

The Christian Life

Grace

Lesson #7 for May 16, 2009

Scriptures: Acts 25:8; Isaiah 53; Romans 5:18,19; 2 Corinthians 3:16-18; Ephesians 2:4-10; Colossians 2:16-20; Titus 2:11-14.

1. This lesson focuses on grace—the idea that God made “sufficient” “arrangements” for our salvation without our help in any way.
2. What makes the Christian religion unique? Is it the incarnation? Other religions have claimed to have an incarnation. Is it the resurrection? Other religions have claimed to have a resurrection. C. S. Lewis once entered a room where that topic was being discussed, and his answer was that Christianity’s unique contribution among world religions is “grace.”—Philip Yancey, *What’s So Amazing about Grace?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), p. 45.
3. To many Christians grace implies the idea of “substitution.” Today, we are going to focus on the idea of “substitution.” Stated in its most simple form, Christ died so that I do not have to die. That, of course, is talking about the second death—the “final” death—not the “first” death or “sleep” death that is happening so much around us every day.
4. God and theologians have used many metaphors to try to help us understand the atonement—God’s once-for-all plan to “deal with” sin. What do you think of when someone says “the atonement”? Is substitution an essential part of the atonement? In what sense?
5. For many students of Scripture, the story in Genesis 22 which recounts the story of Abraham being asked to take his son Isaac and sacrifice him to God is a clear metaphor for God’s substitutionary giving of His Son on Calvary. What similarities and what differences do you see in those two stories? Abraham had failed God on at least two different occasions. In the story of Abraham, we focus on the faith of the “father.” But in the story of the cross we focus on what the “Son” did. Do we ever talk about the great “faith” of our heavenly Father when His Son was dying on the cross? Do we focus on the faith of Isaac? Almost never!
6. Read Genesis 22. Genesis 22:8 quotes Abraham as answering his son’s question with the response, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering.” They had already traveled for three days to arrive at Moriah. Why didn’t any of the servants or Isaac ask that question earlier? Was Isaac afraid to ask any questions? They had often gone to worship God by offering a sacrifice in various places where Abraham had previously set up altars. But, they had always taken a lamb with them. When Abraham said that God would provide a lamb, did Isaac ask any more questions? Did he wonder where the lamb would come from?
7. In Luke 24:15-17, we read about Christ disguising His presence while walking with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. God was “playing dumb” as if He did not know what had been happening in Jerusalem! How often does God “play dumb”? He pointed out to them many passages in the Old Testament which apparently convinced them that His life and His death had been a fulfillment of Scripture. Which passages from the Old Testament did He quote? Genesis 3:15? Isaiah 53? Psalms 22? Micah 5:2? Daniel 9? Why didn’t Luke record the specifics of that conversation?
8. In the early centuries of Christianity, there was a fierce battle between Jews and Christians over the Old Testament. To the Jews, what we call the Old Testament was a history of their

nation and its struggles. Therefore, they thought they should be the ones who had a right to determine how it should be interpreted. On the other hand, to the Christians the Old Testament was a history of a group of people that pointed forward to the coming of their Messiah, and it was fulfilled in the New Testament story of Jesus Christ—the Old Testament was fulfilled in the New Testament. Then, at the right time, (Galatians 4:4) God sent His Son. There is some evidence that verses in the Old Testament were actually changed slightly to favor one view or the other. The final conclusion in that battle—pitting the growing number of Christians against the fading number of Jews—was that the Christians claimed the Greek Old Testament known as the Septuagint (*LXX*) while the Jews retreated to claiming the *Tanakh* or the Hebrew Bible. By the time of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther rejected the Roman Catholic Greek Septuagint in favor of the Hebrew *Tanakh* as being a more authentic rendition of the original Old Testament.

