

## Grace Expectations! – Grace Greater Than My Sin

1/6/19 – Pastor Randy

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### Romans 5:15-17

*But there is a great difference between Adam's sin and God's gracious gift. For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ. And the result of God's gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man's sin. For Adam's sin led to condemnation, but God's free gift leads to our being made right with God, even though we are guilty of many sins. For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ.*

In December, our fourth message in the series "Why Jesus?" answered that question by pointing to Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that God would send a son, who would be His Son, the Mighty God, and that God's Son, the Son of the King of Kings would also be the Prince of Peace.

We learned that the Jewish concept of "peace" is much broader than what our English word usually conveys. Peace is our English translation of the word "shalom" which means wholeness and completeness and in its broadest sense communicates a state of affairs where all things are in perfect harmony with God's will and His creational purposes. I borrowed Cornelius Plantinga's definition of shalom as the state of affairs where everything is as it ought to be. We have shalom when things are the way they are supposed to be!

I concluded that message by briefly addressing the question that must be on your mind when you hear that: "Pastor, if Jesus came to be the Prince of Peace; to bring all things into harmony with God's will, how come the world is in such a mess. How come everything is not the way its supposed to be!?!"

Here was my answer: The King of peace has come and his work of creating shalom had begun. But our King Jesus told us clearly that while he had come to begin his new creation now through His incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension, he was going to one day come again to bring this shalom to its final consummation. The Kingdom has begun, but it is still to come!

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Let's take a quick look at some scriptures that demonstrate the already, but not yet character of the kingdom, or rule of God. Before we do that we need to define what we mean by kingdom. We are not talking primarily about a place or locale but about a realm or sphere over which God exercises his rule and authority, creating shalom. God's final, future kingdom will be detected by your location finder. His kingdom will be the whole created order; the new heavens and earth.

Here are some instances where Jesus and the NT authors declare that the kingdom has begun with the first coming of Christ:

*"From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near." - Matt. 4:17*

*One day the Pharisees asked Jesus, "When will the Kingdom of God come?" Jesus replied, "The Kingdom of God can't be detected by visible signs. You won't be able to say, 'Here it is!' or 'It's over there!' For the Kingdom of God is already among you." - Luke 17:20-21*

*"But if I am casting out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has arrived among you." - Matt. 12:28*

*"He has delivered us from the power of darkness, and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved son." - Colossians 1:13*

These statements by Jesus and other NT writers speak of the kingdom as a present reality but Jesus and the NT writers also looked forward to the Kingdom coming in its fullness in the future.

Jesus taught his disciples to ask the Father for the Kingdom to come. In Acts 1:6 the disciples asked Jesus if this was the time that he was going to Establish God's kingdom on earth by ascending to the the throne of David over Israel. Jesus answer was, "The time for me to do that is not for you to know". Jesus' words clearly implied that the answer was "no", and his implicit "no" was confirmed when the very next thing he did was ascend to heaven.

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Jesus was referring to the future kingdom when he said, “Not everyone who says to me, “Master, Master” will enter the kingdom of heaven; only people who do the will of my father in heaven.” - Matt. 7:21

In Jesus parables about the kingdom in Matt. 13 the kingdom is depicted as if it is operating in the children of the kingdom in the present partially but will come in the fullness of its power and glory at the close of the age. Jesus parables in Matt. 25 also refer to the kingdom being something people will inherit in the future.

Understanding this “already, but not yet” nature of God’s kingdom is critical for Christians. The reason is that without a proper understanding of the extent to which God, through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, is establishing His kingdom rule, birthing His “new creation”, creating His “shalom”, we will either have expectations that are too low or too high.

If we expect a blessing that belongs to God’s people in the future as if it can and should be realized in the present, we are setting ourselves up for disappointment with God which can easily lead to disillusionment with God.

If we expect the blessings that do belong to God’s people now as if they can’t be realized until Christ returns, we settle for less than God’s will for us. If we sell God short, expecting too little of him in the present, we sell ourselves short, experiencing less power and victory than is available to us.

Some preachers attempt to encourage people by filling them with great expectations for the new year. What we really need are not GREAT expectations, but GRACE expectations. GRACE expectations are the expectations we have for this life and the life to come, BECAUSE of God’s grace.

