

DARK YET LOVELY

DEEP UNTO DEEP – DANA CANDLER

I. THE FREE ACCEPTANCE OF GOD

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. Romans 3:21-22

A. Receiving Acceptance

1. To freely receive that which has been freely given is our great invitation as believers in Jesus. God has given us the unthinkable—free entrance into fellowship with Himself, access to His own inheritance and arrayment in His own garments.
2. This entire free gift, which in summary we could call *the gift of righteousness*, has been given based on *nothing* we have done; it has been bestowed upon our utter undeservedness. To quote Misty Edward’s song, “*You owed me nothing and I deserved hell. You owed me nothing yet You’ve given me mercy.*”
3. *We cannot earn this gift* and as those who believe by faith in the work of salvation, we are not ever to seek to add to it by our own works, believing there to be some merit in our additions and in so doing, treating the Cross as insufficient.
4. Paul heralds that he is not ashamed of being unable to bring Himself into a right relationship with God. He is NOT ASHAMED of only being able to receive something freely that he was unable to produce or add to. He says in essence, “*I am not ashamed that all of my goodness/acceptance had to be provided for me as a free gift!*” In one sense Paul is saying that he is not ashamed of the fact that he could not motivate God to take an interest in him (Rom. 1:16).
5. The gospel is not something that invites us to join in a great search or quest for truth. Rather, the gospel confronts us with the truth that is from everlasting. The gospel is the statement that the only hope for man is that God has provided a way of salvation.

B. Our Confidence

Our confidence is that while we were His enemies, Christ died for us. Now that we have been reconciled to Him, how much more is our assuredness of His salvation?

“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely will a righteous man die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us...for if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” Rom. 5:6 – 10

II. EMBRACED IN WEAKNESS: DARK YET LOVELY

“I am dark yet lovely, O Daughters of Jerusalem. Do not look upon me because the sun has tanned me. My mother’s sons were angry with me, they made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept.” S.S. 1:5, 6

A. Dark yet Lovely

1. The truth of being embraced in weakness is clearly seen in Song of Solomon chapter one. The Shulamite begins her journey of bridal love with a crucial revelation. At this beginning stage, though sincere desire for Jesus burns within her, she immediately runs headlong into her weakness. She declares, *“I am dark yet lovely.”*
2. She has been overworked by the believers over her. She lost her way in the keeping of her own vineyard—her own heart. She is in a two-part spiritual crisis: She is rejected by members of the body of Christ (my mother’s sons were angry with me) and she feels shame by the discovery of her own sin (my own vineyard I have not kept).
3. The initial discovery of her sin pains her heart because her desire for God is truly sincere and real (1:6). The biggest question before her now is: how will she relate to God when she discovers her own sinfulness?
“For I know that in me (that is in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present in me, but how to perform what is good, I do not find.” Rom. 7:18
4. When we deeply love the Lord, it is a major crisis when we sin. How we respond in this crisis is a very important part about our spiritual life. It reveals the *firmness* or the *faultiness* of our spiritual foundations.
5. When she declares, “I am dark yet lovely,” she testifies of the revelation that even in her immaturity and weakness; she is beautiful to Him because of the “yes” in her heart. She possesses *weak* flesh but a *willing* spirit (Matt 26:41).
6. This “paradox of grace” is her first experience on the journey. She sees the reality of her sinful desires and shortcomings, but she also sees that she is lovely to God in her God-given passion for Jesus and in her position of righteousness in redemption. She realizes that the very presence of sincere desire to obey Jesus is the beginning of victory.
7. The experience of the bride in Song of Solomon is true of our own journey’s in God. This is a “revelation – 101” for our spiritual life. It has to be part of our very first foundations in order for us to grow spiritually and move forward on our journey. We must embrace the truth that even in our weakness, He enjoys us thoroughly.

B. Considering the Paradox of Grace

1. We have to understand both dimensions of the redeemed heart to understand the grace of God in a more complete way. There is a greater capacity for sin in our hearts than we comprehend. No one fully grasps the depth of the wickedness of the human heart. We have many unperceived areas of sin that lie undetected below the surface like hidden fault lines. On the other hand, the grace of God has helped us in ways that we do not fully perceive.
2. To know that I am *dark yet lovely* is to understand my weakness, which is comprised of my sinfulness, my immaturity and my natural limitations *together with* the revelation of my loveliness to Him.
“Bow down Your ear, O Lord, hear me; for I am poor and needy. Preserve my life, for I am holy.” Ps. 86:1,2
3. Without this seed of this combined confession; we cannot continually progress in our pursuit of Love. We are far weaker than we realize and far lovelier than we realize yet even in our great weakness God possesses great delight in us.
4. This is one of the most difficult tensions for a believer to bring together. Typically we can understand one side of this paradox or the other, but we have difficulty grasping both of them together.
5. By knowing our *darkness* we fully receive and draw upon His strength. By nature, we so often want to be able to stand in our own resolution and commitments to the Lord. Yet God is committed to revealing the weakness of our flesh to us. He wants us to have a leaning heart at the end of the journey. He desires that we would not find our confidence in our commitment to Him but in His commitment to us.
“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9)
6. By knowing our *beauty* to Him we are empowered to have confidence before God even when our sin and immaturity is revealed.
“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” 1 Cor. 3:16
7. When the enemy comes to me with accusation regarding my weakness or immaturity, I respond with the truth of Jesus’ delight in me *even in my weakness*. When He comes to deceive me into taking pride in my beauty or strength, I respond with the vivid remembrance of my weakness. Our loveliness protects us from shame and condemnation and our weakness keeps us from pride and arrogance. Together they enable us to wholeheartedly abandon ourselves in love, confident before Him.

