

Grace Provokes Change
Called to Belong, Pt. 6
Ephesians 4:28

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I. PRAYER

- i. God would you help us, by your Holy Spirit, to understand in our minds and in our hearts the beauty of your grace.

II. INTRODUCTION

- a. There is something that is absolutely essential to life.
 - i. Without this thing, we have no way to warm our environment.
 - ii. Without this thing, we have no way to cook our food.
 - iii. For centuries, this thing was our only source of light.
- b. But as essential as this thing is to our life, it also must be respected.
 - i. If misused, if abused, if it is not properly contained, if it is not carefully applied...
 - ii. It can literally destroy everything that it touches.
- c. What am I talking about? FIRE
 - i. Fire is essential to life! Without that ball of fire in the sky, life does not exist as God designed it.
 - But, we also know how destructive fire can be?!?
 1. Channel "This is Us" flash backs.
 - Fire must be respected. It must be carefully used. And if it is misused, it can destroy us.



- d. This morning I want to talk about the grace of God...because I think it's a lot like fire.
- i. The grace of God is absolutely essential to life!
 - There is no salvation, no hope, no joy without the grace of God.
 - ii. But, the Grace of God, when abused or misapplied...can be so destructive.
 - It can lead someone to believe that they are right with almighty God when they aren't.
- e. And here is why grace is so essential, yet we must be so careful to not abuse it.
- i. Because the Bible says that every single human being has sinned against God.
 - And what we deserve in return for our sin is death.
 1. But, not just bodily death...God has created humans with souls that are eternal....
 2. So, it's not just physical death we deserve, but we, our souls, will spend eternity apart from God and, according to the Scriptures, in unending conscious torment.
 3. This is what we call hell.
 - And I hate preaching about the reality of hell, because it's terrible.
 1. It's horrific.
 2. But it's truth found in God's Word.
 - ii. And it is also exactly why the Grace of God is so essential and why the Grace of God can be so easily abused.
 - Because it is only by the grace of God that we can escape what we deserve for our sin.



1. The grace of God is the greatest news ever uttered to humanity!
 2. Because God is perfectly just and at the same time has such great love for us, he made a way, by his grace, that we could be forgiven of our sin and not have to fear the horrors of hell but could look forward to the joys of eternity in His presence.
 3. That way is through Jesus.
 4. Jesus, the Son of God, came and lived a life as one of us but without sin and then he offers to switch lives with us.
 5. He goes to the cross and takes the punishment that we deserve in our place and we take His righteous life so that when God looks upon us, he doesn't see the life we lived, he sees the life Jesus lived and declares us righteous.
 6. There is no other way that we can be right with God. You cannot be moral enough. You cannot be disciplined enough. You cannot work your way into God's favor.
 7. It's only through trusting the grace of God provided to us in and through Jesus Christ.
- This is substantive grace. God has not just decided to disregard our sins. No, he executed his justice and poured out his wrath onto our sin, it just went on Jesus instead.



- And when we are talking about grace as the only way to escape the judgment that we deserve, you better believe that it is essential...you better believe that it is non-negotiable when it comes to the role that grace plays in our relationship with God.
 1. But you also better believe that some will try and abuse the good news of the grace of God.
- iii. And here is how we see it play out in the church...think of a spectrum.
- On one end of the spectrum, you have more fundamentalist, legalist type churches that acknowledge the work of Jesus on the cross as the start of the Christian life...but the rest of the Christian life is about leaving grace at the door and following rules and laws, checking boxes, working hard to prove to God that you're righteous...
 - On the other end of the spectrum, you have more liberal churches that take the grace of God and use that as an excuse to minimize our sin and reinforce the idea that God accepts us exactly as we are and does not call for us to change...
- iv. Both are an abuse of grace. Both are destructive.
- One is cold, dead religion and the other is just an excuse to keep on living the way we've always lived.



