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Presentation Transcript
Law of God – Part 7 – Grace and Relationship
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We've come to the last presentation in our series on the *Law of God*, which has dealt with some of Paul's scriptures that people have mistakenly used to excuse themselves from obeying God's law.

For the final presentation in this series, we're going to talk about a biblical term we've touched on many times so far in this series, but have not as yet defined it. That term is *grace*. To some of us, grace is an unctuous, pious, sanctimonious expression that is embarrassing to say out loud. To others, it's an excuse to wantonly violate the laws of God. And to yet others, it means freedom to worship God however one wants – Bible aside, Jesus aside, New Testament faith and practice aside. Grace, however, is none of these.

Here's the scripture we quoted in the last presentation about what it means to be under grace instead of being under law – Romans 6:14.

Romans 6:14 – *For will have no dominion over you since you are not under law, but under grace.*

The Greek word for *grace* there is *charis*. (I probably butchered the pronunciation of it, but C-H-A-R-I-S is how it is spelled in English.) It meant, in Paul's day, to show kindness to someone with the implication of graciousness on the part of one showing such kindness. That's a direct quote from *Louw-Nida Lexicon*. "To manifest graciousness toward; kindness; graciousness, grace." So those are all ways it can be translated. It's important to note, they mention, that *kindness* in English indicates an activity in which an individual is kind to someone. It is essentially an event involving a particular quality. And the same is true of *charis*. In Acts 15:40, we can read about that. For this is not just a gracious disposition, but it carries an expectation of the Lord showing kindness. So let's read that scripture in Acts 15:40.

Acts 15:40 – *But Paul chose Silas, and departed – getting ready for one of his journeys – having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.*

In context there, they were not just expecting a good feeling from God, but action toward Paul and Silas from God. There was an expectation, probably, that they would be successful in their mission because of God's direct intervention. And that might have included things like protection from robbers, protection from the government – we all need that – open-mindedness and financial support on the part of the brethren where he was going – real action from God because of His kindness. And in this verse, we used to show the word *grace*, it was about specifically forgiving sin – not under the penalty of the law anymore, even though we still sin, but under the forgiveness of God and the recognition of all the other things that He does. When you hear that word, that's what we should be thinking about.

Next, I want to talk about the *grace process* as it's explained in the Bible. I started out, when planning this explanation of grace, with a list of all the things God does for us. And that seemed to make sense to me in the beginning, as I realized that grace is about God *doing* stuff for us, because He's kind, and also, all that we can expect from Him, but that isn't really where this needs to go, I don't think. I'm going to start somewhere else. I'm going to start out with us before we knew God. What was that life like? Well, in 2 Timothy 2:24, Paul says to Timothy, the young minister:

2 Timothy 2:24 – *And the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves.* So that's God view of all of us in our natural state. We're always working against ourselves in every way.

I look back on my own life before God got my attention, and I was lost. I realize what I was thinking then, and just shake my head. What *was* I thinking? I was so confused and in a state of ignorance about everything! I was insensitive to the things of God – completely outside the realm of my thinking. And I did some really destructive things because I didn't know about God's law. And I had some really self-destructive thoughts and attitudes. Now, I'm not boasting about how much I've changed. The only difference is what *God* has added, because He is, by nature, merciful and gracious. So that's not for me to boast about any changes that have occurred. I now know that I was not alone. The whole world was like I was – in chaos. The whole world is muddling around in confusion because they don't know what works.

I watched a documentary this past week about five movie producers who went with the troops in World War II. They wanted to capture the essence of the war. You've probably seen a lot of their footage if you've watched any war movies about World War II. But when these men, as the war progressed and they moved into Germany, they hit the death camps in Germany and eastern Europe, and they became afraid for society. How could the most educated, scientifically sophisticated country in the world do what they did to so many helpless people? It was utter evil and malevolence and chaos. These men, when they saw this, their collective conclusion was that World War II had to be fought to save society. So that's how bad it was – as we were on the brink of losing our humanity and society as we knew it because of the evil that was there.

If we continue reading what Paul said, we learn even more.

V-24-26 – ...if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will. It's not hard for him. He can do it any time he wants. So, we're all sitting ducks for the devil. That's the state we were in before we became converted.

I listened recently to a sermon that Rick Pratt gave in Cincinnati. And he mentioned that Satan was strong enough to convince a third of the angels – who knew God and were created by God – to go with him and to turn away from God – from their Creator. So, he's powerful. And we fall for his ploys every time without God's help. We're helpless before him, except for God. So, we're all lost then.