C. Basis of our “Loveliness” to God

1. The first basis of why we are called lovely to the Lord is the very ocean of *God’s personality*. It is because of the heart of the Beholder that we are beautiful to God. His view of people flows out of the River of pleasures that abides in His own heart.
2. Our loveliness before Him also streams from the glorious *gift of righteousness* that our Beloved Jesus purchased for us in His death on the cross. By the labors of His soul and not by anything that we have done, He has wrapped us in His own beautiful garments.

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. 2 Cor. 5:21

Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ...” 2 Cor. 2:15

3. The *willing spirit* He gave each one of us at the new birth is another reason for our loveliness before God. This is the “yes” in our spirit to be fully His even before we have changed anything outwardly. The Lord looks at the heart of man and perceives our movement toward Him before it is even externally evident.

Watch and pray lest you enter into temptation. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Matt. 26:41

For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. 1 Samuel 16:7

4. His pleasure in us also flows from *our eternal destiny* as the future bride of God’s Beloved Son.

The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for His son. Matt. 22:2

Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. Rev. 19:7

D. Quotes on “Dark yet Lovely”

1. *“It does us no good, but only discourages us if we see our failures and shortage and do not behold the beauty of Christ, and apprehend and experience our sufficiency in Him. On the other hand, if we see only what we are in Him and do not discern our defects; if we do not apprehend that which must be appropriated and worked out in us; if we do not see all that must be put off, and that Christ must be put on in actual control and manifestation, we become self-satisfied and pulled up.”¹*

¹ Cora Harris MacIlvay, *Christ and His Bride*

2. *Living in this reality means to live our lives out of the healthy reality that we are truly dark, we are sinful human beings with great need...we are weak and poor and needy, we are not God, we need God....and on the flip side, that we are lovely...we have human hearts who have been moved to a deep and profound love, that somehow will not let us go. It is not of ourselves, that anyone should boast, but it is, nevertheless, within us. There is a cry to love Him with such intensity, such abandonment, with the true testimony of ardor that is inflexible, the love that is more jealous than hell, that we have been given. This is lovely. This is the most rare fragrance in the whole earth. This is the ONLY thing that the God of Gods, and Light of Lights, desires. Hearts that choose to love Him, out of the gift of Himself...out of the revelation that we have first been loved.*²
3. *“I am black because outward weaknesses appear in me, but I am comely, because my intention is pure within.”*³
4. *“Black - I confess, as to myself, I am contemptible and deformed... Comely - Yet I am glorious within, and comely through the beauty which my husband hath put upon me, by his graces conferred upon me, in justification and sanctification.”*⁴

III. RECEIVING GOD’S ENJOYMENT IN THE MIDST OF WEAKNESS

A. Receiving Love in our Darkest Place

A very real and necessary part of our journey is receiving this loveliness and His enjoyment *in our darkest place*. We have to find His enjoyment of us in the midst of our weakness. It is not enough to know His enjoyment and delight in me in my strengths or on my “good days.” For the moment that I encounter my weakness, I am dismayed and assume that I am disqualified.

B. Testing our Confidence

1. The greatest test of our confidence being rightly rooted occurs in the very dilemma of our sin and stumbling. When we are at our darkest and weakest place, we must open wide our hearts to the Lord and say, “Enjoy me.”
2. We must offer our love to the Lord in the midst of its weakness and when He receives it as real and genuine, we will begin to believe in the strength of His love more than we believe and hold confidence in the strength of our own. This transformation is our way forward into maturity of love.

² Amy Beth Keilani

³ Madame Guyon

⁴ John Wesley

IV. LIVING BY THE SPIRIT OF GRACE

A. The Law of Works

And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; otherwise grace is no longer grace... Rom. 11:6

1. The law of works means relating to God on the basis of what *we do*. When we live under this law of works, the more condemned we are in our weakness, the more proud we will be in our victory. The more our weakness wipes out our confidence, the more our success will build up our pride.
2. We cannot measure our success by our own works and ride the roller coaster of legalism—down into condemnation and up into pride.
3. This law is based in a religious spirit that undermines spiritual confidence. Our proneness is to base our relationship with the Lord on our own guarantee to God that we won't fail, that we will never do it wrong again. He wants us to stand before Him knowing that we only stand secure because of what *He did* and *who He is*. That is true grace.

