

February 11, 2018

Sufficient Grace

What is Grace?

“By grace we mean the undeserved, unmerited, and loving action of God in human existence through the ever-present Holy Spirit. While the grace of God is undivided, it precedes salvation as ‘prevenient grace,’ continues in ‘justifying grace,’ and is brought to fruition in ‘sanctifying grace.’ ” ***Book of Discipline***, 2016 (p.51)

Prevenient Grace

The prefix *pre* means “before.” And *venient* is rooted in the Latin *venire*, which means “to come.” Prevenient grace is the love of God at work in our lives that comes before we are even aware of God at all, and before we make a conscious response to God. In prevenient grace, God is taking the initiative in reaching out to all people, whether they ever accept that love or not. This kind of grace prompts our first wish to please God, our first glimmer of understanding of the will of God, and our first “slight transient conviction” of having sinned against God. This grace awakens in us a kind of longing for deliverance from sin and a desire to move toward a relationship with Christ.

Justifying Grace

When we repent of our sin, ask God to forgive us, and accept Jesus Christ as our Savior, then God’s justifying grace accepts our repentance, pardons our sin, and connects us to Christ. Christ’s sacrifice of himself on the cross to save us, becomes effective to cleanse us, because we have accepted Christ’s offer of salvation. This change restores us to God’s favor, as we experience regeneration and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We are justified, or made right with God and made into a new creation. 2 Corinthians 5.17 - ***Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he/she is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*** (NIV). This process of justification and new birth is often referred to as conversion. Such a change can be sudden and dramatic, or gradual and cumulative. It all counts and it all marks a new beginning, and yet it is part of an ongoing process.

Sanctifying Grace

Our growth in Christ does not end with our justification. We have been made right with God, through faith in Christ, and we’ve been filled with the Holy Spirit - all good! But God continues to help us grow more like Christ, as we deepen our love for God and our neighbors. So our new birth is the first step in this process of sanctification. Sanctifying grace then continues to draw us toward the gift of Christian perfection, which is what John Wesley described as a heart “habitually filled with the love of God and neighbor” and as “having the mind of Christ and walking as he walked.”

Where Do Good Works Fit in?

This wonderful grace of God in all of its forms, is freely offered to every human being. When we turn to God in faith and receive this free gift of salvation offered through a relationship with Christ, our hearts are strangely warmed and we begin to change. Our experience of God’s grace calls forth a human response and discipline. We *want* to do good deeds; we *want* to come to church; we *want* to help others and pray for our friends, and go on mission trips, and read the Bible, etc. Faith is the only response essential for salvation, but that new status as a redeemed child of God evidences itself in good works. So our faith and our good works belong together within an all-encompassing theology of grace. Asking which one is more important, is like asking which blade on a pair of scissors is more important? They work together and are both important for proper functioning.

So where are you along the journey of faith? Have you experienced the grace of God? Have you said “yes” to Jesus?