

TRUSTING GOD'S PLAN, PURPOSE, AND DESIGN

"God's Amazing Grace"

June 9, 2024

INTRO.: Here at First Baptist, we believe in salvation by grace alone through faith alone. There's nothing you or I can do to earn the forgiveness of God. At least that's what we say but how many people are scared of grace? If we teach what the Bible says about grace won't people just go out and do whatever they want because they know they're saved by grace? Every once in a while, when it comes to communion Sunday, we like to center the whole message around what communion means, pointing each of us to God's Amazing Grace and the magnitude of Christ's death on the cross and His resurrection, providing victory over sin and death. How important is grace? The Apostle Paul begins Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon with this greeting, *"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."* It is only through God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ that you and I can experience the grace and peace of God. True forgiveness of our sins is only possible by the grace of God. Not one of us here can earn God's forgiveness. If that were possible the cross would have been a waste and utter foolishness. Think of it like this:

Grace and Works on a Train Ride

The difference between righteousness by works and righteousness by grace is illustrated by a ride on a commuter train.

A train rumbles into the station with warning bell clanging. The doors open, the uniformed conductor steps out, and you climb on board and find your way to a seat. When you look around the car, you see tickets clipped on the top of occupied seats, paid for with hard-earned money. Those tickets displayed at each seat are the special concern of the conductor, who walks through the car to punch tickets and confirm that you paid for the right to take this ride. If the conductor finds you without a ticket, you will either pay on the spot or be escorted off the train at the next stop. To ride this train, what matters is the paid ticket. This is righteousness by works.

Righteousness by grace, on the other hand, works in a very different way. God's train pulls into the station, warning bell clanging. The doors open and the conductor steps out. Masses of people crowd on board and find their seats, for most everyone wants to ride this train to the city where people never die. Eventually the conductor walks through the train to see if everyone belongs on board. But on this train the conductor is not looking for tickets clipped to the top of seats. In fact, anyone who tries to pay for the right to be on the train will be escorted promptly from the train at the very next stop. That's right; no one can earn the right to be on this train. What the conductor looks for as he walks seat by seat through the car is the penniless people he knows by name, the people who are his friends and who completely lack the means to pay. These poverty stricken people climb on board with only one hope: they believe in the generosity of their conductor friend.

This is righteousness by grace. A ride on God's train is a gift. By our standards, it's unfair. It's scandalous. But like it or not, it's heaven's way.

We are going to look at four things about grace: **GRACE SAVES**, **GRACE STANDS**, **GRACE SHOWS**, and **GRACE SPREADS**. After the first two points of the message we are going to partake of communion. With each one of these points we're going to examine one passage, refer to others, and I encourage you to spend some time this week and the weeks to come to study grace and see the difference it makes in your life. Let's begin the journey.

GRACE SAVES

Ephesians 2:4-5, 8-9

To get the context of these verses let's read together Ephesians 2:1-10.

Ephesians 2:1-10 (taken from New American Standard Bible)

Ephesians 2: 1-2 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Everyone here, and all of the human race, since the sin of Adam and Eve, are dead in our sins, utterly unable to earn the forgiveness of our sins and achieve a restored relationship with God based on our own efforts and merit. We are rightfully under God's wrath and judgment because of our sin. Let me remind you of what verses 4-5 say:

Ephesians 2:4-5 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

This verse in the original language (Greek) begins with the phrase, "**but God.**" This tells us what the Apostle Paul is about to share takes a dramatic turn from our previous state, *being dead in sin*, because of the intervention of God.

"*but God **being** rich in mercy:*" This is a present tense form of the verb; "to be." God is rich in mercy, today, tomorrow, and forever."

"*but God being rich in **mercy:***" mercy is not getting what we deserve.

"*because of His **great love** with which He **loved us:***" this great love of God is an accomplished fact. I will never forget the first time I heard that God loved me. That was earth shattering news to me. Why had I never heard this before?

"*made us **alive** together with Him:*" This also is a past tense. Through Jesus Christ, dead people are made alive. Just as we have seen in Genesis, God made Adam alive physically, so also God makes dead people alive spiritually through Jesus Christ.

"*by grace you **have** been saved:*" present tense; salvation is a present possession for all those who repent and believe.

"*by grace you have **been saved:***" This tense of the participle "saved" is one that has action beginning at a point of time in the past (the moment of salvation) and continuing on forever (salvation is secure in Jesus). It is also a passive participle, meaning we didn't do anything to earn or deserve our salvation; it is all of God!

