as we needed it the first day we believed the gospel by faith. No one ever graduates from "Grace School" – we must continually renew our enrollment in "continuing education" regarding Spurgeon's challenge to us to **grow in grace**. We so often hold "PHDs" in defending our own righteousness simply because we excel in thinking we are more righteous than we actually are. It is quite humbling to think of ourselves as still desperately in need of God's rescuing grace. When you find yourself arguing for your own righteousness, working hard to deny the evidence of your own sin in the matter, then you will fail to seek this amazing grace that is your only hope to survive this fallen world. The tests of our growth in grace come at us constantly, but grace is only attractive to those who recognize they need it – that would be those who admit they are sinners. The spiritual healing of the great Physician is only praised by those who acknowledge that they are still sick with a life long diagnosis of the spiritual disease of sin. It is a tragedy when we praise God for his amazing grace on Sunday and deny our need for that grace the rest of the week. We will never outgrow our need for grace, no matter how much we learn or how much we mature in our individual sanctification process. The bad news is that the struggle isn't over until we are on the other side where sin is no more. (Philippians 3:12 – 16). The way to begin to celebrate the grace that God has so freely given us every day is by admitting just how much we need it. The woman caught in adultery is a beautiful picture of how powerful the grace of God acts in the life of one who truly understands his own sin and depravity – the one who truly understands what he or she is still capable of.

The Take- Away For You and Me?

Grace! What an incredibly profound word! It is the bottom line of your acceptance with God. It is the foundational reason why Jesus is your only hope. He fully and completely satisfied the Father's anger so that you and I will never, ever again face the penalty for our sin. You do not have to live in fear of God's anger. On your very worst, most rebellious, and most faithless day, you can run into the purest, holiest presence of your heavenly Father, and He will not turn you away. Your acceptance has not been, nor will it ever be, based on your performance. You have not been welcomed into an eternal

relationship with God because you have kept the law, but because Jesus did. If you obey God for 1000 years, you will not have earned more of his acceptance than you were granted the very first moment you believed. You do not have to be something before God because Jesus accomplished everything on your behalf. Take the rest of your life to ponder the depths of God's amazing grace!

Questions for Meditation and Reflection

Important Principles to Live By:

1. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." Ephesians 2:8 – 9
2. If God has willingly canceled whatever your regrets are causing you to hold on to, you are free to let it go as well. Stop punishing yourself for debts that God has already canceled.
2. The real test of what we believe is the extent to which we are changed.
3. To refuse to accept the truth of Jesus is to remain in bondage.
4. We must fight the father of lies with the truth of Christ.
5. Grace received must become grace given to others.

Personal Study:

Read: John 8:1-11 as preparation for your personal study.

Ask God to give you fresh insight and understanding into the power of His grace.

1. There is a tendency for Christians to miss the proper balance between sin and grace. Jesus modeled the perfect balance by giving the woman grace, but also confronting her sin. We as Christ followers often fail by emphasizing one over the other. There can be love without accountability which represents a "live however you want" mentality, or there can be a dangerous legalistic, narrow mentality that presents God as a taskmaster who requires moral perfection with no room for error. John 8 is a picture of Jesus demonstrating the proper balance.

- A. As a believer, why is it vitally important to understand this balance of sin and grace? Why is it so easy to get out of balance?

B. How can studying the whole counsel of God help us maintain our balance in understanding grace and sin?

C. Grace is a key attribute of God. **Read** the following references and record what you learn from each passage:

- **Psalm 145:8** - “The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy.”

Your Thoughts?

- **John 1:14, 17** - “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we behold His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth... For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

Your Thoughts?

- **Ephesians 2:7-9** - “That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

Your Thoughts?

D. How do you find balance between the tension of seeing yourself as “nothing” while still recognizing your standing as a child of God, deeply loved and precious to Him, with a God ordained purpose to fulfill?

2. **Read** John 8:4 – 6.

Instead of answering the questions of the crowd, Jesus stooped to the ground, took his finger, and wrote in the sand. The Bible is unclear as to what he wrote. What is your idea of what Jesus may have written based upon the subsequent action of the crowd?

3. **Read** John 8:10 – 11.

- How does Jesus model perfect balance between sin and grace in his exchange with the woman? What do you learn from this encounter that blesses you?

4. **Read** Romans 8:1 and Romans 5:20.

- What do you learn from these passages that encourages you and that deepens your understanding of God's amazing grace?

Prayer:

(As a student of Hillsdale College online courses, this prayer was recently sent to me. Having studied John's gospel deeply now for almost a year, I wanted to pass on the blessing of this prayer. There is enough meat here to keep you full for a while!)

God, the Father, who so loved the world that you sent your only-begotten Son to die for our sins and to rise for our justification; open our hearts to receive your love, and to faithfully embrace the gift of our redemption by your grace.

God, the Son, who formed the world and in these latter days took on yourself our mortal nature and dwelt among us; illumine our imaginations to behold your heavenly glory, full of grace and truth, and so conform us to your divine likeness.

God the Spirit, who overshadowed the Virgin Mary at the annunciation, and anointed Jesus at his baptism; fall on us also, fill us with heavenly breath, and quicken our mortal natures to share in the anointing of Christ, that we may with him, rise to life immortal.

Holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity ever one God, the source and goal of our redemption; we remember that you sent to, entered into, and enlivened our world, so that we might, by your superabundantly generous love, enter into the triune embrace. Grant us grace to turn from this world and set our hearts on you, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of eternal life in you through Jesus our Immanuel. Amen. (Prayer written by Rev. Adam Rick, Chaplain Hillsdale College)

Resources:

Morning by Morning; Charles Spurgeon

Jonah, God's Reluctant Prophet; Mary Ann Bishop

Concise Bible Doctrines; Elmer Towns

New Morning Mercies; Paul Tripp

Devotion

JESUS, REVEALER of TRUTH

I think that one of the most comforting things to learn and understand about Jesus Christ is the awesome truth that He KNOWS. Because He was “*with God*” in the very beginning, even before the creation of the world, and He “*was God*” (John 1:1), and since “*all things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made*” (John 1:3), God in His Holy Word makes it clear that Jesus knows EVERY thing there is to know about EVERY thing!! How can He not, since He made it all?? As hard as it is for the human mind to fully comprehend, the undeniable truth is that there is absolutely nothing in all creation that Jesus does not know and fully understand. There is absolutely nothing hidden from His ever-seeing eye and there is absolutely nothing that is misinterpreted or misunderstood by His all-wise mind. Unlike you and me, nothing in life ever surprises or confounds Him. Therefore, when we have questions about this world, this life, His Kingdom or what the future holds, we can ask Jesus and trust that He will **REVEAL** to us the truth. As the writer of Hebrews explains, “*long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days **He has spoken to us by His Son**, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through Whom He also created the world*” (Hebrews 1:1-2). Jesus Christ is God’s Word made flesh to be God’s message and messenger to the world in order to **REVEAL** to all mankind the truth about God, His Kingdom and His Son, as well as the truth about sin, death, heaven, hell and eternal life.

I also, find this awesome truth to be one of the most frightening things to learn and understand about Jesus Christ, because it means that He knows everything there is to know about me also - ...the good, the bad and the downright ugly!!! The scriptures declare: “*No creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to Whom we must give an account.*” (Hebrews 4:13) “*For He knows the secrets of the heart*” (Psalm 44:21).

*“You know when I sit down and
when I rise up;
You discern my thoughts from afar,
You search out my path
and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, Lord,
You know it all together.”
Psalm 139:2-3*

As beautiful and comforting and loving as these truths about the Lord are, they also cause me to tremble and want to try to hide! Aware that I am full of sin and fall so very short of the glory of God, I find these truths convicting. They humble me and bring me to my knees because they tell me the truth: I can't hide anything from the Lord. Every thought, every deed, every cross word spoken or unspoken, every complaint, every sigh, every desire, every selfish motive, everything and anything that comes into and out of my heart and mind, He KNOWS. Thus, I often find myself abased and crying out much like Isaiah when he saw the Lord *"Woe is me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips."* (Isaiah 6:5) "But even worse, I am a man with an unclean, adulterous heart and an unrighteous, wicked spirit. O Lord, even my best is like filthy rags in Your sight! How can I stand in Your presence, much less be worthy of Your acceptance?"

But this is exactly why Jesus came. Jesus, the God-Man, came to **REVEAL**, to uncover and make known the truth so that we might have life. He came not only to uncover the ugly truth about ourselves but also to REVEAL the beauty of Christ and His redeeming grace upon all who believe. Jesus Christ came to explain the "mysteries of the Kingdom of God" to us so that we might know Him fully as we are fully known and so that we might become all that He created us to be...children of God, co-heirs with Christ and destined for an eternity in His presence in Glory. *"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him."* (John 3:17) *Therefore, since we have been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God."* (Romans 6: 9) *"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him."* (Romans 8:16-17)

This I find to be exciting and absolutely the best news I have ever heard!! Jesus, the Son of God who is the Light of the World came to **REVEAL**—to uncover and expose—all the darkness, all the evil, all the sin and all the wickedness in this world and in us so that we might see the truth, be convicted of our sin and turn to the light of His mercy and grace. Understanding our limited natural abilities to comprehend the truth as written in His Word, He came to **REVEAL**—to explain to us the scriptures, His powerful LOVE letter written to us by God, so that we might grow in spiritual wisdom and knowledge. In addition, Jesus came to **REVEAL** to us the way to live in a manner pleasing to God by modeling that way for us. In Jesus, the **REVEALER of Truth**, God has made known all that we need to know in order to be made right with Him and receive eternal life.

Are you hungry for real revelation and insight into God, His Kingdom, this world and YOURSELF? Are you willing to be exposed...laid naked and bare before Jesus that He may REVEAL the truth about who you really are? If so, there is only one place to go:

INTO HIS PRESENCE. You must go alone, humbly seeking and with sincerity of heart. Then with His Word open before you, you must sit quietly and ask Him to speak and to **REVEAL** anything He wants to remove from your life that is unholy and keeping you in sin and bondage. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul gives a powerful example of how to pray for what we hope to achieve:

*“that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a
Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,
having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know
what is the hope to which He has called you,
what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints,
and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power
toward us who believe.”
Ephesians 1:17-19*

Friends, when you do these things and pray this kind of prayer with sincerity heart, Jesus the **REVEALER of Truth** will not disappoint. In response to your desire and faith, He will **REVEAL** to you things about Himself and yourself, that you would not be able to know or understand otherwise. You will see His heart, His mind, His purposes and His love for you and this world in wonderful new ways that will forever change you. As you grow in your understanding of truth and allow Jesus to transform your way of thinking and your unholy way of life, you will find the peace, joy and satisfaction that you have always longed for. As you spend more time laying naked and bare before the Lord, allowing Him to uncover and expose layer upon layer of sin in your heart, you will come to understand just how amazing His grace really is and you will never again fear being in His presence. What is keeping you from going to Him today and receiving all that He has for you?

*“And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”
John 8:32*