

The Church – A Culture of Grace

As we have seen, the Gospel has set us free from the sin and death, something the Law could never do. This **freedom** was purchased for us by the free grace of God, and we received it by faith. Christ has completely removed all condemnation from us, having justified us by His life and death. God gives us the gift of faith in regeneration as the Holy Spirit powerfully transforms us and takes up residence within our very own soul.

Romans 3:21-24 - 21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even **the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe**; for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being **justified as a gift by His grace** through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; NASB

Romans 8:1-4 - 1 **There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.** 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3 **For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,** 4 in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. NASB
Ephesians 2:4-10 - 4 But God, being rich in mercy, **because of His great love** with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, **made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),** 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 **For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.** NASB

Now these are very great promises indeed. God has now through Christ and the Holy Spirit created for us a whole new state of grace in which we stand. We are no longer under Law but under grace. Moreover, He has brought us together under the headship of Christ and made us one body together with all the saints, the body of Christ, standing together in the grace of God.

1 Corinthians 12:12-14 - 12 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and **all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body,** so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. 14 For **the body is not one member, but many.** NASB

Now if the body stands together in the grace of God, having received abundant pardon from the gracious hand of God, the result should be a new culture of grace and love produced among us by the Spirit. Should the church be a place of abundant grace and healing for all of us who have been so badly wounded by our lives of sin? Indeed it should be. Let us therefore treat one another in accordance with the love and grace with which we have been pardoned by God.

Hebrews 4:16 - 16 Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, **that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.** NASB

1 Thessalonians 5:14-15 - 4 And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, **encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men.** NASB

This powerful culture of love and grace is the continual exhortation of Jesus and the Apostles to the Church. Love is to be the most abiding virtue among us and the motive of our culture together in the Church.

John 13:34-35 - 34 "A new commandment I give to you, that **you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.** 35 "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." NASB

1 Corinthians 16:14 - 14 Let **all that you do be done in love.** NASB

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 - 14 For **the love of Christ controls us,** having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; 15 and He died for all, that **they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him** who died and rose again on their behalf. NASB

Galatians 5:13-15 - 13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, **but through love serve one another.** 14 For **the whole Law is fulfilled in one**

word, in the statement, " You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another. NASB

Ephesians 4:15-16 - 15 but **speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him**, who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, **causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.** NASB

Ephesians 4:32-5:2 - 2 And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. 5:1 Therefore **be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you**, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. NASB

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 - 12 and **may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men**, just as we also do for you; 13 **so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness** before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints. NASB

Hebrews 10:24-25 - 24 and **let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds**, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near. NASB

1 Peter 1:22-23 - 22 Since you have **in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart**, 23 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God. NASB

1 Peter 4:8 - 8 **Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another**, because love covers a multitude of sins. NASB

1 John 4:7-12 - 7 Beloved, **let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God**. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has beheld God at any time; **if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.** NASB

The idea of imparting grace to one another abounds in the New Testament. Consider that the Apostles gave us much encouragement to serve, care and minister to one another. This loving care was to be administered in a spirit of humility and grace.

Romans 12:9-16 - 9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 **Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor**; 11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, 13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. 16 **Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.** NASB

Ephesians 4:29 - 29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, **but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.** NASB

Philippians 2:1-6 - 2 If therefore there is **any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion**, 2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, **maintaining the same love, united in spirit**, intent on one purpose. 3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, **but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself**; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 **Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus**, NASB

Ray Ortlund comments *"Gospel doctrine creates a gospel culture. The doctrines of grace create a culture of grace, a social environment of acceptance and hope and freedom and joy. Jesus himself touches us through his truths to create a new kind of community. Without the doctrines, the culture alone is fragile. Without the culture, the doctrines alone appear pointless. Isn't the doctrine-creating-culture dynamic what we find in the New Testament? For example, the doctrine of regeneration creates a culture of humility (Ephesians 2:1-9). The doctrine of*

justification creates a culture of inclusion (Galatians 2:11–16). The doctrine of reconciliation creates a culture of peace (Ephesians 2:14–16). The doctrine of sanctification creates a culture of life (Romans 6:20–23). The doctrine of glorification creates a culture of hope (Romans 5:2) and honor (Romans 12:10). The doctrine of God — what could be more basic than that? — creates a culture of honesty and confession (1 John 1:5-10). If we want this culture to thrive, we can't take doctrinal short cuts. If we want this doctrine to be credible, we can't disregard the culture. **Churches where the doctrines of grace create a culture of grace bear living witness to the power of Jesus.** I think of it very simply like this:

