

Grace & Works

Dr. Steve Schell | Week 8 Essential Doctrines

1. The message of unlimited grace was never meant to assure the rebellious that there will be no accounting for their sin. It was meant to encourage those with a new heart to keep going while learning how to obey God. The message of unlimited grace encourages the unregenerate heart to continue sinning. It removes the threat of divine justice.

2. In Romans 4:1-12 Paul explains that Abraham became righteous by faith before he was circumcised (the beginning of the law).

- Ge 15:6
- Ge 17: 9-14, 24

3. Paul's point is that the Law is and always was a guide to those who have become righteous by faith (2 Tim 3:16, 17), not a means of achieving the righteousness needed for salvation. But it still has a great role to play in our lives. It teaches us how to live in such a way that allows the tangible presence of God to abide among us, and it shows us how to live a blessed life.

4. Grace for salvation is a gift, but the blessings of God are received by obedience.

5. For those who are in Christ the ceremonial elements of the Law have passed away, but the moral elements of the Law are an expression of the unchanging character of God and therefore will never pass away.

6. When Paul contrasts the word "works" with grace, he is warning us about trying to achieve salvation by keeping the rules of the Law. He is saying that this approach has no possibility of success because of the sin that still resides in our flesh (Ro 7, 8). So, attempting to earn our salvation will produce either condemnation to those who fail (and recognize it) or pride to those who believe they have succeeded.

7. In Romans 7 and 8 Paul explains that a person who does not have the power of the Holy Spirit, or does not know how to rely on that power, will inevitably be overwhelmed by the impulses and attitudes that constantly arise from our unredeemed bodies (flesh).

8. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus explains that outward obedience to the Law is not enough to gain the righteousness needed for salvation. God requires obedience in our inward attitudes as well, which as we all know is virtually impossible, so the point Jesus was making was to show people that they could not earn their salvation. They needed God's grace if they were going to go to heaven.

9. In Romans 7:7-12 Paul tells us it was the inward requirements of the Law, particularly coveting, that he could not obey.

10. Legalism generally focuses on obedience to outward religious behaviors and ignores the sinfulness of our “fleshly” attitudes.

Excerpt from *Preaching Through John*, “Saving a Pharisee” (Jn 3:1-21)

Most people fall into one of two categories: They’re either trying to save themselves, or they’ve realized that they can’t and that they need a Savior. People are either pursuing God’s justice or clinging to His mercy. They either expect to be rewarded or forgiven. And those two attitudes are so deeply different—they lie in such opposite directions—a person can’t pursue both at the same time. No one can try to earn God’s approval while they are receiving His mercy as a gift. It’s just not possible. The heart must look one way or the other. And I admit, there is a third option which is some form of hopeless indifference. That person stops trying altogether and simply looks for ways to cope until death arrives. This is the saddest option of all. Some end up there because they’ve stopped believing eternal life exists. Others believe it exists but are convinced they’ve done something that prevents them from ever receiving it. The root problem in this third option is spiritual deception. The person is believing a lie which needs to be broken by prayer.

The conversation that took place between Jesus and Nicodemus was about the first two categories. That night a man who was sincerely trying to earn God’s favor met a Savior who offered him grace. Jesus placed in front of this Pharisee a choice: Would he stay on the path he was on, or would he abandon it entirely and follow Jesus on a new path? And you and I need to listen carefully to what they were saying because what Jesus said applies to us today just as much as it did to Nicodemus. The choice placed in front of him is a choice each of us must make and continue to make. Which path will we choose, because it’s impossible to walk both at the same time.

Read John 3:1-21

Meeting a Pharisee

Most of us have never heard anyone say anything good about a Pharisee. It seems no one is ever able to explain to us who they were, but they are quite sure they were hypocrites who made everyone else’s life miserable by trying to force them to keep the requirements found in their list of religious rules. And undoubtedly there were a lot of them who did exactly that. We can hear it in the way Jesus warned them. Read Luke 11:37-44; 12:1.

