

# 13. Acceptance of God's grace

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Grace not only gives with joyful generosity, but it receives with grateful humility. When a person truly experiences the grace of God, there is not only a desire to encourage, affirm, and support others, there is also an accepting attitude that allows others to repay with gratitude.

As easy and simple as this may sound, it is neither. It cuts across the grain of our natural tendency to be independent and invulnerable. We want to be people who pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps rather than people who have to reach out for an extended hand to be helped to our feet.

For many of us, the grace of giving comes naturally; it's the receiving end of grace that we have difficulty with. If this describes you, today's lesson should open a whole new dimension in your life.

## A. THE FLIP SIDE OF SEVERAL STRENGTHS

Self-reliant people often have a strong commitment to character. But those who believe so firmly in the pursuit of character often forget that such pursuits can sometimes have a downside.

3 problems come readily to mind:

**1) With a commitment to excellence, there can come an attitude of intolerance.**

There is nothing wrong with fighting mediocrity and pursuing excellence, but the casualties often become the very people within our ranks who are fighting next to us. When we make perfection our standard – instead of accepting another's best – we become unrealistic in our expectations, forgetting the inclination in all of us humans to err.

**2) With a lifestyle of discipline, there can come impatience and the tendency to judge.**

Those who have disciplined themselves against overeating have little patience with those with a Burger King belt line. And those who exercise diligently have little patience for those who get winded just trying to bend over and tie their shoes.

**3) With an emphasis on independence and high production, there is often the presence of pride.**

If you are an independent worker, an independent thinker, or have become independently wealthy, chances are good that you have a great deal of pride. There's nothing wrong with standing on your own two feet, thinking for yourself, or working hard, but it can lead to an attitude of feeling like you don't need anyone else or resisting when someone reaches out to you.

## B. EXAMPLES OF RESISTING AND ACCEPTING GRACE

**1) Examples of resisting grace: Moses and Peter**

*Exodus 3:1-6 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. 3 Then Moses said, "I*

*will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.” 4 So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” 5 Then He said, “Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.” 6 Moreover He said, “I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.*

**Moses** – Moses works for his father-in-law as a shepherd in a rugged region of Mount Sinai known as Midian. It was a place of obscurity, loneliness, hot stinging sands, and howling dry winds.

As he gazes into the starlit night and watches a falling star, no doubt he reflects on his own sudden fall from the luxury of Pharaoh’s palace. He had it all there at the palace – an unequaled education, unparalleled comfort, and unlimited power. One day Moses happened upon an Egyptian assaulting a Hebrew. He intervened and murdered the Egyptian. Fearful, Moses fled for his life. For 40 years he withdrew to the wilderness. And during that 40 years God was silent.

Undoubtedly, Moses felt he had disqualified himself by dropping the divinely appointed baton that had been passed to him. In the desert he had found refuge from Egyptian Pharaoh, but not from guilt and remorse. It is there in that guilt-ridden wilderness that the Angel of the Lord came to him.

Suddenly, a common bush began to shine with the emblem of Deity; from its heart of fire the voice of God broke the silence of the 40 years of the desert with his name, “Moses, Moses.” It was the call of the ministry he was destined to have.

If you think Moses jumped at the chance to return to God’s calling, you don’t understand the grip of guilt. 4 times he resisted the call. As Moses stammered around, God assured him that He would give him grace equal to the task. He assured the insecure Moses of His presence in v12, His power in v20, His provision in v21-22, and His guidance in 4:12.

From Moses’ response to God, we learn an important thing about grace: We resist grace when our guilt and shame have not been adequately dealt with. The past dogged Moses’ heels so relentlessly that he couldn’t receive the grace God had offered him. He felt unworthy.

Of course, no one is deserving of God’s grace. No one is adequate to receive it. But God gives it anyway. And that’s the crowning majesty of grace.

*John 13:4-8 rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. 5 After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. 6 Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, “Lord, are You washing my feet?” 7 Jesus answered and said to him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.” 8 Peter said to Him, “You shall never wash my feet!” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.”*

**Peter** – The setting is an intimate one in an upper room. It is the last supper Jesus will spend with His disciples before He dies. He has much to tell them, especially about humility and service. But the disciples are bickering over their respective great-

ness in the kingdom. Instead of a penetrating sermon, Jesus gives them a visual aid that they would never forget.

Jesus rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself about. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. And so He came to Simon Peter.

