

Foundational Beliefs: The Ways of Grace
Matthew 18:12-14
May 15, 2011

Read Scripture: Matthew 18:12-14

Jesus said that God is like a shepherd who has a 100 sheep. If the shepherd had just one of his sheep to run off, the shepherd would leave 99 valuable sheep to go look for just the one! The shepherd values each and every sheep. **It's a picture of God's grace even though the word grace is not used in that passage of scripture.** The word picture Jesus used of a shepherd going out to seek the lost sheep remind us **grace isn't a thing God gives us, grace is about God's relationship to us.** Grace isn't like a big spiritual bucket of white paint God gives us to pour over the color of our sins and make everything pure and white as snow. Bishop Will Willimon stresses that "grace is not a saccharine ooze that is spread over all of life's ill's and shortcomings that makes everything sweeter than it really is." (This We Believe, p. 50 Willimon) Grace is about God's relationship toward us. So rather than think today of how grace is something we get from God; consider that grace is the way God works with us and in us. A biblical understanding of grace realizes God changes us to be more like Him; instead of us making God out to be whatever we want God to be.

Take a look at these houses. I would think each of us here today could pick one of those homes and say that is would be our dream home. John Wesley once described the way God's grace works in our lives as being like the steps we take to enter a house.

The Porch - God's reaches us through "Prevenient Grace"
John 1:14-16

Wesley said that God's grace starts at the porch. The porch of a

home is often where guests are met and greeted. Before we ever enter the house the host meets us at the porch. John Wesley emphasized that the way God's relationship works is that God meets us wherever we are spiritually or otherwise. God comes to us. God's grace is like the host that waits on the front porch of a home to meet the guest before they even enter the house. **John 1:14-16 states "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us....from his fullness we have received grace upon grace."**

John's words are the reason we believe in the foundational teaching of the **prevenient grace of God**. John said "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..." In Christ, God's grace seeks us out first. It is God being like the shepherd who goes looking for the sheep who ran off. Grace is not a thing, grace is the presence of God who comes looking for us even when we run off from Him.

Today we might see ourselves being like the sheep that has wandered or strayed away from God? We all stray at different times and different ways and it is the reason why we need a solid foundational understanding and experience of God's prevenient grace that chases after us.

You may be Christian but in your heart and soul you're wandering. We may be letting a temptation carry us much farther than we should have ever allowed. The old line about the biblical hero Joseph was that when he was tempted by a woman, Joseph ran from the temptation. Perhaps there is some temptation and you're not running from it. It could be the temptation to remain bitter, it could be the temptation to get away with something and we're thinking no one will ever know.

You may be wandering off from God for something that seems harmless or even good. I have never raised sheep, but I am sure some sheep wander away and get lost just to find greener grass or fresh water; things they need.

Perhaps something is going on in your life on the surface it seems good and harmless but it is misleading you away in the time you spend with God, or God's will for you.

Prevenient grace is the source of that call from God that is prompting you to just to begin even thinking more about Him or to be a part of his plan for your life.

Probably all of us have in view of where we live a house with a porch. It may be nothing more than a porch that allows you to step out of the rain as the owner waits to greet you. It may be a porch large enough to host a group of people. Every time you see a house with a porch, keep in mind that our relationship begins and grows because God comes to us first; not because we have earned it or were superior to anyone else. God's presence comes to us in our highest or lowest moments.

The Door: God reaches us through “Justifying Grace” 2 Corinthians 5:19

John Wesley said the door to a house reminds us of God's justifying grace. The owner of the house invites us to walk through the door of their home because they approve of you, they welcome you in as a friend. Grace is not a thing, but God who welcomes us into friendship with Him. The Bible teaches us in many places of God's grace that justifies us, or makes us right in the presence of God. 2 Corinthians 5:19 states **“In Christ God was reconciling the world.... not counting their trespasses against them...”**

Through faith in Jesus Christ we experience justification from God when we believe and accept our need for God's forgiveness. When we turn to God, and turn away from our sin, God says even though I have every right to punish you, I will not. It is like owing a huge financial debt and the one who is owed, says I am releasing you

from your debt.

Sometimes we talk about Jesus paying the price for our sin as if God had to payoff the devil. God owes the devil nothing. Sometimes we act as if the death of Jesus paid the price of our sin to God. That's impossible they are one. God doesn't need to pay himself. **The foundational belief about justifying grace is simply that we can walk through the doorway of friendship with God because God cancels our debt of sin. 2 Corinthians teaches God doesn't count our spiritual debt against us. We can grow in our trust, strength and purpose each day because God says, to each of us, I am not going to count your trespasses against me -your debt is forgiven.** Let's get on with living this life.

When God releases our sins, he releases all sins even those sins we commit in the future. It is the reason why our baptism doesn't have to be repeated nor our why past sins we have forgotten or too painful to confess need to hold us back in regret or shame.

The House: God reaches us through "Sanctifying Grace" 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

John Wesley described a third way of thinking about God's grace. He said when the Bible speaks of sanctifying grace that is what God does with us once we walk through the door and are fully home with Him. Sanctifying grace is like living totally under God's roof. We are no longer just thinking about Him. We are no longer just curious. Now we have walked through the door by faith and are at home as one of his children living under the roof of his guidance. If that still seems confusing or meaningless let me say it like this.

When I was being raised by my parents they would often say to us

kids, “As long as your living under my roof you will live by our rules” We knew they meant that in their home there were certain behavior and attitudes that would not be tolerated and certain expectations of how we were to behave.

- Their expectations were for our good not harm.
- Their expectations were to make us better people.
- Their boundaries for living under their roof was a way they would pass onto to us a part of themselves.
- All of their expectations were out of love for their children.

That is how God’s sanctifying grace works. God’s gift of his friendship leads us to live more like him, and less like our self-absorbed wishes. His grace sanctifying grace shows when we put more and more distance between the old ways of life that displeased God and move toward a closer connection with Him that seeks to live like Jesus.

This what the Apostle Paul meant when he described how Christians were to respond to their old life style they lived before the came to faith in Jesus Christ. **Paul told them, “And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified...You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus.”** v.11 Paul was teaching that God has cleaned you so up you are able to strive to live in this world like him. God has cleaned up our souls so we can live a different life than the rest of the world.

If faith in Christ is not gradually changing us for the better than something wrong.

If there is a glaring way about us that flies in the face of scripture and we make no strides to change and turn away I would be concerned.

The saddest comment someone can make about an unchristian like characteristic in us is for them to say, “They have always been that way.” Really! Especially if we have lived our lives for a lengthy time as a Christian and involved in the influence of the church; yet

we have behaviors that are opposite to Christian teaching - better get praying and soul-searching.

A new Testament scholar told the story of conversation he had when he traveled to Vietnam. He spoke with Vietnamese Christians who were enduring persecution for their faith in Christ. He was offering his sympathy for the persecution they were suffering. One of them commented, “**Suffering is not the worst thing that can happen to us. Disobedience to God is the worst thing.**” (NIV Commentary, Michael J. Wilkins, p.461)

A foundational belief of sanctifying means we don't accept disobedience to the teachings of Jesus as the norm. Sanctifying grace is about the living under the spiritual roof God's love and truth. Therefore our lives are to grow in bearing a greater resemblance to the ways of Jesus.

Glorious Day Video

Concluding remarks and prayer.