III. SERIES PLUG

- a. This morning what I want to talk about is that as followers of Christ, the only way that we can grow in holiness and the only way that we can experience true life change is in the context of grace.
- b. We've been in a series studying Ephesians 4 entitled "Called to Belong."
 - i. And we've been talking about how every follower of Jesus is called to belong to a local church.
 - And in this last part of Ephesians 4, we are studying that a biblically faithful local church is filled with people who are experiencing true life change.
 - ii. Last week, Nick preached out of Ephesians 4:17-24 and he helped us to see that every follower of Jesus is called to holiness.
 - We are called to see change in our life from our sinful ways to what God has said is good.
 1. Read Ephesians 4:22-24.
 - iii. So, this morning, I want to show all of us that this kind of change in our life, growing in holiness, can only happen in the context of grace.
 - And with that, comes two warnings.... As we seek to grow in holiness and experience life change...



1. ...we will be tempted to leave grace at the door and make the Christian life all about the rules...following the rules will define our relationship with God.
 2. ...we will be tempted to abuse grace and use it as an excuse to live my life the way I want to live it and avoid the need for change...we will disregard God's true attitude toward our sin.
- But, Paul helps us to understand that it is exactly because of God's grace and the fact that we have been set free from our sin that provokes us towards change.
- iv. So, in the final paragraph of Ephesians 4 (v.25-32)...what Paul is doing is he is giving very practical commands to the church in how they help one another grow in holiness.
- So, I am going to preach on the majority of this final paragraph next week.
 - But, this morning, I want to focus on just v.28.
 1. Because in v.28 we get a very simple vision for what true life change looks like and how that is only possible in the context of grace.

v. Read Ephesians 4:28

- Very simple verse and a very simple example and what we see here are three simple stages in the process of change.
 1. So, I want to talk through these simple stages and show you how these three stages only work in the context of grace.



IV. STAGE #1 - CONFESSION

- a. When there is sin in our life, then we have been commanded by God to seek to repent from that sin.
 - i. This clearly means recognizing the sin...calling it exactly what it is.
 - And it means to stop doing it.
 - ii. In the first part of our short verse, the text says..."Let the thief no longer steal..."
 - This isn't rocket science.
- b. But, as simple as the concept is to recognize areas in our life that need to change and to stop doing them...it proves to be more difficult than we think.
 - i. And the reason for that is all of us would rather go through this process of change in isolation and without the knowledge or help of anyone else....because we're embarrassed.
 - ii. And this is exactly why this first stage of confession of our sin can only be effectively done in a context of grace.
- c. But, I need to define what I mean by a context of grace...
 - i. Every single person is either under the grace of God or the condemnation of God.
 - Either their sins have been covered by the blood of Jesus and God has forgiven them or they are still going to pay their sins and God has not forgiven them.



- ii. And the Scriptures tell us that something happens in our hearts when we place our faith in Jesus and we cross over from being under the condemnation of God to being under the grace of God.
 - It says that God takes our old heart and he replaces it with a new heart. Whereas our old heart had no love for God, no regard for his glory, and only cared about ourselves, our new heart has been transformed under the grace of God to now have a new love for God and his glory.
 1. Our identity has changed from being enemies of God to being sons and daughters of God.
 2. And our hearts reflect this new identity as we now have a love for God.
 3. It might be a small love for God at first. As followers of Jesus, we still struggle with sin. Our behaviors and our thoughts don't always match our new identity.
 4. But the fundamental difference between a true Christian and a non-Christian, is the Christian is under grace and by God's grace has been given a new heart that has a love for God.
- iii. You know, I have a deep love for my wife and kids.
 - But, sadly, there are times that the way I treat them does not reflect that love for them.
 1. I can be harsh with my words.
 2. I can be sarcastic or passive aggressive.
 - But the fact that I can sometimes be this way does not mean that I don't have a love for them.



