

Message #85 of *Scripture Beneath The Surface*

"What Is Grace?"

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Hello! Thanks for being with us, and I hope you enjoy our program. Today I'd like to talk about Grace, and I'd like to go into the study of it a little deeper than what is generally heard in most sermons or Bible studies. Of course, that's the nature of our program. We like to bring you concepts and ideas that look at things from a deeper perspective than the average view. We like to go beneath the surface of God's word and see what the underlying principles are which God has used to form his scripture. That's why we call the program, *Scripture Beneath The Surface*, because we like to look at things from not only the surface view, but also from the symbolic view. We like to understand the reasons behind Bible parables, and the hidden motivation of prophecy. It's not that we Christians have to know everything in detail about the Bible in order to be saved, but sometimes when we learn one of the underlying principles, we discover some significant truth which had not previously been seen. Certainly, the Bible makes extensive use of parables, and also, the prophecies of the Bible are mostly hidden from standard reading. For example, we know that the Bible uses symbols extensively, such as beasts. A beast in scripture might be stated as being a lion with wings, a goat with one notable horn, a beast with seven heads and ten horns, a dragon, or a serpent which can speak and be exceptionally deceiving. But, in each of these instances, the beasts mentioned are not actually beasts, but are symbols of something much more significant which will enhance our understanding of scripture.

We also know that the Tabernacle, the Tent of God, which Moses was instructed to manufacture in the wilderness, was a type and symbol of heavenly things. The Apostle Paul tells us that this initial Temple of God was a pattern of things which were in heaven and that the actual things

pointed to better things. We know that the sacrifices that were offered in this Tabernacle, and in the Temple at Jerusalem, were representative symbols. In fact, one exceptional example of symbolism which gives us insight into understanding heavenly things as they apply to us was the Passover Lamb, which was sacrificed each year under the Mosaic Law. This Passover Lamb was a symbolic term which pointed to Jesus Christ as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins.

It is in these types and symbols that we come to know God in a greater and more personal way. And it is by knowing God in a greater and more personal way that we find peace and gain hope for eternal life with him. Types and symbols are necessary, but only if you want to know God better. And, it is by understanding the word of God more clearly that you come to know God better, for God is only revealed by his word. It is either by the written and spoken word of God, or by the manifestation of the word of God in events and actions of people, that God is known. And the reason that you can only know God by the words of God, is that God is a Spirit, and we are humans. We can't look at God with our physical eyes, for God cannot be seen with the eyes of humans. However, we can look at God by first reading or hearing his word, then secondly, by seeing the words of God acted out, and thirdly, by the moving of the Holy Spirit of God within us that reveals the understanding of God's word.

The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit of God searches the deep hidden things of God and then reveals them unto men. When this happens, we come to understand God better, to know who he really is, and what he really does. But the Bible is not opened up to everyone, but only to those who truly do accept the word of God as truth. The Bible is revealed to those of us who believe God. But the Bible is also written so that the truth will not come out clearly to those who do not really care for the things of God. God has formed his word in such a way that the wicked people of earth will be blinded to the things of God, but that God's righteous people will understand. However, the righteous must seek God, and must truly desire to know him better.

I like to use the example of a man and woman to describe the relationship with God. In fact, the Bible uses the symbolic forms of this quite frequently. When it calls the church of God the Bride of Christ, this is symbolic. The actual marriage between Christ and his bride will not be identical with an earthly marriage between a man and a woman, but the concepts of the marriage will be the same. Symbolic terms are important, for they give us a perspective, a viewpoint, in which to consider God in his heavenly realm. It is the way that earthlings can understand heavenly spiritual things. The symbolic terms are earthly terms which describe the spiritual things of heaven. Without symbolism, we humans could not understand a spiritual God very well at all.

