

What's in a Name?
Grace Communion International

Sermon

Hobart, October 24th, 2010

Devonport, October 30th, 2010

Launceston, October 31st, 2010

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Scripture Readings:

Romans 5:17-6:4

¹⁷ For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. ¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

²⁰ The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, ²¹ so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

6 ¹ What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.¹

¹*The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (Ro 5:17). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

INTRODUCTION:

I. HOW MANY PEOPLE IN THE BIBLE HAD THEIR NAMES CHANGED?

A. HOW MANY CAN YOU THINK OF?

- a) Abram = Abraham
- b) Sarai = Sarah
- c) Jacob = Israel
- d) Saul = Paul

B. WHAT WERE THE CIRCUMSTANCES?

1. **Each of them was following after their own way apart from God**
 - a) The meaning of an individual's name meant a lot in those times and cultures
 - b) The name reflected their character, their reputation and approach to life
 - c) So God chose new names that reflected some aspect of their new lives in relationship with God
2. **This is why the church has chosen to change to a new name**
 - a) The old name reflected who we are before
 - b) The new name reflects who God is transforming us to be

S.P.S:

C. AS JOHN HALFORD WROTE RECENTLY;

When our church decided to change its name from Worldwide Church of God (WCG) to Grace Communion International (GCI), some were puzzled. The new name didn't exactly roll off the tongue. We found ourselves stumbling over it, often getting the words in the wrong order. But more to

the point—what did it *mean*? The name WCG may have had baggage, but it at least described what we were. But GCI?

A. LET'S LOOK AT WHAT OUR NEW NAME MEANS

1. and what it means for you and me, and our congregation
2. We will also look at a passage in 2 Corinthians that is helpful

B. PRAYER

BODY:

II. "GRACE"

A. OUR JOURNEY

1. Long and winding road
 - a) uphill and down, been misled and tripped and fallen over many things
 - b) many good times, and many lessons learned

B. BY GOD'S LOVE AND GRACE WE HAVE BEEN KEPT TOGETHER

1. and led to know him more closely through Jesus, and the Holy Spirit

C. GOD NEVER GAVE UP ON US

1. even when we boldly and loudly spoke even against his Grace, and insisted on law and Old Testament observances as being conditions of entering his Kingdom
 - a) and thereby opposed the message of grace
 - (1) the message of Jesus' gospel
 - (2) and so much of the writings of Paul in particular

D. "GRACE" IS PROBABLY THE WORD THAT WAS MOST DISCUSSED AT THE TIME OF THE CHANGES

- 1. It was the term we came to embrace and understand as a key to God's attitude towards us**
 - a) That he loved us as a Father, and freely forgave us through in and through his Son
 - b) That our salvation is by grace, not by works or anything we deserve, and certainly not by being in the "right", "one true church" called the "church of God"

E. GRACE IS TRANSLATED FROM GK: CHARIS

1. Harper's Bible Dictionary;

grace, the English translation of a Greek word meaning concretely 'that which brings delight, joy, happiness, or good fortune.' Grace in classical Greek applied to art, persons, speech, or athletics, as well as to the good fortune, kindness, and power bestowed by the gods upon divine men, moving them to miraculous deeds.

The Septuagint [Greek version of the OT] employs this word to translate the Hebrew root meaning 'favor.' Thus, Noah found favor before the Lord (Gen. 6:8); Jacob sought favor in the eyes of Esau (Gen. 32:5).

Similarly, those showing favor do gracious deeds. For example, showing kindness to the poor (Prov. 14:31) or generosity to all living (Ecclus. 7:33) was an act of grace.

Likewise, the Psalms speak confidently of God's graciousness in hearing prayers, healing (6:2; 41:4), rescuing the oppressed (9:13), giving the Law (119:29), forgiving sin, rescuing the weak, and the like.

