

Prevenient Grace

What a great day to be in the house of the Lord! This morning, I want to continue a journey a started last week into the Articles of Faith of the Church of the Nazarene. Last week we looked at “VI. Atonement.” Over the next several weeks we will look at articles such as

I. The Triune God

II. Jesus Christ

III. The Holy Spirit

IV. The Holy Scriptures

V. Sin, Original and Personal

VIII. Repentance

IX. Entire Sanctification

This morning though, we are going to move to our seventh Article of Faith, which is:

VII. Prevenient Grace

Here is the description of this 7th tenet of our faith:

“We believe that the grace of God through Jesus Christ is freely bestowed upon all people, enabling all who will to turn from sin to righteousness, believe on Jesus Christ for pardon and cleansing from sin, and follow good works pleasing and acceptable in His sight. We also believe that the human race’s creation in Godlikeness included the ability to choose between right and wrong, and that thus human beings were made morally responsible; that through the fall of Adam they became depraved so that they cannot now turn and prepare themselves by their own natural strength and works to faith and calling upon God”

But we also believe that the grace of God through Jesus Christ is freely bestowed upon all people, enabling all who will to turn from sin to righteousness, believe on Jesus Christ for pardon and cleansing from sin, and follow good works pleasing and acceptable in His sight.

We believe that all persons, though in the possession of the experience of regeneration and entire sanctification, “*may fall from grace and apostatize and, unless they repent of their sins, be hopelessly and eternally lost.*” (Repentance)

I think that the first thing that we should get out of the way is, what is ‘*prevenient.*’

Most of us church people understand grace, but prevenient is a word that most of us have never used or even seen.

Prevenient is a word that means ‘goes before.’

So prevenient grace is the grace that goes before salvation.

When we are talking about prevenient grace, we are speaking about the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds of non-believers.

This grace works on their hearts and minds so that they may come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Without the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and minds, no one can come to Salvation.

I mentioned this in bible study this week...this is why the pressure is off when you evangelize!

The first part of our explanation of prevenient grace states that part of what God did when He made us in His image was to give us free will.

You have free will, I have free will, we all do!

Mankind was made with the ability to choose between right and wrong and good and evil.

God told Adam and Eve that they were free to eat of every tree of the Garden except from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

He told them that if they ate from that tree, they would surely die.

Since they were given free will, they chose to disobey God and therefore brought sin into the world.

Free will is one of the most important pieces to our theology as Wesleyans because it is where we differ from Calvinists, but I will come back to that a bit later.

As we have seen in our Bible study, in our services, etc... mankind consistently chooses evil.

No matter how many miracles God showed the Israelites and no matter how much He blessed them, they consistently grumbled and complained.

And we are no different from them. **Genesis 6:5** says:

“The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.”

Because of the fall of Adam and Eve, mankind will always choose their own way, rather than God’s way.

This is what the Apostle Paul speaks about when he talks the ‘carnal man.’

In **Romans 7:15-20**, Paul tells us:

“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 18 For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not

want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.”

The flesh inevitably does the things that the spirit does not want it to do because it is permeated throughout with sin.

You might recall that on the night that Jesus was to be arrested, he asked Peter and John to watch and pray for so that they would not fall into temptation.

However, they repeatedly fell asleep.

Jesus said *“the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.”*

We cannot, by our own will, choose to do right because original sin, which I have spoken on in the past a little, but I will speak more in depth at a later date.

Original sin is already at work within our flesh.

It is only through prevenient grace that God sends His Spirit out so that we can come to Him and turn from our sinful ways.

Now we come to the last part of our statement, and this is where we separate ourselves from Calvinist brother and sisters (Baptist...) and their theology.

We believe that everyone can fall away from God if they choose to do so.

In other words, you can ask Jesus into your heart and later reject Him. Peter puts it like this (**2 Peter 2:20-21**):

“20 If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. 21 It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them.”

The Calvinist doctrine tells us that once you have accepted Jesus, you will never give up that salvation.

So, you could be saved at 7 years old and then when you were 20, go out and rob banks and kill people and you are still saved.

The Calvinist would say that they were never truly saved, but I think that smacks of rationalization.

They don't know the person's heart and can't really say that they weren't saved before.

The writer of Hebrews puts it this way (**Hebrews 6:4-6**):

“4 It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age 6 and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.”

Since this is the point where many of your friends might disagree with you, I want to make sure that you are able to explain our stance on what is often referred to as the doctrine of “eternal security.” This is the Calvinist stance

I can tell you that it was the very first question that I was asked during my first ministerial candidate interview, since I hadn't come from a Nazarene background.

In his book (and video) called *A Case for Christ*, author Lee Strobel interviews a former evangelist that used to travel with Billy Graham.

He was nearly as popular as Billy and they were fast friends, even rooming together quite often.

However, Charles Templeton battled doubt and finally proclaimed himself an agnostic, which means that ‘there may be a God, but I don't

want anything to do with Him.' Templeton denied the very same God that he had previously loved and preached about.

I do not believe that he was destined for heaven, no matter what he thought about God at one time in his life.

For us, it is a matter of free will.

If you ask a Calvinist if they believe in free will, they will say that of course they do.

However, what they really believe is that free will ends when you make a decision, and that once that decision is made, you no longer have any free will.

In other words, once you have accepted Christ, you are completely bound to Him, no matter what happens for the rest of your life.

This is the way that I would like to explain it.

The Bible says that nothing can separate you from the love of God, which is absolutely true. But that doesn't mean that you cannot separate yourself from Him.

(pick someone) You love ***** very much, right?

You have vowed to love her until death do you part, right?

There is nothing that she could do that would cause you to stop loving her, is there?

But what if she decides to file for divorce?

You're still going to love her, aren't you?

But your relationship with her, whether you like it or not, would be null and void.

The same is true with our relationship with God.

He will never let go of you, but you can decide to let go of Him.

He will still love you, but your relationship with Him will come to an end because your free will continues until the time that you leave this earth, one way or another.

No outside force can negate your relationship with God. Only you can.

There is a great example of this free will life in the OT.

In the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy, God set up Cities of Refuge.

In these cities, someone that killed another person by accident and it had been judged that it was an accident, could live out their life in a City of Refuge.

If, however, they chose to leave that City of Refuge, a person wanting to avenge the death could kill that person without incurring any guilt.

You see, they were only protected for as long as they chose to be.

The Apostle Paul tells the church of Colossi (**Colossians 1:21-23**):

“21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— 23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.”

In other words, it’s your choice.

Keep to the faith that you professed and were taught and be kept safe in His arms...or discard your faith in Christ at your peril.

Free will.

This doesn’t mean that if you sin you will lose your salvation, like you lost your keys or your glasses.

It means that it is your choice to stay with God or to decide that you don't want Him in your life.

It was the same for the Israelites. It was their choice to follow Yahweh or turn to Baal, or Asherah, or Dagon, or any of the other gods that the other peoples of their lands worshipped.

But there were harsh consequences awaiting them if they decided to leave Him for another.

If Calvinists are right and my eternal security is assured, no matter what happens after I accepted Christ, then all I have done is attempted to live a holy life and be obedient to God's Word when I could have piddled my life away seeking the desires of my own heart.

If Wesleyans are right and it is possible to walk away from God, then there may be people that are in jeopardy of spending eternity without God because they were told there wasn't anything that they could do to change their relationship with Him.

Keep your faith and your relationship with Christ what it should be.

Vital. Intimate. Loving.

You will never have to worry about that relationship and you will never go through any of the hardships of this life alone.

(Invitation)

(Prayer)