

GROW 201 – What We Teach

Lesson 1

RG² and WHY GRACE?

NEWTON'S CRADLE AND GOD'S *Story*:

"Newton's cradle, named after Sir Isaac Newton, is a device that demonstrates conservation of momentum and energy using a series of swinging spheres. When one on the end is lifted and released, it strikes the stationary spheres; a force is transmitted through the stationary spheres and pushes the last one upward. If one ball is pulled away and is let to fall, it strikes the first ball in the series and comes to nearly a dead stop. The ball on the opposite side acquires most of the velocity and almost instantly swings in an arc almost as high as the release height of the last ball. This shows that the final ball receives most of the energy and momentum that was in the first ball. The impact produces a compression wave that propagates through the intermediate balls."¹

BASIC IDEAS:

1. Creation by a Creator assumes and demands grace.
2. Grace existed even before the presence of sin and the fall.
3. All of Creation and Humanity are recipients of God's gracious condescension to act favorably toward His creation (common grace).

In shadow form, this illustrates for us the centerpiece of the Gospel for the Christian life. Who Jesus is in His person and work is the red ball. Everything that follows carries the energy of that first strike. Moreover, everything will come back to that first action. **We believe the Bible teaches a single *Story* and at the center of this *Story* is JESUS. Everything from start to finish and everything in between is from the gospel, sustained by the gospel, and is the gospel. FOR JESUS IS THE GOSPEL!**

Our intent in studying this subject is to show the centrality of the gospel in all the various pieces and stories making up the biblical *Story*. Unfortunately, it is possible to look at various themes and topics that are Bible based and not see how the gospel produces and sustains the parts. Because of this neglect, subjects that are consequences of one's relationship to God because of the gospel become causes forming the basis of our relationship to God. This is unfortunate. If we do not see the fruit as fruit, it becomes the root and instead of freedom and life, there is bondage and death. Thus, the intent of this study is to celebrate the gospel and the fruit it produces in the life of God's people. With this in mind, let us begin.

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KEY PASSAGE(S):

²⁰ “The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but **where sin increased, grace abounded all the more**, ²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, **even so grace would reign** through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:20, 21).

OVERVIEW OF THE LESSON:

Charles Ryrie opens his work, *The Grace of God*, with the following thought. “Christianity is distinct from all other religions because it is a message of grace. Jesus Christ is the supreme revelation of God’s grace; salvation is by grace; and grace governs and empowers Christian living. Without grace Christianity is nothing.”²

Most all world religions speak of grace, but none is so thoroughly saturated by grace, as is Christianity. To eliminate grace from the *Story* is to end the *Story*. In light of our initial thought, we can properly ask, “What is grace?” Grace lives in the arena of need and inability. If there were no deficiency or need, there would be no necessity for grace.

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TODAY’S LESSON:

I. The Bible as *Story*

The Bible is a *Story*. It is a *Story* of a Creator who acts, an Author who writes, a King who rules, and a Hero who wins. It contains villains, war, defeat, and victory. Inside the biblical *Story* there are six acts or ideas unfolding the person and purpose of God. It will be God’s person and purpose that provide the subject matter or theme of the *Story*. They are as follows:

- Act 1 - **God** - “In the Beginning **God**” (Gen. 1:1 [The Power of God - Pt. 1])
- Act 2 - **Creation** - “In the Beginning God **created**” (Gen. 1:1; Col. 1:15-17; 1 Cor. 8:6 [The Mystery of God])
- Act 3 - **Rejection** - “You shall not eat . . . **She** took and **ate and He ate**” (Gen. 2:15-17; 3:6 [The Justice of God])
- Act 4 - **Redemption** - “**The LORD God made garments** of skin and clothed them” (Gen. 3:15-21 [The Grace of God])
- Act 5 - **Re-Creation** - “**You Must Be Born Again**” (John 3:1-21; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rev. 21:1 [the Power of God - Pt. 2])
- Act 6 - **Worship** - “Stop weeping, **the Lion . . . has overcome**” (Rev. 4; 5 The Glory of God)

This entire *Story* tells of God who condescends to give humanity the joy of His own internal fellowship within Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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II. The Need for Grace

Once something existed outside of God, grace existed. Prior to creation all there was, was God existing in Trinity. Within the Godhead or Trinity nothing needed grace, for every thought or action was worthy of the thought or action. However, all this changed once God created. In creating, He condescended. Grace stoops. **Grace existed even before the presence of sin and the fall. The created is always in need of grace from the Creator.**

The biblical reader will notice how there is rebellion/rejection and condemnation. We see this in the villain's appearance. As noted earlier, grace exists simply because God created; but its presence becomes even more pronounced with the arrival of the villain. It is "sin abounding where grace will much more abound."