Now, a quick word about grace. Grace does not merely refer to the unmerited favor of God which provides forgiveness for our sins and reconciliation with God through Jesus’ death and resurrection. The concept of the grace of God extends well beyond the blessing of forgiveness and

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justification. God's grace refers to every blessing that comes to us from God as a result of His favor, not because we have merited or earned it.

Today, we begin by applying the truth that the kingdom has arrived but is still to arrive in the future to our relationship with this nasty thing we call sin.

If we ignore the reality of Jesus' Kingdom power and authority, his new creation work, is active now in and among us, it will stunt our growth.

**1. Stunted Sanctification.** Those who neglect the reality that the kingdom has come in power and a decisive victory has been achieved by Jesus through His death and resurrection, will tend to view Christians as nothing more than forgiven sinners. If we think that Jesus kingdom is all future there will be great emphasis on the fact that we have been saved from the penalty of sin (justification), but little to none on the reality that we are being saved from the power of sin (sanctification). We end up living with little or no expectation of an actual real-time victory over sin. Moral transformation is viewed as something to be realized only in the kingdom to come. An over-emphasis on our failures to overcome sin in the present implicitly leaves little hope for significant transformation.

There is a popular slogan that Christians have used for years that is only partly correct: "Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven." (SEE SLIDE) We aren't perfect but neither is it accurate to say we are *just* forgiven. This slogan has often been used as an excuse for the failure on the part of Christians to rely on God's grace and the power of the Spirit to resist sin.

Gordon Fee, in God's Empowering Presence writes, "Precisely because the Spirit empowers this new life, Paul has little patience for the point of view that allows for people to be "justified sinners" without appropriate changes in attitude and conduct...If he knows nothing of ethical "perfectionism", neither does he know anything about an internal struggle within the human breast, in which the 'flesh' continually proves to be the greater power." (Pg. 880)

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If we ignore the fact that sin will be a present reality until Jesus return and the kingdom's consummation we will develop an unrealistic expectation of:

**2. Entire Sanctification (Perfectionism).** This results from the failure to properly take into account the clear NT teaching that Christians will always struggle with temptation and sin until the Kingdom is consummated at the coming of Christ. The problem for those who believe that complete victory over sin should be realized here and now, is that they have to cope with a reality that is less encouraging. **There are two unhealthy responses to this unrealistic expectation inevitably being unmet: Self Pity & Pretending.**

**a. Pity** – When some Christians discover they can't live up to these faulty expectations of perfection they are afflicted with self-pity and self-condemnation. If my expectation is perfection, which doesn't allow for the experience of failure, I will live under the Devil's accusation that I am unworthy, my Christian profession is a sham, and I am a failure.

**b. Pretending** – The other coping option is to pretend; projecting an image that one does not struggle with temptation and sin. By denying the reality of their sin, pretenders shield themselves from the pain of guilt, but ironically they also shield themselves from God's mercy and transforming power.

**God's Grace creates an expectation of transformation while guarding us against an expectation of perfection.**

1. God's Grace Enables Transformation - victory over sin. I don't have to be a slave to my greed, lust, anger, envy, jealousy, bitterness, and pride.

We don't overcome sin just by thinking we can. But believing you can't, won't help you, for sure! We need to create boundaries and develop disciplines that will help us to overcome.

*By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.*

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*In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone. 2 Peter 1:3-7*

Paul expressed it this way:

*"...live by the spirit, and you won't do what the flesh wants you to." Gal. 5:16*

*That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God. But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. – Romans 8:8,9*

2. The Grace of God frees me from the expectation of perfection. Grace doesn't encourage us to sin; it encourages us with the hope that when we do sin there is an advocate who intercedes for us. John expressed it beautifully: *But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts.*

*My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous.*

The NT writings are full of instructions to Christians to flee from sin and pursue righteousness. Paul himself said, "I have not become perfect!"

The most encouraging and freeing revelation you can receive is that you don't need to be perfect to be accepted. God wants you to love him, not be perfect for him. One way we express our genuine love for God is when we humbly and sincerely seek his grace to forgive us when we sin and make every effort to obey him in the future.

The second most encouraging revelation is, "I don't have to stay the same!"

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