



GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion

75 – Grace and Charity

Announcements:

7/5 @7:30 -

Prayer

7/6 @6:30 -

Grace Group

7/9 @8:30 -

Sunday School

ICE BREAKER: Do you like the phrase “let’s agree to disagree”? Why or why not?

READ: Matthew 23:3-4

I do not think that it would be much of an exaggeration to call the Olivet Discourse the most difficult passage in all of Scripture. In almost every commentary that I own there are pages and pages of information before you even dive into trying to read and understand the passage itself. This has led to a whole host of thoughts on what Jesus is saying. In particular there are debates about things like: what Jesus is saying, and about when Jesus is saying these things. It basically feels like if you read two people’s thoughts on this passage you will be confronted with two different opinions. Then, what do you do when two people you know and love (for example, RC Sproul and CH Spurgeon) disagree with each other and you disagree with both of them? Really that is the question that I would like to answer today. We will have the next few weeks to dive into the differences, the details and what this is really saying, but before we do all that, let’s talk about how to disagree.

In truth, all of the virtues and things God calls us to will help us in these situations (like humility, kindness, and love) there are two in particular that I would like to spend our time looking at. One we hear all the time (since it is in our name!) but the other we don’t often talk about, and I think it helps a ton: Grace and Charity. Let’s look at grace first. Many of us think of grace in terms of God’s grace, and that is good, since it is the most perfect and holy grace, but if you were to pull out your dictionary and read a bit further down in the definitions you would find the following: “courteous goodwill”. This is the type of grace that I think helps us understand how to disagree with someone. We do so with courteousness. In a world that seems to love to stand up and yell at each other, courtesy is something that it seems has fallen out of favor, but I think it is important. Just because someone disagrees with us on how exactly to read the Olivet Discourse does not mean we should be rude or mean to them. And we should have goodwill. Our first response to these disagreements should be to assume the best until proven otherwise. The person I am disagreeing with, most likely, is not trying to completely undermine and abuse God’s words, rather we disagree on how *exactly* to read these things. So to treat them with courteous goodwill means I lovingly assume the best, then we can move on from there.

DISCUSS: How can we operate in “courteous goodwill” in disagreements? Is there a limit to this?

The second is the virtue of charity. Since this is not one we talk about often, the dictionary will be helpful again. This time we can look at two places. The first is in the oldest origins of the word. It turns out the root word that it stems from means “Christian love of one’s fellows”. Like grace, charity starts with our love for the other person, it is how we can be courteous, it is how we can offer goodwill, and it is how we give charity. The definition of charity here then will be “kindness and tolerance in judging others”. And boy, is there a lot to unpack here. We start with being kind, which is pretty self explanatory, but then we show tolerance. It gets a little difficult there because this is a word that has been abused and then fallen into disfavor. For our purposes here it just means that I will not write someone off just because we disagree with them on something. Not that I approve, not that I condone, and not that I agree, but that I will live with them. This is evidenced in the final portion, it is kindness and tolerance *in judging people*. Note that tolerance does not mean that I do not judge, rather tolerance is something that I have *IN* judging them. We can still disagree, and I can judge your thoughts and ideas, weigh them and agree or, to the point here, disagree, yet we do so in kindness, tolerance, with “christian love of one’s fellows”. YOU can be a preterist, Futurist, somewhere in between-ist in all things related to the Olivet Discourse, and we can still love and co-exist. It is good to have debates, it is right for all of us to seek to understand the Word of God to the fullest, but we must operate in Grace and Charity as we disagree.

DISCUSS: what does it look like practically to judge someone in kindness and tolerance? Is this even possible?