Unless I realize I'm a sinner deserving of God's just wrath against sin, I cannot experience the richness and fullness of His grace. If I deny my sin, I shut the door on grace. This was Jesus' message to the woman at the well. *Yes, you are a woman who is living in sin. Yes, you are just the kind of person I came to save.* We have to acknowledge both realities. This is why talk of the word, "sin" should not frighten us who believe in the gospel. Because it was not mistakes or missteps or misunderstandings that Christ came to conquer and defeat. He came to defeat sin and sin's awful child: death.³

Grace is the kind action of God toward those who deserve destruction and damnation. This action on God's part will bring Him glory. Grace is the platform through which God administrates His love, acceptance, forgiveness, favor, and kindness/mercy. Every action of God is marked by a gracious condescension on His part to interact with what He creates.

III. The Story's Hero - *Jesus Christ*

As the Bible is read as *Story*, it becomes apparent from the very start of the *Story* that everything will revolve around one primary and central figure. This person will be foretold and imaged so precisely that all who look for Him will find Him (Matt. 2:2).

Jesus Christ, the second member of the Trinity, is the hero of the *Story*. He is **the promised seed** of Genesis 3:15 and **the blood picture** of Genesis 3:21. All of the chapters point to Him. The storyline has meaning only as it is sourced in and flows from Christ.

The relationship of Jesus Christ to the word of God in Scripture is that he sums it up, brings it to fulfillment and interprets it. Thus, the *Word of God* is Jesus Christ. **Every word in Scripture points to Jesus and finds its meaning in him.** . . . The significance of this is worth repeating: Jesus Christ in his life, death, and resurrection is the fixed point of reference for the understanding of **the whole of reality.**⁴

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The Hero's arrival in human flesh is the greatest embodiment of grace by God and His obedience to His Father in life and in death is the greatest display of grace for all times. Nothing else can match who He is and what He has done.

When Adam and Eve rejected God and chose their kingdom and their will over His, they immediately began to "feel" the impact of their decision. This consequence is notable by the attempt to cover their nakedness with vegetation. God could have allowed them to continue in their rebellion, but He once again condescended and provided atonement for their transgression. Two elements are notable in the unfolding of the *Story*. The first element is **God's promise** to those who rebelled against Him (Gen. 3:15). The second element is **God's picture** of what His atoning work will look like. (Gen. 3:21). Thus, the promise and the picture become the defining elements within the larger narrative of history. Jesus Christ is the promise fulfilled and the picture completed.

Both the **incarnation** and **crucifixion** are expressions of God's initiation toward man's inability and rebellion. Both acts on His part are gracious.

CONCLUSION:

"Why study grace?" Because without it there is no *Story*. God created and in this simple sentence grace was born. Everything that happens after this initial act will be platforms for God to act graciously toward those He loves for the purpose of bringing them into His presence so that they might enjoy Him forever. It is to this task of discovery we now turn our attention.

BASIC APPLICATION	
1. What did you find helpful from today's lesson?	7. If all of God's dealings with us flow from grace, what should be our response toward Him? What should be our attitude toward others and ourselves?
2. What did you find confusing from today's lesson?	8. Where should our focus be when reading our Bible?
3. How does this lesson help you in thinking through the gospel?	
4. How does this lesson help you in how you view yourself?	
5. What was your "aha" moment?	
6. How might this text challenge you in your daily activity?	

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Genesis 1:1; 3:15, 21; Luke 24:25-27, 45-47; John 1:15-18; Romans 5:1-21; 11:5, 6

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WHAT TO EXPECT THROUGHOUT THIS STUDY ON GRACE:

1. **Key Passage** - This is the primary text or passage from which our study will focus. It is important to remember that every passage has a greater context which impacts and determines its meaning.
2. **The Big Picture** - This highlights how the current lesson fits into the overarching narrative of the Bible, *the Story*.
3. **Initial Truths to Remember** - As each lesson builds in progression, this section will help remind us of important information and vital truths to keep at the forefront of our minds.
4. **Overview** - This will give us a general sense of where we're going in the lesson.
5. **Conclusion** - This statement will wrap up our lesson and lead us into application.
6. **Further Study** - Various passages that supplement our key passage and aid in further in-depth study. For all these passages, consider the larger context for each text. In addition, place the idea within the biblical framework of the one *Story* where Jesus is in the center. Many of our misconceptions about these topics will fall away as we discover a proper interpretation within context.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newton%27s_cradle

² Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Grace of God* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963), 9.

³ <http://www.danieldarling.com/2013/02/if-there-is-no-sin-there-is-no-grace/>

⁴ [Emphasis added] Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (IVP Books, 1991), 59, 60.

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