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Grace Evangelical Church
Sunday, October 31, 2010
"Am I Growing In God's Grace?"
II Peter 3:14-18

In church history, this is a significant day. It is called Reformation Sunday.

For on this day, October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany inviting debate over the legitimacy of the sale of indulgences by the Roman Church

Luther had discovered by reading the Book of Romans that it is by the grace of God through faith in Christ (not the works of men) that a person is justified, or declared righteous by God.

Luther was excommunicated in 1521, but in April of that year at the Diet at Worms he stood before Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and the German princes and refused to recant unless proven wrong by the Bible or by clear reason. His words still ring down through the halls of church history. **"May God be my helper, but I can retract nothing."**

The reformation took root in Switzerland through a priest by the name of Zwingli. Through his study of the Bible and contacts with Lutherans he too came to the understanding that a person is justified, declared righteous, before God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ not by the works of men. On January 1, 1519, he began a 6 years series on sermons in the New Testament.

The reformation also took place in France where a man by the name of John Calvin was among the converts to Christ. In 1536 Calvin moved to Geneva, Switzerland. Calvin was persuaded to stay in Geneva and helped organize the second major surge of Protestantism. In his Ordinances of 1541, he gave a new organization to the church consisting of pastors, doctors, elders, and deacons. His Institutes of the Christian Religion (1536) had great influence in France, Scotland (where John Knox carried the Calvinist reformation), and among the Puritans in England.

It is well to note that even before the Reformation proper there were movements founded by John Wycliffe (the Lollards) and John Huss (the Hussites) during the 14th and 15th centuries. These reform groups, however, were localized (in England and Bohemia) and were largely suppressed. Due to changes in the intellectual and political climate, it made the reform movement of the 16th century much more formidable.

The reformation brought to the forefront the biblical teaching which emphasized:
 Sola Scripture, Sola Grace, Sola Faith.

The leaders of the reformation in the various countries had their lives changed by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

For it is by grace one is saved, delivered from the penalty of sin which is death through the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ, through faith in HIM, and it is not of one's self, it is a gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast.

Indeed, God's grace is one of the major themes of the Bible. That's why the past couple of months on Sunday mornings we have been looking at different aspects of God's grace, His unmerited favor toward us which we don't deserve.

But God's grace is not just that expression of God to us that brings the believer God's forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Christ, God's grace is also to be an on-going daily experience for the believer in Jesus Christ.

Note our text today in II Peter 3:17-18.

"You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."

These are not the words of a novice. These are the words of a veteran follower of Jesus Christ who knows what he is talking about. For in these verses Peter was actually talking about His experience with God's grace.

What's Peter telling us about the grace of God from his personal experience with his Lord?

I. Continually guard God's grace in your life.

Having experienced God's grace in one's life, the believer needs to keep God's grace He has given him safe. He is to watch over God's grace in his life. In fact, the word, guard, is in the present tense and a command, meaning the believer is to continually guard God's grace in his life at all the times.

Guarding God's grace in the believer's life means that the believer is always alert to the reality that, he with the Holy Spirit's help is responsible for making sure that God's grace is kept alive in his life.

How is that done?

1. Always keeping aware that Grace is God's grace.

It is God's grace not the believer's grace.

It's God who gives us His unmerited favor. He is the source of His marvelous, amazing grace. Peter understood that. Paul understood that, when he penned that only by the grace of God he was what he was (I Corinthians 15:10). The same is true for us who follow Jesus Christ. It is only by the grace of God we are what we are in Christ. We continually guard God's grace in our lives by realizing that God gives us His grace. Grace is God's grace.

2. Always realize that God's Grace is all-powerful.

The believer in Christ is saved by God's grace, or is forgiven of his sin and given God's eternal life by grace through faith in Christ. We are saved by grace.

The grace of God teaches us, as Paul wrote to Titus in 2:11-13, how to live – to deny the worldly lusts and live godly for Christ.

God's grace gives the believer hope in the midst of his challenging circumstances. Read Romans 5:1-5. Those verses tell us that by faith the believer stands in God's grace, and exults in hope of the glory of God. God's hope does not disappoint.

Then grace gives believers hope for the future, for the Lord could return for believers at any time. That's why Paul says were looking for that blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

3. Keep continually alert to the reality that God's Grace can't be earned or repaid.

(1) For salvation.

The biblical God's grace is unique in regard to experiencing His forgiveness and eternal life.