Symbolic terms help us to know God because they help us to understand God's word. God's word is the central point of everything for us, for without God's word we would have no opportunity to believe God. And, as the Bible says in Hebrews 11:6, "Without faith, it is impossible to please him." We could never be pleasing in God's sight if we do not believe in him. And, to believe in him a little is good, but to know him intimately is much better. Some people who call themselves Christians have only learned to know God to the extent that they know God exists, and that Jesus is the Son of God. Sometimes these people think that's all they

are required to believe. But if this was all there was to it, then Satan would be saved too, because Satan believes that Jesus is the Son of God. In fact, the demons believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but they aren't saved either. We have the proof of this in the Bible story of the man of Gadara, in Matthew, chapter 8, who had demons which spoke through him, calling Jesus the Son of God. And in Mark, chapter one, there is the story of the man at Capernaum who was possessed with demons, and the demons spoke, calling Jesus the Holy One of God, and even asked Jesus if he had come to torment them before the designated time of torment. Certainly, the devil and his demons believe that God exists and also believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but also, most certainly, the devil and his demons are not saved. Faith to believe in God must be more than believing that God exists and that Jesus is the Son of God. In order to be saved, you must not only believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but you must also believe he is Christ, and you must also believe he is Lord. The term Christ means Savior. In order for Christ to be Savior, he must be able to save. Satan and his angels do not accept God as omnipotent, for they believe that they can be co-equal with God. Satan believes he himself can reign, and even believes he can ultimately have more authority than God himself. And, Satan and his angels do not believe Jesus is Lord. To be Lord is to be master. It is to be the ruler of the one who calls him Lord. In Romans 10:9, it tells us that our confession of Jesus must be that he is not just Jesus, but is the Lord Jesus. When we believe that Jesus is the Lord Jesus, the master of our lives, then we have the faith in God that is necessary for salvation. Also, Philippians 2:11, tells us that true confession of Jesus is that Jesus is both Christ and Lord.

Now, how do we know these things if we do not believe the word of God? And, how can we believe unless we understand? And, how can we understand if we don't hear the word? Our salvation depends on knowing God. And, this is where the concept of Grace really comes into play. However, Grace is one of the most misunderstood terms in the Bible. I've been a Christian for over thirty years, and my experience in churches goes back much further than that. And over and over again I have heard the term Grace used incorrectly. When someone in the church gives the definition of Grace, they almost always state it as being, "unmerited favor." Unmerited favor is part of God's grace to us, but it in no way explains Grace completely. Truly the Grace of God is unmerited, for we don't deserve anything good from God. In no way have we earned the right to receive God's goodness. However, if we accept this definition as the complete description of Grace, then we miss out on much of the Bible's truth. So, before we go any further, let's take a close look at the definition of the word Grace. You may not realize that there is much more to the concept of Grace than is generally presented in churches.

In order to get a proper definition of Grace, we need to look at the word Grace according to the way we mean to use it. The actual term Grace means favor, acceptance, mercy, or some other quality of action which is considered to be good for the person receiving it. However, it is the action of the word Grace which is most important to perceive. Grace, in just a plain simple term which stands alone, is goodness. Goodness is the basic concept of Grace, and all attributes of Grace fall into this category. This goodness can be described in many different ways, but it is always a goodness which is passed from one person to another. It is the giving and receiving of goodness in some form or other which indicates an attitude or attribute of Grace. Of course,

when we study scripture, we are interested in the term Grace as being a word which describes God's actions or attributes toward us. Grace is God's words, actions, or attitude toward us which allow us to receive the goodness of God. This goodness of God toward us influences our lives in one way or another, and therefore we call it the divine influence which comes from God. However, the definition for Grace cannot be stated as just divine influence from God, for God certainly brings divine influence to mankind in some situations that are not good for the man. The influence from God on the mind of man may cause God's will to be accomplished in that person, but that person may not necessarily be receiving goodness from God. To receive Grace, the divine influence has to be goodness from God. Unmerited favor can be goodness from God, but this definition is not sufficient to understand the full scope of Grace. A quick look at 2 Peter 3:18 will show that unmerited favor is not an acceptable definition, for this verse in 2 Peter tells us to grow in Grace. If the proper definition of Grace was unmerited favor, then Peter, when telling us to grow in Grace, would be telling us to grow in unmerited favor. This would not be a good thing. Imagine a Christian trying to be more sinful so that more Grace could be bestowed on him. Of course, that would be silly. But Peter wasn't telling us to do that. He was telling us to grow as we receive the divine goodness of God which influences our lives. He was telling us to take the goodness of God which he bestows on his people and apply it to areas of daily living in order to grow up in the faith of Jesus Christ.

