

PHASE THREE: WALKING IN FREEDOM

LESSON SEVENTEEN:

17. Grace is God's free gift that can't be earned by our behavior. We give our obedience because it allows us to walk in freedom from our damage. His grace gives us the power to forgive and move forward instead of living in the past. 2 Cor. 12:9-10 "But He said to me, 'My grace is enough for you. When you are weak, my power is made perfect in you.' So, I am very happy to brag about my weaknesses. Then Christ's power can live in me...For when I am weak, then I am truly strong." Rom. 3:24, Phil 3:9, Heb. 4:162 Thess. 2:16

NEW LIFE FREEDOM LESSON 17

We continue to take strong steps toward choosing to live in freedom and obedience to God in our daily interactions. It's getting easier to spot the things that used to trip us up and cause us to act on impulse instead of careful thought. The old ways are starting to look less appealing and we're recognizing the Holy Spirit's voice when we need to make decisions. Forgiving doesn't seem as impossible as it once did. We need to remember, though, what got us to this place: God's grace, not our own efforts.

Grace has been described as God's undeserved favor. It doesn't mean that He excuses or ignores our sins, He pays for them through Jesus. Grace depends on God's character, not our conduct. See how Paul explains it in Ephesians 2:4-7: "But God is so rich in mercy, and He loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, He gave us life when He raised Jesus from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) For He raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of His incredible wealth of grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all He has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus." Mercy, love, life and kindness are given to us freely when we choose to give our lives to Him.

We build barriers to God's love when we hold on to the idea that we're earning His grace. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 1:9, "He saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time." Notice that God already had a purpose for us from the very beginning. He didn't wait to see what we would do first. He gave us His word to follow so we could live the holy life He planned for each of us. Fear of falling short in carrying this out can keep us from experiencing His peace in the process.

Remember, following the rules isn't what saves us. It comes from our faith in Jesus as the One who covers our failures. He changes our hearts so we want to do what He says. Philippians 3:9 sums it up. "I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather I have become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with Him depends on faith." The changes we're making in how we live now come from this faith. What used to seem impossible is now not only possible but becomes our focus and goal.

This obedience allows us to live in freedom from our damage. He gives us a new identity that doesn't come from what others say or what we may have said about ourselves. Romans 5:2 shows us a beautiful picture of who we are now. "Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory." Does that sound too good to be true or even to imagine? We're told we can be confident and joyful. We don't have to hide behind anyone else in fear that we'll be thrown out because we don't belong there. We are there because God tells us we belong. We serve Him because we love Him.

He gives us a different perspective on the other people in our lives, especially those that are hard to love. We're battling our human tendencies when we choose to forgive, so we need the reminder Paul gives in Colossians 3:13. "Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others." Making allowance just means we understand that sin is the default mode in human life. That doesn't justify the offence, but we leave it to God to sort out each person's accountability.

It can be hard to wait for God to do the sorting and we can get worn out in the process. Once again, we're reminded of the role of grace in our lives. It isn't just reserved for the moment of our salvation, but it's a valuable resource for all the moments in our days. 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 shows a conversation Paul had with God when he was feeling the weight of his circumstances. Hear God's response to his cry for help and how it changed Paul's outlook. "Each time He said, 'My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.' So now I am glad to boast about my weakness, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong." We may not be ready to be all in with Paul's view, but it can help us remember that our weakest moments are when Jesus comes in and gives us exactly what we need.

Paul used that power to write many letters to the churches he started. We get to read his encouragement to them and apply those words to ourselves as fellow Christ followers. In his letters, Paul shows that God promises even more than power. In 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, he writes, "Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who loves us and by His grace gave us eternal comfort and a wonderful hope, comfort you and strengthen you in every good thing you do and say." We know that the Holy Spirit has been described as our Comforter. He is constantly with us, reminding us of these promises and showing us how to do these good things.

When we put these words into practice, we're showing the effects of Christ in our lives just like those early believers did. Colossians 1:6 makes that connection. "This same Good News is going out all over the world. It is bearing fruit everywhere by changing lives, just as it changed your life from the day

you first heard and understood the truth about God's wonderful grace." While Paul may not have imagined what the world would look like in our time, God did and He's changing us for this same purpose. Other people will be affected by the difference they see in our lives. God gives us the power to move forward instead of living in the past. We can show them that kind of change is available to them too.

Scripture references

Ephesians 2:4-7, 2 Timothy 1:9, Philippians 3:9, Romans 5:2, Colossians 3:13, 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, Colossians 1:6