9. Read Romans 5:8. What is implied by the idea that “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”? Does that imply substitution? Is that a “legal” transaction? How many “non-sinners” did Christ die for? He died for a whole universe full of them—the sinless angels and sinless beings! It was not for this tiny planet full of sinners alone that Christ died! (Ephesians 1:10; 3:10; Colossians 1:20; *Patriarchs and Prophets* 68,69 (1890); *Reflecting Christ* 60 (1985))
10. Christians have often stated that Jesus is the central figure of the Old Testament. What does that imply? Is it a recognition that the *Yahweh* of the Old Testament is indeed Jesus Christ? Or is it founded on the belief that the events of the Old Testament, the sanctuary system, and the teachings of the prophets all pointed forward to a Messiah to come? Or both?
11. Read Isaiah 53. Christians love that chapter. To them it clearly points to the sufferings of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. But to the Jewish people, that chapter is a metaphor for the sufferings of the Jewish nation. Who is right? Read especially Isaiah 53:4,5. What does it mean when it says, “We thought that his suffering was punishment sent by God.” Where did such an idea come from? Can you think of any other passages from the Old Testament that clearly point to the sufferings of the coming Messiah?
12. Read Ephesians 2:8. Is salvation truly “free”? What does “free” mean in that context? Is grace free? Does God expect us to do anything in response to His free gift? What about Matthew 25? Is there any way that we could pay back to God anything of value that He did not give us in the beginning?
13. As far as we can determine, all but one of the disciples of Jesus died a violent death. Did they believe that they had paid the ultimate price? Did it “cost” them to be Christians? Think of all the Christian martyrs!
14. God has made many attempts—and theologians have expanded on those attempts—to try to explain all that God has done on our behalf. Many metaphors have been suggested. But human language is inadequate to explain it. There is a huge communications gap between God and us. Imagine what it would be like if God could explain everything to us in the comprehensive language of heaven!
15. As we know, the Old Testament sanctuary system was “full of” sacrificial animals, particularly lambs. When Jesus showed up on the banks of the Jordan where John the Baptist was baptizing, John is quoted as saying, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” What did the people who were present at that time think of when he called Jesus the “Lamb of God”? What does Lamb of God mean to you? Did they have any idea that it included the idea of dying?

16. Read Matthew 20:28; Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 6:22. What is meant when it says that Christ gave His life as a “ransom”? How did He make us His own through the blood of His Son? In what way did He “buy us for a price”?

The image of a ransom, of a high price paid for us, is a powerful one. “Christ redeemed us from sin, that is, he bought us back from sin...[How much does it cost to buy a sinner back? From whom?] What the metaphor intends is that (a) the means of our salvation is costly and that (b) we have passed from one state to another—from the state of slavery to the state of nearness to God. A redemption means the passing over of ownership at a cost.”—Edward W. H. Vick, *Let Me Assure You* (Mountain View, Ca.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1968), page 33.

17. Scriptures and the writings of Ellen White repeatedly suggest that the life and death of Christ was the only way to accomplish our salvation. Why is that? Was there indeed no other way? Did God “demand” the death of Jesus? Was there a legal requirement that had to be fulfilled? Was it necessary to fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament? Were there questions and issues from the great controversy that had to be answered which could be answered in no other way? Would the God of the universe send the Creator Himself down to this sinful world to die if there had been some other way? How does the death of Christ “buy us back”? Is it that the law requires that someone die? Today, in our system of justice, would we allow an innocent child to die in the place of a mass murderer? Does someone have to die just because God says someone should die? Did the One who died have to be sinless? Why? It is clear that in the beginning God had said, “You must not eat the fruit of that tree; if you do, you will die the same day.” (Genesis 2:17, *GNB*) Since He said that, we should all be dead! We rejoice that Jesus died for us. But what about the Father who gave His Son? (John 3:16) Are we trying to make sense of something not “logical”? Does God need to “make sense” to us?
18. Is it that God’s grace is the only way that we can be transformed into His image? Satan seems to transform some human beings into real “devils.” What is the difference between God’s transforming power and the transforming power of the Devil?
19. Modern movie technology and digital photography have demonstrated that it is possible to fool the eyes and ears of human beings. We can produce images that are truly astounding. But, are they real? Of course, we understand they are not. Are we losing our ability to distinguish between what is real and what is only imaginary? Is that Satan’s goal with the movie industry?
20. One of the metaphors that has been proposed to describe the plan of salvation is that we are “covered over” with the righteousness of Christ. Wouldn’t that take care of the problem? When we approach the gates of heaven, does the Father look us over and since we have put on “the robe of Christ’s righteousness,” does the Father say, “That looks good to Me!” When we are inside the gates, are we then still the same sinners that we were before? Or did Christ die so that God would be able to forgive us? If forgiveness is the only requirement, then there is an even bigger problem because we know that God is forgiveness personified. He forgave us from the foundation of the world. Then Christ did not really need to die! Or do we need to learn something really important about God Himself?