But if we realize that this religious movement probably began with Ezra’s godly reforms, we’ll hear what Jesus was saying more accurately. He wasn’t condemning people for trying to carefully obey God’s Word. His criticism was directed squarely at their lack of honesty in admitting that they had failed. Their “hypocrisy” was that they pretended they hadn’t failed, and then that pride hardened their hearts. If they had been honest with themselves, their failure would have driven them to seek God’s mercy, just like David did when he failed so badly. He didn’t come up with a new list of rules and try harder; he turned in faith to God’s

“loving-kindness,” to His promised love. Listen:

For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise (Ps 51:16-17).

David didn't respond to his failures by promising God he would try to be a better man in the future (though he would become one); he called on God for grace.

Two paths (Jn 3:6-21)

This is not an Old Testament/New Testament issue. The choice people make in how they approach God is as old as time. There have always been two paths. Either a person tries to earn God's approval, or they admit they can't and call on Him for mercy. This is what Jesus explained to Nicodemus. And, basically, here is how He said it:

v6: No amount of human effort can produce this inner miracle that I call being “born from above” or enable a person to do the works that please God. Human effort produces human results which do not please Him. The things that please God must be produced by His Spirit.

v7: So don't be surprised when I tell you that God must change your heart and fill you with His Holy Spirit.

v8: Because when that happens, He's able to guide you and do His works through you instead of you trying to guide yourself by the rules of the Law. God wants people who are moved by the Spirit just like the wind blows the leaves of a tree; you can't see either the wind or the Spirit, but you can see the effect they have on things. What I'm inviting you to is a living relationship with God in which He will guide and empower you.

v9: Nicodemus did not understand, so he asked: How can such things be possible?

v10: Jesus replied by asking him: How can you be a teacher of the Bible and not have seen these promises that I'm talking about?

vs11-13: I'm not simply another rabbi trying to teach people how to obey the Law of Moses; I'm the Messiah, and what I am telling you is not a matter for debate. I didn't think these things up. I actually existed in heaven before I came to earth as a man, so I am reporting to you things I have seen and heard from God the Father Himself. And Nicodemus, if you can't understand what I'm saying when I use these common earthly illustrations, you certainly wouldn't be able to understand if I told you what I know in a straight forward way.

vs14-15: My assignment from the Father, at this point in human history, is not to set up a glorious kingdom on earth but to die. There are many symbols in the Law of Moses which God placed there to teach Israel that the Messiah would have to die and be resurrected before setting up His kingdom. One example is when Moses made a bronze serpent and held

it up on a pole while people who had been bitten by venomous snakes were dying all around him (Nu 21:6-9). That moment was a picture of what is going to happen to Me (Ge 3:15). I'm going to be lifted up on a cross just like that snake was lifted up on a pole, and when people who are dying in their sin see My cross and believe in Me, they too will be saved from the power of death, only then they will be saved from eternal death.

vs16-17: The reason for all of this is that God loves people, all people, and wants to save them, not condemn them. That's who He is, so He created a way for it to be possible to save non-Jews as well as Jews. All anyone has to do is believe in Me, believe that I am God's only-begotten Son, that He sent Me to die for the whole world, and that He wants to save people not judge them. All who look to Me with such faith will be saved; they will be "born from above"; they will be changed inside; they will be led and empowered by the unseen Spirit, and God will give them eternal life, but not as a reward for their works. That's why I'm here. I came to rescue people, not judge them.

v18: Everybody needs a Savior, Nicodemus, including you. Nobody is good enough on their own. Unless people receive God's grace, they will be judged. There is only one Savior. God only has one Son: Me. No one else could die for you.

vs19-20: When people meet Me or hear about what I've done for them on the cross, who they are inside is quickly exposed. Their heart can be seen by their reaction. Some are looking for God. They want to know Him. They sincerely have been trying to please Him or at least find Him. So when they understand the truth about Me, they come to Me. But there are others who keep their distance from Me because they know certain things they enjoy doing are wrong, and they don't want God to tell them to stop doing those things. They feel no need for a Savior.

v21: Any person who sincerely wants to please God and is honest with themselves sooner or later will recognize that their best efforts have failed and that they need mercy. Deep inside they will know that they desperately need a Savior. They will understand why I had to die. My cross will make sense to them. And because their honesty also leads them to discover that all good things come from God, they will humbly acknowledge that whatever they did in their lives that was good was actually something He did through them. They won't take credit for anything.