1. But you know what...I hate that I can do that sometime.
 2. I hate it. I hate that as much as I love them it's possible for me to treat them differently!
 3. And I want to change. I never want to do that again.
- And here is the point...my deep love for my family gives me a deep hatred for my sin against them.
- iv. And in the same way, the Christian's love for God produces a hatred for their sin.
- We will sin against God. There are areas of our life that needs to change! And this love of God that we have produces a hatred of that sin and a desire to change.
 1. Not because of the rules. Not because we are afraid that God will transfer us out from under grace and back under condemnation. Not because we want to impress our church friends.
 2. No, the desire to change comes from a love of God and a desire to honor and glorify Him!
- v. And this motivation towards change that is fueled by our love for God and our hatred of sin can only happen in a context of grace!
- If we are seeking to change in a context of condemnation, then our motivation is not a love for God, it's a love of self...it's self-preservation!



- d. So, a biblically faithful local church is filled with people experiencing real life change...because a biblically faithful local church should reinforce the reality that as Christians we are under grace!
- i. We should remind each other that we are under grace and we should help each other change precisely because we are under grace!
 - ii. Listen, true Christians are people who are changing.
 - Some of us are newer to the faith, our love for God is present but maybe small, and we are seeking to grow and change.
 - Some of us have been following Jesus for longer and our love for God has grown and we have seen a lot of change in our lives and we have more to go.
 - But we are all the same as being under grace.
- e. So, that's what I mean by a context of grace...now back to confession.
- i. This is critical, when we have a love for God, a hatred for our sin, and belong to a church that promotes a context of grace...then we will gladly welcome the criticism of our brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - We will gladly welcome the help in the process of confessing our sin.
 1. Read Ephesians 4:25.



- Because we love God. And when someone else can help me see the sin in my life, they are helping me better love God and get rid of the sin that I hate!
- ii. But, remember our warnings...When we are seeking to grow in holiness and change, we might be tempted to leave grace at the door and make the Christian life all about rules.
 - And when we subscribe to that cold, dead religion, all we're doing is behavior control.
 - This doesn't grow our love for God or contribute to our joy!
- iii. We might also be tempted to abuse grace and use grace as the very reason why we don't have to change.
 - We might even accuse people who lovingly confront us about our sin for not being gracious!
 - But that kind of grace does not grow our love for God, it's just putting Christian language on our love for ourselves...it's cheap grace...and its destructive to the church.
- f. But the true grace of God provokes us to change out of our love for God and to welcome the help from our church in the process of change.
 - i. And that starts with confession.
 - ii. The grace of God provides the context through which we are motivated to confess our sin and seek change.



- You know, I think it is easy for us to abuse grace and almost think of grace as if God has a cavalier attitude about sin.
 1. Almost as if we picture God as saying: “You know, all of you are struggling down there. Don’t worry about it. You’re under grace. There’s no reason to fret over it.”
- But, that’s not God’s attitude towards sin!
 1. Listen, grace does not minimize sin...if anything grace maximizes sin because it tells us that Jesus Christ, the only innocent man in history had to be tortured and pierced on a cross in our place!
 2. God is not cavalier about sin, it’s not a light matter to Him.
 3. But the Gospel also shows us that God is not cavalier about his love for you.
 4. And if that does not provoke inside of you a love for God, a hatred of your sin, and a motivation to change for His glory, I don’t know what will.

V. STAGE #2 – EFFORT

- a. So, in our text this morning, the first stage is confession and the second stage that we see is effort.

i. Read Ephesians 4:28

- The example given in this text speaks of someone who stopped stealing and he started doing something the opposite...doing honest labor.



