Obstacles of Grace

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Introduction ~ (Mime a wall)

Have you ever built a wall?

Often, the walls we create are INVISIBLE. But they are still walls. Whenever we build walls that block God’s love, then we are not able to fully experience God’s blessings and we do not live up to our potential.

I am MC900383920[1]Mark Chow, and this talk is about **Obstacles to Grace.**

Obstacles to Grace~ or SIN~ are those ways that we BLOCK God’s love to us.

Friends, this weekend, you have been hearing a lot about Grace, and, in particular, Living the Life of Grace. As beautiful and desirable as it is, Living the Life of Grace can be challenging, because we live in a real world, affected by the power and consequences of sin. As Paul writes to the Romans: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3.23) We all sin! EVERYbody sins!

But what exactly IS sin? MC900383920[1]Let me give you several definitions of sin.

1. MC900383920[1]SIN is Anything that Separates us From God: When God placed the Man and Woman in the Garden, they were given freedom to do as they chose, with one exception. They were not to eat the fruit of a particular tree. As surely as they disobeyed and ate the forbidden fruit, SIN was born into humanity. Their sin was not just eating the fruit, it had to do with their Disobedience to God… Shifting the BLAME… Passing the BUCK. You see, They wanted to be Like God. From THAT point, they were separated from God. They could no longer enjoy the loving relationship they had with God. + SIN is Anything that separates us from God.

MC900383920[1]SIN is... anything that keeps us from enjoying the loving relationship God offers us in Christ.

1. MC900383920[1]SIN is putting OURSELVES Before God. The very FIRST commandment is: “I AM The Lord your God, You shall have No Other Gods before Me.” (Exodus 20.3) In other words, God wants to be the Top Priority, Top Dog, Numero Uno, Number One in your life. If Anything or Anyone becomes more important than God, then it has become your god. and That is SIN. Now a word of caution: anything we do that comes before God is sin. Even church activities (and yes, Emmaus) CAN become your god. So be careful not to allow Anything to become more important than God. +SIN is putting OURSELVES Before God. In Short, Sin is self-centeredness rather than God centeredness.

Have you ever noticed the Problem with SIN? Stop and Look at the WORD.

MC900383920[1]sIn

The problem with SIN is that “I” am in the Center. and whenever “I” am in the Center, that is sIn. Whenever I make MYSELF the center of the universe and do not acknowledge God, that is SIN!

MC900383920[1]Sin is self-centeredness rather than God centeredness.

1. MC900383920[1]SIN is Missing the Mark. The Greek Word for SIN (Hamartia) literally means “to miss the Mark, to miss the Target.” For three summers, I served as a camp counselor. One of the favorite camp activities was Archery. All we had to do was: line up our arrows, aim and fire! Just hit the target! Simple? Right? Well, most of us had difficulty hitting the target, let alone hitting a bulls eye. In fact, we usually found more arrows lodged in the grass than in the targets. Most of us simply Missed the Target! When we sin, it’s like an arrow that goes astray.

+ MC900383920[1]SIN is ANYTHING that causes us to Miss the TarGet of God’s will for our Lives.

Now that we have a better understanding of SIN (i.e., Obstacles to Grace) ...let us consider

The Two Primary Types of Obstacles to Grace:

those that hinder our relationship with God

and those that hinder our relationship with other people.

1. MC900383920[1]Obstacles to our relationship with God.

Idolatry

Blasphemy

Resisting God

Ignoring God

Disobedience

Unbelief

Ignorance

Pride

Unforgiveness

1. MC900383920[1]Idolatry – worshiping and serving false gods; “no other gods” (Deut 5:7-8).
2. MC900383920[1]Blasphemy – speaking irreverently or profanely of God; using God’s name to curse anyone or anything (Deut 5:11).
3. MC900383920[1]Resisting God – quenching/stifling/resisting the Spirit of God; “Do not quench/stifle the Spirit of God.” (1 Thess 5:19).
4. MC900383920[1]Ignoring God – not making time for God in our lives, not keeping the sabbath for ourselves, our families, and our employees (Deut 5:12-15).
5. MC900383920[1]Disobedience – refusing to obey the will of God; in the Garden, the Man and Woman clearly and openly disobeyed God (Gen 3:14-19).
6. MC900383920[1]Unbelief – refusing to believe and obey the truth. The people of Israel did not believe that God would actually deliver them and help them. Therefore, they never saw the Promised Land. (Deut 9.23-24)
7. MC900383920[1]Ignorance – unknowingly alienating ourselves from God and others. “Ignorance,” as the saying goes, “is bliss;” but not when it comes to matters of the faith. It can be a matter of life and death. (Luke 20.17-19)
8. MC900383920[1]Pride – focusing attention on ourselves rather than giving honor and glory to God; ultimately leads to destruction (Proverbs 16.18; Matt 6:5-8).
9. MC900383920[1]Unforgiveness toward God or others – if we do not forgive, we cannot be forgiven (Matt 6:9-15).
10. Second Type of Obstacles to Grace are MC900383920[1]Obstacles to our relationship with others

