

The background of the entire cover is a close-up photograph of two hands reaching towards each other. The hands are positioned diagonally, with one hand at the top left and the other at the bottom right. The fingers are slightly curled, and the palms are facing each other, creating a sense of tension and longing. The lighting is soft and focused on the hands, making them stand out against a dark, almost black background. The overall mood is intimate and hopeful.

Reigning Grace and Personal Relationships

Expressions of Grace in
Relationships

Patrick J. Griffiths

"Reigning Grace and Personal Relationships"

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Introduction

What is grace? Grace is unmerited, undeserved, and, perhaps, unwanted favor. Grace does for us what we could never do for ourselves. Grace determines that no one can boast of personal achievement and success. Grace, however, is not simply otherworldly and intangible, but real, vital, penetrating, mind-altering and life transforming. Without it nothing works; with it all things are possible.

As a Grace fellowship, grace works within the context of relationships. **First**, we make no claim of being able to merit any of God's favor (Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:10-12; Titus 3:5). We are fully convinced that grace reigns from the inception, continuation, and culmination of the Christian life (Gal. 3:1-5). We are equally convinced that what has been merited by grace cannot be maintained by works. It is impossible for us to undo by our actions what God has done through His actions. **Second**, grace teaches us to love without condition (Gal. 5:13, 14), accept without requirement (Eph. 4:32), forgive without limit (Matt. 18:22), and serve without reward (Luke 6:35). "As a people of grace, we put understanding above accusation, forbearance above faultfinding, and Biblical unity above the demand for conformity" (John 13:34, 35; Ps. 133:1-3).

Yet does grace work? What does it look like in flesh and blood? The intent of this study is to consider grace in the area of personal relationships. Regardless as to the nature of the relationship, grace reigns. Our intent is to note eight qualities of grace as expressed in any relationship. As with any study, there is a tendency to make the study itself a form of bondage. The listing of the eight is not meant to be exhaustive only suggestive. Our propensity toward list making makes us lean heavily in the direction of do's and don'ts and thus toward legalism and bondage. This is not our intent. Any study of grace is to be liberating and purifying. Grace simplifies and releases.

Should we find ourselves in bondage and burden, then somewhere along the way we have lost sight of grace.

Before we go any further, let us make sure we understand that grace is not in place of Christ, but rather grace is Christ. The two words are inter-changeable. So to pursue grace is to pursue Christ and to pursue Christ is to be bathed in grace. Today, may you find in the study of Christ a release. There is hope and healing and wholeness in Christ. He is yours for the taking. May it please the Father to open your eyes to the glory of grace.

Reigning Grace and Humility



*“For you were called to freedom, brethren;
only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity
for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” (Gal. 5:13).*

Grace works humility in and through the people of God. Where grace exists so also humility. Yet what is humility?

Many of us are familiar with the Proverbial statements concerning humility.

“The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom; and **before honor is humility**” (Prov. 15:33).

“Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and **before honor is humility**” (Prov. 18:12).

“**By humility and the fear of the LORD** are riches, and honor, and life” (Prov. 22:4).

Why is humility the precursor to honor? Because power corrupts and fallen human nature loves self more than anything else. To have people shower you with honor in the absence of humility is to become arrogant and self-deceived. Benjamin Franklin said, “A man wrapped up in himself makes a very small bundle,” and in the absence of humility, the bundle is small indeed. Thus humility is the antecedent to honor. Not only does humility provide an accurate assessment of who one is, but it also protects against believing what others might say concerning you. Charles Spurgeon is correct when he said, “Humility is to make a right estimate of one's self.”

“A man wrapped
up in himself
makes a very
small bundle,”

Benjamin Franklin

If worldliness is “The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:15-17), then humility protects us from worldliness. The world would have you believe you’re somebody and that you have rights and you are to be the determiner of your own destiny. Humility, however, teaches people to be the servant, the bellhop and the errand runner (1 Cor. 3:5 [“servants”]).

Galatians 5:13 and following provides an ample picture of what humility looks like through the lens of grace.

“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh” (Gal. 5:13-16).

Grace moves us to serve one another through love. To do so is to be marked by humility. Humility allows me to serve without expecting my “dues” or seeking vindication of my rights. Humility embodies the principle that it is better to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). To be a Christian is to have accepted the yoke of Christ that is marked by humility (Matt. 11:29; 2 Cor. 10:1). Humility marks the incarnation of God into man (Phil. 2:8).

There is perhaps
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There is perhaps no greater act or display of humility than when God became man. Yet such an action as this was not an end, only a beginning. From this singular act a means to an end was secured. He came to die and not just any death, but the horrific death by crucifixion (Phil. 2:5-8). Scripture often

works from the greater to the lesser. This action on God’s part is no

less true. Because of what He has done, how can His people do less? Just as . . . so also. His humbling becomes our pattern.