- b. When we talk about growing in holiness and seeking to change from our sinful ways, the conversation cannot just be in the negative.
- i. You can't just focus on stopping but there has to be intentional effort in the other direction...we need to strive to do something in the positive.
- So, if you struggle with gossiping in the workplace, you can't just focus on not gossiping, you need to put effort towards building up your co-workers instead.
 - If you struggle with coveting the life, money, and possessions of other people, you can't just focus on not having those thoughts but you need to put effort towards having gratitude for what you do have.
- c. But, here's the thing. Putting effort towards doing something opposite of the sin that we struggle with will only work in the context of grace.
- i. Think about it, if we decide to leave grace at the door and embrace cold, dead, fundamentalist religion...then what is our motivation behind this effort?
- The motivation will be to try and appease the wrath of God. It will be to try and prove to those around us that our faith is genuine. It will be about saving-face, maintaining a reputation...



- ii. On the other side, if we decide to abuse grace and use it as a way of minimizing our sin...then we simply won't be motivated to change when it gets hard and we have setbacks.
 - It will be too easy to throw in the towel and begin coming up with reasons why the effort is not worth it.
- iii. But, when we understand the substantive grace of God for what it really is and that God does desire for us to change and he has placed us under grace so that we CAN change...
 - Then this fuels a will-power, not fueled by fear of condemnation and the need to prove to God our righteousness...but a will-power fueled by a love and gratitude for God...A will-power fueled by the grace of God.
 1. Striving to change under the grace of God is entirely different than striving to change under the condemnation of God.
- d. And, this is critical, when we have a love for God, a hatred for our sin, and belong to a church that promotes a context of grace...then we will gladly welcome the help and accountability from our brothers and sisters as we seek to put effort towards changing.



- i. We welcome the help! We welcome people asking us about how things are going. We welcome people walking side by side with us in the change. We welcome people giving us a pep-talk when we want to throw in the towel.
- ii. This isn't about condemning one another!
 - We're under grace!
 - This is about loving each other and helping one another change!

VI. STAGE #3 – TRANSFORMATION

- a. Back to our text, the first stage is confession, the second stage is effort, and the final stage is transformation.
 - i. Read Ephesians 4:28
 - This is a change at the heart level, at the motivational level. This person is no longer focused on taking from others for himself, he is focused on working hard so that he may give and bless others.
 - This is true transformation. Not just when our behavior is different, but when our desires and motivations are different.
- b. And you know what, getting to the place where the desires and motivations of our heart is changing can only be done in a context of grace.
 - i. See, the Bible has a way of taking all sin and funneling it down to one singular condition of the heart.



- Romans 1:25 says that the essence of sin is that all of us have begun to worship and serve the things that God created, namely ourselves, instead of worshiping and serving God alone.
 - In other words, sin is the reality that we love ourselves more than God and others and we live for ourselves more than God and others.
 1. This is why God says that all of the law is summed up in the commands of loving God and loving our neighbor.
 - Look at our thief here in Ephesians 4.
 1. He used to steal. He would take from others for himself.
 2. But now, the transformation is that he is now living to give to and love others.
- ii. So, here's the deal, if we decide to leave grace at the door and embrace cold, dead religion...and all of our Christian life is about proving to God and others that we're worthy and righteous.
- Than our hearts have really never changed in the first place. We're still living for ourselves. Maybe our behavior has changed but the inclinations of our heart is the same.
 1. And to God, it's all sin.
- iii. If we decide to abuse grace and use it to minimize our sin...then again, all of our Christian life is about how I want to live. I'm living for myself. My heart hasn't changed.



- I've just started to use Christian language to make it sound better.
- c. So, true heart transformation where the desires and motivations of our heart begin to change can only happen in the context of grace.
- i. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:15 tells us that “[Jesus] died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.”
- Jesus died for us so that we would no longer live for ourselves, but that we would change, and live for Him!
- d. But, how does a context of grace provoke that kind of transformation in our hearts?
- i. Thomas Chalmers is famous for saying that the only way to get rid of old, sinful desires in our hearts is through the expulsive power of a new desire.
- In other words, our hearts need to be captivated by our love for God more than it is captivated by our love for self.
- ii. At the end of the day, the pathway to true change in our lives is through the heart.
- We talked about gossip earlier...it's going to be difficult for you to change that habit and put effort towards something new if you're not also addressing how self-focused your heart is.
 1. To someone who gossips, other people are objects to be used for your own self-promotion.



