

“GRACE AND GRATITUDE.”

Robert Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden

November 24, 2019, 6:00PM

Scripture text: II Corinthians 4:15

Introduction.

As we are in Thanksgiving week it seemed to me appropriate to address a question about grace and tie it to gratitude and the glory of God. I will do this this evening and Thursday morning.

II Corinthians 4:15 For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving (gratitude), to the glory of God.

Let me teach you a German word. It's one of the most important German words you need to know, especially in the up-coming election year.

TANSTAAFL: “There ain't no such thing as a free lunch.”

This is a handy word to remember every time you hear a politician offer you something for free. When they say that, say back TANSTAAFL: “There ain't no such thing as a free lunch.”

There is nothing free, everything costs something. If someone offers you a free lunch, it just means someone else paid for it. If they offer free health care, someone else paid for it.

As Margaret Thatcher famously said, “The problem with socialism is sooner or later you run out of other people's money.”

But what about grace?

But what about grace? Isn't grace free. Well yes, it is free to us, but it cost someone something. Jesus paid for it with the cost of His own blood. It cost Him His life. So, grace is free to us because it is paid for by Jesus. Jesus picked up the check.

If we are going to stick with our Tanstaafl idea, then there ain't no such thing as free grace, but there is costly grace, that is given to us as a gift.

We have been bought for a price, we have been ransomed, we have had our debt forgiven.

Here is the thing about free things. You can't earn them. If you do something to earn it, then it is not a gift, it is a payment, it is getting your due.

If you are an employee and your employer has agreed to pay you \$25 dollars an hour, when you work, he is in your debt, he is obligated to pay you your agreed upon wage. When you employer gives you your check do you write him a thank you note? No, not because you don't appreciate it, but because you were owed it.

Romans 4:4-8 Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.

That's not grace, you can't earn grace, it's a gift.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Grace is the unmerited favor of God.

That tells us what grace is not. It is not merit.

You can't earn it, you can't deserve it, you can't do anything to make God give you more or less of it. You can't gain it and you can't lose it. It is God's gift and He doesn't take back gifts. We can't change His eternal disposition toward us. He's our Father and we are His adopted children.

A friend of Zach's at his college recently wrote:

“This offends me, the grace of God offends me. I don't want to need grace. I want to earn grace, to have the smallest hand in deserving it. The very fact that I need grace makes it hard to accept, to enjoy, to want. ... when it comes to reconciling before God, I want to bring just a note card or scrap of worth, some little bit of self- earned righteousness. I want God to need me. Even if it's just a little bit” (Ruth Winslow).

Grace is offensive, it says we are spiritually bankrupt, there is no God-pleasing thing in us.

We are like the prodigal sinner being embraced and given a robe and sandals and a ring and the fatten calf killed and a party started. What did the prodigal contribute to what he received? His only contribution was sin.

The wedding supper of the Lamb is a feast, but it is not a potluck. You can't bring a casserole or a side dish or even a bag of chips. You can't even bring a fork or a napkin. It is all done, there is nothing you can do or add or contribute.

It reminds me of how we act at a restaurant with friends, and someone picks up the check and offers to pay the whole thing. What do we do? We want to do something, we offer to pay half and if that is refused, then we offer to pay the tip. Sometimes they agree.

We have a hard time receiving gifts. We want to have some part in it. But let me be clear about this desire to try to bring something to please or appease God to earn or win His favor.

Romans 14:23 Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

“Those who seek to earn the grace of God by their own efforts (don't realize it, but they) are trying to please God with sins” (Martin Luther). All our efforts are stained by sin.

Paul clearly got this when he said:

I Timothy 1:15-16 Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. 16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

God chooses us sinners to display His grace in, so there can be no boasting, no bragging, no saying look what I did, look what I got. Paul spells this out in his Corinthians letters.

I Corinthians 1:26-29, 31 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ... 31 so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

And then Paul goes right on to apply this principle, this truth to himself.

I Corinthians 2:1-5 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

II Corinthians 12:8-10 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Because of the grace of God there can be no room for pride or boasting except in His grace.

Can a beggar be proud? Can a person who lives off the good will of others boast and brag? We are beggars before God.

What do you have that you did not receive?

I Corinthians 4:7 What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

It's a question where the answer is understood to be obvious. Can you think of something you have or are that is purely your own doing without the grace of God? We have nothing that we have not received. Grace means I got nothing, and I need everything.

John the Baptist similarly remarks, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven” (John 3:27).

II Corinthians 4:1 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.

Paul starts chapter 4 of II Corinthians reflecting on his own ministry and what he has because of the grace of God.

Everything he is as an apostle comes by grace. He knows what he was before and compared to what he was and what he deserved, this is amazing grace.

II Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

Grace is the best thing that has ever happened to anyone.

I Corinthians 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am.

Our God is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Exodus 34:6–7).

This grace is distinct to the Christian faith. No other religion emphasizes divine grace the way the Bible does.

God loved us from before the foundations of the earth, before creation, before your birth, before we could do anything.

God loved us while we were yet sinners, while we were at our very worst, while we were only doing bad things.

God loved us while there was absolutely nothing good in us.

Jesus has the merit, we get the mercy.

What do we do with grace?

Respond. What does that response look like? Humility before God and before one another.

II Corinthians 4:15 For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving (gratitude), to the glory of God.

Give thanks for grace. Express great gratitude.

Whenever you receive a gift you say thank you. You express your gratitude.

Gratitude is the sign/evidence that you understand grace, that is truly is a gift.

When we really get grace, our truest response is gratitude. People who are ungrateful or don't say thank you show they don't have a clue about what they have received.

Furthermore, gratitude doesn't just delight in the gift, it delights in the giver.

Psalms 103:1-5 Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!
2 Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,

3 who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,
4 who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
5 who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

And what determines how much gratitude we feel and express? How great is the gift and how undeserved the gift. The greater the gift the greater the gratitude and the more undeserved the gift, the greater the gratitude. Where grace abounds, gratitude flows unceasingly.

This is our nightly prayer. Father, thank you for all of today's grace, the grace we have seen and the grace that was unseen, your blessings and benefits, your provision and protection.

Let us be the most thankful church in town. Let's outdo ourselves in giving thanks. May we never cease to be amazed by God's grace.

Gratitude is like a mirror. Grace reflects in the mirror and it bounces back to God as thanks.

Imitate it grace.

Be gracious and merciful as God is gracious and merciful. Give forgiveness.

Grace is meant to flow through us. We are to be streams, not puddles.

Are we known for grace or are we known for being demanding, critical, complaining? Are we perfectionist? Do we treat others differently than we want to be treated? How do we treat those we live with, those who work for us or who serve us? Are our actions a gracious reflection of the grace we have received?

Do we ask for and give forgiveness? Do we give to others what they don't deserve and haven't merited?

May grace and gratitude be multiplied to you and multiplied in you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord this week and always.

Prayer: Holy Father and God of all mercy and grace. No human mind could have ever conceived or made up a God like you who from before the foundations of the earth planned to act in mercy and grace toward those who sin against you. We stand in need of our infinite mercy and grace and pray now that you will send us from here better understanding it and more deeply applying it to our needs and the needs of those around us. Glorify yourself in our midst for the sake of Jesus