When John recorded the event, the syntax of his sentence in v6 captured Peter's stunned reaction: "Lord, You, my, wash the feet?" We would smooth out the halting words to read, "*Lord, are You washing my feet?*" Peter's response in v8 is emphatic in the Greek text: "*You shall never wash my feet!*"

Out of Peter's example, we can learn another important point: We resist grace when our pride is still predominant. Each time grace extends its hand, pride slaps it away. That's why grace and pride cannot coexist because pride is resistant to the approaches of grace.

## 2) Examples of receiving grace: Samson and Paul

*Judges 16:28-30 Then Samson called to the Lord, saying, "O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!" 29 And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars which supported the temple, and he braced himself against them, one on his right and the other on his left. 30 Then Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life.*

**Samson** – Samson was set apart before birth to deliver Israel from the death grip of the Philistines in Judge 13:5. If ever there was a life scripted for success, it was him. His parents were strong believers who dedicated him to the Lord with the vow of the Nazarite – never was he to drink alcoholic beverages, to touch the carcass of anything dead, or to cut his hair.

For 20 years Samson proved faithful to his calling as the judge. Though he could make Rambo look like a wimp in comparison, this He-Man had the she-strength when it comes to sexual temptation. In the Philistine territory, he told the secret of his strength to Delilah who, in turn, motioned to her Philistine cohorts to enter the room and shave his head. But Samson did not know that the Lord had departed from him and became a slave of the Philistines.

Though Samson reaped what he had sown, God's grace proved even more abundant than the moral failure in this man's life. Samson's hair began to grow, and with it, his strength returned. Once he felt the power of God rippling through his muscles, another thing returned – the determination to fulfill his call of delivering Israel from the Philistines.

From the story of Samson emerges an important principle about receiving grace: We accept grace when we release all our expectations. When we no longer feel we deserve grace, but still extend our hands toward heaven, God's grace is extended toward us without an exception. Samson's life was a washout, eroded by the flood of his uncontrollable lusts. He didn't deserve a second chance. But that's when God

shows Himself most radiantly, like the sun emerging from behind dark storm clouds. And that's when grace comes streaming down to bathe us in the warmth of its rays.

*Philippians 3:3-7 For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, 4 though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; 6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. 7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.*

**Paul** – Paul had much to boast about. He was the cream of the crop, top of the upper echelon in Israel. Pretty impressive pedigree – at least in human terms.

In spite of his stunning resume, when God looked at Paul's life, all He saw was a black hole. It is God's estimation of Paul's life that caused the apostle to reevaluate his credentials in v7. The Lord changed Paul's direction from the vain self-fulfillment to the upward call of God.

*Philippians 3:13-14 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Grace is what steered him in that direction by enabling him to look at the map he was using in an entirely different light.

This brings us to the fourth principle about grace: We accept grace when we no longer put confidence in the flesh. By "flesh" we mean the tendency to achieve something in our own strength apart from trusting in the empowerment of God. When we put those things behind us, as Paul did, then we will be able to forge ahead to what lies before us – the magnificence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## C. WHAT IT TAKES TO LET GRACE IN

*Revelation 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.*

No matter how hard Jesus knocks on the door of our hearts or how persistently, that door must be opened from the inside. For some, that door has been closed for so long that the hinges have been rusted tight.

What can we do to oil those hinges and swing open that door?

**1) It takes an admission of humanity.** – We've got to come to grips with the fact that we're only human, that we all sin and, sometimes, we sin greatly.

**2) It takes an attitude of humility.** – Nothing is so welcomed by grace as true humility, which is nothing more than a realization of one's true standing before God – that God is preeminent, that He alone is worthy of glory and praise.

## D. APPLICATIONS

**1) We resist grace when our guilt and shame have not been adequately dealt with.**

No one is deserving of God's grace. No one is adequate to receive it. But God gives it anyway. And that's the crowning majesty of grace.

**2) We resist grace when our pride is still more important than anything else.**

Each time grace extends its hand, pride slaps it away. That's why grace and pride cannot coexist because pride is resistant to the approaches of grace.

**3) We accept grace when we release all our expectations.**

When we no longer feel we deserve grace, but still extend our hands toward heaven, God's grace is extended toward us without an exception.

**4) We accept grace when we no longer put confidence in the flesh.**

By "flesh" we mean the tendency to achieve something in our own strength apart from trusting in the empowerment of God. When we put those things behind us, as Paul did, then we will be able to forge ahead to what lies before us – the magnificence of the Lord Jesus Christ.