- If you struggle with lusting after others, it's going to be hard to fight that addiction if you're not addressing how self-focused your heart is.
 1. To the one who lusts, other people are reduced to objects to be used for their own pleasure.
 - If you struggle with coveting the money, possessions, and life of other people, it's going to be hard to address that constant feeling of inadequacy if you're not addressing the selfish reflexes of your heart.
 1. To the one who covets, people are just competition.
 - If you struggle with sin! Which is all of us!
 1. God and every person around us is reduced to our servants...and its wicked.
- iii. And only grace has the explosive power to expel this selfish wickedness out of our hearts.
- Here's how:
 1. Because, when we have a love for God, a hatred for our sin, and belong to a church that promotes a context of grace...then we will gladly allow our hearts to be exposed in all of its nasty motivations and desires.
 2. And as the wickedness and evil of our hearts are laid bare to our brothers and sisters in Christ who are recipients of the same grace that we are...you know what's going to happen?
 3. The body of Christ is going to take the grace that they all have vertically received from God and they are going to minister it to us.



4. They are going to love us, forgive us, and be gracious with us in the same way that God has done all of those things to them in Christ.
 5. They will take our sin seriously and call us to change but will also accept us, love us, and be committed to us.
 6. When our heart expects to be rejected, judged, marginalized, and condemned because it was exposed with all of its wickedness, the shock of the love and grace of the Bride of Christ will begin to piece by piece chip away at the old, selfishness of our hearts and replace it with a new love for God and others.
- Your heart cannot undergo this type of transformation in the context of condemnation nor a context of cheap grace.
 1. It can only happen in the context of the real, substantive grace of God.

VII. CONCLUSION AND COMMUNION

- a. So, let me ask everyone here. Are you under the grace of God?
 - i. Have you trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins?
 - ii. Because if you have, you are under grace and that grace provokes us towards change.
 - Not so you can stay saved. Not so you can impress God.
 - But because God is good and he is leading you towards joy.



b. So, where do you need to change?

- i. Are you weighed down by the weight of your sin and the constant struggle to please God because you've left grace at the door?
 - If that's you, you need to share that with your brothers and sisters in Christ and let them build you up in the truth about you...that you are under God's grace. That Jesus suffered in your place. That you are a son and a daughter of God. And that God wants you change because he cares for you.
- ii. Are you appealing to cheap grace as an excuse for your sin? Do you look to grace as a way to not have to change?
 - If that's you, you have completely missed grace. The grace that you believe in is nowhere near as radical as the real grace of God.
 - Now is the time to confess that and to begin to bring the issues to the surface that you know need to change in your life.
 - Let your brothers and sisters in Christ minister the real grace of God that will provoke change and lead you to joy.
 1. I promise the cheap stuff isn't as good as you think....let's not play with fire.

c. This morning, we are going to share in communion with one another.

- i. Communion is a way that we remember the real grace of God because it is a way for us to remember what Christ did for us that we may be forgiven of our sin.



- So, we take bread and break it. And we are reminded of how the body of Christ was broken in our place so that we don't have to endure the wrath of God.
 - And we take the juice, and we are reminded of how the blood of Jesus was shed on the cross so that we could be cleansed from our sins.
- ii. So, if you are a Christian. If you believe in what Jesus did on the cross and you trust your whole life to Jesus, go to the communion table.
- Grab the elements and go back to your seat and take a moment to reflect on the grace of God in and through Jesus.
 - You are under grace!
 - You are not under condemnation!
 - And as you allow your heart to rest in that truth, allow your heart to confess to the Lord where change needs to happen in your life.
 - Because the grace of God provokes change...and it is all for His glory and your joy.
- iii. Fence the table.

VIII. PRAY

