



LOVE 103

WE ARE RESTORED

So, in review: God is love, displayed in the fact that he created us, created a beautiful world for us to live in, then gave us FREEWILL to obey him as we enjoyed his creation. All we had to do to obey him was to respect the created order – **God → Man → Creation** – but we chose otherwise. Now, the world is out of joint and we don't seem to know how to act. But, because God is love, he is fair and JUST, so he gave us the LAW, not so he could condemn us, but so he could show us his ideal. Because we could never meet his ideal, we have sinned against God and others; we deserve punishment, but because God is love, he is also MERCIFUL and has provided a way for us to escape the punishment we deserve.

But it is even more. It is more than escaping punishment, we have actually been given a way to restore ourselves to a right relationship with God and return to respecting the created order.



We all know people who seem happy even though they have never asked for God's grace or received his forgiveness. You've probably even been there yourself. Why do you think that is? If you feel differently now, why?



What ways have you learned or heard of over the years to try and earn salvation?

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

~ Ephesians 2:8-9

Some people think that they don't really need God's favor because they're a pretty good person, but you must ask yourself the question, "Compared to whom?" We look at those around us, those in charge of us, those who raised us, and we don't look too bad. This is often referred to as pride.

But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." ~ James 4:6

God has a different standard; he compares us not to one another, but to what he originally intended.



Do you recognize how God has given you grace in the past? How so?

GRACE

So we deserve punishment, and there is nothing we can do about it. This is exactly why a right relationship with God must begin with his free gift, GRACE.

Grace is literally defined as "unmerited favor." A right relationship is offered by God, free of charge, in spite of the fact that we do not deserve it. And it is fortunate that we do not have to earn God's love, because there is absolutely nothing we can do to earn it or deserve it.

His grace is an extended hand, unconditional love. But what does that favor provide that we cannot live without?

FORGIVENESS

On the flipside of pride, you find fear. Do you ever fear that, because you don't deserve his love, God could not love you? How would you know if he didn't? Would he

smite you? Would he punish you unfairly? Would he let you run wild then cut you down at the very end? Or worst of all, might he just ignore you? Well, the answer is that God doesn't work that way. The natural byproduct of God's grace is something that none of us can live without: FORGIVENESS. It comes to us free, but it was not without cost. A price was paid...

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace. ~ Ephesians 1:7

And because this price has already been paid on our behalf, we are to live courageously, not in fear.

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. ~ 2 Timothy 1:7

If all God wanted was for us to straighten up and do all the right things, couldn't he just make us do that? Because he does not, he must have something more in mind for us. God does not force us to enter into a love relationship with him (it wouldn't be love if he did).

So in light of Jesus' sacrifice, we can receive grace, which brings with it the forgiveness of sins. But can it really be that easy? Paul says we cannot earn it, but is nothing required? Are we merely asked to assent to a proposition?

Not exactly. God asks of us two things: love and loyalty. He asks us to RESPOND to his proposal, offered as a free gift and received through faith in Christ.

He [Jesus] came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. ~ John 1:11-12

Say the welcoming word to God—"Jesus is my Master"—embracing, body and soul, God's work of doing in us what he did in raising Jesus from the dead. That's it. You're not "doing" anything: you're simply calling out to God, trusting him to do it for you. That's salvation. With your whole being you embrace God setting things right, and then you say

it, right out loud: "God has set everything right between him and me!" ~ Romans 10:9-10 (the Message)

But how do we respond to this offer? Does it matter? How do we "receive" Christ? How do we begin to enjoy the benefits of "salvation," that is, having everything set right between God and us?



If you did not grow up in the Christian Church (Restoration Movement churches), what did you grow up thinking was necessary for salvation? Did you even talk about it? Were "born agains" seen as crazies?

Even those that agree that mankind requires saving differ on this quite a bit. Many would tell you that all you need to receive God's grace is to repeat some words. Others might suggest that a ritual of some sort will do the trick. Both are right and both are wrong. Are those words or actions, heartfelt as they may be, really what it means to respond to God's proposal? If we are called to love and loyalty, what does that entail? Would a marriage be successful if all we did was repeat some words or sign a contract or hold a ceremony? Love and loyalty amount to more than a series of positions or activities on a checklist. So what is expected? How do we respond? Fortunately, this is not as mysterious as some would make it out to be.