Humility is the trademark, the identifier and brand of the believer. Humility is not personality driven. Humility is incapable of being hidden; as with the arrogant so also the humble. God is in union with His people. Heaven is occupied by the humble (Matt. 18:4). We are to identify ourselves with the humble (Rom. 12:16). God's grace always proves operative in those whose hearts are humble before Him (Matt. 23:12; Luke 18:14; 2 Cor. 7:6; James 4:6, 10; 1 Pet. 5:5, 6). The inherent merit of humility is honor (James 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:6; Prov. 15:33; 18:12; 22:4).

What does humility look like in the body of Christ?

First, humility accepts who we are in light of who God is. The Christian never sees himself as having earned the favor of God. The humble always see themselves as recipients of underserved, unmerited, and unwanted favor. One's rights begin to fade in the face of gracious humility.

Second, humility accepts what we do in light of who God is. The humble understand that what we are in the area of service is exactly what God wanted us to be. He determines who serves and how they serve (1 Cor. 3:6-9; 12:7-11). With gracious humility there is no longer a striving for popularity, power, and prestige. Gracious humility no longer "jockeys for position." It no longer cares what one knows or who one knows, only who knows you.

Third, humility loves without condition. Humility recognizes that God has loved the unlovely. Gracious humility no longer withholds love. Reaching out is a sign of gracious humility.

Fourth, humility accepts without requirement. Humility recognizes that God has accepted the unacceptable. Gracious humility puts to death cliques, factionalism, quarrellings, and conformism.

Fifth, humility forgives without limit. Humility recognizes that God has forgiven the unforgivable. Gracious humility works from the greater to the lesser. We can forgive because we have been forgiven.

Finally, humility serves without reward. Humility recognizes that God's work and reward are in proportion to His resources, thus the believer never has to worry about any injustice. Life is often characterized by being underpaid, underappreciated, and overworked, yet gracious humility embraces what can be given in light of what has been given. Gracious humility embraces the centrality of Christ crucified.

Gracious humility always seeks to take the role of a servant rather than that of a master. As you pursue Christ, think on these things. May your response be one of gracious humility.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?

Grace is not the absence of activity, but it is a productivity that is sourced in the Holy Spirit.

As noted in the introduction, there is this internal drive to do and thus merit or earn. *We are reluctant to rest.* To receive something without work makes us appear as beggars, hobos, vagabonds, and tramps. Grace is not the absence of activity, but it

is a productivity that is sourced in the Holy Spirit. There are three passages that bring this out.

The first is found in Philippians 2:12 and 13. Often we cite verse 12, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling" without finishing the thought in verse 13.

"So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **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**" (Phil 2:12-13).

What does God's work look like? It looks like me working out my salvation with fear and trembling. The two cannot be separated. His action produces in me and through me my action.

The second thought is found in Ephesians 2:8-10 and supports the idea stated in Philippians 2:12 and 13.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. **For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them**” (Eph. 2:8-10).

The idea behind “workmanship” is that of a product or thing made. God is crafting us. We are the work. This same thought is contained in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and 24 and Philippians 1:6.

Finally, we must consider the story of Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-42.

“Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but **only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her**” (Luke 10:38-42).

These eight expressions of grace are not works to be achieved as much as fruits to be enjoyed.

These eight expressions of grace are not works to be achieved as much as fruits to be enjoyed. These are the qualities God is working in and through His people. We do not merit or earn them; they exist only in Him and He works them in us and through us to those around us. Our “labor is to enter into His rest” (Heb. 4:11). The struggle is to not work like Martha, but to rest like Mary. Our natural inclination is to “get busy” and “work for Jesus.” Friend, let us “Be still and know that He is God” (Exod. 14:13; Ps. 46:10).

Please do not look at these eight readings as tasks to be checked off on your daily task list. Relax, slow down, enjoy, and see God.

OBSERVATION

- What does humility look like in others? What does a fellowship marked by humility look like?
- What does humility look like in you?
- What do you believe to be the ear-marks of humility?
- Is it possible to live humbly in a context where people openly reject God?

Reigning Grace and Teach-ability

“He [Apollus] began to speak out boldly in the synagogue.

But when Pricilla and Aquila heard him,

They took him aside and explained to him

the way of God more accurately.” (Acts 18:26).

2

Grace works teach-ability in and through the people of God. Where grace exists so also teach-ability. Yet what is teach-ability? Humility says, “I could be wrong.” Being teachable says, “I do not know everything.” Teach-ability and humility work hand in hand. One who is not humble will not be teachable. Many of us have had discussions with people who think they know when in reality they do not know, but they do not know that they do not know. They are noted as “know-it-alls.” A teachable attitude believes that God is working in and through His people. A teachable attitude believes that God can and does use whatever and whomever to instruct His people. It is never in the absence of His Word, but the vehicles He uses are diverse and extended.