Even where the vocabulary of grace is absent, God's actions are suffused with grace. God loved Israel in spite of its puny numbers (Deut. 7:6-9) and rescued the community from the howling wilderness, encircling it with care (Deut. 32:10). God kept covenant with Israel even when the covenant was violated by the people (Ezek. 16:8) and brought the captives home from Babylon (Isa. 49:14-18). Promises abound in the OT that flow from God's graciousness.²

²Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row, P., & Society of Biblical Literature. (1996, c1985). *Harper's Bible dictionary* (electronic ed.) (357). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

F. GRACE IS AT THE HEART OF WHO GOD IS, AND THEREFORE HOW HE LIVES AND INTERACTS WITH THE SON AND THE SPIRIT, AND WITH US

- 1. So when we talk about "grace" we are talking primarily about God and Jesus Christ**
 - a) God relates to us out of unconditional love and grace
 - (1) He favours us
 - (2) He has saved us, and made us one with him purely out of grace and divine kindness and generosity
 - b) We are in Christ, to grow in this grace that is at the heart of the life of God and his kingdom
 - c) We are to think about ourselves before God through his eyes of grace and love
 - (1) And we are to grow in the Grace of Jesus, empowered by the Spirit to view others with the same heart of graciousness and generous love and treat them graciously
 - d) We are called to be transformed by God's grace
 - (1) This is the opposite of what the human mind presupposes grace will lead to
 - (a) rather than becoming lax and immoral we are led to a much more deep and effective obedience to God and a higher spirit led morality, as opposed to a legalistic, law, duty and fear based obedience typified by the Pharisees and far too many other religious groups down through the ages

G. PAUL TALKED ABOUT GRACE CONSTANTLY;

1. Example from Romans

Romans 5:20 NIV

²⁰ The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, ²¹ so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Dead to Sin, Alive in Christ

6 ¹ What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

2. The NLT translates grace in this passage as;

a) "God's wonderful kindness"

Romans 5:21-6:2a NLT

²¹ So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God's wonderful kindness rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sin's Power Is Broken

6 Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more kindness and forgiveness? ² Of course not!

H. JOHN HALFORD:

As a church, a ministry and as individuals, we had been and continue to be renewed, and not by our study, scholarship, or righteous behavior, but by the grace of God in spite of ourselves. We have learned that grace is far more than just a religious word; it's the kindness of God actively transforming human hearts and minds.

We had lived through, and helped facilitate, the remarkable—some say unprecedented—transformation of our church from legalism to the freedom that comes from understanding the gospel of grace. It was not an easy transition (ironically, God's grace seems to be a hard pill to swallow), and many did not make it with us. Most of us have lost friends who decided not to change.

The trauma that accompanied our denominational transformation is in the past now, and our church has settled down.

The abandoning of legalism has led to a much more relaxed atmosphere all around. The artificial barriers erected by an authoritarian structure and rank consciousness had disappeared—somehow they seem irrelevant in the new climate of freedom.³

³ John Halford, "What's in a Name", Christian Odyssey, Sept 2010, <http://www.gci.org/CO/1009/GCIname>

III. "COMMUNION"

A. GRACIOUS LIVING

1. Besides learning of the grace of God, we have grown in living lives of grace

a) Learning to be more merciful and forgiving towards one another, family, friends, and foes

2. We have seen how grace brings peace and harmony, real unity

a) a unity that is very different to imposed unity, unity based on law, conformity and even fear

3. Relationships within our fellowship have been transformed by grace

B. THIS LEADS TO THE SECOND WORD IN OUR NAME:

1. Communion

C. GREEK KOINONIA;

1. Fellowship, partnership, sharing together, communion

D. PAUL ALSO TALKS ABOUT COMMUNION CONSTANTLY IN HIS WRITINGS;

1. Back in Romans 5 where we read about grace, he talks about the outcome of God's great love and grace shown in Christ;

Romans 5:8-11 NLT

⁸ But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. ⁹ And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's judgment. ¹⁰ For since we were restored to friendship with God by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be delivered from eternal punishment by his life. ¹¹ So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God—all because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us in making us friends of God.

E. THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S GRACE IS TO LEAD US TO COMMUNION WITH HIM

1. To live in loving, grace based, relationship and fellowship, to be partners in life with him,
 - a) and with one another!

