

Week 5: Grace Not Condemnation

Key Verses:

John 3:16-17

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Idea:

Grace flows out of love; it is love with legs on. In fact, grace is not possible without love. As humans, if we do not love someone, we will have great trouble merely dispensing justice, let alone treating people better than they deserve. Only when we love others deeply do we find the motivation and capacity to extend grace. Jesus is the living embodiment of grace. He extended grace rather than condemnation toward the lost, and this was why so many people loved him. This is a vital point for us to grasp because, as we have already noted, today's church is overwhelmingly perceived as judgmental and condemning. [Page 49]

Grace does not diminish the reality of sin or its seriousness. In fact, by affirming sin's reality and seriousness, the full depth of God's grace is revealed. Grace is God's extravagant forgiveness that is lavished upon undeserving sinners. [Page 51]

From Liz's Message:

What is Grace?

- Justice: You get what you deserve.
- Mercy: You don't get the punishment you deserve.
- Grace: You get blessings you don't deserve.

Reflect:

- Read John 3:1-21. The famous John 3:16 is found at the end of a dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus, in verses 1-15. How would you describe Jesus' explanation of the gospel in these first 15 verses? What strikes you about his explanation? Is he focused on calling Nicodemus to turn from specific sins, or does he have a more positive message? Now read verses 16 and 17 again. While verse 16 remains a favourite verse of many Christians, notice the message of verse 17. What application does this have for our own proclamation of the gospel today?

- Read Ephesians 2:1-10. This passage starts, in verses 1-3, with a very candid description of the state of those who are outside of Christ. How are they described? Then verses 4-5 describe the means by which people are saved from this condition. Notice that they are not saved by cleaning their lives up! How are they saved? Then in verses 6-7, what is the ultimate result of our salvation? In verses 8-10, we are given one of the great summaries of the means of salvation in the Bible. Explain in your own words. What implications does this have for the message that the church must present to the world?
- Get different members of the group to read the following verses (some people may need to read two verses): 1 Corinthians 16:23; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Galatians 6:18; Ephesians 6:24; Philippians 4:23; 1 Thessalonians 5:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:18; Philemon 1:25. Have you ever noticed how Paul concludes almost every letter with a reference to the grace of Jesus? Why do you think he does this? What does this say about the primary message of the Christian faith?
- Given all that has been discussed this week, what impact you think this should have on our engagement with the world – particularly regarding the difficult issues of other people *sinful* behaviour and society's moral issues. How should the character and message of Jesus guide our own response?

Pray:

Pray for people whom you may know who have felt judged and condemned by the church and who have not heard the message of grace and reconciliation that Jesus came to give. Pray for Christians and churches who may be preaching a message of condemnation rather than grace and forgiveness. Pray for wisdom for yourselves and for the church as a whole, as we seek to stand firm on God's unchanging standards but also hold out his message of love and grace.