The author of Proverbs has much to say concerning the spirit of teach-ability. To be wise one must be teachable (Prov. 1:5; 12:15; 15:31; 19:20). The young are consistently exhorted to heed the instruction of their parents and authorities (Prov. 1:8; 4:1, 10; 5:7; 13:1). The consequences of being teachable are immediate and eternal (Prov. 1:9; 4:2-9). The one who listens is the one who is blessed indeed (Prov. 8:34). A fool is marked by a non-teachable spirit (Prov. 12:15). He is noted as a scorner (Prov. 13:1).

Perhaps the classic example of gracious teach-ability can be found in two wonderful New Testament passages.

The first is found in Acts 18:24-28 in the story of Apollus. From the text we learn that he was an “eloquent man, and was mighty in the Scriptures.” Yet despite all of his learning, he willingly submitted

himself to the instruction of the married couple, Priscilla and Aquila. Who, pray-tell, were they?

The second classic example of teach-ability can be found in the apostle Paul. Paul's credentials were impeccable. He was everything anyone would want in this world (Phil. 3:4-8), yet he gladly submitted himself to an unknown man named Ananias (Acts 9:10-19).

Being teachable means you have a submissive spirit. Gracious submissiveness is "quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger" (James 1:19). Key components of gracious submissiveness are an attentive ear, a held tongue, and a non-judgmental spirit. When we listen to the individual speaking do we actually hear what they are saying? It is easy for us to think we actually know, when in reality we do not.

We are all too quick to judge others before we have had the opportunity to allow the information to percolate through our intelligent base. Often our foolishness is manifested to others in our inability to listen and think before speaking. Mark Twain said, "When I was fourteen years old, I was amazed at how unintelligent my father was. By the time I turned twenty-one, I was astounded how much he had learned in the last seven years."

Gracious submissiveness makes us teachable. May God protect us from judging others before we have had the opportunity to actually think.

To think we know
"truth" assumes all
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known.

Being teachable means you have a non-judgmental spirit. Oh, the damage done to the body of Christ through conceited attitudes toward others who do not conform to our way of thinking. To think we know "truth" assumes all knowable truth is known. When we consider the vastness of God's workings, we are

mere specks on an eternal unending quest to know. We swim in an ocean of information and assume what we have is what we see and what we possess is what we observe. How small. When one considers the unfathomable dimension of God's knowable knowledge and then the expressions of that knowledge through personalities and cultures, there ought to be a hesitancy to judge too harshly and to conclude all too quickly that we are "right." Yet we continue to divide and separate and quarrel and alienate, etc. How sad.

Being teachable means you have a gracious spirit towards the variable. Although I can "beg to differ" this does not mean I need have a contentious and cantankerous attitude towards those who differ in their ideology. Wrong is wrong. A gracious spirit towards the "error" will not make the error right or true. Nothing can change error. One might be persuaded of the inaccuracy of the error and displace it with truth, but the error is still error. Yet regardless of the error's nature, I need not be venomous toward the carrier of the error.

The constant plea and prayer of the Psalmist is to be taught by God (Pss. 25:4, 5; 27:11; 86:11; 119:12, 26, 33, 66, 68, 108, 124, 135, 143:10). A Hebrew word for "teach" is "a goad." The implication is that God must "goad" us to learn. The Psalmist recognized his own bent toward a non-teachable spirit and thus the plea for God to goad him into learning. My desire is to be teachable first and foremost before God and then through His people and that which He has created. May God be gracious and grant to us, His people, a gracious teach-ability.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?

"Leisure is a form of silence, not noiselessness. It is the silence of contemplation such as occurs when we let our minds rest on a rosebud, a child at play, a Divine mystery, or a waterfall."

Perhaps you have already forgotten chapter one. Are you resting? Are you seeking your satisfaction in Him? Remember the story of Martha and Mary. Strive to be a Mary (Luke 10:38-41).

Remember, these eight expressions of grace are not works to be achieved as much as fruits to be enjoyed. We do not merit or earn them, they exist only in Him and He works them in us and through us to those around us. The struggle is to not work like Martha, but to rest like Mary. Friend, “Be still and know that He is God” (Exod. 14:13; Ps. 46:10).

Please do not look at these eight readings as tasks to be checked off on your daily task list. Relax, slow down, enjoy, and see God.

OBSERVATION

- What does teach-ability look like in others?
- What does teach-ability look like in you?
- What do you believe to be the ear-marks of teach-ability?

Reigning Grace and Liberty

*"All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable.
All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything."
(1 Cor. 6:12).*

3

Grace works liberty in and through the people of God. Where grace exists so also does liberty. Yet what is liberty? Liberty has often been confused with "a license to sin." Unfortunately, such a defining leaves liberty without any real "bite." Grace liberates. We should make no mistake as to the openness of a gracious liberty. Bondage is a consequence of sin not grace. Yet what is a gracious liberty?

