

Cultivating the Heart: Understanding God's Grace



Introduction

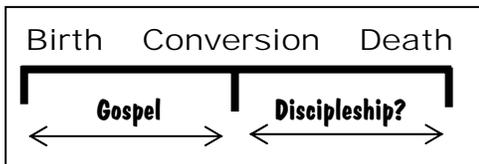
A great challenge in our lives: disappointment
 1) with others 2) with life 3) with God 4) with yourself
 One key to persevering in the Christian life and bearing fruit is to come to a better understanding of God's grace.
 Col. 1:6 Heb. 12:15

I. What is grace? John 1:17

Justice- Getting what we deserve.
Mercy- Not getting what we deserve.
Grace- Getting what we don't deserve.
 - Frequency in the N.T. 122x
 "Grace to you" in 18 of the 22 epistles
 - The essence of the doctrine of grace is that God is for us.

II. When do we need grace?

What did you need most before you came to Christ?
 How about now?
 Galatians 3:3
 - Why do I always need grace? I will never be acceptable because of my works.
 - Jack Miller: "Preach the gospel to yourself every day."
 - Discipline without desire is drudgery.



III. The problems of legalism

1. It fosters pride and discouragement in my life
 - a) **pride** – because I think that I am better than others because of what I do; or because I compare myself with others whom seem to be less "successful" than I am.
 - b) **discouragement** – because I fail again and again to live a holy blameless life; or because I compare myself with others who seem to be more "successful" than I am.
 2. It's impossible to make it by our works
 Matthew 5:48; James 2:10

IV. Two extremes: legalism and license

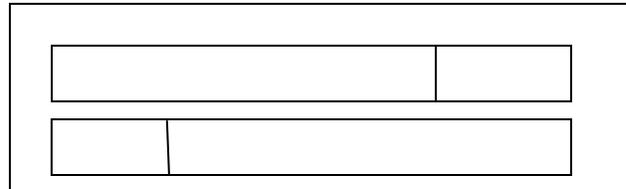


V. Illustrated in the Parable of the Prodigal Son

| <u>The prodigal son</u> | <u>The proper son</u> |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Younger | Older |
| Foolish | "Wise" |
| Wayward | Obedient |
| Wasted his inheritance | Saved his inheritance |
| Left home in rebellion | Stayed home in submission |
| "My father's not fun" | "My father's not fair" |
| A picture of the sinners | A picture of the Pharisees |
| When the prodigal returned | |
| Pled with the father | The father pled with him |
| Upset with himself | Upset with his brother and father |
| "I am not worthy to be called your son" | "I deserve better treatment than this" |
| Reconciled in the end | Unreconciled in the end |
| Broken and humbled | Unbroken and proud |
| Scarred but close | Unscarred but distant |
| Humble because of his failures | Proud because of his accomplishments |
| Most aware of his own failures | Most aware of others' failures |
| Hard on himself | Hard on others |
| Outside to inside | Inside to outside |

Prodigal Son and You

You tend to be a mixture of both.



| <u>Rebellious</u> | <u>Religious</u> |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Wayward | Obedient |
| Failure | Success |
| Wasted your inheritance | Saved your inheritance |
| Left God in rebellion | Stayed w/ God in submission |
| Reconciled in the end | Unreconciled in the end |
| The part of you you're ashamed of | The part of you you're proud of |
| Hard on himself | Hard on others |
| "I'm terrible" | "I'm great" |
| Mercy | Justice |
| Need | |
| Calvary | Sinai |
| A new understanding of God's mercy | A new understanding of God's righteousness |
| Psalm 51 | Psalm 73 |
| Bathed and healed by His grace | Examined and humbled by His law |
| Luke 15:7; 1 Timothy 1:15 | Is. 64:6; 1 Cor.15:10 |