

Biblical Theology of Love and Grace

GOD IS LOVE

Introduction

- What do the terms “love” and “grace” mean?
- The term “love” can mean different things to different people
- Cambridge dictionary: “to like another adult very much and be romantically and sexually attracted to them, or to have strong feelings of liking a friend or person in your family”
- Grace: “the quality of being pleasantly polite, or a willingness to be fair and honest”
- The God of the Bible is not an impersonal force, an abstract idea, or a mere feeling
- The living God is the God of love and grace
- These terms are embodied in stories as well as in direct affirmations
- In particular, it is Jesus and his story that provide the lens to help us see what love and grace look like in the Bible

Divine Love

- What does divine love look like?
- Moses found out on Sinai when God appeared and declared his name and nature. In the ANE, to declare one's name is to state who one really was (Ex 34:6):
- ⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, **abounding in love** and faithfulness,
- Israel had just experienced God's love when she was freed from bondage from Egypt

Divine Love

- Thus, God's love is manifested when he elects, makes promises, and rescues people from danger (Deut 7:7-9):
- ⁷ The LORD did not set his affection on you and **choose** you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. ⁸ But it was because the LORD **loved** you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. ⁹ Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.

Our Response to God's Love

- God's love for his people called for a response on Israel's part
- God commanded Israel, “⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut 6:5)
- In the context of Deuteronomy, it was a call to loyalty to God and a call away from loyalty to idols. Yet Israel failed God over and over again
- The depth of God's love can be seen in the prophet Hosea. He is to love a faithless woman and in so doing mirror the love God has for his faithless people (Hos 3:1):
- The LORD said to me, “Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.”

Jesus Manifests Love in Action

- Jesus embodies the divine love in his coming and his cross:
- ¹⁶ “For God so **loved** the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16)
- ⁸ “but God demonstrates his own **love** for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8)
- ⁹ “This is how God showed his **love** among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him” (1 Jn 4:9)

Our Response to Jesus' Love

- The NT also prescribes appropriate responses to Jesus' love (Jn 13:1-17):
- “Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love” (13:1)
- ¹² “When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. ¹³ “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them” (13:12-17)
- In other words, our love for Jesus should manifest itself in humble service

Our Response to Jesus' Love

- Love is the new commandment (Jn 13:34):
- ³⁴ “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.
- In what sense is this commandment new?
- It is new because it is informed by the story of Jesus
- Our love for Christ should carry over into the Christian household (Eph 5:25):
- ²⁵ “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her”
- This love is self-sacrificial

Our Response to Jesus' Love

- Paul talks about **love** in action terms or verbs (1 Cor 13:4-8):
- ⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ Love never fails...
- This love is not manufactured by us; it is a fruit of the Holy Spirit: ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us (1 Jn 4:19)

Divine Grace

- What does grace look like in the Bible?
- It is the undeserved favour bestowed by God on an inferior party
- Israel experienced God's grace when he delivered them from bondage (Ex 34:6):
- ⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and **gracious God**, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,
- God's grace is put on display in the story of Jonah and Nineveh (Jon 4:2):
- Jonah laments: ² "I knew that you are a **gracious** and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

Divine Grace

- In the NT, the nature of God's underserving grace is best summarized by Paul (Eph 2:8-9):
- ⁸ "For it is by **grace** you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast."
- For Christians who received God's grace, we, too, must express grace in our generosity and speech
- ⁹ "For you know the **grace** of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9)
- ⁶ "Let your conversation be always full of **grace**, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Col 4:6)

Conclusion

- God's love and grace often occur together in the Bible, for they are both undeserved. They both express God's goodness
- Yet love and grace must be distinguished (2 Cor 13:14):
- ¹⁴ "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."
- The love of God is the motivation—the fountain point of God's divine nature and initiative
- God's love is expressed primarily in his undeserved favor toward us, when Jesus died on the cross for our sins
- Both divine attributes demand appropriate responses on our part

Application Pointers

- How can we respond to God's love in loyalty, faithfulness, service, and deed?
- How can we extend grace to others in giving, word, and deed?