Consider with me Paul's thoughts in 1 Corinthians 6:12, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything."

Paul's statement is interesting. As a general rule, "All things are lawful for me." This means exactly what it says. God has given us all things to enjoy and in so doing to return thanks (1 Tim. 6:17). Yet he places on the statement several qualifiers.

First, "Not all things are helpful" (v.12a). **Second**, "I will not be enslaved by anything" (v.12b). **Third**, "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord" (v.13). **Finally**, "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price" (v.20).

The qualifiers help us to understand the nature of the grace received. Grace opens before us a fertile field of activity. We may enjoy the richness of God's world and the diversity of His people. Grace is not only a green light of opportunity, but a yellow light of caution and a red light of abstinence. Grace does "instruct us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:12).

Grace is not only a green light of opportunity, but a yellow light of caution and a red light of abstinence.

The exhortation in verse 18 is emphatic, “Flee immorality.” The list of sins is as diversified as personalities and cultures, but there is one common denominator that traverses all personalities and cultures and it is the sin of sexual immorality. This sin, unlike others, is a “sin against your own body” (v.18). This is not a “right” you possess. This sin is not yours to commit since your body is not your own. When Jesus Christ died on Calvary’s cross He purchased you. He redeemed you from the sin market by paying the debt that stood against you. He liberated you from sin’s marketplace. You are now free. But your freedom is not a license to sin; it is rather the liberty to serve.

You are now free.
But your freedom is
not a license to sin;
it is rather
the liberty to serve.

Our freedom from sin is a freedom to Christ. We left sin’s mastery only to be mastered by Christ. Because of His work in us and through us, we are now to glorify God in our bodies (v.20). This is our true freedom, our true liberty. The more we learn of Him and His Word and the more mind renewal

takes place, the more we will see life transformation. When it really gets down to it, what can sexual immorality offer us that we cannot already find or already have in Christ?

Paul picks this thought up again in 1 Corinthians 10:23, “All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify.”

Though all things are permissible, it does not mean that all things are of equal value. Though all things are allowable, it does not mean that all things are for the strengthening of the body (v. 23). The principle for whether or not we are to indulge in a liberty is found in verse 24. I am to put the good of others before my own.

Verses 29 and 30 appear to be a common objection raised by those who seem to have to “curb” their liberties for the sake of the weaker brother. The “complaint” is legitimate, but the principle off of which

we should be working is found in verse 31. Whether you indulge or do not eat, whether you drink or abstain, this is not the point. The point is “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

Throughout chapters 8, 9, and 10, the common theme appears to be the edification of God’s people and the redemption of those who are yet to be saved. All actions are rooted in the design of God for His ultimate glorification.

There is liberty in being addicted to nothing or no one but Christ. Is all that I do centered on the redemptive work of God and on the building up of His people? How much of what I do is actually self-serving?

There is liberty in being addicted to nothing or no one but Christ.

May God stir me to see the selfness of my own heart and thoughts. May He continue to show me the wickedness of my own heart and the absolute sufficiency of His own Son. May God continue to move us in our slavery to Him. May our joy be found in our bondage to His cross. May our appetites be such that we crave nothing but Him. This will only take place as we bury ourselves in a true knowledge of who He is, what He has done, and who we now are in Him.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?

“Saving faith is an immediate relation to Christ, accepting, receiving, resting upon Him alone, for justification, sanctification, and eternal life by virtue of God’s grace.”

Charles Spurgeon

Spurgeon correctly notes how saving faith rests not only for justification but also for sanctification. It is injurious to our faith to see its inception, but not its continuation, by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Again, these eight expressions of grace are not

works to be achieved. You cannot merit them. They exist only in Him and He works them in us and through us to those around us.

OBSERVATION

- What does liberty look like in others?
- What does liberty look like in you?
- What do you believe to be the ear-marks of liberty?

Reigning Grace and Simplicity

4

*“More than that, I count all things to be loss
in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord,
for whom I have suffered the loss of all things,
and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ” (Phil. 3:8).*

Grace works simplicity in and through the people of God. Where grace exists so also does simplicity. Yet what is simplicity?

Henry David Thoreau said, “Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb-nail.” Yet is simplicity defined by absence and is it impossible to attain in the presence of abundance?

Simplicity allows us to leave the good for the best, the temporal for the eternal, the immediate for the gradual, and the cluttered for the designed. Simplicity is a call back to the fundamentals. It is a retreat to the foundational. Simplicity needs not be rural versus suburban or monastic versus lavish. Simplicity does not necessitate Spartan conditions. But in simplicity “things” become the possessed not the possessor. Perhaps Leonardo DaVinci is correct when he said, “Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.”

