

Is God's Grace Informing my Christian Experience?

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“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-it is by grace you have been saved.”

Ephesians 2:4-5

Retired Dallas Seminary President Donald K. Campbell offers an excellent commentary on the above verse. He writes:

In Ephesians 2:4-5 Paul pointed out the relationship of three important doctrinal words, *love*, *mercy*, and *grace*.... *Mercy* may be defined as God's compassion which moved Him to send a Savior for the lost world. But if salvation could have been provided simply on the basis of God's mercy alone, the sacrificial death of Christ would have been totally unnecessary. Divine *love*, on the other hand, was the motivating force behind all God did in providing salvation. Yet God's infinite love could not realize its desires to save sinners unless there was a total satisfaction for sin. This was provided in the atoning death of Christ, and only then could God's grace be freely bestowed on the lost. *Grace* can be defined therefore as God's unmerited favor in the giving of His Son, through whom salvation is offered to all.¹

For those of us have received the free “*love-gift*” of salvation, believing that Jesus is God, He died on the cross for our sins in substitutionary atonement, and bodily rose again, we have come to the “*liberating*” truth that redemption precedes morality.

Nevertheless, have we come to the fact that redemption should govern our morality as well? Stated differently, since God's grace conquered both the penalty and the power of sin (Romans 5:12-21; 6:1-23) are we allowing His grace to govern our lives by allowing Him to equip, strengthen, and control our lives in totality or holistically in our conduct, daily walk, or moment-by-moment living (2 Corinthians 8:6-7; Colossians 4:6; 2 Thessalonians 2:16; 2 Timothy 2:1)? How is God's undeserving, sovereign, marvelous, and matchless grace informing and guiding my thoughts, activities, experience, and sphere of influence as a believer in Jesus Christ?

Well, after hearing a very gifted young seminary student at Dallas Theological Seminary give a devotional on living out God's grace at the College of Biblical Studies, I thought I would assess myself in this area of my life. In other words, since I am the recipient of God's unmerited favor, I am now called and commanded to imitate Jesus Christ, who is the embodiment of grace and truth (John 1:18); Am I living out what God has given me? Surely, if I am a recipient of God's grace, my disposition or character needs to be one that embodies this new sphere or new rule of life.

The following list serves as indicators or “*road signs*” that helped me to critically and reflectively determine whether, to what extent, and how consistent I'm living out what God has given me. They may loosely be categorized under three spheres of thought: consent, comparison, and control (but in no certain order).² Consider the following questions:

¹ *The Theological Wordbook* by Don Campbell, Wendell Johnston, John Walvoord, and John Witmer (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000), 147-8.

² Special thanks to Mr. Justin Racca for his insights on this issue.

If I am a recipient of God's unmerited favor, then why do I still seek the approval of others?

If I am a recipient of God's unmerited favor, why I do continue to compare myself with others?

If I am a recipient of God's unmerited favor, then why I do continue to control others or allow others to wrongly control me?

While some of these indicators are more pertinent than others, I do hope at least some of them will be helpful to you.

I'm allowing God's grace to inform/guide my Christian life when...

1. ... I don't actively seek the approval of others for personal value, worth, or significance.
2. ... I don't compare myself to others-no matter how gifted, intelligent, beautiful, or successful they are.
3. ... I don't control or manipulate others -whether it is out of habit or for self-serving purposes.
4. ... I don't "*spin*" the facts in order to get what I want.
5. ... I don't wrongly submit to the control of others because of issues that involve personal significance, worth, or value.
6. ... I don't day dream of a better life.
7. ... I don't *delight* in the attention others give me.
8. ... I don't bear bitterness towards those who have hurt me.
9. ... I don't compare or conform myself to current cultural trends as reflected in various forms of advertisement, media, film, etc.
10. ... I don't bear jealousy or resentment in my disposition.
11. ... I don't bear a competitive disposition for self-promotion.
12. ... I don't seek to be "critical" just in order to look good.
13. ... I don't "*burn bridges*" but treat people as having more worth than myself.
14. ... I don't have to have "*the last word*" in a conversation or "*re-word*" a conversation that makes me appear to be superior or more authoritative.
15. ... I don't pro-actively seek to do only that which is "*self-promoting*" or "*self-serving*."

