

The Ethics of Grace (Ephesians 2:1-10)

Karen Morerod¹ writes about the lesson she once learned from a sweater. Yes, I said “a sweater.” Here is her story.

I was in a store shopping for a sweater. The cost needed to be minimal, so I went to the clearance rack to start looking. As I flipped through the sweaters, one caught my eye. It was the right color and the right size, and best of all, the price tag was marked \$8.00. Without much more thought, I made my purchase.

At home I slipped on the sweater. Its texture was like silk. I had made my purchase so quickly that I hadn't noticed how smooth and elegant the sweater was. Then I saw the original price tag: \$124.00!

I gasped. I had never owned any clothing of that value. I had come home with what I thought was a “cheap buy,” but the original price was quite high. I had been oblivious to its value.

Just as with my sweater, I have often treated the power of Jesus' blood like a “cheap purchase.” His grace, though free to me, carried a high price tag – the life of his very own Son.

The sweater lesson recalls the skit this morning. Burt explained to

Josie that God's grace is all-encompassing – it includes mercy. Josie recognized that Burt's offer of both grace and mercy was unearned and undeserved. Now as smart shopper's we might not draw that conclusion with the sweater analogy. When Karen Morerod got the sweater home she was in awe. Until she realized that she got a lot for very little she had been unaware of the value of her purchase.

I once had a similar experience many years ago. I was working near Las Vegas and my brother came up to spend a weekend. We went into Vegas and of course did a little gambling – very little I might add, but my brother won \$500 playing Keno. For a \$2.00 card he walked out of the casino with \$500.

We both had this very strange feeling that something was quite wrong with cashing in a \$2.00 ticket for \$500 in cash. We both agreed that the windfall was unearned and undeserved and so we felt guilty. I suppose that guilt harkened to the strong work ethic we inherited from our dad. Most of us need to work for a living. As working people, we usually feel like we get what we earn or deserve – a day's pay for a day's work. Not a month's pay for a day's work.

But in the kingdom, the work ethic syndrome is reversed. God's grace is free. We can't work for it. We can't earn it. And as sinners, we can never deserve it. I always remind people that if God gave us what we deserve, we would be very unhappy creatures. God's grace is a lot like

¹ Karen R. Morerod, “Lesson Learned from a Sweater,” *Decision* (November 1999), page 39.

getting a \$124 sweater for \$8.00 or exchanging a \$2.00 Keno ticket for five \$100 bills.

Both of these stories make it clearer to me why most of us can't understand that God's grace is freely given, with no strings attached. Most of us just aren't used to getting something for nothing. We feel we have to work for it, to earn it. But trust me. No, trust God. Get used to the fact that God's love for you – God's grace and mercy – if freely given, with no strings attached. Get used to the fact and accept that you can't earn God's grace and that you will never be good enough to deserve it. And then realize that the ethic of grace also means that you can never be bad enough to fall out of God's grace.