Simplicity allows us to leave
the good for the best,
the temporal for the eternal,
the immediate for the gradual, and
the cluttered for the designed.

Simplicity is not in opposition to day planners, think pads, cell phones, electronic recording devices, computers, gadgetry, or technology, but simplicity looks past the shadow to the substance. This is what Paul meant in Philippians 3:8, “More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ

Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.”

Simplicity needs nothing that it does not already have. Simplicity sees sufficiency and satisfaction in Christ and His cross-work. Yet simplicity is not easily attained in a world standing in conflict to it.

Simplicity is fought for, won, achieved, attained, gained, embraced, realized, and clung to. Simplicity is intentional, it is focused. Notice Paul’s wording in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

Simplicity sees sufficiency and satisfaction in Christ and His cross-work.

The flesh, the world, and the devil call us away from simplicity. To find satisfaction in what He is, what He has done, and who we are in Him; this is simplicity and our current context seeks to pull us away from Him. Thus there is the constant battle to stay centered in the midst of a force that drives us from the center. Socrates reflects the conflict that exists in all people at all times and in all places when he said, “How many things are there which I do not want?”

What we have to do and what we are willing to do can be two different actions. What we have to do is bordered by our present circumstances and situations. What we are willing to do must be defined without boundaries. It is when our volitional side can gladly

embrace the control of God in every area of life and see and feel and taste the very sufficiency of Christ that we find simplicity.

Simplicities bedfellows are contentment, rest, gratification, and ease, but these things sit in a room of disarray, sorrow, conflict, and upheaval. “Who is rich? He who rejoices in his portion” (The Talmud). Can you see the scenario? Gracious simplicity brings peace to the restless, contentment to the dissatisfied, and gratification to the embittered. Yet this is what simplicity is and does. Oh, may God grant to us His people a gracious simplicity.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?

“The best of all medicines is resting and fasting.”

Benjamin Franklin

Franklin is correct in noting the therapeutic benefits of resting and fasting. Both actions call us to “slow down.” In the absence of direction we rush toward a goal that does not exist. Tremendous energy is expended, but at what cost? May it please God to slow us down.

OBSERVATION

- What does simplicity look like in others?
- What does simplicity look like in you?
- What do you believe to be the ear-marks of simplicity?

5

Reigning Grace and Honesty

“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy” (James 3:17).

Grace works honesty in and through the people of God. Where grace exists so also does honesty. Yet what is honesty?

The story is told of Diogenes, a fourth century BC philosopher who carried a lantern through the streets of Corinth looking for an honest man. His search ended in futility.

The Scripture uses the word “honest” only four times. Perhaps our most familiar occurrence of the word is found in Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, **whatsoever things are honest**, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

It is translated with the word “grave” in 1 Timothy 3:8, 11 and Titus 2:2. In our English usage of the word “grave” it seems to suggest serious, solemn, or somber. The Greek word means, “worthy of respect or honor, noble, dignified, reverent. The word implies that which is majestic and awe-inspiring” (Rogers & Rogers).

To be an honest man or of honest character means you can be trusted and looked to for counsel, direction, and leadership. Honesty speaks of transparency, of being one-faced. Honesty is the opposite of

Honesty is who one is in private when no one but God is aware of your actions or thoughts.

hypocrisy. An honest person is one who can be respected; one who is esteemed. Honesty has nothing to do with or defined by pedigree, popularity, power, or prestige. Honesty is who one is in private

when no one but God is aware of your actions or thoughts. The connections between the fruits of grace are undeniably intertwined. “Integrity is doing the right thing, even if nobody is watching.” The honest man is a man of integrity. It is the same “face” you wear in public. There is a wholeness to the honest man that is woefully lacking in the hypocrite or liar.

There is nothing worse than being in any relationship that is marked by dishonesty. Dishonesty creates tension, distrust, and heartache. Dishonest leads to a lying tongue.

Proverbs tells us that God hates a lying tongue (Prov. 6:17, 19; 12:22). He considers it an abomination. Liars shall not last (Prov. 12:19) or go unpunished (Prov. 19:5, 9). The people of God are to hate the lying tongue (Prov. 13:5). It is not to be a part of their character (Prov. 14:5). An individual of base character is marked by lying (Prov. 17:7). Only a foolish man lies. Yet honesty is what marks the moments. It is only as we are honest in individual moments that we are marked by honesty.

It has been said, “Before us lie two paths -- honesty or dishonesty. The ignorant embark on the dishonest path; the wise on the honest. For when you help others, you help yourself; when you hurt others, you hurt yourself. Those who remain honest know the truth: character overshadows money, trust rises above fame. And honesty is still the best policy.”

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?

