

THE GOD OF GRACE

John 1:14-18

Christianity is the only set of beliefs in the world that has the concept of a gracious, personal, loving God. Notice that I said, "set of beliefs" and not religion. Actually, Christianity is not a religion. Religion is man's attempt to work his way up to God through good works, while Christianity is God's attempt to get down to man through grace. So, we don't have a religion like everyone else. Thank God that we don't have to relate to Him based on our merit or our works. That's what grace is all about! God is a God of truth, but that's not how He wants to be seen first. He wants us to see His grace and mercy first. This is what makes God different from every other "so-called" Deity in this world today. It is the fact that He is full of grace and mercy.

WHY DOES GRACE GO BEFORE TRUTH?

1. Grace encourages me to desire God.

Hebrews 4:14-16

You can never get closer to God than your concept of Him will allow. The devil loves to present God as the overbearing ogre from Heaven with the Ten Commandments in one hand and a baseball bat in the other!

2. Grace makes truth bearable.

John 8:1-11

Truth without grace is mean. Grace without truth is meaningless. God could destroy us with the truth. You can't handle the truth! That's more than a Jack Nicholson quote from "A Few Good Men." It's reality!

3. Grace makes the Word understandable.

Matthew 9:9-13

Grace (Love) is the interpretive key to the Bible. Without grace, the Bible is a very dangerous book. It has been misused in order to do a lot of very bad things! Millions of people have been killed in the name of God using the Bible as justification.

FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF GRACE

1. Grace gives me something I don't deserve.

Ephesians 4:4-9

The ONLY condition for grace is faith. There are two things you can do with grace: 1) You can accept it or 2) You can reject it, but you can never deserve it! You can't be proud and walk in grace, because grace is 100% about Jesus and 0% about you.

2. Grace suffers for the sake of another.

I Peter 2:21-25; 3:7-9

While we were in our sins, Jesus was loving us. Our sin put Jesus on the Cross. I was His enemy. While I was against Him, He was for me! He doesn't treat people the way they treat Him.

3. Grace accepts those I would otherwise avoid.

Luke 6:32-36

Luke 6:35 says, "...For He is kind to the unthankful and evil." Did you know that about your God? He just loves everybody. Some of these people are going to go to hell, but they don't go to hell without God loving them! They were "unthankful and evil," but our God is a kind God, and He's not just kind to people who like Him; He's kind to everyone. Therefore, we are to be merciful and gracious as our Heavenly Father is merciful and gracious.

4. Grace creates a safe environment for those who are weak or hurting.

Matthew 12:18-22

Your weaknesses and frailties are not safe with people who are not gracious. When you are hurting, you want to be around someone who is kind (harmless to others). Jesus is your safe place!

5. Grace extends forgiveness and pursues peace and reconciliation, whether it is deserved or not.

Luke 6:36-38

We live in a world that is very hateful with really bad stuff going on. If there has ever been a time in the history of the world when people need to see love and grace, it's today! We are called Christians, because Christian means "little Christ." We are the only Jesus that some people are ever going to see. The way we love them and the way we treat them is a window for them to see the wonderful love of our Lord Jesus Christ.