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The Glory of God's Grace

Luke 15:11-32

What is meant by the "Glory of God's Grace"?

The word for "glory" - which by now most of you are familiar with- comes from the Hebrew word, קָבֵד (*kabed*), which speaks of the substance or weightiness of something. Its opposite is the word "light" (as in weight). And so, we read of God's glory in Isaiah:

Isaiah 64:4, "For from of old they have not heard nor perceived by ear, neither has the eye seen a God besides Thee, who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him."

The second word is “grace”. What is grace? Grace is much more than a principle of unmerited forgiveness (which is the essence of *Sola Gratia*). In fact, it is used in a variety of ways in the Bible to describe these things:

1. The teaching by which we are saved, Titus 2:12b-14.
2. The Teacher, Titus 2:11-12a.
3. The basis of our salvation- not by works, but the work of Christ credited to us, Ephesians 2:8-9.
4. A worldview, Romans 5:1-2.
5. A leverage point, Romans 5:1-2.
6. Outright ability, 1 Corinthians 15:10.

In light of this, it should be no surprise that a prominent theme in the New Testament is grace. Paul wrote of God:

Ephesians 1:5-6a, “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace...”

So, when we talk about “The Glory of God’s Grace” we are talking about the weightiness/effectiveness of the salvific working of God by which He forgives and transforms sinners into children of the living God. Accordingly, I hope you see that this is a big topic in Scripture; which we will spend eternity growing and maturing in, which no doubt is why Peter exhorted us, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...” (2 Peter 3:18a).

Toward that end, today I want to look with you at another facet of God’s grace, His Paternity. Let me begin with some prefatory words.

The “fatherhood” of God is an Old Testament teaching. Moses exhorted the people of God this way:

Deuteronomy 32:6, “Do you thus repay the Lord, O foolish and unwise people? Is not He your Father who has bought you?...”

Malachi asked his listeners this:

Malachi 2:10a, “Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us?...”

David said this, speaking of God:

Psalms 68:5, “A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, is God in His holy habitation.” (cf. also Psalms 103:13; Proverbs 3:11-12)

And so, in the Old Testament God was revealed to be our “Father.” And yet, when we look at

the focus of the Old Testament Jew, it is very clear that they never really acted upon this revelation.¹ It is NOT until we get the New Testament and the ministry of Christ that we see the true importance of this facet of God's character (its emphasized in Scripture). In His earthly ministry, Christ's main name for God is "The Father."

We have seventeen recorded prayers of Christ in the New Testament. As the pattern for how God would have us relate to Him, it is significant that of Christ's seventeen prayers, sixteen have our Lord approaching God as "Father."² That no doubt is why when the disciples asked Christ to teach them to pray, the first thing Christ said was, "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who art in heaven...'" (Matthew 6:9a)!

Why the emphasis on God as our Father? Because THE fundamental relationship we have with God in redemption is that of a child to their father!³

John 1:12, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right [he is speaking legally here] to become children of God."

Whether you realize it or not, when a person enters into the Kingdom of God, they enter into it as the legal heir of God! Truly, we are His sons and daughters! And that no doubt is why the first words of a believer when they come to a saving relationship with God is "Abba! Father!"

Galatians 4:6, "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"

And so, if you are saved, THE word that should first come to your mind when you think of God is NOT any of these:

- Master.
- Lord.
- Holy One.
- Awesome.
- Glorious.
- Great.
- Loving.
- Friend.
- Companion.

BUT "Daddy! Father!"

But herein is the difficulty. For if you have or were blessed with an earthly father who was gracious and kind, showing unconditional love and acceptance, then most likely you will have no problem relating to God as "Father." Yet that is NOT the case for many today!

Let's face it, there is no such thing as a perfect parent! In counseling I tell people that much of our adult life is spent overcoming the bad parenting of our parents. That is NOT to say that they were bad parents. But they were sinful ones and so failed on many fronts!

Because of this, it is incumbent upon each of us to discard our *experiential understanding* of what a father is and allow Scripture to teach us what it means to have God as our Father.

Toward that end, I want to look with you at a passage which speaks of the "Fatherhood" of God; the parable of the Lost Sons. Here Christ pictures God in terms of a father of two rebellious children.

The Parable, Luke 15:11-24.

