

## R12.2 May 2024 Blog The High Price of Grace

*“But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—then He said to the paralytic, “Get up, pick up your bed and go home.”<sup>1</sup>*

It has been said that Christ came to change the world. If this is so, then He paid a needlessly high price. And His followers, no price at all. This would almost certainly be true if grace and forgiveness were the same thing. To see this important difference consider another Gospel.

Suppose that, instead of being born into obscurity and poverty, Christ entered this world through a wealthy and influential Jewish family, having access to and credibility with the Jewish elite. At the right time He would go to them and demonstrate His miraculous powers, proclaiming Himself to be Messiah and enlisting their aid to bring His kingdom to Israel and the world.

He would then go to the Roman occupiers and demand they leave His kingdom. Any resistance on their part would be met with the power of legions of angels called down by Christ. He doesn't go to the cross. How quickly the Lord could have ushered in His glorious kingdom! And what of the sin of His people, both Jew and Gentile? He has “authority on earth to forgive sins.” It would have been so easy.

But there are at least four flies in this fragrant but flawed ointment. First, the righteous anger of God has not been propitiated, nor His justice satisfied. Second, His people, though forgiven remain slaves to sin and subject to death. Third, Satan has certain claims on this earth and its people that have not been adjudicated in the courtroom of Heaven. Fourth, the curse has not been lifted from the earth.

This is the heart of the matter. God is moral and lawful. Only the righteous life and death of His Son could satisfy God's justice and bring peace between God and man and begin to nullify Satan's claims to the kingdoms of this cursed world.

Similarly, only Christ's resurrection could destroy death and Satan's power through it. And by sending the Holy Spirit, God gives power to His people to become new immortal creatures with a new nature. And we begin to become so while on earth, as we put to death the “old man” and put on the “new man” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

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<sup>1</sup> All scripture references in this blog are NASB95 unless otherwise noted

Herein is the costly difference between forgiveness and grace. Grace includes forgiveness but is much more than forgiveness. Forgiveness costs nothing for Christ or His people. Grace costs both Christ and His people their lives (Luke 9:23-24). Forgiveness leaves us unchanged. **Grace changes our very nature.** In forgiveness our sinful human nature lives on. In grace our sinful flesh is destroyed, and we become partakers of the divine nature (see: 2 Peter 1:4, Ephesians 4:24, 1 John 3:2, 2 Corinthians 3:18).

This is the astonishing reality of Paul's declaration that what we gained in Christ is "much more" than what we lost in Adam. What we lost in Adam was catastrophic. But in Christ our human nature is wedded to the divine nature. "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Seen from another perspective, there is a shift from Old Testament to Gospels to Epistles in the following way. The OT majors on human behavior, while the Gospels emphasize behavior, motive and character (Sermon on the Mount). But by the time the Holy Spirit had communicated the full Gospel to the Apostles, we see the real goal is Christ-likeness, i.e. God's people having elements of the divine nature, while still retaining their human nature. All this by His grace. Forgiveness is only a means to the end of God sharing a part of His nature with His once sinful creatures. WHO IS ADEQUATE FOR SUCH THINGS?

It is true that grace is a free gift, but there are two steps in gift-giving. First the giver must offer the gift and then the potential recipient must accept it. Consider the offer to a student of a full scholarship to his favorite university. The university must extend the offer but the gift is not received until the student accepts it by enrolling and completing the prescribed curriculum.

Grace is like the scholarship. To accept it is to "enroll" in God's family and complete the curriculum. Once the gift is accepted, the Lord defines the curriculum.

The question we must ask ourselves is whether we have accepted forgiveness or grace from God. The one who accepts grace also receives forgiveness, and the whole of God's curriculum. For the one who accepts only forgiveness, there is no curriculum. But then, that is another Gospel.

### **Applications:**<sup>2</sup>

1. Investigate the scripture references included above and consider whether you have truly accepted *forgiveness* or *grace* from God.

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<sup>2</sup> Added by the R12.2 Leadership Team

2. Practice articulating the difference between *forgiveness* and *grace*, and then engage in conversations with fellow believers about the incredible value of God's grace. It is a form of worship to edify other followers of Christ in this way.
3. Charles H. Spurgeon once wrote, "Our chief desires are for holiness, usefulness, likeness to Christ, preparedness for heaven. These are the desires of grace rather than nature – the desires of the righteous man rather than of the mere man."<sup>3</sup>
  - a. What are your chief desires? Make a list. Are your desires temporal or eternal?
  - b. Does your heart reflect the desires of one who has accepted God's grace? If not, what prayers will you lift up to the Lord to change your desires?
4. Are you enrolled in God's family and progressing (maturing) in His curriculum? (consider Hebrews 5:12-14)

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<sup>3</sup> Spurgeon's *Cheque Book of the Bank of Faith* – April 15<sup>th</sup> (see also Proverbs 10:24)