

Grace

One of the most important affirmations that we make as Christians is to speak of the grace of God. At times grace has been contrasted with law. However in scripture God's law is itself a gift of grace. It is not illuminating to set law and grace over against one another.

"The word became flesh and lived among us ... full of grace and truth."

John 1:14

The church came to believe that the grace of God was embodied in the person of Jesus Christ. Focused in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus we see God's attitude and action toward us: forgiving, healing and liberating. As John writes, "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace."

" by grace you have been saved."

Ephesians 2:5

In the teaching of the New Testament grace represents God's attitude toward us. The Old Testament refers to this as God's loving kindness which is constant. This attitude is the wellspring for God's action which reaches out and helps us to receive the offer of salvation.

"Thy sovereign grace to all extends immense and unconfined."

Charles Wesley

In the Arminian theology of the Wesleys, God's grace is universal in scope. It seeks out each person and provides the ability to respond to the initiative. There are no limits to God's desire for reconciliation and relationship.

"The Christian story is about a love that did not wait to be deserved; never has been deserved, can never be deserved."

David Tripp

The distinctive feature of God's grace is that it is freely offered. We cannot impress God or persuade God to love us. We do not earn God's favour. We do not merit or deserve grace. Grace is not offered in response to our performance. Grace is offered to each and is experienced simply as gift.

"Grace is cruciform..."

Peter Groves

There is nothing automatic or mechanical about God's loving attitude and action toward us. There is always a cost in the service of reconciliation. The cost of grace is demonstrated in the cross of Christ in which we are given a glimpse into the heart of God.

"Grace is simply love overcoming judgement."

Mike Riddell

Each of us fails to realise our best self. We may intend to do good, as St. Paul says, and we disappoint ourselves. Grace is characterized by God's generosity. We may have deserved to be judged or condemned, but through Christ we have received forgiveness, healing and invitation to relationship. We may be outraged that God's grace extends to those we might distance ourselves from.

"All human nature vigorously resists grace because grace changes us and the change is painful."

Henri Nouwen

God takes the initiative and invites us into relationship, and then waits for our response. We detect resistance deep within toward receiving the gift because we know what might be expected. We are called to grow and to mature and we experience an inner reluctance to be open to this action of God.

"Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross..."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

This German theologian was concerned that the church proclaimed the grace of God but did not insist on the demands of God. The offer of grace is accompanied by consequences such as repentance, spiritual disciplines and a developing awareness of social justice. Grace is not an individual possession: rather it is the shared experience of those drawn into the community which is called to take up the cross.

"God loves me as I am to help me become all that I have it in me to become."

Desmond Tutu

Grace is dynamic: it accepts us as we are and seeks to take us toward the full stature of Christ. There is a goal. Grace assists us at the beginning of the journey and provides us with resources along the way. The grace of God is not content with only the start of the journey.

A testimony to grace

"To speak of grace is to say that finally our lives are not our own, that we are recipients of a gift we did not create, the very gift of life itself, but that throughout our life we are given gifts we do not deserve - friends, experiences, joy in the midst of pain - and that at the end we will be upheld by a power we do not control, promising a fulfillment not of what we have crafted, but of what the giver of grace continually crafts through us, with us, and despite us.

Yes, we are those who craft our lives.

Yes, we are even more those whose lives are crafted.

The best moments are those when we perceive, in however dim a way, that our own intentionalities are working, not at cross purposes with, but in some kind of harmony with, the divine intentionality that wills good and not evil, and seeks, working through the freedom that is indubitably ours, for the fulfillment of our grace-filled lives.

It is grace that makes the dislocations creative rather than destructive. It invests the dislocations with new possibilities, puts them in a broader framework, offers us a perspective from which God can sometimes turn to good what others may have meant for ill."

Robert McAfee Brown

Methodist Church of New Zealand
Te Hahi Weteriana O Aotearoa

On Grace



*Whoever drinks the water I
give will never be thirsty*

Wesleyan Spirituality #2

Prepared by the Rev. Dr Terry Wall for
the Faith and Order Committee of the
Methodist Church of New Zealand
Te Hahi Weteriana O Aotearoa

April 2014

"Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ..."
Ephesians 3:8