In this passage, relationally Christ gives us the two types of children (Christians) that can be found in the Kingdom of God.

1. One who would relate to God as a Santa Clause figure (Luke 15:11-24). Here the relationship is distant as the boy views his father simply as someone who exists to bless him.
2. One who would relate to God as a task master (Luke 15:25-32). Here the relationship is distant as the boy's passion is to secure the favor of his father via his labor and diligence.

The Rebellion, vv. 11-12.

Luke 15:11-12, "And He said, 'A certain man had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' And he divided his wealth between them.'"

We have here a story of a child seeking to be free from parental constraint. He is restless and wants to "see the world." And so, in line with Deuteronomy 21:17, this "younger son" requests his share of his father's estate.⁴

The Squandering, vv. 13-16.

Luke 15:13, "And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country [IOW, he went as far away from his father that he dared], and there he squandered his estate with loose living."

The emphasis here is on the foolishness of the son. He kept nothing in reserve!

Now as we just read, about this time a "severe famine" hit the land such that "he began to be in need." And so, he hired himself out to a local farmer who:

Luke 15:15b, "...sent him into his fields to feed swine."

This would be understood by Christ's listeners as one of the greatest insults for a Jew (recall that pigs are unclean animals, Leviticus 11:7)! As bad as this was, it got even worse- for...

Luke 15:16a, "And he was longing to fill his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating...": the young man is so desperate, he NOT ONLY took a job tending pigs, BUT he longed to eat their food!!⁵

The Repentance, vv. 17-21.

Luke 15:17a, "But when he came to his senses..."

This is akin to what we would call a conversion experience. In his humiliation, the boy woke up and realized that his dad wasn't so bad after-all and that his home wasn't the issue. He was the issue! And so, he makes up his mind to return to his father, confess his sin, and seek to be welcomed back as a servant!

Luke 15:20, "And he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him."

You know the rest of the story! The father does NOT shame him BUT welcomes him back with open arms! Yet not everything is as it should be! For the reception of this younger, "spoiled" son incites the rage of his older brother.

The Rebellion, vv. 25-30.

Luke 15:25-27, "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things might be. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound'"

What a shock to discover:

1. His younger, worthless brother had returned and
2. Rather than cast him out, his father welcomed him back!

And so, we read thus:

Luke 15:28-29a, "But he became angry, and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began entreating him. But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many

years I have been serving you...”

The nuance in the Greek in v. 28 regarding the older boys “service” is incredibly negative. We could translate it as, “For so many years I have been slaving you!” And herein we see the problem of the older brother. The spirit with which he did his work was NOT that of a son, BUT a slave! Frederick Danker wrote of this:

When he says I have served... the mask drops, revealing the frigidity of the soul. The father thought he had a son! But to the older son the father’s house spelled slavery. (Danker, 1988, p. 277)

Such is the parable of the Lost Boys — the Prodigal Son and the Prodigal Brother! Now, there is no question Christ gave this to teach us about the nature of His Kingdom, specifically as it relates to God’s response to the relational errors primarily found amongst God’s people when it comes to their relationship with God. And so, I want to use this parable to highlight some of the characteristics revealed in Scripture about God as our Father. Notice the first one found the paternity of our God.

[A Sacrificing Father, vv. 11-12; Matthew 27:45; Romans 8:31-32.](#)

Luke 15:11-12, “And He said, “A certain man had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.’ And he divided his wealth between them.”

What is amazing about this request is that its fulfillment could only come as the estate was broken up and part of it liquidated.⁶ In other words, this request would have meant the destruction of the father’s house.⁷ Yet, the father was willing to bear that burden!

From this we derive an incredible facet about this Being we call God. He is gracious unto unimaginable sacrifice! In the parable, the father was willing to liquidate his property. And so, it is with our heavenly Father. For our benefit, He was willing to liquidate the relationship He had with His Son by placing Him on a cross!

Matthew 27:45, “Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour.”

In Scripture, darkness is a picture of judgment! At this moment and for the next three hours, Christ suffered under the wrath of Almighty God that we might be saved! Paul stated the implication of this in Romans.

Romans 8:31-32, “What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?”

All of this speaks of the sacrificing grace of our Heavenly Father! This perhaps is the only time the expression can be taken literally: God the Father considered “no sacrifice to be too great” in the redemption of you and me!

