

Discipline of Grace - Week 2

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Luke 18:11-12 **11** The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. **12** I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’

Central idea – We have points in common with both the Pharisee and the tax collector, the prodigal son and the older brother.

Developing the Discipline of Grace

1.a. How could a man (William Carey) of such remarkable faith in God lament toward the end of his life his own sinfulness and shortcomings? Why would Carey not rather reflect with gratitude and praise on what God had done through him?

1.b. Should Carey’s attitude be an example for us to follow, or should we write it off as an unfortunate bit of introspection that comes with old age? Was Carey’s attitude due to an unhealthy, low self-esteem? Or did it reflect a healthy realism characteristic of a godly, mature Christian?

1.c. Do you find Carey’s attitude difficult to maintain in your own life? Is it motivating? Why?

2. If ever there was a person who excelled in the disciplines of the Christian life, in obedience, and in sacrificial service, surely it was the Apostle Paul. Yet he viewed himself in a manner similar to William Carey. Paul kept “down-grading” his self-concept in view of the seriousness of sin. As Paul grew over the years, to what did he compare himself? (How did he “rank” in each case?)

About 55 AD, 1 Cor. 15:9 **9** For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

About 57 AD, Romans 7:18 **18** For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find.

About 60 AD, Ephesians 3:8 **8** To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

About 63 AD, 1 Timothy 1:15-16 **15** This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. **16** However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

3. Now consider the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14). The Pharisee was orthodox in his beliefs and very committed in his religious practices. He fasted twice a week (spiritual disciplines); he was not a robber, evildoer, or adulterer (obedience); and he gave a tenth of his income (service). To use our good-day/bad day terminology, he was living in a continuous good-day scenario, or so he thought.
 - A. What then was the one fatal flaw in the Pharisee's thinking?
 - B. By contrast to the Pharisee, how did the tax collector see himself and his sin? (and in relation to whom?)
 - C. Why did Jesus declare the tax collector righteous before God?
 - D. How does this parable speak to you?

4. Jesus also gave us the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). The emphasis of that story is on the compassion and grace of the son's father. Jesus could have stopped there, but He proceeded to tell us about the jealousy and resentment of the older brother. How is that older brother like the Pharisee of Luke 18:9-14?

5. While love is the primary character trait befitting Christians, it is also the most difficult to practice with more than mere lip service. To put "legs" to the concept of love, try viewing the great love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, in terms of action steps. As you read over these action statements, ask yourself how you are doing in your day-to-day practice of love. On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (always), how often do you tend to take these measurable actions?

I am patient with you because I love you and want to forgive you. 1 2 3 4 5

I am kind to you because I love you and want to help you. 1 2 3 4 5

I do not envy your possessions or your gifts because I love you and want you to have the best. 1 2 3 4 5

I do not boast about my attainments because I love you and want to hear about yours. 1 2 3 4 5

I am not proud because I love you and want to esteem you before myself. 1 2 3 4 5

I am not rude because I love you and care about your feelings. 1 2 3 4 5

I am not self-seeking because I love you and want to meet your needs. 1 2 3 4 5

I am not easily angered by you because I love you and want to overlook your offenses. 1 2 3 4 5

I do not keep a record of your wrongs because I love you and “love covers a multitude of sins?” 1 2 3 4 5

Is there any room for self-righteousness in the light of this practical standard of love?

6. Bridges found twenty-seven positive character traits taught in the New Testament (see Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 4:1-2,25-32; Colossians 3:12-17; 1 Timothy 6:6-11; James 3:17). The traits are:

Compassion	Godliness	Patience
Considerateness	Goodness	Peace
Contentment	Honesty	Perseverance
Faith	Humility	Purity
Faithfulness	Impartiality	Righteousness
Forbearance	Joy	Self-control
Forgiving Spirit	Kindness	Sincerity
Generosity	Love	Submissiveness
Gentleness	Mercy	Thankfulness

A. Get a friend who knows you well to help you mark those traits in which you’ve grown in the past year

B. Mark 2 traits you believe God would like you to focus on for growth.

- C. To the extent that we miss the mark in these positive Christian character traits, we are sinners in need of God's grace.

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- 7.a. Bridges contends that Christians should view themselves as both saints and sinners. Why is that?
- 7.b. How do you tend to view yourself usually – as a saint, sinner, or both?
- 7.c. How are you viewing yourself after completing this study session?
- 7.d. What will you do with what you have learned in this session?

What's the point of all this?

The point is to help us identify with both the Pharisee and the tax collector, both the prodigal son and the older brother. While no one really wants to identify with the Pharisee or the older brother, we are willing to identify with the tax collector and the prodigal son. But are we really willing to say “God be merciful to me *the sinner*” or “I am no longer worthy to be called your son”? Are we willing to admit that even our righteous acts are no more than “filthy rags” in the sight of God? If you can truthfully say yes to these questions, then you got the point of this chapter.

Having reckoned with the seriousness of our sin, we are in a better position to apply the gospel of grace to our lives every day.