

Five Grace Bridges

There is an excellent film about World War II called *A Bridge Too Far*. It is packed with dozens of big name stars in short roles. This film is based on actual events. The story is that the British and the Americans decided to take a series of bridges moving toward an actual invasion of the German homeland. This was to be an enormous breakthrough after several horrible years of war. They would proceed through Holland taking several bridges very quickly. They sent some paratroopers ahead to the further bridges and began the assault. Then these soldiers had to hold until the main force arrived.

One officer asks another, "What is the best way to take a bridge?" This officer played by Robert Redford says, "By taking both ends at the same time." So, they proceed. But the mission fails due to the pride and hubris of the British and American commanders. They took bridges that they could not hold and were forced to retreat leaving the poor Dutch people to face a renewed wrath from the Germans. The Dutch people were overjoyed at the arrival of the Allies but had to pay the price for Allied planning mistakes. Eventually the Allies did take all the bridges and invade and conquer Nazi Germany.

Christian believers have the ability to take the bridges that advance them in their understanding and practice of Grace from both ends at the same time. This is because, with God's great power He will take one end and teach and empower us to take the other end. But we must take one bridge at a time and consolidate our power before moving on to the next. Or we will have to retreat and start over again.

We must meet God's conditions before we can advance.

Bridge One

Ephesians 2:8-9 KJV

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

All of our salvation begins and ends with grace and grace alone. Any vestige of a belief that God will love you more because of your actions must be destroyed; removed all together. God has loved you with all His love since you were conceived, and even before. His love is very great and eternally strong. Your actions may grieve the Holy Spirit and He may discipline you in this life for them, but He will not weaken, He cannot weaken, in His love for you.

Your rewards and responsibilities in the afterlife will be determined by your faithfulness and works in this life. God will wipe away all your tears for not doing better. But your entrance to a life of eternal joy was fully paid for by Christ on the cross long before you knew you needed it.

All ground at the foot of the cross is level. All ground at the judgement seat of Christ is not. You get in free. You are honored for your life example and works.

You cannot change or grow from a carnal Christian to a spiritual Christian by any form of self-effort, transforming Grace by Faith will change you. Without a consolidated victory at Bridge One you cannot move ahead successfully.

Bridge Two

John 1:16

And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace.

2 Peter 3:18

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen.

We cannot be idle in our faith, we must grow in grace all of our lives. Although it may sometimes seem that we are having to learn the same lessons over and over again, in many cases we are actually given opportunities to do it better and better each time.

Bridge Three

2 Peter 1:3

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

We must remember that we obtain this very growth from God by grace and through faith. Our faith must grow to the point that we actually believe that we have already won before we experience the full joy of the victory. This is true because God has already provided the victory, all we have to do is walk it out. We may ask, "What are we winning over in this journey? As always it is the world, the flesh, and the devil. Our flesh, our fallen human nature, is our own worst enemy.

This is because as long as a part of us, that part which is actually already dead and defeated by the Holy Spirit, is a secret agent inside of us that works with the world and the devil to defeat us. How then do we ever win? How do we learn to act like the believer that we want to be? They next bridge is key.

*** Bridge Four ***

Romans 7:15 - 20

15 For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.

16 But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good.

17 So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.

19 For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.

20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

This bridge is perhaps the most difficult for Christian believers to understand. We have to learn that as far as God is concerned we are always in His favor and not give in to our own feelings of guilt and shame when we fail to be the believer that we want to be. If we forget this, we spend a LOT MORE TIME in regret than we do in victory and peace.

What is the condition in the Romans 7 escape clause? The condition is that "I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good." You must not make excuses. You must really and truly agree with all your heart and soul. Then, and only then, can you disown the sin and escape from future failures. Faith must overcome guilt and shame. We live by faith.

The Cleopatra Story.

This story is in the film *Cleopatra* starring Rex Harrison and Elizabeth Taylor. It too is based on actual events but takes certain liberties with the facts. However, this story is a great illustration. In about 46 B.C. Julius Caesar goes down to Egypt to solve the argument between Cleopatra and her brother as to who will be the ruler of Egypt.

Caesar falls in love with Cleopatra and gets her pregnant. When the baby is born Cleopatra tells one of her women to take the infant and lay it at Caesars feet. The servant objects that the Prince of Egypt should be laid at the feet of a Roman. Cleopatra makes it very clear that she is to obey her and report back on what Caesar does. She reports back that Caesar picked up the infant. Cleopatra rejoices because she knows that under Roman custom Caesar has acknowledge the child as his heir. Cleopatra wanted her son, Ptolemy Caesarion, to be both king of Egypt and of Rome. In the end this did not work out and Caesar's nephew Octavian became his heir. Later Octavian chose to rule as Caesar Augustus.

The illustrated point is this: If you agree that the Law is Good when you fail, and you really did not want to do what you did, you can disown the sin and proceed with confidence. Do not pick it up. Do not claim it. If you do it will become your inheritance the next time. If you are not absolutely sincere in this, it will not work. You cannot cheat on God.

John writes something that agrees with Paul in Romans.

I John 3:18-21

18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before him.

20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

If you fail to overcome in your Christian walk in any way, there are any number of ways to fail and to sin, your heart will condemn you. Ignore your heart and believe God. Again, you must be absolutely sincere. Then you are a lot less likely to fail the next time. You will not utter that curse against your brother, you will not lust again like you did the last time. You will not be greedy again. All because you are changing and growing to be more like Christ. Then when you do succeed your heart will not condemn you and you will have confidence toward God. As a believer saved by Grace through Faith you are in a win-win situation. Believe it. Act like you believe it.

Bridge Five

Philippians 4:4-7

4 Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.

5 Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

6 Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Peace is the seal on God's grace. This peace cannot be counterfeited. God's real peace is recognized intuitively by the believer. This peace and your rejoicing will help consolidate your victories. This peace will keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

And then remember:

Philippians 4:8

8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

This daily discipline will pave the way for future victories.

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