A Providing Father, v. 17; Matthew 6:28-30.

Speaking of the prodigal, Luke wrote:

Luke 11:17, “But when he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!’”

The God we serve is a generous Being! Think of it... if the father in this parable would take so much care for his hired servants, how much more his own child? And so it is with our Father. Christ told His disciples this:

Matthew 6:28-30, “And why are you anxious about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *do so for you*, O men of little faith?”

This is the providing grace of our Heavenly Father! Because we are sons, He will not “withhold any good thing”! (Psalms 84:11) This is why, He also is a pursuing Father.

A Pursuing Father, v. 20a; Matthew 18:12-14.

Speaking of the prodigal we read:

Luke 11:20a, “And he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him...”

That his father “saw him” in this distant land tells us that the father was NOT sitting back, waiting for his son to come home. RATHER, he was out seeking him! And so it is with our Heavenly Father! When you and I sin, we tend to run from God. Now when we do this, what is God doing? Planning on how He is going to get us?! NO! Our Father is pursuing us!

Matthew 18:12-14, “What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? And if it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. Thus it is not *the* will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.”

This is the pursuing grace of our Heavenly Father- a grace that will never let us go!

A Compassionate Father, v. 20b; Psalms 103:13-14.

Again, speaking of the prodigal we read this:

Luke 11:20b, "And he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion *for him*, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him."

What an incredible picture of intimate, loving care! In Christ's day it was undignified for an older person to run. Well, forget cultural conventions, the father had his boy back! And so, he "...ran and embraced him, and kissed him"!!

Christian, did you know that this the heart of God for you? When you and I sin, we feel ashamed and wonder if ever God will forgive us. Yet at any time in your rebellion, if you turn around, you will discover that your Heavenly Father is right behind you, beside you, and even before you! Referencing our sin, David wrote of God:

Psalms 103:13-14, "Just as a father has compassion on *his* children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are *but* dust."

This is the compassionate grace of our Heavenly Father who will not let us go even when we are in rebellion!

A Tender/Kind Father, vv. 21-22a; Romans 8:1.

Luke 11:21-22a, "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him...'"

There is a facet to this confession that is easily missed. To see it, we have to compare the planned confession (vv. 18-19) with his actual confession (vv. 21-22a).

Luke 11:18-19, "I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; 19 make me as one of your hired men.'"

Now compare that with this:

Luke 11:21-22a, "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said..."

What is missing? V. 19 which contains the son's plan to relate to his father as a hired man!

Christian, because our basic inclination is to relate to God as a *Santa Clause figure* or a *Task Master* — both of which believe that divine blessing is based on what we do — we always think that when we sin, a massive frown comes upon the face of God which will only be removed by you and I doing something to make it up to Him! You must see that this is categorically wrong and amounts to a massive misunderstanding of the character of our Heavenly Father! God is NOT waiting to rub your nose in your sin before He forgives. In fact, BEFORE we repent or confess a sin, God has already forgiven us!

Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

This is the tender/kind grace of our Heavenly Father which will never allow us to be anything else in our relationship with Him but His son or daughter!

[A Celebrating Father, vv. 22b-23; Luke 15:7b.](#)

We read of the father upon the repentance of the prodigal:

Luke 11:22b-23, “But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him [this was a status symbol declaring the honor and importance that ought to be ascribed to the individual], and put a ring on his hand [a signet ring reflecting authority] and sandals on his feet [in Christ’s day, slaves did not wear sandals. Truly, this boy was NO slave; RATHER he was and would forever be his child!]; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and be merry [in this day fattened calves were reserved for visiting dignitaries; that is how important the boy was to the father!!].”

Now why the show of honor?

Luke 11:24, “...this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.”

When the son rebelled against his father, the emotions involved would have been akin to those surrounding the death of a child! But now that the son returned, it is as if the father had received him back from the dead and so he celebrates! Christian, that is how God views your presence in His Kingdom. Think of what occurred in heaven when you were saved...

=Luke 15:7b, 10: Christ said “...there will be *more* joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance... In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

All of this speaks of the Irrepressible Joy that God has for His children even though they are feeble, foolish, and wrong!

An Assuring Father, vv. 28-31.