Paul's gospel

Who does this sound like? It sounds like Paul, doesn't it? So that's where Paul got his gospel; he actually understood Jesus. Like Nicodemus, Paul was a Pharisee who had tried as hard as he could to earn God's favor. But when he first heard about the cross, it made him angry because he was still too proud to admit that he needed mercy. That revelation came later, but when it did, Paul built his life on these very truths. He knew firsthand the danger of trying to earn God's favor and warned us that we must not let even a little bit of self-righteousness creep back in. Listen:

...but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that Law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone... (Ro 9:31-32).

For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Ro 10:3-4).

Paul knew from his own painful experience that a person can't trust their own good works and God's mercy at the same time. It's either one or the other. And it only takes a trace of trusting ourselves to drive out our dependence on the cross of Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. Were you ever a religious person who tried to earn God's favor? How did that affect you? Did you feel close to God or far away?
2. What's the difference between self-discipline and legalism? Name an area where you discipline yourself. What prevents that from becoming a law to you?
3. What's the difference between doing something as a form of worship and doing it because of legalism? Name something you could do as an act of worship or as a way to try to earn God's favor.

Excerpt from *Preaching Through John*, "The New Covenant" (Jn 14:15-24)

Have you ever wondered why so many individuals who claim to be Christians behave so badly? In some cases, large numbers of so-called Christians have behaved worse than unbelievers and some even at a level of evil explainable only by demonic influence. Have you ever been reading a history book or watching a documentary only to suddenly realize that the horror being described was perpetrated by people who called themselves Christians? Or, have you noticed that with sad regularity a Christian leader will be caught doing something awful? It's unnerving. It's discouraging. It leaves a person wondering if Christianity is true. If it does what it says it does, then why isn't it making its followers more like its Founder? Where's the change? Where's God? Where's the miracle?

In my opinion, this is the most serious charge against Christianity. These glaring failures make it appear that our faith is just one more set of religious teachings, one more philosophy among all the other teachings and philosophies in the world. Yet, to be fair, we have to point out that while some Christians and so-called Christian societies have behaved badly, there have been individuals and communities of believers who have loved and served their Lord with amazing sincerity and selflessness. Most of us know someone whose life reveals miraculous change. No one can deny that something really happened to that person.

So the question is: Why are some people who call themselves Christians becoming so much

like Jesus, while others who also call themselves Christians behave no differently, or even worse, than unbelievers? As we read through John's report of the disciples' final evening with Jesus, we can hear in the Lord's voice great expectation for the future. He clearly expected those disciples to change and become like Him. He knew that change hadn't happened yet, but He was sure a miracle would happen to them after His cross and resurrection, one that would leave them different, empowered and, above all, obedient to God. As He served them the bread and cup from the Passover table that evening, He gave a name to that miracle. He called it the "new covenant." He said it would transform rebellious, selfish, independent people into obedient, loving, humble disciples. That miracle was something God had promised as far back as Moses. The prophets said it was a gift that the Messiah would bring to all who would truly repent and believe.

I think this miracle, or miracles, that Jesus called the "new covenant" is what causes some people to become real Christians and others to be Christians in name only. The lack of it helps explain the hypocrisy we read about in history and the absence of a conscience in certain individuals. Actually, the Christianity Jesus envisioned that night can't exist apart from it. Everything He and His apostles taught was designed only for people who had entered this new covenant, for people to whom God had given a new heart.

The problem with grace

Christianity replaces the covenant God made with Israel at Sinai with a new covenant; it replaces the Law of Moses with grace, which is the gift of God's righteousness. But grace is appropriate only for those who have a new heart, one upon which God has miraculously written His Law. The Law of Moses is based on curses and blessings, threats and rewards. It motivates right behavior by appealing to the flesh, but if a person's heart has not been changed, threats and rewards are the only way their behavior can be controlled because they are still, by nature, rebellious, selfish and independent. Grace will actually produce lawlessness if the heart is not transformed. It removes the fear of God and assures a person that they will go to heaven regardless of their horrible behavior. In many ways grace produces worse results than no religion because it overrides the natural restraint of the conscience. What a person might have been afraid to do, grace assures them will be forgiven. It can produce even worse character than legalism because it removes any fear of punishment.

