

All Things New: Holy Life

Day One

Difficult Grace

Accepting grace is far more difficult than we often realize. It seems like the easiest thing in the world to accept unmerited favor. And yet, there is always something in the back of our heads that wants to be worthy of the gift. "He really deserved to have something good happen after all he's been through". "It's about time things went my way". We always believe that our bad "luck" is undeserved, while the good things that happen to us are earned. When we go to God, there is always the remnants of a works salvation lurking in the background of grace. It often manifests itself in a barrier between ourselves and the lost. We believe that "those people " who are non-Christians are getting what is coming to them for the sins that they commit. "What do they expect?" Of course they are indeed getting what is coming to them, but we also see our blessings coming to us, rather than the product of grace. When you allow the difficulties of accepting grace to go unchallenged, you begin to think that you have earned God's favor, and if that is true, others could and should do the same. You now have no grace to extend to others, and will sit in judgment over them. Anything that hints at the fact that you haven't earned your salvation will be ignored, and you will slowly lose touch with the reality of who you are. You will focus more and more on the faults of others, and your relationship with God will bring weariness instead of joy because you feel the need to earn everything, rather than enjoying the free gifts of God. Bitterness and envy will take over, and like the brother who stayed in the story of the prodigal son, you will completely miss the party. Don't let this happen to you. Accept God's grace no matter how difficult. Always remember that it is a gift you haven't earned. Do the hard work of doing no work. Take joy in the unmerited favor you receive from the throne of grace.

Verses: Luke 15:11-32, James 4:1-10, Ephesians 2:1-10, 1 Corinthians 15:3-10

Prayer Topics: Mercy, Forgiveness, Peace, Joy

Day 2

Growing Into Salvation

The second verse in 1 Peter 2 contains the interesting idea that we must grow up into salvation. This is surprising phrasing if you have a modern definition of salvation. To the modern mind, salvation is a geography problem. I don't want to end up in the place called hell, and I'd much rather spend eternity in heaven. Therefore, I need something to transport or transfer me from one location to the other. This is not the ancient understanding of salvation, and it's why the picture of heaven that most people have is so flawed. Like Islam, most people have a picture of heaven that assumes that I can get there the way I am, loving the things I currently love. Therefore, heaven must be a place I can do the things I currently love. In Islam, this is certainly the case as people spend eternity pursuing earthly pleasures. Conversely, most people think that if heaven consists of things I don't currently like, I will not like heaven. Of course, there is some truth to this notion, but we are overlooking another possibility. When you are a child you think of adulthood as a child casting your present condition into the future. I remember not being able to understand why my dad liked watching the news, or why he didn't like my music when I became a teen. With the level of maturity I had, it was not possible for me to understand the greater joy found in greater maturity. In the same way, we often misunderstand that salvation is a total transformation of us rather than a change in our geography. Like a car bound for the crusher at a scrap yard, salvation is not the avoidance of being melted down, but the complete restoration that makes the car the perfectly functioning machine that it was meant to be, fulfilling the role it was created to attain. We are to begin the process of salvation at once, not waiting for the afterlife. The transformation and re-creation of salvation begin through the work of the spirit

when we enter the covenant of grace, and it continues as long as we live.
Pursue salvation by longing for the word of God in your life, letting it transform you into glory, for that is salvation, and it begins now.

Verses: 1 Peter 2:1-5, Acts 4:12, Matthew 7:21

Prayer Topics: Progress, Training, Renew

Day 3

Sacrifice

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. - 1 Peter 2:5

So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

*“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,”*

8 and

*“A stone of stumbling,
and a rock of offense.”*

*They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.- 1
Peter 2:7-8*

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your
bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual
worship. - Romans 12:1*

The Bible calls us, both in 1 Peter and Romans, to make spiritual sacrifices to God. What does this entail? From the context of 1 Peter, as well as the implication of Romans, we see that obedience is a spiritual act of worship or sacrifice. In order to understand this we must understand more fully the idea of worship itself. When we look at an object, our brains do a number of things that we are mostly unaware of. First, our brains decide to focus on something. In order to do this it distinguishes the object from those around it. Next, it decides the importance of that object in meeting its current goals. This thing it has decided to look at is a tool to reach the goal or an impediment, or on rare occasions this object changes the goal. Some people see God as a tool to achieve their goals. They pray to Him to give them what they want and see Him as a way to receive the things they had already decided to pursue. Others think that God is ruining their fun, keeping them from doing what they want to do. A few people see God and their goals change. God is the most important thing and pursuing him becomes the goal of their lives. These last ones are the worshipers, and this is true worship. To give up what your life was about before you saw God, to put those old goals to death and put your life in service to God as the most important being in existence is to be a living stone in his temple. Are you ready for worship? What needs to happen in your mind or heart to become a living stone?

Verses: Titus 2:11-14, Hebrews 9:11-14, 1 John 1:5-10

Prayer Topics: Goals, Priorities, Obedience

Day 4

God's Glory

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.-1 Peter 2: 9-10

We have been shown mercy and have been made a people for the purpose of proclaiming the excellencies of God. While most of the time the world sees this as the duller chore in the world, the believer sees this as living a life of joy and fruitfulness. One of the leading neuroscientists has said that every act of perception is a mini-narrative. This means that every time we look at an object we are making a value judgment about it. It is hard-wired into our brains and can't be divorced from the act of seeing. This is because we have not acquired the ability to see for no purpose, but so that we can act in the world. Action in the world is therefore a putting into practice our value judgments about the world. The mature Christian does not need to work to be good, or toil to praise God. He does these things naturally as he perceives the world around him and acts in it. The way he builds up others and the world, the way he loves, the joy he expresses, all of these things flow from seeing God as the most excellent object of his perception. He simply lives out the natural consequences of the excellencies that he sees in God. Do you see the excellencies of God? Have you tasted and seen that he is good? Live out what you have seen, heard, and tasted.

Verses: 2 Peter 1:3-11, Philippians 4:4-8, Philippians 1:9-10

Prayer Topics: Perspective, Admiration, Worship

Day 5

Submit

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. 19 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.-1Peter 2:18-19

Chapter 2 of the book of First Peter contains some very lofty and inspiring language about us being formed into living stones in His temple and being made a people. This symbolic language is meant to convey truths that are now being illuminated. There is a very practical way that we are to live out the reality of being a living stone in the temple, and that is through submission. There is a structure to this temple, it is not a pile of stones. This structure is spiritual, but has physical manifestations. We do not submit because we are forced, but out of reverence for the structure God created. This reverence encourages us to respect the structure even when the stone that is near is not finished being shaped. The person in authority over us does not have this authority by means of their skill or knowledge, but by means of God's appointment. If you will only submit when you feel like the person is right, you are only submitting to yourself and your own wisdom. The temple cannot stand if each stone believes they themselves are the judge of the entire structure. To be a people, or to be the temple, we must submit to being a part of the whole. That ultimately means being submissive to the creator of the whole, and that means submitting when the authority over you is not in the right. Now you are submitting to God, not to man. The question is not if the authority above you is right, but whether the one who created the idea of authority is right. Submit to Him, and be a part of the Living Temple.

Verses: Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:5, Romans 13:1-7

Prayer Topics: Humility, Willingness, Eagerness