Speaking of the prodigal brother we read:

Luke 11:28-29a, “But he became angry, and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began entreating him. But he answered and said to his father, ‘Look! For so many years I have been serving you...”

Here the son is upset at what seemed like unfair treatment! Recall, He is NOT here relating to his father as a son BUT a slave.

If your gut-response to this boy’s plight is that of endorsement and agreement (*I too would be upset!*), that is only because we are so used to relating to God as a servant and not a son. Family members secure in their relationship are not threatened by the generosity of a father. Only slaves are, for their standing in a household was never secure!

That having been said, what is the response of this father? Does he rebuke or disown him? No!

Luke 11:31, “And he said to him, ‘My child, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours...”

This is amazing! The father here does NOT chide or humble the son who was acting like a slave. Rather, He reminds him of his place in His household, “All that is mine is yours!” *You are not a slave, but my son!!!*

This is so typical of us as Christians! God has given to us “everything pertaining to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). Yet we quickly forget this and so can be found living as slaves (as if God’s continued love, care, and provision were predicated upon our actions). At these times we must be reminded of a simple, yet glorious statement, “All that is mine is yours!”

Romans 8:16, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”

So, behold the assuring grace of our Heavenly Father which guarantees that all that is promised to us in Christ most certainly will be enjoyed by us to the utmost. We can never lose it!

Christian, we have before us a description of the true nature and disposition of our Heavenly Father. In this regard, we must labor to cast aside every false notion that we might have of what it means to have a father, and prayerfully and painstakingly labor to allow this truth to transform our understanding of God and so how we relate to Him on a moment by moment basis!

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End Note(s)

¹ “Faithful Jews had known of God as their Father in several ways. They saw Him as Father of Israel, the nation He chose to be His special people. Isaiah declared, “For Thou art our Father, ... Thou, O Lord, art our Father” (Isaiah 63:16; cf. Exodus 4:22; Jeremiah 31:9). They also saw Him in an even more intimate and personal way as their spiritual Father and Savior (Psalms 89:26; 103:13). ¶ But over the centuries, because of their disobedience to the Lord and their repeated flirting with the pagan gods of the peoples around them, most Jews had lost the sense of God’s intimate fatherhood. They saw God as Father only in a remote, distant, faded figure who had once guided their ancestors.” (MacArthur, 1985, pp. 375-376)

² He used the title Father in all of His prayers except the one on the cross when He cried “My God, My God” (Matthew 27:46).

³ Recall that “adoption” is not an Old Testament word. Jews did not adopt children. And so when we come to the New Testament and there discover this word in relation to what we have become in Christ (Romans 8:15, 23; Galatians 4:5), we are forced to consider the secular use of this term which reveals quite a significant definition. In Rome, every child was adopted! When the time came for a Roman boy to become a man, the coming-of-age ceremony served as that time when the Roman father claimed the boy as his own! Did you get that? The fact that a boy was the blood relation to a man legally meant nothing in Rome (and more often than not, such was the case relationally as well). It wasn’t until he was adopted that he became the legal heir of the father- at which time the father took a significant interest in the child.

That is why this is such a significant word in the NT- for that was the culturally understood significance of adoption. In our culture, there is a persistent stigma which views adopted children as second-class off-spring (which any who has adopted a child knows that this is not true). Nevertheless, we approach the Bible with this excess baggage and so miss the glorious point of “adoption” in Scripture. Because we are “adopted in Christ” we are not just full heirs but co-heirs with Christ! As Paul said in Romans 8:17, “...if [we are] children, [then we are] heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...”

⁴ In this case, the share probably was 2/9 of the property. Had the father died, the share would have been 1/3 in accordance with Deuteronomy 21. Yet in the case where the father had yet to have died, the share obviously would be less, approximately 2/9 of the family wealth. See I. Howard Marshall’s treatment in the *New International Greek Testament Commentary* on Luke, p. 607.

⁵ I. Howard Marshall quotes an ancient source which said, “When the Israelites are reduced to carob pods, then they repent” (Marshall, 1978, p. 609). From this we get a sense of the desperate situation of the prodigal.

⁶ (Hendrikson, 1978, p. 753)

⁷ Rabbinic law maintained that the land of just such a liquidation would become the property of the purchaser, but the previous owner could live on it till his death. (Morris, 2008, p. 263)