*“Contentment consists not in adding more fuel,
but in taking away some fire.”*

Thomas Fuller

Most of us live life as if it were a lunch buffet. We grab a 12" plate and expect it to do the work of a 16" plate, too much too soon. We think if we have a 16" plate we will get more done. You cannot fit 10 pounds of activity in a 5 pound sack. Friend, the key is to place on your plate only those items that are necessary. Contentment comes in balance and moderation as it relates to life's consuming force. Perhaps God will allow us the wisdom and courage to remove some of the fire that is presently consuming our lives. This is where our joy and rest will come; when we see Him as sufficient and satisfying.

OBSERVATION

- What does honesty look like in others?
- What does honesty look like in you?
- What do you believe to be the ear-marks of honesty?

Reigning Grace and Integrity

*“An overseer, then, must be above reproach,
the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent,
respectable, hospitable, able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2).*



Grace works integrity in and through the people of God. Where grace exists so also does integrity. Yet what is integrity? Is integrity important as an expression of grace? Alan K. Simpson, the former U.S. senator from Wyoming who holds the Lombard Chair at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University said,

“If you have integrity, nothing else matters. If you don't have integrity, nothing else matters.”

The Scripture speaks of a leader being blameless in 1 Timothy 3:2.

“A bishop then must be **blameless**, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2).

Paul uses the word again in 5:7 when addressing the women of a fellowship and 6:14 when ending his final exhortation to Timothy.

“And these things give in charge, that they may be **blameless**” (1 Tim. 5:7).

“That thou keep this commandment without spot, **unrebukeable**, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Tim. 6:14).

The word means, “to be inculpable.” The idea is that the individual cannot be arrested. No charges can be brought against him and made to stick or proven true.

A different word is used in 1 Timothy 3:10, Titus 1:6 and 7.

“And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found **blameless**” (1 Tim. 3:10).

“If any be **blameless**, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly” (Titus 1:6).

“For a bishop must be **blameless**, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre” (Titus 1:7).

Here the idea is that the individual cannot be called into question. His life is so exemplary that no one can find an occasion to accuse him of wrong doing.

Our English word integrity speaks of this wholeness. The idea of integrity is that of being incorruptible, of being sound or healthy.

When one is blameless, they are whole, sound or healthy. It is always interesting to see how the fruits of grace intermingle so that all of them stand together. Integrity plays an enormous role in any sustainable relationship. “There can be no friendship without confidence; and no confidence, without integrity.” Without integrity there can be no long-standing relationships.

A person of integrity rings true when struck hard.

The person of integrity is at peace with themselves and their surroundings. Integrity is not built on or around situations or circumstances. Such conditions only show what is true, they cannot create integrity. A person of integrity rings true when struck hard.

Adam’s seed knows nothing of biblical integrity. It does exist within humanity at large because God is gracious in the dispensing of

common grace, but there is a supernatural expression of this union between words and works that only God can cause.

May His people be unequivocally marked by the grace fruit called integrity.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?

"Contentment is natural wealth, luxury is artificial poverty."

Socrates

As we continue to consider these eight expressions of grace it is easy for us to lose focus and drift into the arena of rights, merit, earn, and deserve. Contentment is so crucial for healthy Christian living. Can we believe that He is enough? If we could learn to be content we would stop chasing after the trinkets of this age.

OBSERVATION

- What does integrity look like in others?
- What does integrity look like in you?
- What do you believe to be the ear-marks of integrity?

7

Reigning Grace and Purity

*“And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself,
just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3)*

Grace works purity in and through the people of God. Where grace exists so also does purity. Yet what is purity? Is purity important as an expression of grace?

Sometimes a word is more easily defined by its antonyms than its synonyms. To think of something that is impure or defiled enables us to conjure up images of darkness and evil. We often think of purity as it is expressed in the area of morality. Yet, purity can exist in thought, ideas, images, and actions. John speaks of a religious or ceremonial purity in John 11:55. Paul participated in such an action in Acts 21:24, 26 (See also Acts 24:18). Spiritual purification is also referenced in James (4:8 [See also 1 Pet. 1:22]).

John (1 John 3:3) tells us that as we live in light of the coming of Jesus Christ we will seek to live pure lives; lives that are free from distraction and defilement. This same idea is carried in Isaiah 6 where the prophet saw the LORD high and lifted up and as a result there was purification from ceremonial and moral defilement.

First Thessalonians 4:3 states it is God’s will for His people to be freed from moral defilement. And yet purity of being far exceeds moral purity. Moral purity is a subset within the arena of purity.

Biblical purity encompasses Matthew 6:33, “But seek first His kingdom and righteousness.” Biblical purity is being singular of heart, it is “Watching over your heart” (Prov. 4:23). Biblical purity understands “The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart” (Matt. 12:34). Biblical purity originates from within. Biblical purity is sourced in what God has done and is seen in what God is doing.

Biblical purity is not determined by people's evaluation of us, but by God's working in us.