B. The Law of Grace

For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. Eph. 2:8, 9

I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" Gal. 2:21

1. The law of grace means relating to God on the basis of *who we are* in His heart. There is nothing a human heart can do in the context of works, actions or holiness to *motivate* God to enjoy them. There is no righteousness you can add to yourself to promote His kindness toward you.
2. The more we find God's enjoyment of us in the midst of our weakness, the more protected we will be in the midst of our promotion. The more confident we are before God in our weakness, the more gratitude and humility we will have in our victory. The reason for this is that when we are confident in the midst of weakness, it reflects the fact that our confidence is truly anchored in God's grace and not in our own strength.
3. When we relate to God based upon who we are in His heart, fear of judgment and rejection is removed from our relationship.

There is no fear (of rejection or judgment) in love; but perfect (mature) love casts out fear, because fear involves torment (fear of being judged). He who fears (the relationship injured with fear) has not been made perfect in love. (1 Jn. 4:18)

C. Totally Accepted

1. There are only two ways of standing before God: *totally accepted* or *totally rejected*. There is no middle ground. We are not partially accepted and partially rejected, allowing for the hindrance of relationship that is characterized by uncertainty and insecurity.
2. The degree that we feel confident and freely accepted before God in the midst of a time of spiritual stumbling is directly indicative of our degree of groundedness in the truths of this Gospel of Jesus. We are fully accepted—end of story. This is our constant assurance.
3. The ultimate uniqueness of Christianity compared to every other religion such as Taoism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc. is that we begin our journey fully embraced and accepted and we then live out of that reality. Contrastingly, other religions begin with uncertainty in hopes to finally “arrive” and the process is about earning ones way into a greater degree of access or spiritual status.
4. We are freely accepted by God based on nothing we have done and no unique quality we possess. This too contrasts oppositely from other religions. There is no partiality with God. We all have equal status regardless of race, ethnicity, social status, education, gender, history, etc. We stand on equal ground, abundantly received and freely accepted *just as we are*.
5. God opens wide His heart to us in free Self-giving based upon our *position*, who we are as a new creation in Christ in the new birth, rather than upon *what we do* in our track record or our level of maturity.
6. If you are sincere before the Lord, whether you have just come off of a 40-day water fast or whether you have just responded to your spouse with an angry spirit, you have the *same* access to God.
7. Typically, we approach God in direct relation to our recent spiritual track record, putting ourselves in a kind of religious probation if we think ourselves failing or propped up in misdirected confidence if we feel we’ve done “well.”
8. We must learn to relate to God on the basis of *who we are* rather than on *what we do*. If we relate to God on the basis of what we do then when we do good we become proud and when we discover our weakness, we come under condemnation. By relating to God on the basis of *who we are*, we are freed to find gratitude in our times of victory and confidence in our times of weakness.

V. WHOLEHEARTED RESPONSE IN HOLY LIVING

A. Holy Living

1. The confidence message of “Dark yet Lovely” or being embraced in weakness is only valid *in the context of our wholeheartedness.*

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in the present age” Titus 2:11, 12
2. To say that “He likes me even in my weakness” outside of the context of *repentance* from my sin happening in my heart is a heresy. His enjoyment of us is not contingent on our maturity and sinlessness yet that does not give us license to continue in sin, receiving the grace of God in vain (2 Cor. 6:1). *He delights in us even in the context of leaving our sin.*

What shall I say then, should we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?...even so we also should walk in the newness of life. Rom. 6:1 - 4
3. Confidence without pursuit of wholeheartedness: Licentiousness. This is forgetting His jealousy, His zeal to possess us entirely and not just in part.
4. Wholeheartedness without pursuit of confidence: Legalism. This is forgetting that His kindness and power upholds our weak places relentlessly.

B. Knowing His Heart

1. We must understand both the *kindness* and *severity* of God (Rom. 11:22). These are the two dimensions of the Bridal Paradigm. They are not contradictory in His heart but are the heights and depths of His Person.
2. To the one sincere in love, His kindness is unending. It is relentless. It will leave us awestruck for eternity. It is the kindness of God that leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4). When we perceive and come to know the tenderness of His heart, we are motivated to pursue righteousness and to leave all ungodliness. Yet to the one who is stiff necked and proud before Him, the Lord will resist. The Lord will be adversarial to the one who presumes upon His grace and mercy, tolerating sin in his life.

“...That in the ages to come He might show us the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus...” Eph 2: 7

“For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far as He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are but dust.” Ps. 103:11 – 13