- Gospel doctrine – gospel culture = hypocrisy
- Gospel culture – gospel doctrine = fragility
- Gospel doctrine + gospel culture = power

Don't settle for preaching the truth only. **Build a relational ethos that feels like the gospel. It's powerful.**"

Not only do I believe this to be true, but I would suggest that this is very exhortation given again and again by the Apostles. Consider Paul's letter to the Colossians. In chapter 1 he gives an apologetic for the Lordship and Deity of Christ and explains into chapter 2 that Christ and the Gospel are the foundation and roots of the Christian life. In chapter 2 he also speaks of the Work accomplished in the atonement, and reminds us of our freedom from the world system and judgment and teachings of men. In chapter 3 he addresses the Christian life and culture in the church. Consider this overview of Colossians chapter 3. Here we will find out just "How to Live the Christian Life." Summed up in short....

- **3:1-4** – we are to **THINK** like Christ
- **3:5-11** – we are to **PUT OFF** the old life of sin
- **3:12-17** – we are to **PUT ON** the new life in Christ

3:1-4 – we are to **THINK** like Christ

Here Paul begins by explaining that we must begin to apply spiritual wisdom and understanding to the way we **THINK** about our lives. We are to think about and pursue the great spiritual realities of the Kingdom of God, and not the earthly mundane and temporary **"things that are on earth."**

Colossians 3:1-4 – 1 If then you have been raised up with Christ, **keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.** 2 **Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.** 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then **you also will be revealed with Him in glory.**

These things Paul says are the result of having **"died"** [that is to sin], and that our **"life is hidden with Christ in God."** This is further encouraged by the strong **HOPE** of **glorification** that we eagerly look forward to at the Second Coming of Christ.

3:5-11 – we are to **PUT OFF** the old life of sin

Here see the imperatives of the Gospel which are rooted in the Law. **See here how the Law sweetly complies with the Gospel.** Paul preaches the Law in order to show us in a mirror the corruptions of our nature, heart and lives, urging us to put them to death.

Colossians 3:5-11 - 5 Therefore **consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.** 6 For it is on account of these things that **the wrath of God will come,** 7 and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now **you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.** 9 **Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices,** 10 and

have **put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him** 11 — a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. NASB

a culture of grace and love among themselves.

3:12-17 – we are to **PUT ON** the new life in Christ

Even though Paul intently and clearly proclaims both the imperatives and threatening of the Law in verse 5-11, he goes on to exhort the Church to develop a **culture of grace**, acceptance and love. This *culture* was to flourish with all the **virtues** of Christ which are to be our constant pursuit.

Colossians 3:12-17 - 12 And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, **put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other**, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 And beyond all these things **put on love**, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 And **let the peace of Christ rule** in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and **be thankful**. 16 **Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs**, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. NASB

Consider how pleasant a fellowship of loving saints who pursue these virtues is. Indeed this kind of fellowship imparts a life transforming power like we see in the early church (Acts 2:42-47). When the Church abides in **“compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with one another in forgiveness,”** there the Gospel is on display in a powerful way. This is the environment we should be experiencing in the church. It is not that we never admonish one another, there is a proper place for that as Paul states, **“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another.”** But admonishment is for the unruly, not for the weak or fainthearted.

1 Thessalonians 5:14-15 - 4 And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, **encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men**. NASB

The Word of God is sufficient to expose our hearts to His holiness and give us a heavenly standard of righteousness. This is our constant pursuit and meditation in the Church. It is the main reason why the Word of God takes center stage in the corporate worship of the Church, because in and through the preaching of the Word, God speaks to us in His sovereign authority and stunningly beautiful grace. We need not castigate, censure and chastise one another in an unnecessarily critical manner. After all, isn't the Word of God preached with conviction sufficient to transform God's own people by the power of His indwelling Spirit? Indeed it is. Ray Ortlund comments... *“It's what everyone needs. Everyone. Gospel + safety + time. A lot of gospel + a lot of safety + a lot of time.*

- **Gospel:** good news for bad people through the finished work of Christ on the cross and the endless power of the Holy Spirit. Multiple exposures. Constant immersion. Wave upon wave of grace and truth, according to the Bible.
- **Safety:** a non-accusing environment. No finger-pointing. No embarrassing anyone. No manipulation. No oppression. No condescension. But respect and sympathy and understanding, where sinners can confess and unburden their souls.
- **Time:** no pressure. Not even self-imposed pressure. No deadlines on growth. Urgency, but not hurry, because no one changes quickly. A lot of space for complicated people to rethink their lives at a deep level. God is patient.

This is what our churches must be: gentle environments of gospel + safety + time. It's where we're finally free to grow.” Let us heed these wise words from this wise pastor.