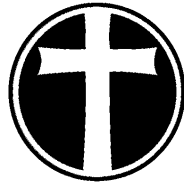


Heritage Christian Church

Participating Membership

God's Grace

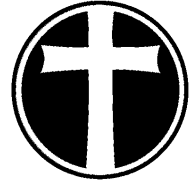


Receiving the Gift of Eternal Life

(Lesson 1 of 8)

God's Grace

Receiving the Gift of Eternal Life



BEGINNINGS. We've all had them at various points in our lives. If you can't remember any of your own, other people may be willing to share theirs. You could ask a six-year-old girl about her first day of school. Or follow around a young man on his first day at the new job. Or share in the joy as a newlywed couple giggles out their excitement as "I now pronounce you..." gets pronounced. They'll all tell you that beginnings are a great time of life (albeit a little scary).

But beginners often overlook crucial factors that made their beginning possible. They may forget that their beginning required numerous steps leading up to it. The first-grader isn't dwelling on how mom went shopping for supplies and new clothes, and spent hours trying to help the child get ready for what she'd find that first day. Years of intense studying and an investment of thousands of dollars prepared for the new job. And the newlyweds fell in love quite a long time ago, even though today they officially begin life together.

God's grace enables us to make a very important beginning spiritually. It's by grace, a word meaning "a favor we didn't earn," that we start the Christian life. But God's grace involves more because He literally came to our planet in the person of Jesus Christ, and by means of the death of Christ on the cross, He paid our crippling sin debt. He comes to each of us now, pursuing us even in our waywardness and points us in a new direction. His grace also has staying power. He persistently takes us the next step of our spiritual journey. He never gets tired of working with us, and he NEVER gives up on us. That's grace.

Grace may be a somewhat unfamiliar term to you, or like so many, you hear it sprinkled in "spiritual" conversations but aren't exactly sure how to define it (you may have even used the word without really knowing what you were saying-it happens!). You also may have come from a spiritual tradition where the term had a usage different from what is found in the Bible. So we all need to understand the meaning of grace and then solidify our understanding of our own beginning with God. For some of us, this very study will be the doorway into that first experience of grace that enables us to say, "I finally understand what grace is, and I'm sure I'm a recipient of it." For others of us, we will be able to affirm again, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me."

Day 1

Our Need for God's Grace

Some people assume that they are not that much worse than anyone else, so they don't need any special help from God. How would you put in your own words the message of the following verses to those who think themselves morally "acceptable"?

Romans 3:10 –18, 23

(See also Isaiah 59:2 and 64:6 and Galatians 3:22)

What do we deserve because of our sin? What does God offer and how?

Romans 6:23

According to Romans 5:8 – How and when did God show His love for us?

Sometimes, we can be too proud to make such an admission of moral failure. How would you describe the relief that God stands ready to offer so that we do not have to shy away from being utterly honest when admitting our sinful condition?

Isaiah 1:18

Romans 8:1

(See also Matthew 11:28-30 and 1 John 1:8-9)

Day 2

Sometimes, we're afraid to admit our sinfulness because to do so feels so hopeless. Many of us react to that sense of despair and decide to become "religious"- we try to change our behaviors so we feel and appear better. After reading carefully Ephesians 2:8-9, write a letter to yourself explaining why you can't and don't have to earn God's acceptance. (See also Titus 3:4-7)

To forgive someone literally means to release that person from indebtedness. But if you forgive a debt, the money must then come from somewhere else-usually you, the debt-forgiver. In the spiritual realm, God's forgiveness means we're released from spiritual debt. But our sins don't just vanish into thin air. According to this verse, how is our debt forgiven in a spiritual sense?

1 Peter 2:24

(See also Hebrews 10:10-14)

Now consider your own life. Why would you agree that you need God's grace in order to have a relationship with Him?

Day 3

Our Response To God

Once we're at that position where we've been honest about our need for God's help and forgiveness, what does the Bible say is the next step?

John 1:11-12

Romans 10:9

(See also Acts 16:30-31 and Galatians 2:16)

Describe briefly the time in your life when you gave up trying to obtain God's favor through any accomplishment of your own and rested in the work of Christ's death on the cross for you. If you haven't done that yet, or aren't sure if you have, note that below.

I John 5:11-13 speaks of only two types of people: those who accept Christ and have eternal life, and those who don't. What does verse 13 say about your eternal security?

Day 4

The Outward Sign of God's Grace

According to the following verses, what was the response of new believers, those who had recently received God's grace, which visibly demonstrated what God had done in their lives?

Acts 2:37-38, 41

Acts 10:47-48

(See also Acts 8:36-38 and Acts 16:14-15)

Day 5

According To Romans 6:4-5, what is signified by baptism?

Many people, maybe you too, were baptized as a child. But the pattern in the New Testament (example: Acts 18:8) is “believe-then be baptized”. Why do you think it would be appropriate for a person to be baptized AFTER his or her conversion instead of before it?

The Elders' Affirmation on "God's Grace"

Christ followers understand and have individually received Christ's saving grace. They have abandoned all attempts to earn God's favor through accomplishments of their own and find security only through Christ's sacrificial death on their behalf.

In obedience to Christ's command, they have undergone water baptism as believers, giving outward witness to the inner cleansing and renewal experienced in Him.

Personal Response On "God's Grace" (Please retain for your membership interview)

How does someone become a Christian in the true sense of the word? Describe how that happened for you.

Note: Much misunderstanding exists about what it means to be a "Christian." Church attendance, belief in God, strong commitment, etc. are all good but none of them make you a Christian in the biblical sense. If you're at all unclear as to whether or not you're a Christian, we'd like to clear up any confusion you have -- please don't feel embarrassed if you're not sure. Do not go any further on this response sheet for now. Set up a time as soon as possible to meet with your Life Group leader, your Ministry Team leader, or a staff person to discuss your uncertainties. This matter is of vital importance to every participating member (every person really!).

Have you been baptized as a believer?

Yes

No

Describe when and where.

Note: While we respect the religious traditions of those who have been baptized as infants, we believe Scripture teaches that baptism should come after a person has personally received Christ. Baptism does not save the individual, but when one chooses to be baptized it is a demonstration of a willingness to follow all of Christ's commands. If you have not yet been baptized since you became a Christian, we ask that you do so at one of our Baptism services so that we can celebrate your commitment to Christ with the rest of the church members.