**Week 4 Re-Formed**

**Justice Reformed Sola Gratia**

**June 13, 2017**

It’s so good to be back with you. I hope that your Small group experience has provided you with some new friends, some new insights, and a brighter light of Christ on your daily path of life. I have the pleasure and privilege of speaking and teaching today on grace. One of the best books I have ever read was “What’s So Amazing About Grace” by Phillip Yancey.

Yancey is a thoroughly engaging author and this book does not disappoint. He tells the following story about grace. He speaks over and over again about nuances of grace and descriptions of grace. As he gets to the end of the book he tells a story of a concert in Wembley Stadium which was a tribute to the 70th Birthday of Nelson Mandela. And actually you can google this performance and find it. Some of the biggest names in music from 1988 were performing and then there was Jessye Norman. Jessye Norman is a world renowned operatic soprano. While she wasn’t of the name of many of the more “big name” musical acts, her voice brought the house down.

With the crowd speaking and there being a general din over Wembley Stadium, Jessye filled her lungs and sang in a deep and resonant voice “Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound…” As she continued singing the crowd quieted to silence and she rang out in the evening air the marvelous words of Amazing Grace. The crowd was stunned and silent…the grace she sang was amazing indeed. Yancey concluded with the thought, “Jessie Norman later confessed she had no idea what power descended on Wembley Stadium that night. I think I know. The world thirsts for grace. When grace descends, the world falls silent before it.”

Amen?

Americans love to talk about grace and there’s almost a reduction of the entire corpus of the Scriptures to one of grace. It’s highlighted when people not familiar with Jesus and how grace works into our lives say things like, “well you’re a Christian and you have to be nice.” Or you have to forgive me because you’re a Christian. Or the ever popular, I’m not sweating sin my life or my disobedience, because God forgives me. This grace is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls cheap grace. He writes, “cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline. Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, and grace without Jesus Christ."

Cheap grace, so many love cheap grace, and so few want to deal with the Cost of Discipleship, which is the title of the book from which this quote comes.

So where are you in your life? If you’re like so many people you think of God as a friendly guy who just kind of nods and smiles and forgives our sins like they are no big deal. But as we think about being Re-formed, we need a little reorientation regarding sin and its consequence. In Romans 6:23 Paul writes, “The wages of sin is death.” In Ephesians 2:1-10 Paul again writes that we are spiritually blind and dead in sin. I know! I know! All this talk of sin is depressing, but yet it’s necessary. Sin is an affront to the people against whom we sin, but sin is also and more importantly an affront to God himself. Without grace we die in sin and are eternally condemned. Eternal death is the consequence of sin. Sin condemns.

So hard, this is so hard in our culture. We think of the world as progressing. We think of humans getting better. We think of our own selves perhaps getting better and better, but like a single spot on a shirt ruins the piece of clothing, sin brings eternal death, relational brokenness and alienation from God. Sin is so much more than our culture lets on.

Not to be labor this point, but to a degree our lives are so insulated from some of the effects of sin. We live in a prosperous time, in a prosperous place, where so many can buy what they want to alleviate how they feel, look, come across to others etc., etc., etc. But still when evil things happen we are shocked. It’s then that we are reminded that we live in a world that is devolving, among a broken people, in a lost culture. But yet there is grace.

But the soul still aches. Dr. Luther felt assailed by the evil one. He knew the wages of sin was death. The church had told him all along that for a person to be right with God, the person was to cooperate with God. God started the process of salvation, but man had to complete it. That gap of completion is where the church became somewhat of a club. Where the grace of God isn’t complete there is room for human guilt to be abused. Jesus would love you more if you were a better person. If you were a better Christian you wouldn’t talk that way. If you really loved Jesus you would give more money, read your Bible more and on and on. Many of us have heard this stuff over and over. But it damages the soul, as it did for Dr. Luther. There’s no amount of comfort outside of Jesus work on the cross that can assuage the guilty conscience.

So we turn back to Scripture and unlock grace. Not a cheap grace, but a rich, deep and costly grace…Let’s look at Ephesians 2:4-10, “4But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9not by works, so that no one can boast. 10For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. So let’s break this down.

God’s grace is rooted in his love. John writes, “For God so loved the world that he gave…” God loves the world. He loves you and me. It’s his nature. He can’t not love you.

God’s grace is rooted in his mercy. He relents from punishing us for our sins and holding us accountable for our own sin. Again God’s nature is one of showing mercy, it’s what he does, it’s who he is…he can’t not be merciful.

God’s grace is rooted in Jesus death and resurrection. Grace is earned by Jesus Christ on the cross. We are saved by grace. Jesus answered the question of sin on the cross. By his suffering and death he paid the debt to God, in essence the wages of sin are paid by Jesus. Sin is paid for by Jesus. Grace is the blessing of the death of Jesus.

Our sins are not on us they are on Jesus. Our sins don’t kill us, they killed Jesus. Our sins are not our own anymore, rather they are taken upon Jesus and reckoned.

So the grace of God for us in Christ saves and it is complete. Our hiding and shame is covered. The luggage of guilt is left at the cross. No more leveraging, no more wondering…we are saved by grace delivered to us in Jesus Christ…it is finished, it is complete.

Luther’s understanding of this both comforted him and emboldened him. Grace has that effect on a soul…perhaps even on your soul.

I love the last verse of the passage “for we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works in advance for us to do.” For me in my life, if you want me to help you, please don’t guilt me into it or leverage something. You know Tim, we did this for you, now you can help us. I really struggle with that, and to a degree it hurts my soul. But love me, ask me, encourage me and I’ll carry your cheese wherever you want it. Whatever you need. I’d rather die than quit.

This is also the effect of grace on the Christian heart. We are God’s workmanship. We are handmade creations of God. And our lives are recreated in his grace. Grace alone! So our lives are lives of good works. But again we want to be careful to a degree about this.

I know people who look at the grace of God as a cheap item that has no value, or at least their lives reflect that. They live like pagans, they ignore weekly worship, they neglect the Word of God, they treat others poorly and perhaps even live in open sin. But real grace cost God the life of his son Jesus. Real grace is purchased with the blood of Christ. The sheer magnitude of the love and mercy of God illicit a response of service and a life of love.

You are God’s workmanship…you really are.

I know for some I left more questions than answers…and that’s ok…I hope that in your time in your small group you could talk through your questions as well as the questions of the study guide…We are saved by grace and grace alone or as Dr. Luther would say, Sola Gratia

God bless you…