At one point, Peter, a friend and follower of Jesus, one of his apostles (Jesus' inner circle of twelve) in fact, had to answer that very question:

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." ~ Acts 2:38-39

RESPOND

Peter was explaining what Christ had done for mankind, and those listening cried out, “What must we do?” It appears that Peter suggested we take two steps toward God and he will close the rest of the gap. We must REPENT and be BAPTIZED, and God will forgive our sins (the consequence of his grace gift) and give a second gift – the Holy Spirit. God reaches out to us through his son, we merely walk into his arms. It is a love/love transaction.

*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. **We love because he first loved us.** (emphasis added)
~ 1 John 4:18-19*

REPENT

Essentially, just by joining this class you have taken the first step toward repentance. To repent means literally to change your mind, or more specifically, out of contrition (sorrow or remorse for sin) change your direction – choosing to change direction and follow not your own way but God’s way, the way demonstrated by his son, Jesus Christ. This is what **The Way** is all about.



How does this differ from your previous understanding of repentance?



Does repentance seem like a one-time deal or something you must do again and again? What is your experience?

So the fact that you’re here means you take repentance seriously. We will spend the entirety of this curriculum describing what a repentant life looks like, but what of this other part?

BAPTISM

Just like the fact that no words you say are a magic

incantation to save you, neither are the waters of baptism a magical elixir to cleanse you. Baptism is an act rich in symbolism. Paul describes that symbolism in a nutshell:

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. ~ Romans 6:4

When we submit to the very strange act of baptism, we are buried with Jesus as we are submerged in the water, and then we are raised with him as we are lifted back out. We then emerge, renewed. This ushers in our new life in two ways: *immediately* as we are forgiven our sins and receive the Holy Spirit (per Peter) and gain citizenship in God’s kingdom (see John 3:5), and also *eventually* as we receive resurrected, glorified, physical bodies (like the resurrected Jesus – see John 20:26-28) in the new heavens and the new earth when Jesus finally returns to set all things right.

Does this mean that anyone who was baptized in some other way was somehow less baptized? Who knows? But it would be hard to equate the sprinkling of water on your head with death, burial, and resurrection. Likewise, if we are to be raised to new life like Christ was raised, then it stands to reason that we would have to submit our lives as Christ did, which would be very difficult for an infant.




If you were once baptized in another way but were later baptized by immersion, what made you decide to do that?



If you are immersed, how does that make you feel about those who are not? If you were immersed but for a different purpose (e.g., membership), do you feel any less “saved” or any less “baptized?”

But whether we have met all the symbolic requirements of baptism, Peter does respond to the question, “What must we do?” with “Repent and be baptized,” and John and Paul tell us we must believe, and confess Christ. So responding in love appears to include these things: belief, confession, repentance, and baptism – none of which constitutes an attempt to earn grace but rather an appropriate response to it, an acceptance of the gift, offered freely.

Have you responded in this way? Are you unsure? If you have, document that below. Reflect on the nature of that decision, not just specifics like date and age and such, but the reasons for the decision, events that precipitated it, if any, the repercussions of the decision, and your motivations for it. If you have not, reflect on the reasons you have not or stumbling blocks you are encountering.

 What are the dangers of being too particular about modes and specifics when we consider our response to God’s love?

When we respond to God’s love, he restores us. The gulf between us is bridged. And he sends a gift, a helper, the Holy Spirit, so that he might be present with us at all times, even as he is absent from us in body but present with God, running things and interceding for us. This is a profound mystery, but good news to those of us who love him.

So we love because God first loved us. He loves. We love. He loves us. We love him. But also because he loves us, we love others, and because he loves us and we love him we want to know him more. We will discuss getting to know God better in the GROW segments, but next we look into loving others.

SO FAR:

G _____ is a F _____ G _____

God’s G _____ leads to F _____

These G _____ require our R _____

B _____ , C _____ ,

R _____ , and B _____

B _____ with Christ, R _____ to new life.