So, for all our foolishness and weakness in sinning and doubting, at some point God shows up, and He gets our attention. He's interested in us. I didn't even know what kind of trouble I was in, and I only knew that I didn't know what to do. But He began to show me. He began to show *me*. He was interested in *me*, I found out. I didn't know why. Sometimes I wonder why still today. So, when He did, I had to acknowledge - just like the scripture said – the ugly, unvarnished truth about myself – at least, what little I saw of myself at that time. And that's one of the requirements – that we will repent and acknowledge the truth about our sins in ourselves.

Now, I was watching a show about Jesus and His disciples, called *The Chosen*, recently, and there is a scene where Nicodemus – who had previously tried to cast demons out of Mary Magdalene – found her, because he had heard that she was healed. And he asked her how she was now free and who did this miracle? And she said, "I don't know His name, but I know I was one way and now I'm completely different, and in between, there was Him." Many of you have had that experience, like I have. We learn that God's nature – His total likeness – is seen in the law. We were all gone astray from that good way of living life.

In Luke 19:10, Jesus, when asked why He had visited Zacchaeus, a tax collector, said that He had come to *seek and to save those who are lost*. And I have observed before that there are two ways to God. One is like mine, where I knew nothing about how to worship God, and God began to call me. And I knew something different was happening. I was one way, and then I was completely different. I know that many people have grown up in the faith, and it's different for them. They have always known what to do, but sometimes don't see that their calling was from birth through their family. It doesn't feel like something new has happened, because it's not new. He's always been there.

Some people think that children don't have a spiritual life – that they're just carnal. Well, let me tell you, that is a huge blindness. Children, like all adults, suffer the effects of living in the devil's world. Paul calls that effect *the flesh*. So that sounds like it's a part of us – and it is now, but it didn't used to be. But children also have a mind created by God that is a natural receptacle

for the Holy Spirit. They can be drawn, just as adults can be. And through the example and the behavior and the attention of their parents, as converted people who have Jesus and God living in them, they are being drawn too. Read this with me in Acts 2:38. This is where Peter was preaching this huge sermon on the Day of Pentecost, when the church was just getting started. Some of us don't think anything at all about the kids in the church. Peter did.

Acts 2:38-39 – *Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise – the promise he’s talking about – the promise of salvation, the promise of forgiveness of sin – is for you, and for your children, and for all who afar off, everyone whom the Lord our God Himself calls.*

So there it is – the truth about children and their ability to be drawn by God. So, stop thinking that they're not being called. It's right there – right there before our eyes.

So, how does God work primarily with children? Well, it's easy to understand if you know what the word *called* means in the Bible. A calling, as explained in a number of Bible helps, is an *invitation*. When a person grows up in a home with converted parents, they're being invited through the model and the upbringing of the parents by God. This is about children who grew up in the church – *your* children, he said – not the children of people that aren't being converted, but the children who grow up in Christian homes.

So, do I think that children should be baptized? Well, no. Two reasons: One, not enough life experience to understand what a lifetime commitment is, in many cases, or what it means to repent, or what sin is, or to be affected by it as much. And two, there's not sufficient brain development to weigh the options and possibilities like there will be in just a few years when they're adults.

Now, anytime you make a hard statement like that, there are always exceptions. I mean, I was baptized before I was twenty-five years old, which would be before my brain fully developed, and it took. But I had to learn a lot more as I grew older.

I work with hundreds and hundreds of children about life choices. And that's why I have that opinion about not enough life experience and brain development. It's just not time yet. That doesn't mean that they can't enjoy all the benefits, if they're growing up in a Christian home.

So, continuing on now with this explanation of grace. Once God calls us, and we repent – that is, accept the invitation by surrendering to Christ – He becomes our Lord and Master. We promise to obey Him – to obey His law. We promise to follow Him as He obeyed God's law and to be obedient to God. And once we do that, then our sins against ourselves, and our sins against others, and our sins against God are forgiven – gone! We're no longer under the death penalty by the free gift of Jesus Christ through God the Father.

Even now, I think, after 50-some years, try as I might, I still sin every day, and quite often, don't even know that I've done it yet – so, beset with weakness, blindness, foolishness, stupid actions and thoughts. As time has passed, I've started to understand what Solomon said, that man, at his best, is completely futile. We are so weak. And, because of our lawlessness, we have all earned the death penalty. And it's the only God can have a healthy family. People like me and you cannot be let in. We would wreck for everybody. So there is a death penalty for violating God's law. And everyone of us has been put on death row.

