

You Want Me to do What? A Grace-Based Initiative

Overview of Teaching

- A. Understanding Grace
- B. Why we need it
- C. The application - A Grace-Based Initiative

Main Text

1 John 4:7-11;19-21 (NIV) ⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. ²¹ And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

- The word “Love” is mentioned 18 times in these eight verses
- Notice it says God is Love - it’s not something He has, it’s who He is
- Notice it says two times in two verses how God showed his love - through the Son; sent the Son.

A. Understanding Grace

- Grace is a word with various meanings (per Merriam’s Dictionary)
 - I. A way of moving that is smooth and attractive and that is not stiff or awkward
 - II. Unmerited divine assistance given humans for their regeneration or sanctification
 - III. Approval, favor
 - IV. A charming or attractive trait or characteristic
 - V. A short prayer at a meal asking a blessing or giving thanks
- Personal Favorite Biblical Definition: The *unmerited favor* and *divine influence* of God toward *regenerated* man
- Grace impacts every area of the Believer’s life - our salvation, our growth, our stability, our service and our afflictions

B. Why do we need Grace?

- God is Holy and perfect. Because of our inherited sin, we are born separated from God
- No amount of our works or efforts can fix the problem of our sin before a Holy God
- All sin leads to death, and death without salvation in Christ is eternal separation from God
- We have a major problem: **Eternal separation from God!**
- The solution? God's Grace which provides:
 - Salvation (justification - set free from the penalty of sin)
 - Through faith alone, not works
 - By the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ atoning for all sin
 - The pouring out of the Holy Spirit to empower us with gifts
- This is only the beginning, not the end!
- We need Grace because our sin has alienated us from our intended relationship with God
- We are strengthened and empowered by Grace through the Father sending his Son as atonement (payment) for our sin, and then giving the gift of the Holy Spirit to love those around us and mirror His Grace

C. You Want Me to Do What?

- As Believers bought with a price, we are called to continually give away what we have received in order to keep what we've been given

- *Wait, what?* -

- Love is the outflow of God's Grace
 - God's Grace outflows as Love to us through the work of Jesus Christ
 - As His Love in Christ inflows to us, we must outflow that Love to others - we are conduits

1 John 4:8 says: “⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because **God is love.**”

- This is divine, self-sacrificing, self-giving, perfect Love (Agape Love)
- “Anyone who does not love does not know God”...
 - If we are not characterized as showing love to others, we must examine where the problem is (hint: God is not the problem!)

1 John 4:19 says: “¹⁹ We love **because** he first loved us.”

- This self-sacrificing Love that sent Christ to die for our sin is the kind of Love we are to give others

1 John 4:21 says: “²¹ And this **commandment** we have from him: whoever loves God **must also love his brother.**”

- We must love others as God loves us as shown through His Grace in Christ Jesus

How do we do this?

A Grace-Based Initiative

- President George W. Bush established the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives:
 - Strengthen faith-based and community organizations to expand their capacity to provide government based social services
 - Believed these groups were well-positioned to meet the needs of the local individuals it served
- Original office established by President Bush changed names and has been marred by controversy, scandal and legal issues
 - While seemingly well-intentioned, the initiative has failed to accomplish what it was designed to do - strengthen, equip and effect social services delivered by our government. It failed because it did not contain the one thing that cannot fail...

We already have a Grace-based initiative that cannot fail!

- In order to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, we don't need to create a bureaucracy that is destined to fail - run by sinful man
- Our Grace-based initiative is simple: We must **look** to Christ and **reflect** on the Grace given to us and allow Him to strengthen, equip and effect His power through us to all those around
 - It cannot fail if Christ is at the center of it - nothing fails with Christ at the center of it!
 - It will not be marred in controversy or scandal or legal problems - at least not on its merits
 - It takes the burden and the work off of us and correctly places it on Jesus
 - It will solve the core of our relationship problems

