



Writings of W. Burney Overton

As I See It to Be

Grace Applied

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W. Burney Overton

“After all this preaching about Grace, I feel as if I am wallowing in a pool of Grace,” she said. “It sounds great, but I don’t know what to do about it. I need to hear something about how to apply it in my life.”

What do I do with the Grace of God? What difference does it make in my everyday and ongoing relationships? No one has taught me. I don’t know.

It is as if I received the message that I had inherited a million dollars, but no information as to how to get my hands on it. I’ve never had to figure out what to do with that much money.

You might say, “Don’t worry, just give me the million dollars. I’ll figure out what to do with it. I wouldn’t object to wallowing in a pool of money. No one has to tell me how to apply that to my life.”

Maybe that answers the concern about how to apply Grace in my life. But it isn’t an adequate answer. Grace Theology applied to life is more complex than having access to a million dollars.

Grace Theology! Grace! What do I mean by Grace?

For me, the essence of Grace Theology is that God loves me – and you – and each person of His creation – with unconditional love. The statement is short – and uncomplicated – and easy to express. The impact on my life is neither uncomplicated nor easy. It is very profound. It affects me to the very core of my being. It challenges the beliefs and assumptions on which my life is based.

I live in a world characterized by conditions – and demands – and requirements – and restrictions. I seldom experience people loving me no matter what. And I often feel very conditional in loving another. I have needs and desires that depend on other people to meet. I am reluctant to stick my neck out with caring if I don’t already feel cared about.

Unconditional love! Just thinking about such a concept frightens me. I’m not sure why, but it does.

People say, “Well, if Grace Theology is true, that means I can do as I please. I can be irresponsible. I can be cruel and mean and grasping. I can act hatefully. I can be the very worst kind of person, and still be loved unconditionally.”

If Grace Theology is true, the statement is correct. I can be that kind of person. I can do as I please. But what will I please to do, and for what reason?

Grace Applied –

The simple fact is that I can’t apply it, and I can’t not apply it. If I realize it – and

accept it – and believe it – all the rest of my life is affected in a most profound way. My approach to life is different. My outlook on life is changed. My reasons for being and doing are altered. I see me – and you – and the world in which I live – and what I do – and what you do – from another perspective entirely.

Nothing is the same anymore.

It is as if I lost my right arm in an accident. Prior to losing it, I was noted for my athletic ability. I pitched baseball well. I was good on the tennis court. I played a guitar better than most. I was capable, but virtually all my capability was dependent on my use of my right arm.

Now, only a short stub remains. Everywhere I turn I am faced by the fact that I no longer have my right arm. I wallow in a pool of it, and I cry out, “How do I apply the loss of my arm to my life?”

I don’t apply it.

I accept it. I face the reality. I study how to adjust to the reality. I decide what to do and how to do it. And I get on with my life accordingly. I can’t apply it. I incorporate the reality in my life. My approach to life is different. My outlook on life is changed. My reasons for being and doing are altered. I see myself – and you – and everything from a new perspective. Nothing is the same anymore.

If I accept and believe Grace Theology, I become a new creation. The world hasn’t changed, but I have.

Even though I have changed, it could be that I live my life pretty much as I have all along. I could do the same things, live in the same relationships, think the same thoughts, and be interested in the same causes.

On the other hand, it could be that because I believe Grace Theology, the whole pattern of my life changes. I cease to do the things that deny unconditional love. I become involved in positive and constructive kinds of activities. I act towards others with increased compassion and kindness. I am more tolerant and understanding. Believing in Grace Theology could alter my behavior a great deal.

None of these changes have to do with applying Grace. They are the products when I believe Grace. Believing Grace makes me over from inside out. The application is in the terms of my reason for doing what I do and being who I am. I face the reality that I have lost my arm, and get on with my life in terms of that reality. I face the fact that I believe Grace Theology, and I get on with my life in the light of that belief. I am free to do as I please. I please to do those things that are the expression of being loved unconditionally.

In human relationships, when I believe that I am truly loved, I have no desire to

do harmful and destructive things. I do not wish to think bad thoughts. I do not want to be judgmental or condemning. I choose not to say hurtful and critical things. I want to respond to being loved by being loving. My life, my activities, my thoughts and feelings are all shaped by this new undergirding belief. I may or may not be different on the outside – but, I will be very different on the inside, and all that is outside will reflect the difference. I will be who I am, and do what I do because, knowing that I am loved unconditionally, I want to love unconditionally in every part of my life.

First Corinthians 13 adequately and beautifully expresses how to love. I paraphrase some of it:

Even though I am the world's most outstanding orator, persuading and inspiring thousands of people, and my use of my power is for another reason than an expression of unconditional love, I am a noisy gong or clanging cymbal.

Even though I have great powers to see and understand what is going on in the world, and much knowledge in many areas of life, and such a depth of faith that I can move mountains, and my use of all these abilities is for another reason than an expression of unconditional love, I just don't amount to anything.

No matter how much I give away, nor how great my sacrifice, if my reason for doing so is other than to express unconditional love, nothing is gained.

This chapter indicates in many different ways what happens when the purpose behind thought, and action, and feeling is to give expression to unconditional love. It ends with the words, "...but the greatest of these is love", and the next chapter starts with these words, "Make love your aim."

I do not know how to apply Grace. I do know that, when a person is motivated by belief in Grace Theology, all of life is an expression of that belief. Therefore, I examine what I do – what I think – how I feel – and I keep raising the questions, "What is my reason? Why do I react, or act, as I do? What was behind my gracious and kindly behavior? What pushed me to be rude and thoughtless?"

Grace Theology is not something I do. Grace Theology is something I believe. My actions, and words, and attitudes, and feelings, and moods reflect and declare to the world what I believe. It is frightening, but I can't hide what I believe. I can't keep it out of how I live my life.

It appears that what it comes down to is this. If I want to apply Grace in my life, I believe both that God loves unconditionally, and that I can love with that same unconditionally. Then I read, and study, and meditate, and pray, and discuss, and listen, and think, and do all things that enable me to grow toward more complete understanding of what it means to be loved unconditionally, and to love unconditionally.

I examine the way I go about living my life to see if I am expressing in the best way possible my belief in Grace.

I don't get caught in what I should or shouldn't do. I check to see if I am motivated by unconditional love. I don't look for rules and regulations. I search my own heart and mind to see if I am being as effective as I want to be in loving.

My son, aged 12, is unhappy with me. He wants a motorbike, and he is using a lot of pressure to make me get it for him. He even claims that I don't love him if I won't let him have it. He pouts and storms to his room without doing his chores. I am torn. I want him to know I love him. I want him to love me. I don't like upheaval. Many of his friends have motorbikes. I don't want him to feel left out. I want him to have the opportunities and privileges that others have.

I ask myself, "What is your reason for deciding one way or the other?" If the undergirding reason is to be truly and unconditionally loving, then I can sift through all those other possible reasons until I can be sure that I decide what I decide because I love him that much.

I can't apply unconditional love. I can make it the undergirding reason for all that makes up my life and for all that I do. Then I can't not apply it.

What it comes down to, then, is this, "Make love your aim."

This is how to apply Grace in my life.