There's an interesting conversation recorded in Luke between Jesus and some people who asked Him about the eternal fate of some people who had suffered death at the hand of Pontius Pilate. And He said to them, "Do you think that these people were worse sinners than all others? No! Unless you repent, you will also likewise perish." Well, this was shocking news to the Jews He was talking to, because they thought being a Jew meant salvation. And He was telling them it just doesn't work that way. He came to rock the boat. We have *all* sinned, and so we are all doomed. And even if we repent, we will still not be able to live without more sinning. So, we're all doomed, *except* for one thing – and that is the *graciousness* of God. He was willing to sacrifice His own Son – to die in our place – to pay the penalty for our sins. And His Son also was willing to die in our place. Both of them equally gracious toward us. And that one thing, then, is how much God loves us. Jesus said, "Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

So, except for that, we're all goners. Do you remember the definition I read to you about grace? It's an action taken because of kindness. That's what God is doing for us. And it didn't begin with Christ. God's love for us has no beginning. He has always been about having a family. He created the universe and angels so that we could be successful in becoming His children. The earth has an environment around it – an atmosphere – like a thin skin – that protects us from space. It's an amazing place. And angels were created to be helpers with us.

So, by the death and the resurrection of His Son, Jesus, we can now be forgiven. And then we can be justified. We're sin-free.

But what about the sins we inevitably commit, try as we might to avoid them? Well, that brings us to the next step – reconciliation. Everything we see and know about God is because of His loving plan for us. The one thing He asks of us is that we desire to be a part of it with Him – to love Him back. To prove that desire, we must repudiate our past sin and strive with our might to walk as Jesus walked – sin-free. And, if we do that, then our past sins *will* be forgiven and we will be drawn back to God. Our sins alienate us from God. So, if we stop sinning, and we have Christ's sacrifice to cover our past sins and take care of any eventuality in the future, then we're reconciled to God. And we can now live guilt-free in His presence. He's going to give us the Holy Spirit to help us with that. And by that Spirit, astoundingly, He and His Son, Jesus, will come live *in* us. How's that for intimacy – an intimate relationship.

So He put aside my past foolishness and began to draw me to Himself – to reconcile the breach I had created by my bad behavior and thinking. Paul talks about it this way in Galatians 2:20. So once we're reconciled, by the way, what does that produce? You now have a relationship, don't you? Paul said:

Galatians 2:20 – *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

So that's where we really start to understand what grace is in its fulness. Grace is an ongoing, undeserved, loving, protecting relationship between each one of us and our Father and His firstborn Son. It's not just about forgiveness of sin. It's about *all* our needs – physical and spiritual – being met by God – including protection from the sins of unawareness and omission and weakness. It's like a protective dome over us, with each one of us inside that dome, and God and Christ with us, where He works lovingly with each one of us in a unique, specially crafted way to advance us toward and into eternal life with Him in His Kingdom. And it's also about mutual devotion. It's a two-way relationship. It's as John said, "We love Him because He first loved us."

So, it's all about our personal obligation to live a new life in Christ through His sacrifice and Spirit. And that's why Paul asked the ridiculous question, "Should we continue in sin so that grace may abound?" If you listened to what I said so far, that question doesn't even make sense. Of course not! If we enter into that relationship, then we will live a new life where we will grow in the grace and truth of Christ by the Spirit and through the Father. Our mistakes will not be held against us, as long as we continue to trust God and strive to follow Him.

So, just to wrap up here, let's go to John 1:17:

John 1:17 – *The law was given through Moses, and grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*

Even this scripture people misunderstand. It's not that Christ came with grace and truth to make Moses and the law obsolete. It's that Christ came with grace and truth so that people could live by the full spiritual intent of the law – not under the law's penalty, doomed to death, with our imperfect efforts to obey it, but under the protecting canopy of God's grace while they grow and walk with Christ, who is our Law-keeper. And, of course, we do all this in the belief that God keeps His word. And that's called living by faith. And what is the benefit of that kind of faith? Well, let's let Paul explain it to us – Romans 4:16.

Romans 4:16 – *That is why it depends on faith – he said – in order that the promise may rest on grace, and be guaranteed to all his offspring – not only to the inherent of the law, but also the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.*

So, time out here. Did you catch it? The law is a part of the grace process, but not the only part. “Not only to the inherent of the law, but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham.” Both parts are part of the process. Repentance should teach us that. Let’s read more about what he said in verse 17:

V-17 – *(As it is written, I have made you the father of many nations) – that’s God talking to Abraham. In hope, he believed against hope that he should become the father of many nations as he has been told. So shall your offspring be. He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was good as dead, since he was about one hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God. But he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised. That is why his faith was counted to him as righteousness.*

So, if we have that kind of faith, then our faith in God is counted to us for righteousness, as it has always been from the very beginning until now – sin-free, guilt-free. God wants us to trust Him, to obey Him, to love Him. He wants our whole heart. And He and Jesus, whom, we are told, is the captain of our salvation, have a plan for each of us that they’re working out as they live in us to ensure that we will grow into that kind of relationship with Him.

“I was one way and now I’m completely different. In between, there was Him.”

Until next time, this is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.