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

This is a repeat of what we have just looked at in verses 4-5. Is God making a point?

"*for by grace you **have** been saved:*" present tense; salvation is a present possession for all those who repent and believe.

"*by grace you have **been saved:***" This tense of the participle "saved" is one that has action beginning at a point of time in the past (the moment of salvation) and continuing on forever (salvation is secure in Jesus). It is also a passive participle, meaning we didn't do anything to earn or deserve our salvation; it is all of God!

Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. What did Jesus tell people they needed to do?

Mark 1:14-15 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. **15** "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Good works will never get anyone to heaven. How many people here get text or email reminders about your upcoming appointments? Have you ever forgotten an appointment and you're glad you got that reminder, so you didn't miss it? In the message they usually give you the opportunity to confirm or cancel your appointment. I even get them for my car. When I was away at the conference a few weeks ago I received one for an appointment I made for some work I had done on the car. Somehow, I had made this appointment for when I was away at this conference with the same car that needed to be repaired (2 ½ hours away) and so I quickly called and rescheduled. The Bible says there is an appointment that everyone of us will keep. There will be no rescheduling or canceling this appointment.

Hebrews 9:27 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,

If God were to ask you, "Why should I let you into My heaven," what would your response be? The only answer that satisfies God's demand for justice is what Jesus Christ accomplished through His death on the cross and resurrection. We need to repent and believe.

Grace saves, and:

GRACE STANDS

Romans 5:1-2

Let's read Romans 5:1-8 in unison and we think about what it means to *stand in grace*.

Romans 5:1–8 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. **8** But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

It seems to me that many people begin with grace but slip into a works mentality. I firmly believe that the Scriptures teach that not only are we saved by grace, but we live by grace. We cannot do what God wants us to do without His power and strength. Any growth in our lives in becoming more like Jesus, after we believe, is purely through God's grace. We are going to first look at just the first two verses of this passage.

Romans 5:1–2 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

"we have been justified:" This is a past tense participle declaring the state of the believer in regards to his/her standing with God. Through Jesus Christ, by faith, God's demands of justice have been met. It is also a passive form which means this something God has done. There is once again no credit given to us for God's justification. What is the result?

"we have peace with God:" This is a present tense, an ongoing state for the believer.

"we have peace with God:" What do you and I have? We have peace with God!! Prior to our salvation we were at war with God. We were actually His enemies because of our sin. Communion reminds us that the debt of our sin has been paid. It was a debt so deep we could never repay it.

"through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand:" The verb *"to stand:"* is in a tense where the action begins in the past (the moment of salvation) and is ongoing from that point. If you know Christ as your Savior and Lord you are not only saved by grace at the moment of belief, but you also stand in that grace ongoing. It is crucial that we know and understand this truth. Knowing that we currently stand in God's grace provides the strength and power to live the Christian life.

ILLUS.: "A pastor of a small church would occasionally call on one gentleman to pray, and every time this one particular guy would pray, he would end with the strangest statement, "And, oh Lord, prop us up on our leaning side."

Finally, the pastor pulled him aside, and he said, "I love the way you pray, but I don't understand your little closing phrase. What are you talking about – prop us up on our leaning side?" He responded, "Well, Pastor, I'm a farmer. I live out on the farm and, you know, I live in the country. I've got an old barn, and it's been there a long time. It's been through a lot of weather, and a lot of storms, and a lot of bugs have eaten at it."

He said, "I got to looking at it one day when I was riding on my tractor, and I noticed that it was leaning to one side. So I thought to myself, oh my goodness! The barn is leaning, and it's a matter of time before the whole thing falls.

He continued, "So, you know what I did? I went and got some pine beams, and I propped it up on its leaning side." He said, "It still leans, and probably always will. But I propped it up on its leaning side. And it's not going to fall down because I propped it up on its leaning side. And I got to thinking about it.

When I was on the tractor, Pastor, and I was riding in the field, I thought about the kind of year I've had, and some of the storms I've been through, and some of the people that are bugging me, and eating away at my joy and eating away at my spirit. And I just got to thinking, you know, I'm still here! I'm still standing after all that stuff I've been through. The storms, and the howling winds – they couldn't topple me. I'm still standing by the grace of God."