It is this concept, of receiving divine influence of goodness which most accurately describes Grace. Grace is the goodness of God which influences our lives when God bestows it and when we receive it. In actuality, the word Grace is God's good actions or attitudes toward us. In some situations we must receive that divine influence in order to apply the goodness to our own words, actions, and attitudes, but sometimes the divine influence is just given by God without our having to do anything. However, in one way or another, when God gives Grace, we receive it. Of course, it is never merited, for our own righteousness is as filthy rags compared to the goodness of God. But the Grace of God, bestowed on us, is always the favor of God, for it is the goodness of God which is given to those he loves.

God exhibits attitudes and actions of Grace toward us when he is pleased with us, or when he is showing us mercy in spite of our being displeasing to him. The divine influence of God's goodness touches us in many ways, but always in a good way. It is always a blessing to us. We are not always good, but God is good. We have God's word to prove this, as well as his actions and attitudes. Of course, those who are wicked, and who have no heart for God do not necessarily receive the Grace of God. However, they may receive Grace sometimes, in the sense of receiving mercy. Mercy is divine influence from God, and it is also goodness which is bestowed on us.

But, what does Grace really mean to us other than as a quality of God? There is more than Grace as an attribute of God, for God is not only love, but God is also a jealous God. God is sometimes angry, and sometimes he is merciful, depending on the individual situation. The Grace of God is always the goodness of God, but God has other attributes, other qualities, which do not express themselves as Grace. Yet, in every sense, God's divine influence is always at work in the earth

and in men's hearts. The term, influence, means a power which will make a difference in a person or in an event. God's power influences everything on earth. In some cases God gives influence which can be ignored. This is part of God's determination to give man the power of choice. In some other forms, God's influence is a power which brings about a concrete action without any alternative action allowed. God's influence is everywhere, for it says in Ephesians 4:6, that God is in all, and in us all. The world can only exist within the scope of God's power, both in that which he decrees and in that which he allows. God's power is demonstrated on a continuing basis, but it is only through the Grace of God that goodness is received. It is only through the divine influence of God, given as a blessing, that the term Grace comes into existence. Grace, therefore, is divine influence which is a blessing instead of a cursing. God's goodness is always a representation of the qualities of God, and are demonstrated in many different ways. His Grace is never merited, but, it is always good, for God is good.

Now, there's one more topic I'd like to bring up this week, and it doesn't have anything to do with the subject of Grace, at least directly, but I would like to ask our listening audience to pray for us. Scripture Beneath The Surface is brought to you by a few of us who also meet together at various times for church and fellowship. At this current time we hold church services on Sunday morning in my wife's and my living room. We've been doing this for some little time. We live, at this time, in Bellevue, but feel that God has given us direction to move the ministry to Battle Creek. It is concerning this move that we would desire your prayers.

Now, our ministry has never asked for financial support from you listeners, for we believe that God will supply our need, and up to this time he has, and we thank him for it. But we would like to ask you for your spiritual support through your prayers for this special situation as we look for God's will. We already believe God wants the move to Battle Creek to be completed, and my wife, Miriam, and I have put our house up for sale. Of course, we expect God to provide a sale of our house. However, we are also looking for God's will in where we live and where we hold church services. We have been praying and asking God what his will is for the small group we have in our house church, whether it remains in a house with a significant sized living or family room, or moves into a separate building for that purpose.

I would like to ask you to pray, if you would, that God would open up a door for a church building for us in the Battle Creek area, or even possibly a church where our small group can hold our services along with others who worship as we do. We're not yet certain what God really wants to do, but only that we must relocate the ministry to Battle Creek. We believe it is possible that there are others in our listening audience who may want to merge with us in this endeavor, or may even be in need of pastoral services for their current membership. Whatever it is, we would desire your prayers. As I've said before, we have not asked anyone for money, but we would desire your prayers in order that this move of the ministry to the Battle Creek area might be accomplished as soon as is reasonably possible.

In addition to your prayers, if you have any ideas or suggestions, or even questions, I would love to hear from you. Of course, for the final decision, we will look to God and trust his Holy Spirit to guide us.

If you do need to contact me concerning today's message, or concerning the move of the ministry to the Battle Creek area, please continue to listen, and Kim will give you my phone number and our addresses. Thanks for being with us!