

INTIMACY WITH GOD  
Part Six  
“Experiencing His Grace”

Intimacy with God is life’s most satisfying reality. Nothing can rob you of intimacy with God, except idolatry. Anything that captures your heart and imagination more than God is an idol. Idolatry is always the reason we ever do anything wrong. Idolatry isn’t one sin among many but the root of all of our sins. Idolatry is the sin beneath the sin. How do we deal with our idols and the sin that they produce? By Experiencing His Grace!

**Exodus 34:6-7** <sup>6</sup> The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup> keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

God is forgiving yet also is so holy that he cannot let injustice and wickedness go unpunished. This is a conundrum that is actually the tension that drives the plot of the entire Old Testament. Is our covenant relationship with God conditional, based on our obedience to him, or is it unconditional, based on His love for us? In the end, will his holiness and justice be more fundamental than his love and mercy, or will it be the other way around?

The authors of the New Testament point out the answer to all the riddles of the Old.

**Romans 3:23-26** <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. <sup>26</sup> It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

When Jesus died on the cross he took our curse for our unfaithfulness, so that we could receive the blessing he earned through his perfect faithfulness (Gal3:10-14). Jesus fulfilled the conditions of the covenant so we can enjoy unconditional love of God. Because of the Cross, God can be both just toward sin and yet mercifully justifying to sinners.

His blood is shed for our forgiveness (Matt26:28)

He ascended to God’s right hand to grant forgiveness (Acts 5:31)

The message with which he sends his disciples out into the world is to “preach repentance and forgiveness of sins” (Luke 24:47)

“In Him we have the redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins”—Eph1:7

It means no sin can bring us into condemnation, because of Christ’s atoning sacrifice.

It also means that sin is so serious and grievous to God that Jesus had to die.

We must recognize both of these aspects of God’s grace or we will lapse into one or the other of two fatal errors which are both spiritually deadly:

- 1) Think that forgiveness is easy for God to give. To lose our grip on the costliness of forgiveness will result in a superficial, perfunctory confession that does not lead to any real life change. Our great debt and sin against God required an infinite payment, and the only way God could forgive us was

to bear it himself. If you forget this, your prayers of confession and repentance will be shallow and trivial. They will neither honor God nor change your life. (Antinomianism/Liberalism/Cheap grace)

- 2) Or will doubt the reality and thoroughness of our pardon. To lose our grip on the freeness of forgiveness will lead to continued guilt, shame, and self-loathing. When we forget that God loves us in Christ, repentance becomes the appeasement of God. (Legalism/Moralism/Religion)

Only when we see both the freeness and the cost of forgiveness will we get the relief from the guilt as well as the liberation from the power of sin in our lives.

We must not only admit our sins but also find the attitudes of the heart that led to the wrongdoing and confront them with thoughts about God's greatness and steadfast love until the motive for willfulness and selfishness begin to weaken and erode. We admit sin with our mind but forsake sin with our heart.

### **Killing Sin**

To be a child of God means to so rest in the Father's love that when we sin, we will seek God's pardon for displeasing Him, and do all that we can to pursue a heart that will not displease him again. We won't simply admit sin but will forsake it.

To kill sin is to weaken it at the motivational level by meditating on God's holiness and love in Christ, and other biblical doctrines, and then seeing our specific sin in their light. This will make the sin look unattractive to us. We come to see its folly and evil in this true light and find ourselves more able to resist it in the future. Proverbs 8:13 The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Holiness is someone who is so satisfied in God that sin loses its appeal.

This will only happen when we move beyond seeing the danger of sin—its consequences—and find ways to convince our heart of the grievousness of—how it dishonors and grieves the one to whom we owe everything. Everyone must learn the ways of their own heart and devise ways of preaching to our own hearts, using biblical truth in ways that especially weaken our particular false beliefs and wrong attitudes.

### **Self-Examination and Repentance**

We should confess anytime we are aware of sin in our daily lives but also regularly examine our lives to expose sin we may be unaware of.

- ✓ Ten Commandments (Ex20) Thinking out the way in which you have been violating each commandment in deed or attitude of heart.
- ✓ Fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal5:22-24)
- ✓ Identify your Idols:
  1. What controls most of your thoughts and feelings?
  2. What motivates the things that you do?
  3. What are you most afraid of?
  4. What brings the highest amount of frustration and anger into your life?
  5. What is the one thing that can change your mood in a second?
  6. What would your friends say is your favorite topic of conversation?
  7. What are some things you think you could never live without?
  8. What brings you solace (comfort, support, relief)?
  9. What do you yearn for?
  10. What is one thing you wish God would do for you?

- ✓ George Whitefield (18 Century British evangelist) once wrote, "God give me a deep humility, a well-guided zeal, a burning love and a single eye, and then let men or devils do their worst!" Those four features make a good summary of a vital Christian life.

**Deep humility.** Have I looked down on anyone? Have I been too stung by criticism? Have I felt snubbed and ignored? **Consider the free grace of Jesus** until I sense a) decreasing disdain (since I am a sinner too), b) decreasing pain over criticism (since I should not value human approval over God's love.) In light of his grace I can let go of the need to keep up a good image-it is too great a burden and now unnecessary. Consider free grace until I experience grateful, restful joy.