Why? One can't earn God's grace for one's righteous deeds are like polluted garments before God because He is holy without sin, and man's good deeds are always tainted with his sin. This means that a person's good deeds could never outweigh one's bad deeds.

One needs the perfect Savior to represent a person before the biblical God to satisfy His righteous demands, and pay the penalty for his breaking God's law which is death. Only Jesus Christ has done that through His death burial and bodily resurrection. One needs to accept Christ as his personal Savior to experience God's forgiveness and eternal life. God does it all for the individual. The individual just needs to accept the gift of God's forgiveness and eternal life in Jesus Christ.

(2) For serving.

The biblical God's grace is unique in regard to serving the Lord as His follower.

The follower of Christ can't become more accepted by the Lord in serving Him or repay the Lord for His grace given by serving Him. There is no earning of some kind of brownie points by being faithful to Him. That is what justification is all about. The believer in Christ is declared righteous and out of that position, the believer serves the Lord because he has been blessed by the Lord, accepted in HIM and desires to please HIM in all that he thinks, says, and does. Grace's blessings motivates the believer to serve the Lord with faithfulness and joy.

4. Always let God's Grace be unconditional in your life.

We live in a world of conditions.

I love you because . . .

I love you since . . .

I love you forasmuch as . . .

I will love you if . . .

I will love you when . . .

I will love you provided. . .

I will love you presuming. . .

I will forgive you if

I will do this for you if

Those are all conditions we can live by. It is conditional grace. It means there is something in a person (attractiveness, goodness, or action) which could make another person stop showing grace or keep one showing grace.

God's grace is entirely just the opposite.

God's grace is not based on our goodness, what we have done, or what we haven't done. God's grace is based upon His person and flows out of his person to us because of who HE IS. He is the God of love and grace. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us. While hanging on the cross, Christ asked His Heavenly Father to forgive His accusers and those crucifying Him because they knew not what they were doing. That's unconditional grace. That's Calvary grace and its revolutionary.

That means even when we sin or we fail, God's grace is still there for His forgiveness when we confess our sin. He is always there for our encouragement when we may make a wrong decision. He doesn't approve of our actions when we sin, but His grace has not left us, because God is God of forgiveness and grace. His grace is unconditional, no strings attached. We just need to respond in faith and obedience to HIM.

Dr. David Seamands tells the story of a teenager who had made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. He had his ups and downs as a follower of Jesus Christ. He would come during an invitation at the end of a church service, and ask for prayer. He came one night to the front of the auditorium at the end of an evangelistic service. Dr. Seamands had prayed for him and they sat talking together. The teenager was very sober as he shared with determination that he was going to "make it this time." Then he asked, "But what if I fail? What happens when I fail?"

Dr. Seamands said to him that he had come to know him pretty well so he told him that he could guarantee him one thing, "You will fail, you will fail, so what?"

That caught the young man off guard as he thought over the "so what?" The teenager began to smile and he said, "Hmmm. . . . I think I see what you mean. I think I'm catching on. Of course, I am going to fail. I'm going to fail. But that really doesn't make any difference does it?" His whole face lit up.

Dr. Seamands said that a lot of growth followed in that young man's life when he truly discovered the way of grace.

Certainly, this young man discovered that with grace, failure is going to happen, but God is there to help him through it, and if there is sin involved, God forgives when he confessed, but he could go on living for his Lord. Of course, he didn't sin that grace may abound.

That young boy went on to be a pastor for 11 years being a dispenser of God's grace and eventually a teacher about grace as a professor of systematic theology in seminary.

Then Dr. Seamands commented, "Are you wondering about my strange reply that I was sure he would fail because I knew him so well. That's because I happened to be his dad!"

It's easy to beat one's self up over one's failures or a sin one commits. Or to beat someone else up over his failure or his sin.

That's not the way of unconditional grace. Unconditional grace doesn't get stuck on failure, but focuses on God's grace and with God's help finds a way out of failure by looking to the Lord and going on with HIM.

Unconditional grace doesn't continue focused on the sin one may commit, but rather the believer should focus on God's grace and be quick to ask God's forgiveness and continue to live in God's unconditional and amazing grace. God's grace is certainly life transforming.

But there is one more reason we should guard God's grace given to us through faith in Christ.

5. Always know the position God's grace gives the believer.

(1) The believer stands in God's grace.

