

A World Without Grace

Intro: Most of us have heard the quick and easy definition of grace: unmerited favor. Sadly, that definition doesn't begin to touch at the richness of grace and its central position in the doctrine and life of the Christian.

(Yancey's story) Two women on a bus discussing M. Scott Peck's book *The Road Less Traveled*. "What's it about?" "Not sure. Some sort of guide to life. Here are the chapter titles: Discipline, Love, Grace..."

"What's grace?" "I don't know. I haven't gotten to grace."

Here's the thing: most people haven't gotten to grace. We live in a world that isn't good at grace.

I. Without Grace in the Name of God

- A.** There are hundreds of millions of people on this planet who withhold grace in the name of God! They believe that their God requires us to live without grace personally and without offering grace to others.
- B.** Sharia law. Karma. Morals police. Religious Police.
- C.** Churches are not immune. In fact – they tend to lead the way in appealing to God and their faith as a reason to deny grace.
 - 1. I learned the verse as well as you: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (John 1:17)
 - 2. We have spent a lot of time, money, energy and blood in determining truth, what is essential, and what is important. We want to have more truth, and believe it more, than our religious rivals. (the man in Opelika with the tracts on Bible versions)
 - 3. When will we find churches that try – following the text of John – to 'out-grace' each other?
- D.** It's not that the world doesn't need grace. Then why is the church so slow to develop a reputation of being where grace is found and freely given?

II. The Age of Grace, the Age of Law

- A.** Were you taught that the OT was the age of law and the NT ushered in the age of grace? I was, too, but the way we taught our doctrine didn't seem to indicate any difference between the laws of the OT and the laws we labored under.
1. Smoking, drinking, movies, rock music, wearing makeup and jewelry, watching TV on Sunday, watching much on TV anytime... (Free Kirk rules)
 2. Skirt length, hair length, mixed bathing (???)
- B.** And then come the rules on worship. Each denomination grabbed its bag of essentials and then beat each other up with it – an ever escalating ladder of rules. You gain God's favor by following the prescribed pattern.
- C.** Where was grace? I could find law easy enough, but where was grace?
- D.** Don't tell me that the world has grace. Look what it does to people. It treats them as disposable commodities; as consumers, or as ephemera – short term entertainment. (Craig Ferguson's plea on behalf of Spears and Anna Nicole Smith)
- E.** Sometimes Christians shine – think of Wilberforce and his campaign against slavery in England (the foundation of the new movie "Amazing Grace.") We can all come up with dozens of stories where the grace of God was found in His people (so let's not make this discussion entirely dark).
- F.** Neither can we ignore the fact that we have a problem. (Yancey's story of the woman, addict, prostitute who was asked to go to church. Why is it that the very people that ran to Christ are the ones we run from?)
- G.** Erma Bombeck's story of the little boy slapped and quieted in church. Is our God really the kind of God who is pleased by a slap on a child's face and a tear falling from his eye? Is church really a place where we aren't allowed to smile?
- H.** Some really believe that, if something is fun or beautiful or tastes good, it must be sinful. (St. Bernard habitually shielded his eyes to avoid the beauty of the Swiss mountains and lakes) We run to the very laws that Paul says are useless: Colossians 2:16-23.

III. God's Prescription – Colossians 3:1-17

- A.** Set yourself on something higher than the rules of the world.
- B.** Make sure that evil isn't part of your life. (5-11) This includes prejudice and racism.
- C.** What should the church and its people be known for? (12-17)
- D.** Forgive me if I mourn the fact that we are often known more for our music style and our teachings on worship than we are for these things. (12-17)

A world without grace? It doesn't have to be that way. We can decide that we will not ignore the pleas of God to be this kind of people. We can decide that we will not lay aside the sacrifice of Christ – a sacrifice that freed us from law – and act like it never happened. Dare we lay aside the gift of Jesus?

We have the opportunity to be a people of grace as we give, plan, reach out, and as we love those around us. "Love one another, for love is of God.