The grace of God is meant to be given to the person who has been miraculously changed inside, to the person who loves God and wants to please Him. That person does not need threats or rewards to do the right thing. A transformed heart needs only to be taught how to obey, how to break free from the control of the flesh or escape the assaults of the devil. Like obedient children, those with a new heart seek to be nurtured and trained by their heavenly Father.

Because the gospel has often been stripped of its essential demands, many people have been misled into thinking that they are right with God and that for them, the Law has passed away. So, they have tried to function in the freedom that Christ gives only to turn

that freedom into an opportunity for the flesh and fall into deeper bondage than before (Gal 5:13).

Another Helper

No sooner had Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (v15) than He said this, “I will ask the Father and He will give you another Helper, so that He may be with you into the [next] age...” (v16). The Greek word translated as “Helper” is paraklete. It is that person who comes to help us when we call out in need. He was speaking about the Holy Spirit. He said the Holy Spirit was Someone they already knew because He had been with them, but He would soon take up residence inside them. This step, which He described elsewhere as a baptism with the Holy Spirit (Ac 1:5), is absolutely foundational to the new covenant Jesus was promising. In effect, He was saying, “Not only will you be given a new heart, you will also be given new power which will make it possible for you to obey My commands.” They would not only want to do the right thing, they would be able to do the right thing.

But the process of helping people receive this power has been neglected over the centuries at least as badly as the essential demands of the gospel. Even those who repent and believe, and are thereby given a new heart, may often be left without help to receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit, which brings the power and divine guidance needed to live the righteous, fruitful life Jesus envisioned. Instead, new believers are often inundated with teaching, which they lack the power to obey. So, old behaviors may continue or even grow worse; demonic harassment may increase yet the person has no understanding of how to stop it, and prayers for help seemingly go unanswered. Some stop trying to change, some give up the faith and some hide their private lives and hope for a miracle. This problem of powerless Christianity is so longstanding and widespread that many think this is all Christianity has to offer. But it’s not.

The prophet’s promise

The Christianity Jesus expected us to proclaim offers both a new heart and new power. And the promise that God would send both is deeply rooted in Scripture. Moses described this miracle. He looked forward to the day in which God would “circumcise [the] hearts” of His people (Dt 30:6). That means God will supernaturally remove the rebellion, selfishness and independence that’s found in every human heart. Jeremiah called this miracle a “new covenant” (Jer 31:31). Here’s what he said this new covenant would do:

“But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They shall not teach again, each man his brother, saying, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jer 31:33-34).

Ezekiel explained how this miracle would take place. Through him God said,

“I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes (permanent rules), and you will be careful to observe My ordinances (prescribed rituals)” (Eze 36:27).

So, there it is: a new heart and new power, the desire to obey and the ability to obey. And both are still available if we truly respond to the demands of the gospel (repent and believe), and if we actively welcome the Holy Spirit to come and take up His residence inside us. Then, it’s a matter of learning to walk in the grace and power He has given us.

The bread and the cup (Lk 22:14-20)

With these truths in mind, let’s listen carefully to what Jesus said to His disciples during the Passover meal on that final evening. First He took some bread and explained that He, like the Passover lamb, would die for them, and then He picked up the cup that is served after the meal has been eaten. It’s called the “cup of redemption.” He held up that cup and said,

“This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood” (Lk 22:20).

In other words, “My cross and resurrection will bring you the promised new covenant.”

Today, as we take communion together, let’s join those disciples at that table. And when the bread and cup are passed to us, let’s receive that new covenant, let’s receive the new heart and the new power that He died to give us.

Questions

1. Some of us have grown up in Christianity, so it may be difficult to identify a beginning point in our walk with God. But when would you say your heart changed? When did you realize that you really loved Him and wanted to obey Him?
2. Have you received the baptism with the Holy Spirit? Was there a moment when you knew He had come to live inside you? Tell us how you knew.

