

Sharing Grace Graciously

Those who claim to know God's grace must speak and act graciously toward all. Jesus was described as "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). He proclaimed truth in such a way that people "marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth" (Luke 4:22) and His conduct was gracious as well.

Like Jesus, we must share the truth of grace graciously so that this wonderful message will not be tarnished, undermined, and even contradicted by ungracious words and conduct. How can we be gracious as we seek to proclaim grace? We will be more gracious when we understand and reflect in word and deed what is inherent to the concept of grace itself.

Grace is humble. The grace we experience as Christians removes all grounds for boasting because it is an absolutely free gift unmerited by anything we are or do. It keeps us from having an inflated opinion of ourselves (Rom.12:3). Instead, we should reflect the sentiment of the Apostle Paul who said, "But by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10). Since our new identity and position is given by grace, we claim no inherent virtue or value over others. Grace admits a sinful past and an imperfect present. We should proclaim clear truths vigorously, but as we descend the spectrum of Scriptural clarity, we must humbly admit that our understanding is less than perfect and deal graciously with those who have a different understanding.

Grace is liberating. Grace has freed us from bondage to the law and legalistic demands (cf. Gal. 5:1-13). A legalistic spirit tyrannizes people with arbitrary and artificial expectations that stifle Christian growth, but a gracious spirit allows them to grow to become more like Christ. A gracious attitude toward others frees them to be what God wants them to be instead of demanding that they become what we or others might want them to be. America is called a free country because people are allowed to think, question, converse, debate, disagree, or object. Likewise, Christian graciousness creates an environment that allows people to reach their fullest potential without fear of censorship or condemnation.

Grace is risky. When God gave us everything for nothing and guaranteed our future he took a chance, a chance that we might abuse His blessing—as some surely do. Believers can use the grace that liberates as "an opportunity for the flesh" (Gal. 5:13). Grace can be abused, set aside, or rejected (e.g., 2 Cor. 6:1; Gal. 1:6; 2:21; 5:4; Heb.12:15). When Jesus chose His twelve disciples, He risked entrusting His message and reputation to men who were unproven in character, untrained in doctrine, and uncouth in manner. A gracious attitude toward people sees the potential that God sees in them and is willing to trust God to bring it to realization.

Grace is patient. The Scriptures tell us to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). That growth is a process in which grace teaches us (see Titus 2:11-12 where the word for teaching is one related to the training of children). Since God has designed spiritual maturity to be a growth process, He bears with our imperfections as we progress. God is like a patient parent waiting for a child to mature. We likewise acknowledge that fellow believers are in a developmental process; they are not a finished

product. Each stage of growth has its expectations, which differ with each person. We exhibit graciousness when we allow others the room and the time to become more Christlikeness in understanding, character, and conduct.

Grace is encouraging. The biblical idea of encouragement implies the help of one who comes alongside of another to support or strengthen them in time of need. Someone with a gracious disposition reaches down to help others and lift them up (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9). A gracious spirit does not unlovingly criticize, condemn, discourage, or suppress someone so as to hinder their growth. Grace purposes not to defeat others, but to boost them toward Christlikeness. Someone has said that grace holds a halo over our head and helps us grow into it. We are more likely to grow when others expect and encourage us to become what God has made us in Christ. A gracious spirit reflects love in that it “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor. 13:7), i.e., it believes the best about others and optimistically helps them with a forbearing spirit. Graciousness gives others the benefit of the doubt in matters of conscience and conduct that are less than absolutely clear.

Grace is kind. It bestows on another thoughtful and helpful goodness (cf. Eph. 2:7). Kindness is more than doing or saying something good, as reflected in the little girl’s prayer, “God, help all the bad people be good, and all the good people be kind.” A gracious spirit considers the feelings of others and deals gently with them with good will and a helpful intention.

Grace is forgiving. We demonstrate the kind and loving nature of God’s grace when we grant forgiveness to those who offend us (cf. Eph. 4:32). The New Testament idea of forgiveness contains the idea of release. When we forgive those who hurt us, we release them from being the target of our resentment. It is a gracious act to absorb the pain of an offense without returning it, as Jesus did with those who caused His painful death.

Conclusion

In an attempt to advance the message of God’s grace, it would be tragic if an ungracious spirit undermined the credibility of that message and even turned people away from it. That would be a *disgrace*. Just as we can not teach the love of God with a scowl, so we can not advance grace without a gracious spirit to all who are inside and outside the family of God. We who so dearly treasure the truth about grace must be gracious in sharing it. When we are, people will be attracted to our message. “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Colossians 4:6).