

WHAT IS GRACE?

by Sean Michael Lucas

TO THE GROUP LEADER: This resource is designed to help you lead others to better understand one of the “Basics of the Faith” booklets published by P&R. The numbers in brackets indicate the page number in the booklet. Below each question is an answer based on what the author presents, or advice on how to discuss the question. You have the freedom to adapt the questions to best fit your group.

A good teaching technique is to distribute the questions to the group and have them write down how they would answer BEFORE reading the booklet. After reading, members can refine their answers based on their reading. As a group, members can discuss their views to affirm or modify what they wrote.

1. What is your understanding of the concept of grace? Think deeper than a simplistic answer. (5-8)
As you work your way through the group for an answer to this, challenge them to think deeper by asking them to give you more.
2. Read Ephesians 2:1-3; 4:17-19; Titus 3:3; and 1 Corinthians 2:14. Analyze everything it says about the person who is “dead in trespasses and sins.” (6-10)
If possible, list their answers and keep the list in front of them throughout the lesson. In order to demonstrate what grace is, they need to be clear of the stark contrast between the saved and the lost.
3. How much influence, or control, do you think the world, your flesh, and Satan have over people who are unsaved? (10-13)
Many people, possibly even some in your group, don't believe that people are controlled, or at least influenced by these three forces. It is critical for them to understand how each plays a part in blinding people from seeing the glorious gospel of our Lord. (Show them 2 Cor.4:4.)
4. How serious is God's wrath? What makes Him so angry? (13-14)
God's intense anger is not just against individual sins, it is against what all mankind did to break their relationship with Him and destroy His creation. God created us to glorify Him and to enjoy Him. Nothing gives Him greater pleasure than fellowship with us. When we seek to replace God with anything in violation to the 1st commandment we replace Him with other gods – idols – and that causes God to be angry. When we put those gods away, the fellowship we have with Him is better than any we can have with what He created. (Piper: “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”)
5. All of this, so far, has been the bad news. Now for the Good News: Read Titus 2:11-14. What does grace do in our lives? (16-18)
*Go over these items carefully with the group and help them to see how grace *trains* us in these areas. Dr. Lucas brings out the list of contrasts in Eph.4:17ff. Explain what Paul teaches about grace training us in Titus 2:11-14 to live free from the list in Eph. 4:17ff (and even Eph.5 & 6). Also, show them grace is not only for today, but it is a promise that extends to our end on earth and into eternity.*

6. The Catechism tells us our chief purpose is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. What then is the chief end of God? (18-26)

God lives to ever be glorified! That, to us humans, sounds egotistical, but when God receives glory He turns around and pours out all the more grace upon us. When we learn to be satisfied (or content) in Him (the 1st commandment) we truly learn how to live. That makes all the difference in how we worship Him.

7. Explain what Paul means when he says, “For the grace of God has appeared...” (Titus 2:11) (18-26)
Grace is not a thing; grace is God in His character. We know of God’s grace by seeing it displayed in all its glory in Jesus. The Son is given to us in spite of our being sinful people deserving of His wrath and displeasure. We have been saved ONLY by grace, which we neither earned nor deserved (Eph.2:8-9).
Be sure you take the group through Dr. Lucas’ points in this section.

8. Paul says we were “created in Christ Jesus for good works.” (Ephesians 2:10) What good works does he have in mind? (26-30)

It is important that the group understand a couple of things here. The first takes them back to our chief purpose in being – to glorify God. The way we do this is by reflecting His glory through the way we live. This is explained by Paul throughout the rest of Ephesians.

The second is to recognize our place in His Kingdom. We live to serve Him, and not the other way around. His purpose for our lives may not be what we would chose, but we must always remember His choices are always right and always best for the sake of His Kingdom. With this in mind, we move the church out to reach the part of God’s Kingdom that is not living by the King’s standards. We bring the Good News of the Gospel to a lost and needy people who live in God’s Kingdom and need to know Who this King is and what this King wants to do for them to enjoy Him also.

After going through these questions, read the text and fill in the answers in preparation for class, noting other questions you might have. [By the way, if you do have any other questions about what you read, write them down here so you remember them at class time.]

APPLICATION

If your chief end is to reflect the glory of Christ in and through your life, then you need to examine carefully how you are living. To this end, go through all the commands in Ephesians 4:17—6:20. Pick out about 10 areas of your life: five where you are doing fairly well, and five in which you are struggling most. Rate each of them from 1-7. Next, make a plan how you, with the recognition of your dependence on the Holy Spirit to enable you to do this, can move up even one notch over the next year.

No matter how old you are in Christ, you need to measure how well you are growing in your Christian life. The above exercise will enable you to do just that.

Get started right away, and start watching, with joy, at all the Holy Spirit will be doing in your life to make you more like Jesus.

For Further Study

Grace Works! And Ways We Think it Doesn't, Douglas Bond. P&R, 2014.

Saved by Grace: The Glory of Salvation in Ephesians 2, Richard D. Phillips, 2009.

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