Peter tells his readers here that they have continually known (present tense, on-going experience) that there are those who distort or deny God's grace. In spite of what others do to God's grace, the believer has a wonderful position. He stands in God's grace. He is steadfast in God's grace. He is secure in God's grace.

Paul reminds us again from Romans 5:1&2, "Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction into this grace in which you stand (action completed in the past with the results continuing on); and we exult in hope of the glory of God."

Through faith in Christ, the believer stands (past, present & future) in God's grace. What a position the believer has in Jesus Christ. He is steadfast in that position given to him by the Lord Jesus Christ.

(2) The believer can forfeit his standing in God's grace.

To follow the thinking of those who distort God's grace may cause one to fall from where he is standing (which means to forfeit what they have in God's grace, not to lose their salvation, but to not live in the grace of God as given to them in Christ).

How does the believer in Christ forfeit his standing in God's grace.

Forfeiting God's grace can take place when the believer unintentionally or intentionally ignores or forgets that:

God's grace is God's grace.

God's grace is all-powerful.

God's grace can't be earned and repaid.

God's grace is unconditional.

Really forfeiting God's grace is cheapening God's grace.

Could it be that we have bad attitudes, we don't enjoy our relationship with the Lord and other believers because somewhere along the line we have forfeited God's grace and are living in the flesh not in God's grace in the power of the Holy Spirit?

The believer in Jesus Christ must always in the power of the Holy Spirit stand in God's grace, then God's grace won't be forfeited in his life.

The believer in Christ is to continually guard God's grace in his life.

Secondly, the believer is to . . .

II. Know the enemies of God's grace.

1. It involves the thinking of unbelievers.

Peter calls them lawless (atheistic) and wicked.

(1) They deny the power of God's grace (II Peter 3:1-7).

They deny the power of God's grace by scoffing at and denying the return of Jesus Christ (II Peter 3:1-7). They are involved in the concept of **uniformitarianism, which** assumes that the same natural laws and processes that operate in the universe now, have always operated in the universe in the past. Simply stated, they interpret the past by the present. Since all things have continued a certain way in the present the past was the same way. The evolutionary theory operates by uniformitarianism today.

Peter is quick to point out that they ignore or deny God's creative power and ability to bring things into existence suddenly. They also deny the flood which was God's direct intervention into the world to bring His judgment.

Peter is saying that those who deny Christ's coming, are really denying God's supernatural power in His supernatural grace to intervene suddenly into the world He created.

(2) They don't understand God's unconditional grace (II Peter 3:8-9).

The Lord is not bringing His judgment on those who deny the power of His grace because His unconditional grace is longsuffering not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance, or come to know Christ as personal Savior.

God has unlimited grace for those who reject him including the atheists, the agnostics, and whatever title is given to people in our world today including all the cults, isms, and world religions.

God's grace is available to anyone even though the individual may not accept God's grace.

(3) They don't understand God's grace for the future (II Peter 3:10-12).

God in His time will destroy the present heavens and earth and create a new heavens and earth. Such should cause the righteous to conduct themselves in godly living in the power of the Holy Spirit. Those who deny the grace of God have no understanding of God's grace for the future of this old world and the new world. To them it is all fiction. Some have thought the Mayan Calendar might be true when it indicated the world could end in 2012. I have heard something about there needing to be a correction to that idea. Without God's grace at work in a person's life through faith in Jesus Christ, a person has no true understanding of the future.

(4) They don't understand what it means to live out God's grace (II Peter 3:14-16).

Unbelievers do not understand what makes a believer in Christ want to live out His grace in their lives. In fact, followers of Christ have been compared to radical Islam. Of course such is a complete misunderstanding of God's grace to the believer in Jesus Christ while deceiving those who are deny God's grace or are nominally familiar with God's grace. Peter writes that those who misunderstand God's grace, distort the Word of God, here Paul's letters as well as what Peter is saying. Considering God's completed Word of God, the Bible, unbelievers can distort the entire Bible.

It's not just unbelievers that can be enemies of God's grace,

2. It can involve the thinking of believers.

Peter is an example. He was quick to tell the Lord who He was when Jesus asked His disciples who did men say that He was. "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God," was Peter's reply.

When the Lord told Peter that he would deny Him. Peter was quick to reply I won't deny you. I am willing to go to prison and to death for you.