**A Well-guided zeal.** Examination: Have I avoided people or tasks that I know I should face? Have I been anxious and worried? Have I failed to be circumspect or have I been rash and impulsive? **Consider the free grace of Jesus** until there is a) no cowardly avoidance of hard things (since Jesus faced evil for me), b) no anxious or rash behavior (since Jesus' death proves God cares and will watch over me). It takes pride to be anxious - I am not wise enough to know how my life should go. Consider free grace until I experience calm thoughtfulness and strategic boldness.

**A Burning love.** Have I spoken or thought unkindly of anyone? Am I justifying myself by caricaturing (in my mind) someone else? Have I been impatient and irritable? Have I been self-absorbed and indifferent and inattentive to people? **Consider the free grace of Jesus** until there is a) no coldness or unkindness (think of the sacrificial love of Christ for you), b) no impatience (think of his patience with you), and c) no indifference. Consider free grace until I show warmth and affection. God was infinitely patient and attentive to me, out of grace.

**A 'single' eye.** Am I doing what I am doing for God's glory and the good of others or am I being driven by fears, need for approval, love of comfort and ease, need for control, hunger for acclaim and power, or the 'fear of man?' Am I looking at anyone with envy? Am I giving in to any of even the first motions of lust or gluttony? Am I spending my time on urgent things rather than important things because of these inordinate desires? **How does Jesus provide for me** what I am looking for in these other things? Pray: "O Lord Jesus, make me happy enough in you to avoid sin and wise enough in you to avoid danger, that I may always do what is right in your sight, in your name I pray, Amen."

## **What do you actually do in the process of using the means of Grace (Spiritual Disciplines)?**

### **Two Things:**

Eph. 4:29-32<sup>29</sup> Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. <sup>30</sup>And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

1 Thess. 5:19<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. <sup>19</sup> Do not quench the Spirit. <sup>20</sup>Do not despise prophecies (Testimony of Jesus Rev19:10).

- ✓ Don't Grieve the Holy Spirit. (Seek to Please) Repent – Identify the idols of your heart and see all sin as a trampling on the love and wisdom of God. Ps. 51:4 “Against you, you alone (only) have I sinned...”
- ✓ Don't Quench the Holy Spirit. (Seek to Listen) Believe – Find your identity in Christ and see all salvation as a filling of your heart with the great things of who Jesus is and what He has done for you so that your appetite for Christ exceeds your appetite for sin. Ps. 51:12 “Restore to me the joy...” It wasn't that I sinned and lost the joy... (1John1:8-9)

Prayers for repentance for pride, for coldness and a lack of love, and for anxiety and mistrustfulness could sound like this:

O Lord, I fall into pride, but on the cross you made yourself of no reputation and gave up all your power and glory—for me! The more I thank you and rejoice that you did that, the less I need to worry about my own honor and reputation, about whether people are approving of me or not.

O Lord, I fall into coldness and irritability, but in the garden just before you died, you were so gentle and affirming of us even when we went to sleep on you. On the cross you were giving yourself for people who abandoned you or mocked you. The more I thank and rejoice that you did that for me, the more it melts away my hardness and makes me able to be patient and attentive to people around me.

O Lord, I fall into anxiety and fearfulness, but you faced the most astonishing dangers for me. You were torn to pieces, so bravely, for me, so I could be utterly loved and eternally safe in you. If you were courageous for me facing those overwhelming cosmic evils, I know you are with me now.

Therefore, I can be steady as I face problems.

## Where Are You?

**Are you “sailing”?** Sailing means you are living the Christian life with the wind at your back. God is real to your heart. You often feel his love. You see prayers being answered. When studying the Bible, you regularly see remarkable things and you sense him speaking to you. You sense people around you being influenced by the Spirit through you.

**Are you “rowing”?** Rowing means you are finding prayer and Bible reading to be more a duty than a delight. God often (though not always) seems distant, and the sense of his presence is fairly rare. You don't see many of your prayers being answered. You may be struggling with doubts about God and yourself. Yet despite all this, you refuse self-pity or the self-righteous pride that assumes you know better than God how your life should go. You continue to read the Bible and pray regularly, you attend worship and reach out and serve people despite the inner spiritual dryness.

**Are you “drifting”?** Drifting means that you are experiencing all the conditions of rowing—spiritual dryness and difficulties in life. But in response, instead of rowing, you are letting yourself drift. You don't feel like approaching and obeying God, so you don't pray or read. You give in to the self-centeredness that naturally comes when you feel sorry for yourself, and you drift into self-indulgent behaviors to comfort yourself, whether it be escape eating and sleeping, sexual practices, or whatever else.

**Are you “sinking”?** Eventually your boat, your soul, will drift away from the shipping lanes, as it were—and truly lose any forward motion in the Christian life. The numbness of heart can become hardness because you give in to thoughts of self-pity and resentment. If some major difficulty or trouble were to come into your life, it would be possible to abandon your faith and identity as a Christian altogether.

If you pray, worship, and obey despite negative circumstances and feelings, you won't be drifting. You may feel that you are making no progress at all rowing, yet you are, and when the winds rise again, and they surely will, you will sail again before them. Don't grow weary...keep rowing (Gal6:9)!