Acceptance of Jesus as our Savior covers our blemishes and defects and presents us perfect before God. The transformation goes deeper, too. God’s grace has the ability to remove our spiritual blemishes in order to restore us to

the original image of His perfect likeness. *Adult Teacher's Bible Study Guide*, p. 81.

What do we mean when we say that Christ's righteousness "covers over" our blemishes and our sins?

21. Ellen White says:

Those who in their actions pervert the grand principles of His holy law are under condemnation, for the righteousness of Christ cannot cover one unconfessed sin. {*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 17, p. 241.2}

"But the blood of Christ will never atone for a sin unrepented and unconfessed." {*Signs of the Times*, March 7, 1878 par. 22}

It is the inclination to excuse our moral defects that leads to the cultivation of sin. We must never forget that God ascribes sin to the one who transgresses; it is not registered against Satan, but against the sinner. God never accepts the agency of Satan as an excuse for the committal of one sin. **When there is any excuse for a seemingly wrong act, it is not sin.** Satan triumphs when he hears the professed follower of Christ offering excuses for his defects of character. **Sin unrepented of, unconfessed, can never be blotted from the books of God's record.** Through faithful, thorough confession of sin, the heart is cleansed from its moral impurity. There must be a forsaking of the sins the Lord has reproofed, before the soul can stand acquitted before God, humbled and repentant, realizing that he has served Satan, pleased him, glorified him, and dishonored his Lord. {*Signs of the Times*, December 13, 1899 par. 2}

22. Is the change that takes place in the Christian a legal one? An imaginary one? A real one?
23. The Scriptures state plainly that "the wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23, *KJV*) The Old Testament sanctuary system clearly suggests that every sin—even unintentional sins—are to be dealt with by the death of an innocent victim. (Leviticus 4:2,13,22; Hebrews 9:22) At least two things must be accomplished by the death of Christ: 1) God's character and law must be vindicated before the universe, and 2) The salvation of man.
24. So, what happened on that Friday on Calvary? Of course, there are many opinions. Some take a more objective view of what happened. They emphasize the facts of the case and talk about the actual events that occurred outside Jerusalem. Others suggest that while the historical events are central, the really important part is what happens in us in response.
25. Read again Isaiah 53:4,5 and Romans 5:12-19. Was Christ "punished" for our sins? Was He punished at all? Was He punished by God? By us? Or was that a demonstration of something absolutely essential in the great controversy?
26. The idea that Jesus Christ died in our place, so that we will not suffer eternal death but become partakers of the life that He offers, is usually referred to as the concept of substitution. To many this is an abhorrent idea. They do not like the legalistic language often used or the concept of divine wrath against sin. But whatever we may like or dislike, the grandiose truth is that God has dealt with the sin problem in the way He decided was suitable. Being just, he could not ignore sin; being love, he could not abandon the sinner. *Adult Bible Study*

27. Read Romans 8:3. God “did away with sin,” He “dealt with sin” by sending His own Son. Jesus said that if He was lifted up, He would draw “everyone” to Himself. (John 12:32) Look at Ellen White’s explanation of that passage.