Peter, of course, denied His Lord. After His bodily resurrection the Lord restored Him to fellowship and usefulness as indicated in the Book of Acts, and Peter's writing of First and Second Peter.

What caused Peter's downfall?

Pride – Self-confidence.

But Peter learned a valuable lesson in his relationship with His Lord and he wrote about it in I Peter 5:5, "Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time."

What causes us to forfeit the grace of God in our lives? Our pride leads us into thinking we can handle life on our own, and we can display the attitudes that we want.

Yes, believers are tempted by the old nature within, by the sirens and lights of the world, and by the devil himself. But we yield to such temptations, when pride begins to take hold and we think we can do what we want without any consequences.

As A.W. Tozer has said, sin is always wrong judgment. Sin takes place because all of a sudden we feel we can do something that's not right without any consequences.

Why do we cheapen God's grace by thinking that God's grace has no power, or God's grace can be earned, or God's grace is conditional?

PRIDE!

Pride is what got Adam and Eve in trouble, and its gotten us in trouble ever since that time in the Garden of Eden.

What's the opposite of pride?

Peter learned what it was! Humility.

Humility for the believer in Jesus is: Submitting to the LORDSHIP of Christ in one's life on a moment by moment basis.

What did Peter write, "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you at the proper time."

Peter learned that submitting to the GRACE OF GOD in his life was the way God's grace was experienced and manifested in His life.

Which brings us to the next few words in our text. As the believer with God's help guards God's grace in his life, and keeps alert to the enemies of God's grace in his life, he must

III. Grow continually in God's grace

But, strong contrast with what Peter just wrote about. Grow means to increase, to expand. Grow is a command and in the present tense.

Peter is telling his readers, and I believe himself, as well as us today who follow Jesus Christ,

KEEP GROWING CONTINUALLY IN THE GRACE AND KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

The question I ask is, "How does that happen?"

1. By possessing the life of Christ through faith in Him.

Since the believer is to be growing in Jesus Christ, it's obvious life is in his life to produce that growth. This life is eternal life, which has the potential to grow since Christ is the Vine and believers are the branches. Any believer in Jesus Christ, then, possesses that life which can grow, can mature in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. **Regeneration** has taken place in the life of the believer. He has been **reconciled** to God.

2. By realizing one's position in Jesus Christ.

As mentioned, the believer in Jesus Christ stands secure in the grace of Jesus Christ. His life is endowed with the unmerited favor of Jesus Christ. As one stands secure in God's grace, the believer is a saint, set apart to God as His possession. He has been **sanctified**.

3. By letting the Holy Spirit take control of one's life.

This involves a daily submitting to the Lordship of Christ through the Word of God.

Paul put it this way in Philippians, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12b-13).

Growing in God's grace is the believer in concert with the Holy Spirit in obedience to the Word of God so Christ's life is evident in you.

****It involves a process.**

Growing is a process as the life of Jesus in a believer begins to develop and take form.

****It takes time.**

Growing in grace doesn't happen overnight. It takes time for a seed such as corn planted in the ground to come to maturity.

****It involves being teachable – One is to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Knowledge of God's word is there to cause the believer to grow continually in God's grace. The two go together.**

--By reading and studying the word of God.

--By taking time for daily prayer

--Open to the Lord's leading, and learns to rejoice in the Lord not in circumstances that may be challenging.

--Develops a biblical world-view.

--Willingness to change one's attitudes and behavior as directed by the Word of God.

--Uses the discernment of the Word of God to have insight into how to use the money God provides as well as the talents and spiritual gifts God provides or him.

--Learns to have a forgiving heart as Christ forgave him.

--Is not condemnatory of others nor makes comparison with others.

--Gains understanding in what it means to live by faith in the Lord, yes to risk for the Lord, and even in the tough times to keep trusting the Lord.

--Able to have victory over temptation.

****It involves learning to give, take, forgive, and serve in the family setting.**

****It involves being a part of a church fellowship, learning to accept one another, care and pray for one another, support one another, and encourage one another.**

****As one matures in grace, one should be able to teach, disciple and mentor others.**

****One learns to share his or her faith as opportunities arise, while also having an interest in spreading the Lord's gospel world-wide.**

****One seeks to live in the light of Christ's any moment return.**

****Knows that there is still room for growing in God's grace.**

The believer growing in God's grace has a certain knowledge and understanding of the Word of God, applies that Word to his life on a daily basis, but also knows there is still more to learn in his or her life with the Lord.