F. WE CAN SEE THIS PURPOSE IN THE COMMUNION OR LORD'S SUPPER SERVICE

1. In which the love and grace of God expressed in Christ's sacrifice at the cross, the blood of the New Covenant, represented by the wine
2. leads to our being made one bread, one body in Christ, sharing, partnering in his life

G. WE WILL PICK UP ON THE "COMMUNION" ASPECT OF OUR NAME NEXT TIME

1. Because there are so many helpful lessons to be learned from it

IV. "INTERNATIONAL"

A. INTERNATIONAL REPLACES "WORLDWIDE"

1. We are by God's grace, an international communion, a worldwide church and fellowship.

B. OUR RECENT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE IN ORLANDO WAS A DEMONSTRATION OF HOW INTERNATIONAL OUR FELLOWSHIP IS

1. I got to meet up with friends from all over the US and Canada, from India, New Zealand, Fiji, India, Philippines, England, South Africa, South America and the Caribbean

C. JOHN HALFORD WROTE ABOUT HOW THE CONFERENCE REFLECTED THIS THIS INTERNATIONAL ASPECT OF OUR "COMMUNION"

Getting together in Florida, we were reminded that the church—any church—is most effective when it is first and foremost a loving community. In our case, we have a most unusual opportunity, for our community, our communion with Christ in the love of the Father by the Holy Spirit, reaches across racial, cultural and national boundaries; indeed, around the world.

International We came from all over—from nearly every state in the Union, from Canada, from Mexico, the Caribbean, South America, Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa and the islands of the Pacific. It was a vivid reminder that we are very much an international church—in fact, not just in name.

At each meal, one of our international mission directors reported on the spiritual growth and gospel outreach in his region. And in President Joseph Tkach's address to the conference, he featured even more of the work God is doing through our denomination in the many outposts of the gospel God has given us around the world.

We were reminded that God has drawn us together into a church that is truly international in scope. Caribbean Director Charles Fleming summed it up after a visit to our small congregation in Haiti following the devastating earthquake earlier this year. "In many ways," he wrote, "the most striking aspect of this visit for me was the realization that our Haitian brothers and sisters draw strength from the solidarity they sense coming towards them from our worldwide church family. It is as if members around the world are a 'distant presence' in their daily lives. They repeatedly asked us to pass on their thanks and stated that they take comfort from knowing that people are praying for them."

It is a blessing that our church is large enough to have opportunities to work together and small enough that those opportunities can be personal. Friendships are continually being built across the national and cultural boundaries that more often than not create division in our world.

As we met together in Florida, we experienced again the abiding love of God as an international communion that has been transformed by his undying grace.

Grace Communion International is a good name for that.⁴

⁴ John Halford, "What's in a Name"

V. 2 CORINTHIANS 13:13[14] SUMS UP OUR NAME

A. 2 CORINTHIANS 13:11-13[14] NLT

Paul's Final Greetings

¹¹ Dear brothers and sisters, I close my letter with these last words: Rejoice. Change your ways. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.

1. We are constantly being called to be renewed, to change, to grow, to repent

- a) And the areas we are called to grow in are in the areas of grace and communion
- b) We are to encourage each other to grow in love, harmony and peace, because that is who God is, and what the new life of Christ that is being shared with us, is all about

2. When there is a lack of grace and communion, that is a sure sign that we are not walking with God.

¹² Greet each other in Christian love. [with a sacred kiss] All the Christians here send you their greetings.

3. Keeping in contact with fellow Christians in other places is important for us, and them

- a) Interesting how most NT letters end with the re-affirmation of connections between members from other areas
 - (1) and often we see greetings from members of the area receiving the letter who are with the author travelling around other areas, or supporting Paul when he was in Prison
 - (2) They were also reminded at times of the need to support other church areas when they were going through tough times

¹³ May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

* 2 Corinthians 13:12-13 Some English versions divide verse 12 into verses 12 and 13, and then verse 13 becomes verse 14.

**B. IN SOME TRANSLATIONS VERSE 12 IS SPLIT IN TWO,
AND SO V 13 BECOMES V 14.**

KJV ¹⁴The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, *be* with you all. Amen.

1. **This verse in a sense sums up our name**
2. **And notice that it also is thoroughly trinitarian**
 - a) We depend on, and exist because of the Grace and love of Jesus and the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION:

**C. EVERY DAY WE DEPEND ON THAT GRACE AND
COMMUNION**

1. **It is what all of us around the world are to be growing in together**
2. **And it is what we look forward to for eternity when Jesus returns to be the Lord, the King, the High Priest of all mankind**
 - a) To bring everyone internationally, and all of the universe into his communion of grace
 - b) To live in his love and peace, in intimate communion and fellowship for ever