

## Charis

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1 Corinthians 1:1-9

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By now most of us have probably heard about the alleged moral failure of Tiger Woods. A young lady has claimed that she and Tiger have had an affair. This news has not only affected his income, but his marriage as well. Personally, I'm about as tired of hearing about this as I am about Michael Jackson's death. But this past Sunday, Brit Hume (a Fox News Broadcaster) said something that I found to be quite amazing. The panel was discussing the future of Tiger Woods, mostly surrounding his golfing ability in spite of this personal struggle. But on National Television, Brit speaks to the emotional struggle that Tiger must be facing, and makes a reference to the healing power found only in Christianity.

What Brit said has obviously created quite a stir. As a matter of fact on Monday he had to defend himself again. But instead of backing down and apologizing for his remarks, he stayed firm in his beliefs. Brit Hume believes that true healing for Tiger's failure can only come through Jesus.

What exactly is this Newscaster implying? Is he trying to say that no amount of counseling, no amount of therapy, no amount of time, or no amount of money can ever take away the pain and grief associated with his mistake? Why is it that only in Christ can a person, dealing with this amount of remorse, find freedom? It's because this newscaster understands the depth of grace; the kind of grace that can only be found through Jesus.

One of the common misconceptions of grace is that God simply lets us off the hook; that we receive grace from God because He has turned His head and does not hold us accountable for our actions. But this concept is totally flawed. If God was just going to close His eyes to our sin, then it would not be necessary to offer any sacrifice for the forgiveness of that sin. The Old Testament laws of sacrifice would not have been necessary. Jesus would not need to die on the cross. A person needs only to read a portion of the Bible to realize that we humans must have done something wrong. It appears that God does hold us accountable for our sins simply because He demands atonement (or payment) for that sin. So for someone to come

along and say that God is just letting us off the hook, they apparently don't fully understand grace.

Where there is no sin, there is no need for grace. But since God does offer grace, consequently there must be sin. In other words, grace happens because of sin. This is what the newscaster was alluding to. God does not expect you to deserve grace. God does not expect you to earn grace. God does not let you off the hook. However, God does offer grace through Christ Jesus (the punishment for that sin is paid by the death of Jesus). But grace cannot come without incredible cost; not just at a cost to God, but at a cost to us as well.

I want you to pay close attention to what I'm about to say next. This is the central point to fully understanding grace. Grace will not come without first admitting guilt. Let me say that again; Grace will not come without first admitting guilt. Since grace happens because of sin, grace cannot happen until we admit sin. Grace cannot be given until we fully realize that we NEED grace; until we fully realize that we don't DESERVE grace; until we fully realize that we have not EARNED grace. Grace is the product of a broken heart. Grace is what happens when we admit our guilt.

Picture it as a courtroom. God has set a standard of which behavior is acceptable, and which behavior is not. So one day you do something or say something that the Bible says you shouldn't. You've just broken one of God's rules. Now, you could stand there in the courtroom defending yourself for an eternity. You could argue that what you did was not wrong (That's the popular trend in our world today. People argue that there is no standard of right and wrong). You could blame others for your problem. But by doing all these things, you will not receive grace, because not once have you been willing to admit that what you did was wrong. How can grace be given when guilt is denied? Now picture the individual who can't even lift his eyes to face the judge. He knows what he has done is wrong. He has stopped making excuses and admits his guilt. What happens next is where grace comes in. The judge announces the verdict: Guilty as charged. But the sentence never comes. Oh, this man is guilty of the crime, but he does not suffer the punishment for that crime because Jesus has willingly taken the sentence (the

punishment) for him. This man is guilty but not condemned because of what Jesus did on the cross.

This is the grace that is available for anyone who trusts in the blood of Jesus to pay the penalty for their sin. We Christians stand before the Judge guilty. But we are not condemned because we have accepted Jesus as our Savior.

I tell you all of this, this biblical understanding of grace, so that you will better understand why Paul says what he does to the Corinthian Christians. *“May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.”*<sup>1</sup>(1 Corinthians 1:3). The word grace that Paul uses here is the Greek word *Charis* (*khar´-ece*) - favor or kindness shown without regard to the worth or merit of the one who receives it and in spite of what that person deserves.<sup>2</sup> Paul doesn't start out this letter with the statement, “Hey, it's was really good to hear from you guys”. What Paul is saying is that he hopes these Corinthian Christians take the time to become broken before the Lord and admit that they have not been behaving the way God intended. Paul is urging them to stop playing church and admit their guilt. Then, and only then will they find God's grace. One gets the impression that all of the divisive issues this church was facing happened because these Christians had forgotten grace; a grace that reminds them of who they used to be, and a grace that produces humility in the heart of all believers.

Sometimes I think we do the same. I believe most of the tensions that arise in a church come because the people have forgotten who they are. Without an understanding of grace, pride and arrogance can run rampant among a body of believers. There is no humility; no brokenness that comes from confessed guilt. I think a lot of tension and divisions arise because Christians forget why they need grace to begin with. Grace is necessary because there has been sin. And we all have sinned whether we want to admit it or not. So, what about us? What about you? Grace is a word we throw around so casually; so carelessly. Do you long for grace? Do you think we need a healthy dose of grace? If so, grace can only come by first admitting that we are guilty as charged; that we have sinned.

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<sup>1</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>2</sup>Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., Harrison, R. K., & Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). *Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary*. Rev. ed. of: *Nelson's illustrated Bible dictionary*.; Includes index. Nashville: T. Nelson.