Idolatry

Blasphemy

Resisting

Murder Addiction/Abuse Lying Gossip Stealing Coveting Laziness Dishonor

Ignoring

Disobedience

Unbelief

Ignorance

Pride

Unforgiveness

1. MC900383920[1]Murder
2. Murder is more than the physical act of taking one’s life. It can take on the form of abuse and can wound others psychologically, emotionally, and even spiritually.
3. The Ten Commandments say clearly, “You shall not murder” (Deut 5:17).
4. Jesus said that anger is as bad as murder. (Matt. 5.21-22)
5. MC900383920[1]Addiction and abuse - can take many forms.
6. Any physical abuse, substance abuse, neglect or abusive relationship diminishes life and becomes an obstacle to grace.
7. Any form of sexual abuse – adultery, promiscuity, pornography, and all forms of sexual exploitation of children, youth, and adults – creates an obstacle to grace (Deut 5:18; Matt 5:27-30).
8. MC900383920[1]Lying – saying things that we know are untrue (Deut. 5:20; Eph.4.25)
9. MC900383920[1]Gossip or slander – saying things with the intent of hurting others. (Exo. 23.1; Proverbs 25.18; Ephesians 4.31)
10. MC900383920[1]Stealing – taking things away from those who own or deserve them (Deut 5:19)
11. MC900383920[1]Coveting – refusing to be satisfied with what we have; wanting what someone else has. (Deut 5:21). This can be manifested in an unhealthy desire for position, power, property or relationship that others have.
12. MC900383920[1]Laziness – refusing to be a good steward of the life, gifts, graces, property, and power God has entrusted to you. (Prov. 12.27)
13. MC900383920[1]Dishonor
14. When we dishonor our parents, spouses, children, and other primary relationships in our family, we create an obstacle to grace in our prayer life, and our dishonor has consequences for generations to come (Deut 5:16).
15. When we dishonor our spiritual leaders, pastors, and others in positions of authority established by God, we create obstacles to grace.
16. MC900383920[1]Obstacles to our Relationship with Ourselves
17. MC900383920[1]Lack of love – refusing to love ourselves in a healthy manner so that we can love our neighbor (Mark 12:29-31). Love God, Love Others. Love self
18. MC900383920[1]Bitterness -harboring ill feelings; is a matter of the heart; closely related to Hatred and Anger. eventually leads to Murder; is like a dangerous virus of the spirit that can quickly spread to others (Heb 12:14-15; I John 3.15).
19. MC900383920[1]Spiritual blindness -is having sight but no vision; is a complete unawareness of the things of God; not seeing God’s plans and purposes unfold. (Luke 6:37-42).

+Through Jesus Christ we can overcome the obstacles to grace.

1. MC900383920[1]The vertical line in the cross reminds us that Jesus Christ restores our relationship with God. In Christ we:
2. MC900383920[1]Remember our reconciliation – Jesus’ ministry began with the call to repentance, the offer of forgiveness, and the promise of eternal life (Mark 1:14-15).
3. MC900383920[1]Remember our baptism. Through faith, we are all Children of God.(Galatians 3.23-28)
4. MC900383920[1]Recover our identity as children of God – we center our faith in the cross of Jesus Christ because it stands as the most powerful witness to the central message of the Bible; God created us, God loves us, and God gave His only Son that we might have eternal life (John 3:16).
5. MC900383920[1]Receive the power to walk in the Spirit. (Acts 1.8; Galatians 5.16)
6. The Christian life is possible if we accept the life of Jesus as our model and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to lead us in our relationship with God.
7. A life in grace involves the daily practices of piety, study, and action.
8. MC900383920[1]Resist evil and renounce the forces of the evil one (James 4:7-8).
9. MC900383920[1]The horizontal line in the cross reminds us that Jesus Christ restores our relationship with ourselves and with others. In Christ we:
10. MC900383920[1]Come to know and love our true selves; therefore, we are reconciled to ourselves.
11. MC900383920[1]Become reconciled to our neighbors; therefore, we can love one another, live in peace, and seek justice together.
12. MC900383920[1]Seek spiritual guidance from others in the body of Christ. A Spiritual friend is someone who knows the pathways in a relationship with God and the obstacles to grace; he or she walks along with us on our spiritual journey and helps us discern the will of God.
13. MC900383920[1]Participate in all the means of grace, including a small group where there is commitment to accountable discipleship.
14. MC900383920[1]Pray for leaders and those in authority over us (I Tim. 2.1-4)
15. Love our enemies (Luke 6.27-30), feed the hungry, clothe the naked, etc. (Matt 25.34-40).

Conclusion

The Christian life is a daily decision to take up our cross and follow Jesus Christ (Matt. 16.24-26). MC900383920[1]It is a life lived in the shape of the cross, with appropriate attention given to our relationship with God and our relationship with others. There is always more grace in God than there is sin in us (Romans 5.20-21). For nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom.8.31,38-39). In Christ, we can overcome every obstacle to grace. The question is: Will you overcome these obstacles or will you ... build walls?

MC900383920[1]De Colores!