Sermon: “Grace, Love and Repentance” Dr. Steve Schell, January 8, 2017

Does grace mean I can keep doing bad things and still go to heaven? Does God's love mean I don't have to stop? Does repentance mean if I say "I'm sorry" God will let me continue sinning? If asked those questions most of us would quickly answer, "No! Of course not," that is, until God told us to stop doing something we really wanted to do. In that case our answer might be less definite. We might start looking for Bible verses that could be interpreted to mean "maybe" or listening for "prophetic words" that say, "In your case it's okay; you're the exception to the rule." What used to be unquestionably right or wrong in our mind gradually becomes debatable. We might even start quoting conflicting opinions on the matter to show how uncertain a definite answer is on that subject.

What's happening is that we've entered into the process of making something that was once forbidden into something that is now possible. Before we can convince others that God will allow us to do what we really want to do we must first convince ourselves. In order to do that we have to start questioning the standards of right and wrong that we have been taught, looking for loopholes. And this temptation to reinterpret God's moral standards is a danger which, sooner or later, will confront us all because sooner or later each of us will really want to do something God forbids, which is why it is so important for us to understand these three terms: grace, love and repentance. As you might expect, each of these words has been given a wide variety of definitions so that one person might say the word and mean one thing while another hears them say it and understands something entirely different. Since there's only one proper way of deciding the true meaning of each word, and that's listening to what the Bible says with an unbiased ear, let's ask the Bible to tell us what each word means and then ask ourselves how God wants those words to guide us when we really want to do something that He forbids.

Definitions

Grace (charis): The word "grace" essentially refers to a gift someone gives you because he or she likes/loves you. The gift is unearned and undeserved. It's given only because of the kindness and love found in the giver's heart. Jesus is the perfect expression of God's grace. Through Him God lovingly offers salvation to people who don't deserve it. Listen:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life (Jn 3:16).

But now apart from the Law (of Moses) the righteousness of God has been manifested...through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus (Ro 3:21-24).

Love (agape): There are several words in Greek which we translate into English as "love," but this special word points to the kind of love that gives selflessly. Again, it exists because of the generous heart of the giver, not because of any deserving quality found in the receiver.

"If you love (agape) those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them... But love your enemies, and do good... expecting nothing in return; and... you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil [men]" (Lk 6:32, 35).

But God demonstrates His own love (agape) toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Ro 5:8).

Repentance (metanoia): This word literally means to change one's mind; to move from one opinion or attitude to another. It means we think differently after we repent. We stop going

in one direction and turn around and go in another. The word has nothing to do with emotional feelings of sorrow. It looks to the future, not the past, and charts a new course, with new attitudes and goals. In the Bible the word primarily means to change our attitude toward God: to move from distrust and rebellion to trust and submission.

And Jesus answered and said to them, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (metanoia)" (Lk 5:31-32).

Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all [people] everywhere should repent (metanoia) because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness (Ac 17:30-31).

If these words are removed from their biblical contexts, they can be turned into philosophical concepts that give a person permission to deliberately rebel against God's moral standards and assume that they will still go to heaven. In other words, these words can be used to justify lawlessness. But if we keep their true biblical definitions in mind, they will empower us to become like Jesus. They will confront and encourage us. They will demand change and assure us that God is patient with us while we learn how to change. Here's a great example:

The Romans 7 man (Ro 7:15-8:1)

I think Paul in this passage is describing a frustrated believer. He's probably describing the struggle that went on inside himself before he learned the truths he teaches in Romans 8. Notice: The Romans 7 man genuinely wants to obey but doesn't know how to control the impulses that come from his flesh. He is helplessly enslaved by the forces within his own body. To that person, who has put his or her faith in Christ, Paul says, "Therefore there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Ro 8:1).

In other words, God knows you would obey if you could, so until you can there is no condemnation. Grace covers you. But once you learn how to walk free from the control of your flesh and then choose not to obey, you move into a different category. Now you're rebelling, not struggling; you're defiant, not helpless. And grace was never intended to cover that.