- In Mark 12:31 Jesus tells us that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind and with all our strength.
 - Is this a commandment we alone can keep? No!
 - Only the work of the Cross and Christ's righteousness and the gift of the Holy Spirit given to us can allow us to accomplish this - nothing we do
- In Mark 12:31 Jesus also tells us the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves.
 - Is this a commandment we alone can keep? No!
 - Again, this is only a commandment that can be obeyed through the work of the Cross, Christ's righteousness imparted to us and through the gift of the Holy Spirit
- The two greatest commandments, right from the mouth of Jesus, cannot be obeyed by us alone!
 - Discouraging? **It should be** - it points us to some very simple, basic truths that point us to Jesus Christ
- In fact, we are given many commands in the Bible that point out the obvious:
 - We must love our brothers and sisters
 - We must love our enemies
 - We must deny ourselves and pick up the Cross daily
 - We must be a servant
 - We must reflect/mirror the very Grace given to us to everyone around us
 - We must be selfless in our relationships
 - We must overlook offenses
 - We must live at peace with others - to the extent possible with us
 - We must be willing to use the gifts and talents Christ has given us to His glory, not ours
 - We must be slow to anger and quick to forgive
 - We must control the words out of our mouths
 - We must be humble, thinking of others more highly than ourselves
 - And on and on and on...all of which show us the holiness God requires

How is it even possible to do one of these consistently, let alone all of them?

- That is where the Grace-based initiative comes in

5 Simple Steps to Starting a Fail-Proof Grace-Based Initiative: (Application)

Step 1: Think... (not a passing thought, but careful deliberation)

- Think about who you really are before a Holy God - can you meet His requirements?
- Think about the depth of His Grace and Christ's sacrifice on the Cross - let it really sink in. Could you or would you do what He did?
- Think - do you deserve anything from God? Did God need to do any of this?

Step 2: Consider... (apply logic and reasoning to thought)

- Consider that God graciously did not give you or I what we deserve, rather He did not spare even His own Son to redeem us
- Consider how Jesus stepped out of total perfection, utter and complete bliss and unity with the Father to come down into a broken, evil, fallen world to fulfill the requirements of the law and set us free from the penalty of sin
- Consider that Jesus' greatest pain at Calvary wasn't the lashes or beatings or the crown of thorns or the insults and mocking or the spitting or the nails or the slow death or even the complete injustice that was occurring *(If ever there were an innocent person undeserving of death - especially death in this manner - Jesus Christ is the one and only person to lay claim to that)*
- Consider that Jesus' greatest pain at Calvary was the Father's withdrawal from Him - something He had never experienced. Once all sin was put upon Him, the Father had to turn away. At that moment Jesus - fully human and fully God - experienced a pain, a despair and hurt so great He was willing to give up His spirit. He had never known an existence without perfect union and relationship with the Father
- Consider how Jesus knew this was His purpose in coming down to our sin-soaked world
- Consider that Jesus did that for you...willingly *(we often look at the collective aspect of what Jesus did for us - don't miss out on the individual aspect)*
- Consider what Christ's actions say: **You were worth it, all of it!**

Do you know you're worth it?

Step 3: Ask... (through Christ Jesus, we have the right to boldly ask of the Father)

- Ask Jesus to give you His eyes for people
- Ask Jesus for His heart for people
- Ask the Holy Spirit for gifts to build up the body of believers
- Ask Jesus to help you get out of your own way - we are usually our worst enemy!

Step 4: Stop... (working through step 3, it's time to make some conscious decisions)

- Stop letting yourself be defined by anything other than what Jesus thinks about you
- Stop placing value on things which have no lasting/eternal value *(not that everyday issues are irrelevant - we must decide to place value in what Jesus places value in)*
- Stop shouldering burdens that weren't meant to be shouldered by you *(Jesus graciously offers to have us cast our cares and concerns on Him)*
- Stop believing you're unforgivable - *then what was the point of the Cross?*
- Stop believing you aren't good enough - *of course you and I aren't, wasn't that the point of the Cross?*
- Stop believing you weren't worth it - *this is nothing short of a lie directly from the enemy*
- Stop complicating things more than they need to be - *the Gospel is simple and is plain for us to understand*

Step 5: Start... (again, more intentional, conscious decisions need to be made)

- Start letting Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit empower you to love your neighbor
 - Start letting Jesus show you through the work of the Holy Spirit what it means to love your enemies
 - Start letting Jesus direct your paths and make decisions, not you or I
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- A Grace-based initiative is nothing more than looking at what God has done for you and I as evidenced in Jesus Christ, realizing that His undeserved Grace empowers us through the Holy Spirit to do what's **impossible** on our own
 - A Grace-based initiative transforms the focus from yourself to Jesus Christ
 - Let the rich Grace of God as demonstrated in Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit transform your mind and lead you out of bondage and into victory in this life.
 - Remember: There is victory now - you don't have to wait for eternity!