

Man's Need of God's Grace



Grace (Part 3)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as I continue to share with you on the special Christmas theme summed up in one beautiful word of measureless meaning: Grace.

In my talk yesterday I dealt with the distinction between grace and works. Grace cannot be earned. If we earn anything by working for it then it is not grace. That's the essential difference. Grace cannot be earned.

The difference between grace and works points to two alternative ways to achieve righteousness with God. The two alternatives are the law and Christ. This contrast or these two alternatives are summed up in John 1:17 which says:

> "For the law was given through Moses: grace and truth come through Jesus Christ."

So, there's one alternative, the law given by Moses. The other alternative is grace and with it truth which came through Jesus Christ.

But because none of us have ever succeeded in keeping the whole law all the time, none of us can afford to seek righteousness with God by the works of the law. Consequently, for us in this condition there's only one way actually left and that is the way of grace through faith. So, Paul says in Romans 10:4:

> "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

It's important to see that phrase "for righteousness" as a means of achieving righteousness with God. The death of Christ on the cross closed the law. It was no longer an acceptable means with God. God offered the human race an alternative which was faith in Christ and his atoning death.

Today I'm going to explain the condition of the human race left to themselves apart from God's grace. Once we understand this we understand why grace alone can meet

man's needs.

The first picture I'm going to give you of humanity before God's grace begins to move is found in Matthew 4:12-16. This describes the beginning of the earthly ministry of Jesus in Galilee and every time this time of the year comes around this is what I always think of. I think of this picture of humanity and then Jesus coming on the scene, grace manifested. This is how it reads:

> "When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison he returned to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum which was by the lake [that's the sea of Galilee] in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali, to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, [that's the sea of Galilee] along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: the people living in darkness have seen a great light: on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."

You see the picture of humanity when Jesus comes on the scene, it's of people living in darkness. It's of people living in the land of the shadow of death. What does that picture to you? I can sum it up in three phrases: darkness, hopelessness and no expectation but death. That's the condition of humanity apart from the grace of God. One version actually says that they were sitting in the land of the shadow of death. Motionless, they had no way to move, they couldn't get out of it. They had no alternatives. The shadow of death, that long dark shadow of death fell each day just a little longer across their lives. They had nothing to wait for but death. How hopeless! How pitiful! And then the grace of God! To those people the light shown. They had nothing to do with the light shining, they couldn't command the light. If the light hand not shown there nothing that they could have for themselves. That's the grace of God. It's free, unmerited, undeserved. It's not in our power to command. All we can do is respond to it.

May God help each one of us to make a fresh response to that marvelous grace at this Christmas season. May we see ourselves as we are or as we were without the grace of God and realize afresh the infinite depth and riches of the grace of God.

Now I'll show you the same condition spiritually described by Paul in Ephesians 2:1-5:

> "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions: it is by grace you have been saved."

Notice how Paul at that point emphasizes it's only grace that could help them. You see, spiritually we were dead. We were dead in our transgressions and sins. We were cut off from the life of God. We were incapable of responding to God in any way.

Consider the helplessness and the hopelessness of a dead person. You can present the law to a dead person but he can't even see it. You can preach sermons to a dead person but he can't hear them. You set good examples to a dead person but he can't see them. There's nothing that will help that person that's in his power to achieve. And that was our condition. Paul says all of us were like that. We were like that by nature. That's an unpopular statement in many circles today but it's still true. By nature we were cut off from God. We lived in a world without God, without his grace.

I think of the worlds of the hymn of Charles Wesley, "Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night." How true that is in every one of us, bound in sin and in the darkness of nature's night, incapable of helping ourselves, incapable of responding, incapable of doing any good things, just dead.

That's one clear reason why the law cannot help anybody. Paul says that in Galatians 3:21:

> "For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law."

If a law could give life then a law could help a dead person. But the law cannot give life. The law is not of that nature that it imparts life. It tells us what to do. It's beautiful, it's holy, it's just. But it cannot give us life. And the only primary need of a dead person is life. And life comes solely by grace.

It's like Jesus walking there into Galilee to those who sat in the region of the shadow of death. And that glorious light of God's grace and mercy shown upon them. They had nothing to credit themselves with, it was all the grace of God.

Now we look for a moment at the Old Testament picture of man without the grace of God. It doesn't differ in the least from the New Testament. We'll turn to Psalm 14:2-3 which is a statement about the whole human race. It speaks about the sons of men, that's the entire human race. Psalm 14:2-3:

> "The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt: there is no one who does good, not even one."

That's not New Testament, that's Old Testament. Primarily it was addressed to Israel but it also includes the whole human race as God looked down from heaven on the sons of men. He was looking for anyone who did good. More than that, he was looking for anyone who even sought God out of his need. And the answer is there wasn't even one. You see, apart from the grace of God we don't even seen our need of God. Think of that beautiful hymn that we know so well, "Amazing Grace." There are two lines that say, "twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved." Apart from the grace of God we can't even see our need. We can't see the desperate situation we're in, we're like dead people. There's nothing that we can do for ourselves till God's grace comes into operation.

I remember after I came to know the Lord Jesus Christ and tasted of his grace in a real personal way I used to say to myself, "Well sure I was a sinner. There's no doubt about that." Thank God I never had any doubt about that. But I would say, "After all, there was something good in me. I really had a desire for the truth." I really was pursuing the truth. That's why I started yoga. That's why I started philosophy. That's why all these things. So, really there was just a little good in me and God worked on that little good. And one day out of Scripture and through the Holy Spirit I saw very clear even that desire for the truth wasn't there by nature. It was placed there by God's grace. It was one of the ways that God's grace began to move in my life. And that started even before I was a teenager. And yet, I didn't come to know the Lord in a personal way until I was 24 or 25 years old.

So you see, God's grace works in our lives even before we know we need it and even before we're willing to turn to God and receive.

Well, our time is up for today. I'll be back again tomorrow at this same time. Tomorrow my topic will be grace versus justice.

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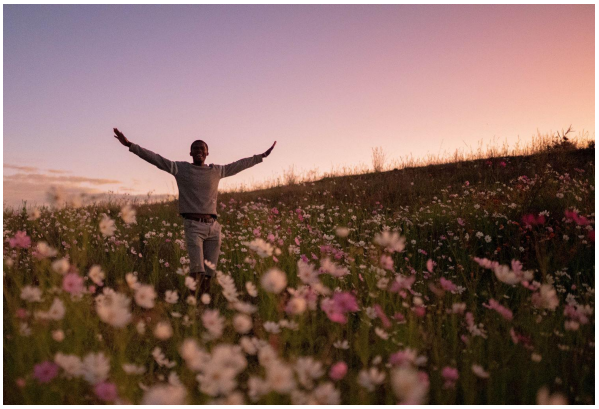

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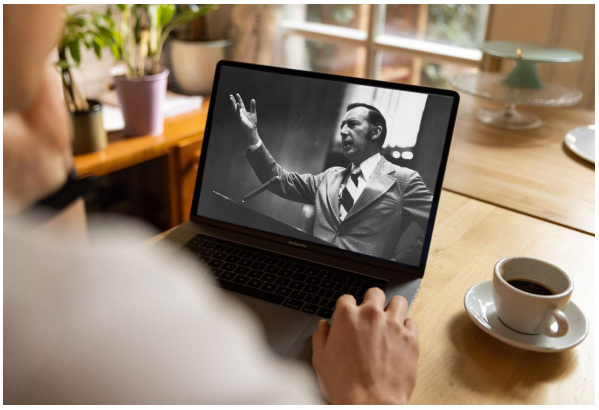

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