But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe. To this result of His great sacrifice—its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: ‘Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me.’ John 12:31, 32. **The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin.** *Patriarchs and Prophets* 68,69 (1890); *Reflecting Christ* 60 (1985)

Did the angels need a substitute? The holy ones? How do you feel when you consider the fact that Jesus died “in your place”? Is it possible to take your sins or your guilt and “place them” on the Son of God? Is that what happened at Calvary?

28. When our first parents sinned, someone’s blood needed to be shed as a payment for the sin debt. The only one qualified for that position was Jesus. He willingly volunteered to pay the debt.
- As soon as there was sin, there was a Savior. Christ knew that He would have to suffer, yet He became man’s substitute. As soon as Adam sinned, the Son of God presented Himself as surety for the human race.—Ellen G. White, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1084.
29. Why is blood the only way for sin to be cleansed or remitted? What does the shedding of blood symbolize? Why was Jesus the only One qualified to pay the sin debt?—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, May 9-15, 2009, page 83.
30. Do we have a “debt” of sin and guilt that must be paid for in blood? Who demands the payment? To whom is the payment made? The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* makes no attempt to answer those questions.
31. Read 2 Corinthians 3:16-18; Hebrews 12:2,3.
32. Let the repenting sinner fix his eyes upon “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29); and *by beholding he becomes changed*.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 439,440; italics supplied. [Is something “magical” happening in that situation?]
33. As we know, Ellen White suggested that we would do well to spend a thoughtful hour every day

contemplating the life and death of Christ. (DA 83.4) What do you think would happen to you if you did that? How would the church be different if a significant number of church members did that?

34. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has often emphasized “present truth.” What is the relationship between “present truth” and the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ? Do we still have any questions about the centrality of the life and death of Jesus Christ? Does thinking about the life and death of Jesus make real changes in your life?
35. Seventh-day Adventists have become known worldwide for their relatively unusual set of doctrines or teachings. Why are those doctrines or teachings important? If we just “look to Jesus,” shouldn’t that be enough? Do our doctrines and teachings add anything to the centrality of Christ?
36. Grace is hard for some people to accept. We like to believe that we can earn our own way. If we could earn our own way, then who would claim credit for doing it? But if we read the Bible carefully, we know very well that we are sinners and ultimately we cannot do anything about it. “God’s grace saves us from sin by making us blameless before God.” *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* p. 87. How does that actually work? Many people seem to like the idea that it is all a mystery. If we try to explain it, it removes the mystery and possibly even the effectiveness of God’s grace. Remember that we are going to spend the rest of eternity talking about this! It should be clear that Jesus lived a perfect and sinless life. He also died the death of sinners and He did not deserve to die. If I look carefully at His life and death, I should be able to see that there is a choice being offered to me: 1) I can choose to live a life like the life which He lived, [recognizing that I will often fail in my attempts], or 2) I can choose to live a life according to my own desires and thus choose to die the death that He died.
37. Some people are offended by the idea that God demanded the life of His Son as a payment for the sins of humankind. [I am offended by this idea!] That, though, is one of the images used by the Bible, so we must take it for what it says. What should the image tell us about the seriousness of sin and how costly our redemption was?
- If there is one doctrine many contemporary people object to, it is the atonement. Many do not accept the idea that our problem should be solved by an intervention from the “outside.” (*Ibid*, Friday, May 15, 2009)
38. Are you offended by those words in the *Bible Study Guide*? Did God “demand” the life of His Son? Why did Jesus have to die? Do we have better answers than that?
39. Where is the great controversy perspective in this discussion? How do the angels feel about God? Do they think that He “demanded the life of His Son as a payment”? Would you be comfortable living with an omnipotent Someone who did that?

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