That's why the saying, "Please be patient, God is not through with me yet," applies to each believer.

What is the ultimate purpose of continually growing in God's Grace?

What does the text say in I Peter 3:18?

"To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."

The ultimate purpose of growing in God's grace is that God will be glorified in our lives. Grace is really Christ living in the believer, Christ in you the hope of glory, and His life being display through the believer so that in the power of the Holy Spirit,

Christ, Yes, God Himself, will be glorified or shown through our thoughts, attitudes, words and actions.

In this mini-series on Grace we have talked about these different words given in the Scripture.

Regeneration – God giving the believer His life – which gives the believer an eternal hope here and for life after this life. Life is hopeless no more.

Propitiation – Christ has satisfied God’s wrath so we can be forgiven before God and take responsibility for our actions in His power. I need play the blame game no longer.

Justification – God declares the believer in Christ righteous before HIM. Now the believer doesn’t have to live caught in the performance trap, for being accepted by the Lord, He can serve the Lord motivated by His love. He no longer does he have to think about trying to be perfect to be accepted by others or by God.

Reconciliation – God changes the believer in Christ from being God’s enemy to being His friend. God approves of the individual and he can live for the Lord regardless of what others say or think.

Sanctification – God sets a part the believer in Christ to Himself as His possession – holy unto the Lord. That gives the believer boundaries in his life which provides him the freedom to live for Christ in a world that lives by its own standards.

Glorification – Positionally the believer in Christ has been glorified, for Romans 8:30 tells us that those He justified, He also glorified. That is the ultimate purpose of God’s Grace – the believer’s wonderful position in Christ – to be glorified, be like Jesus Christ and show Him off forever.

That means, as Dr. Francis Schaeffer used to say, the believer spiritually has died and gone to heaven already, and now has returned to earth so Christ’s life can be lived out through the believer, that is to glorify, show God off in one’s life, while living on planet earth.

That’s what growing in God’s grace is all about. It is letting the life of Christ come through you, as a follower of Christ, as you depend on the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within you.

The challenge is we get so bogged down in our daily routines, or we get so complacent in our walk with the Lord, that it becomes old hat. We may tend to think, “I know all that!” or “I have heard that before. But please tickle my ears and warm my heart.”

God help us. We must not become a Christian club where we pat each other on the back and go our merry way and then return on Sunday to go through the routine again.

Who are you praying for that you know who may be struggling and needs to grow in Christ? Who are you praying for that needs to come to know Christ as personal Savior? Who have you invited to church recently? Who in your neighborhood, if you have kids around, invited to Sunday School? Or would you try to have an evangelistic Bible study in your home for your neighborhood or friends that you know who may not know the Lord personally?

A fellow bought an Mini Cooper convertible.

He put on the license plate the word, “PELLUCID.” But he spelled it “PELUCID” with only one “L.” He was allowed only 7 letters on his license. Pellucid, he explained is defined as the quality of admitting the passage of light, so

being transparent, transparently clear in style or meaning. For him it was a natural choice since a convertible allows light to shine through.

He also ordered a license plate frame that read, "Ask me what Pellucid means."

He added that people do ask him what the word, "PELLUCID," means. When they ask, he explains why he has only one "L" in the word and what the word means. Then he continues, "I'm a believer, and I try to let the love of God shine through me." If someone backs away, he says that he lets it go. Perhaps he has sown a seed.

One time in a Home Depot parking lot, a woman stopped and asked him about his car and then about his license plate. He gave her the definition of the word, PELLUCID, and added the line about God's light shining through me. She didn't back off, but asked him he believed all that. He told her that he did, for God rescued him from death, and the least he could do was to tell others about Him.

She was on her way to her car so he said there wasn't time for a five-point presentation of the gospel. But she did say, "That's very nice." He told her to go to church on Sunday and she responded that maybe she would.

He closed by saying that there is no moral to this story. Just the sowing of seed. Having an odd license plate. Being willing to spend an extra thirty seconds. You can do that.

Are you growing in God's grace? Am I growing in God's grace. If we are growing in God's grace, God is doing something in our individual lives, our family life, our church life, and those we come in contact with.

If we are growing in God's grace, He is continually nudging us to touch someone else with His love.

Then it will no longer be reformation Sunday, but a daily transformation in our lives with Jesus Christ.

Let's keep growing in God's grace to the glory of God!!