Heart-searcher

You'll notice it all comes down to the intent of the heart; it's not so much what a person does but why they do it. Two people might be doing the same sin but for two very different reasons: One is ignorant, confused or overwhelmed, while the other has silenced their conscience and charged ahead. Their motives are different, and God deals with them differently. One He patiently covers, while from the other He lifts His presence and confronts. Without understanding this, we can administer the wrong medicine to the wrong disease. The grace of God is the proper antidote for a person who is trying to earn their salvation by works, but the fear of God and a call for repentance is the proper antidote for a

person who is lawless. A lawless person tends to hear the grace of God as permission to keep sinning. There are indeed still people in America who are trying to do enough good deeds to go to heaven, but it seems most of America has become lawless. One way or another people have come to the conclusion that God doesn't care what we do. But the greatest problem we face is that many in the church have concluded the same.

A false notion of sin

Many times I've heard people confidently claim that all sin is the same in God's eyes. One sin, they say, is just as bad as another, and by that same logic some argue that no sin is worse than another. If that were true, it would mean that using bad language is equally as wrong in God's eyes as murder or adultery. But that is simply not true. All sins are not equally evil. Some are far more cruel, selfish or addictive than others. And the proof that God views them differently can be seen in the variety of punishments assigned to different sins in the Old Testament. For committing one type of sin a person might have to sacrifice a turtledove or pay back a portion of money; for another, a person could be taken out and stoned. Clearly God views some sins as worse than others, and we see that same attitude toward sin carried into the New Testament. Both Jesus and Paul warn us that there are sins we must stop doing in order to go to heaven. They are not telling us to try to earn our salvation; they are telling us that any person who has truly surrendered to God will not continue to do certain things. Listen:

“Every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit... So then, you will know them (false prophets) by their fruits. Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven... Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness'" (Mt 7:17-23).

Biblical discipline

Biblical discipline has nothing to do with punishment. Punishment is intended to hurt someone because they hurt us, but discipline is meant to rescue, not punish. Sometimes we can cling to things that are destroying us or others, and we refuse to let go until circumstances drive us to do so. In that case God will discipline us directly and/or by means of His people. Here's an example of Paul disciplining a man who called himself a Christian but insisted on committing adultery: 1 Corinthians 5:3-13; 6:9-10.

Did it work? Did the man repent? It appears that he did. Listen: 2 Corinthians 7:8-12.

Notice: The man and the church became sorrowful that they had tolerated the adultery, and that godly sorrow produced true repentance which expressed itself by changed behavior. Paul didn't allow the man to claim to be under grace and continue in that adulterous relationship. Repentance meant he would stop and do everything in his power to repair the damage he had done. Grace didn't mean God didn't care what he did; grace

meant God would forgive him when he repented and not until he repented. Otherwise, he remained an adulterer, which was why Paul was so alarmed at the Corinthian church for being indifferent toward the man's sin. Paul is saying they weren't being kind to him; they were passively watching him perish. Paul is saying there are things we cannot do and still go to heaven.

The price of repentance

Real repentance is complete surrender to God. And the person who truly surrenders to God desires to become like Him and will pay whatever price is necessary to achieve that goal. Self-denial becomes a familiar part of everyday life. Confession and fresh surrender happen quickly when we discover we've sinned, and to that heart, to that "child of God," God gives endless grace.

Our response

So how does a child of God respond when he or she hears the words grace, love and repentance? We don't hear God say He doesn't care if we keep on sinning. We hear Him inviting us to come to Him regardless of how dark our past; we hear Him committing Himself to us regardless of how weak our flesh; we hear Him assuring us of the power of the cross, regardless of how far we've fallen, until we become pure, kind, generous, honest and selfless... just like Jesus. We hear Him committing Himself to walk beside us while we change, not giving us permission to walk away.

Questions

- 1) How would you explain God's grace to a small child? How would you explain repentance?
- 2) Has God ever had to discipline you, press you to let go of something that was damaging you or others? If it's something you are willing to share, tell us what He did and how it changed you.
- 3) How often do you find yourself repenting on an average day? When was the last time you had to repent?