We are biblically pure when we are "finding, celebrating, and declaring that Jesus Christ is enough in this life and in the life to come." The Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard was correct when he noted how "purity of heart is to will one thing."

In the absence of biblical purity there exists nothing but spiritual adultery and idolatry. Without Christ within, people are nothing short of being white sepulchers filled with the bones of dead men.

Biblical purity is grateful for the gifts of the generous giver, but always leery of the adulterer within that wraps its tentacles tenaciously around the gift instead of the giver. Thus, "He who loves with purity considers not the gift of the lover, but the love of the giver" (Thomas Kempis).

Biblical purity fights for simplicity, pursues abandonment, seeks defeat, longs for brokenness, jettisons clutter, hates the distraction, and baths in singularity.

Biblical purity is never found apart from Christ and is always rooted in Christ.

Biblical purity is never found apart from Christ and is always rooted in Christ. Thus the questions, "Are we a biblically pure people? Am I biblically pure?" It is not, "Am I moral, or ethical, or theologically orthodox, but am I singularly devoted to Him? Do I seek Him above all else?"

Are you . . . am I biblically pure?

It shames us to think of how little we actually think of Him. Yet we rejoice . . . we rejoice knowing that He is completing His work in us and through us to those around us. We rejoice . . . we rejoice

knowing that His work is a progressive work that ends in victory and certainty and is inevitable. Thus . . . we rejoice.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?

"No man or woman is an island. To exist just for yourself is meaningless. You can achieve the most satisfaction when you feel related to some greater purpose in life, something greater than yourself."

Are you resting in Him? Think with me of the song entitled, "Jesus, I am resting, resting."

Jesus, I am resting, resting,
In the joy of what Thou art;
I am finding out the greatness
Of Thy loving heart.
Thou hast bid me gaze upon Thee,
And Thy beauty fills my soul,
For by Thy transforming power,
Thou hast made me whole.

Refrain

*Jesus, I am resting, resting,
In the joy of what Thou art;
I am finding out the greatness
Of Thy loving heart.*

O, how great Thy loving kindness,
Vaster, broader than the sea!
O, how marvelous Thy goodness,
Lavished all on me!
Yes, I rest in Thee, Belovèd,
Know what wealth of grace is Thine,

Know Thy certainty of promise,
And have made it mine.

Simply trusting Thee, Lord Jesus,
I behold Thee as Thou art,
And Thy love, so pure, so changeless,
Satisfies my heart;
Satisfies its deepest longings,
Meets, supplies its every need,
Compasseth me round with blessings:
Thine is love indeed!

Ever lift Thy face upon me
As I work and wait for Thee;
Resting 'neath Thy smile, Lord Jesus,
Earth's dark shadows flee.
Brightness of my Father's glory,
Sunshine of my Father's face,
Keep me ever trusting, resting,
Fill me with Thy grace.

OBSERVATION

- What does purity look like in others?
- What does purity look like in you?
- What do you believe to be the ear-marks of purity?



Reigning Grace and Charity

*"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels,
but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong
or a clanging cymbal" (1 Cor. 13:1).*

Grace works charity in and through the people of God. Where grace exists so also does love. Yet what is love? Love has often been defined as a feeling, something that is ethereal or airy. Yet, love is concrete, steel, bedrock, intelligent, and sustaining. Love has real staying power. It is neither fickle, fragile, nor failing.

If humility says, "I could be wrong." And teach-ability says, "I do not know everything." Charity, in the midst of this, recognizes that "love is always an appropriate response in any situation."

Yet what is charity or love? There is perhaps no finer definition of love than that found in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13.

"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails; . . . But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:1-13).

In the first 3 verses, love's necessity is stressed. Without it, nothing is of value. No sacrifice or hardship or achievement has any significance. With it, however, all loss is gladly endured and embraced. Remember the story of Jacob and Rachel?

When Jacob sought to marry Rachel, he had to serve her brother Laban for seven years. Listen carefully to Genesis 29:20, "So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her." His hardship was considered by him a small thing because of his love for Rachel. This is what love does to inconvenience, hardship, and sacrifice.

In 1 Corinthians 13, verses 4-7 tells the reader what love looks like and finally verses 8 and 13 confirm the enduring nature of love's existence. I have always been fascinated by 1 Corinthians 13. I personally believe you could remove the word "love" and replace it with "Christ" and it would read the same. What we have in 1 Corinthians 13 is a picture of Christ.

In the
absence of
love nothing
else matters.

Love is perhaps the lost jewel of Christian living. In its absence nothing else matters. Excellence without it is nothing but sterile know-how. Love enables endurance. Love lightens hardship and sorrow.

Jesus said to his disciples "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34, 35). He did not say by your doctrinal precision or musical selections, but by your love one for another. I trust this will not escape us.