16. ... I don't seek to please others but Christ alone.
17. ... I don't think negatively about myself or become "*hyper-critical*" about who I am in Christ.
18. ... I am not suffering the "*woe-is-me syndrome*" or victimized mindset.
19. ... I don't put "*others down*" esp. in an effort to secure or maintain my own position significance, or worth.
20. ... I don't complain about my own discomforts, pain, or losses, whether major or minor...but actively trust in the sovereignty and goodness of God.
21. ... I don't privately (in my heart) or publicly shame others into doing what I want or demand.
22. ... I don't lay a guilt-trip on others in order to promote my interests, goals, or purposes.
23. ... I don't raise my voice to gain attention or somehow establish authority among a group.
24. ... I don't actively seek to turn every conversation "*back to me*" for selfish reasons or pursue only that which I want to talk about.
25. ... I don't pass on rumors or secrets that may (falsely or factually) incriminate others.
26. ... I don't seek vindication, vengeance, or retribution.
27. ... I don't secretly delight in the misfortune of others.
28. ... I don't seek to maintain my salvation by doing "*good deeds*."
29. ... I no longer say, "*I told you so...*"
30. ... I no longer think "*God must be out to get me*" when bad things happen.
31. ... I am not "*fearful*" that I will lose my salvation when I disobey God or am not critically fearful that I am really fooling myself that I am not a member of "*the elect*."
32. ... I take pleasure in the study of God's goodness, beauty, and worth.
33. ... I pray to God about all my situations.
34. ... I am the first to seek to be uncomfortable in order that others may be comforted, experience better and greater blessings, etc.
35. ... I consistently and reverently uphold others in intercessory prayer.

36. ... I seek to seek be to be approved unto God as a good workman, soldier, and servant.
37. ... I grace becomes a part of my character or disposition, not merely a duty or an obligation.
38. ... “*I want this...*” is never or rarely expressed in my daily thoughts or conversations.
39. ... I drop my personal agenda to ministers to others in their times of need.
40. ... I give up what is dear to me for the benefit of others.
41. ... I love the unlovely, the unfortunate, the hurting, the bitter, and the miserable.
42. ... I love those who are “*high maintenance*” or those who “*mentally*” drain me with their self-absorbing needs, complaints, and shallow criticisms.
43. ... I encourage and energize others to go beyond their potential.
44. ... I can trust God no matter how difficult the circumstance.
45. ... I am able to no longer allow the harsh words, complaints, or critical words to circumvent or dictate my spiritual life.
46. ... I am able to minister to the needs of others even if it costs me resources, time, energy, or fortune, or blessings.
47. ... I pro-actively *make* opportunities to have and foster sincere and godly fellowship with others.
48. ... I am able to proceed with confidence even if everyone is against me.
49. ... I pro-actively cultivate humility and compassion.
50. ... I can honestly let go of past hurts, misunderstandings, and blame.
51. ... I am able to minister to others with little difficulty maintaining a positive attitude of servanthood (not merely a helper).
52. ... I assume no ill-intent even if I know I have been purposefully wronged.
53. ... I come to the honest appraisal that I no longer *own* myself; my life now belongs to Jesus Christ, His ministry, and His ways.
54. ... I am liberated to be me...this is the way God designed and gifted me. 😊
55. ... I pro-actively pursue holy living in order to reflect His beauty.
56. ... I share the Gospel of Jesus with others.

57. ... I am grieved for those who have not experienced God's grace in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
58. ... I am able to resist (present tense) the temptations of the flesh, world, and devil.
59. ... I truly recognize (present tense) my own sinful frailty, limitations, and propensities.
60. ... I marvel (present tense) at the beauty of Calvary and the riches of His divine grace.

Are you interested in the further studies of God's grace?

1. See Lewis S. Chafer's *Grace: God's Marvelous Theme*.
2. See John Piper's, *Future Grace: The Purifying Power of Living by Faith*
3. See Charles C. Ryrie's, *The Grace of God*.

LAST THOUGHT:

"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself" (Rom. 15:1-3a).

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