Paul noted how the love of Christ compelled him (2 Cor. 5:14). His prayer is that the people of God would understand and embrace the fullness of that love (Eph. 3:14-19).

What does the love of Christ look like when it is worked in and through His people? Let me suggest four ways. **First**, when His love is working in us and through us we love others without condition. It is a tragic observation, but often we are highly selective in whom we will or will not love. **Second**, when His love is working in us and through us we accept others without requirement. Everyone everywhere craves acceptance. Yet there exists a failure in achieving the sense of well-being that comes from being accepted. Why is this so? It is so because people establish their own set of subjective absolutes and vacillating means of measuring others and thus many feel rejection's bite. When love does its work, acceptance is openly

Love without condition. Accept without requirement. Forgive without limit. Serve without reward.

and freely extended to all regardless as to standing or station. **Third**, when His love is working in us and through us we forgive without limit. It is a regrettable calamity but many are consumed

by a bitter spirit produced by an unforgiving attitude. When God's love works in us forgiveness will flow through us. Forgiving one another should never be an issue for believers. **Finally**, when His love is working in us and through us we serve without reward. Serving graciously is its own reward. Because we see ourselves as unworthy recipients of His love, our service rendered is an expression of gratitude. It is not done for public recognition or human affirmation. Love is, in itself, the motive.

Today mankind is in desperate need of being loved. God's love has been openly manifested (Rom 5:6, 8, 10). As believers, we are conduits of His love to a lost and dying world. As believers, our greatest evangelistic tool is a loving fellowship built around the centrality of Christ. It is this unity that will draw the love starving

souls to the Father. May God enable us to have the kind of love that shines like a penetrating beacon into the fog of night.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?

*"Focus on the journey, not the destination.
Joy is not found in finishing an activity but in doing it."*

These eight short readings on the expressions of grace are meant to refresh and brighten the path you are currently on. There is joy in the journey for we do not go it alone.

Do you remember chapter one and the exhortations at the end of the reading? Remember Martha and Mary? Do you remember that these expressions are not merited or earned, but fruits of the Spirit's activity in us and through us? Friend, do not lose hope. God is so good to us. Rest in Him knowing He will always do what is best.

OBSERVATION

- What does charity look like in others?
- What does charity look like in you?
- What do you believe to be the ear-marks of charity?

A Final Word

In a society controlled by immediate results and microwave outcomes, having to wait for a response or time passage can be frustrating and exasperating. We are the offspring of pragmatism and expect direct results without delay. Value and worth are attached to whether or not convenience and self created expectations are served and maintained. Yet biblical truth and biblical change are not bound by or a slave to our degenerate sense of right, useful, or profitability.

In the middle of all this, sits the God factor. Ultimately, God is in control. This control determines who does what and when it is done. Biblical change is not sourced in the individual, but in God. This does not negate how God works change through the will of His creatures, but biblical change comes from God.

He is the one who opens and closes eyes. He determines who, what, where, when, how, and why. The means God uses in working change is through mind renewal.

As with any study the degree of the outcome is first sourced in mind renewal (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23 ["Be renewed in the spirit of your mind"]) and then flows through right choices (Rom. 6:12-14 ["Do not go on presenting the members of your body"]) that result in a healthy emotional response (James 1:2 ["Consider it all joy"]).

Perhaps you have read this short work with the hopes that God would use it to minister in you and through you change. Friend . . . change is always possible when God is in control. Perhaps today you despair, perhaps today what was once known has become unknown, the familiar has become a stranger and joy has turned to sorrow. Hold fast.

The author of Ecclesiastes (3:1ff) tells us, the reader . . .

- 1 There is an appointed time for everything.
And there is a time for every event under heaven--
- 2 A time to give birth and a time to die;
A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.
- 3 A time to kill and a time to heal;
A time to tear down and a time to build up.
- 4 A time to weep and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn and a time to dance.
- 5 A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones;
A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing.
- 6 A time to search and a time to give up as lost;
A time to keep and a time to throw away.
- 7 A time to tear apart and a time to sew together;
A time to be silent and a time to speak.
- 8 A time to love and a time to hate;
A time for war and a time for peace.
- 9 What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?
- 10 I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with
which to occupy themselves.

After reading all of this we cannot afford to miss verse 11.

- 11 **He has made everything appropriate in its time.** He has also set eternity in their heart, yet man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.

“Reigning grace and personal relationships” is to remind us of God’s time and what His grace can look like through His people. If you do not find yourself where you think you should be, be patient. Only we are in a hurry to go where we do not know. God is patiently and perfectly working out the details of our lives for His pleasure and glory.

Today, may God find us silent and still. May we joy in the moments of meditation as we think of the one who alone is worthy. May He

open our eyes to see that who He is, what He has done, and who we now are in Him, is the ultimate reality that alters our present moment.



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