He concluded, "From time to time, I find myself leaning. Leaning toward my old desires, leaning toward anger, leaning toward becoming bitter or hateful at the people who are bugging me, or leaning toward going back to the old habits and the old life I used to have. And when I feel myself start to lean toward that tendency, I just remember that old barn, and

I pray out loud - "Lord, thank you for propping me up on the leaning side." Jesus loves you (Pastor Alfred Nizeyimana ; from Turning Point with David Jeremiah))

Look what we read in 2 Corinthians 5:17

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

"*the old has gone:*" past tense, accomplished fact.

"*the new has come:*" once again a verb tense that begins in the past (moment of salvation) and continues on and on.

So, we come to communion this morning knowing that grace saves. We don't come on the basis of anything we have done. It is all what God the Father has done in sending Jesus Christ to be our Redeemer. Jesus Christ came on the greatest rescue mission ever.

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

COMMUNION (blank slide)

We have been reminded that Grace Saves and Grace Stands: we are saved by grace, and we live by grace. Thirdly:

GRACE SHOWS

Romans 6:1-2; 14

So many are hesitant to preach grace too loudly because people may take advantage of it. Just ask Jesus into your life, add Him to everything else you are doing, and go on living your life. This is truly a misunderstanding of grace. Grace changes everything.

Grace Should Encourage a Life Well-lived

In his best-selling book *The Reason for God*, Tim Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian in Manhattan, shares the story of a woman in his congregation who was learning how the grace extended to us through Christ's work on the cross can actually be more challenging than religion. He writes:

Some years ago I met with a woman who began coming to church at Redeemer and had never before heard a distinction drawn between the gospel and religion [i.e. the distinction between grace and what is often a works-based righteousness]. She had always heard that God accepts us only if we are good enough. She said that the new message was scary. I asked why it was scary and she replied: *If I was saved by my good works then there would be a limit to what God could ask of me or put me through. I would be like a taxpayer with "rights"—I would have done my duty and now I would deserve a certain quality of life. But if I am a sinner saved by grace—then there's nothing he cannot ask of me."*

She understood the dynamic of grace and gratitude. If when you have lost all fear of punishment you also lose all incentive to live a good, unselfish life, then the only incentive you ever had to live a decent life was fear. This woman could see immediately that the wonderful-beyond-belief teaching of salvation by sheer grace had an edge to it. She knew that if she was a sinner saved by grace, she was (if anything) more subject to the sovereign Lordship of God. She knew that if Jesus really had done all this for her, she would not be her own. She would joyfully, gratefully belong to Jesus, who provided all this for her at infinite cost to himself.

Source: Timothy Keller, The Reason for God (Riverhead Books, 2008), pp. 189-190

What does grace change? In Ephesians 2 we spoke of being dead in sin and being made alive through Jesus Christ. Grace tells me I am dead to sin and alive to God. I can live gratefully for Him, realizing I am permanently adopted as His child, loved by Him, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, having the same power residing in me that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. I know that He loves me even when I disobey but loves me too much to leave me there. He convicts me of my sin and restores my fellowship with Him upon my confession of that sin. He NEVER disowns me. I am not working to impress Him, to gain His favor for He has already given me that. He not only justified me, He also made me righteous with the righteousness of Jesus. I serve, obey, and love Him out of immense gratitude for His love, grace, and forgiveness.

In Romans 5 the Apostle Paul tells us that where sin abounds, grace abounds even more. How have you seen God's grace show up in the midst of your sin? So, some may conclude, "Since where there is more sin, there is more grace I should just sin more." Paul's answer to that is found in Romans 6.

Romans 6:1-2 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?

Shall we go on sinning that grace may increase? Paul's response, "By no means!" The idea here is, "Don't even let it cross your mind!" Anyone who has come in contact with God's grace should not think like this. Why?

"*we died to sin.*" This is a past tense. It has already happened! It is absurd to think that I would just continue to live a life of sin with what grace has accomplished in my life.

Romans 6:14 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

"*shall not be your master.*" be the master of, to dominate

"*you are not under the law.*" This is a present tense. It has to do with being under the condemnation of the law. The keeping of the law was never meant to save people, but it actually shows us we are unable to keep the law. To understand grace we need to recognize we were first under God's righteous wrath and judgment for our sin.

"*but under grace.*" It is the redeeming power of grace that allows the believer to live for God. Grace shows up in our lives as we live a life in gratitude to God, being more and more conformed to the image of Christ through God's power and strength.

Grace Saves, Grace Stands, Grace Shows, and:

GRACE SPREADS

Galatians 6:1-2

How does knowing God's grace affect my relationships with others? I believe that people desperately want to be in a place where grace is displayed. Too often we can shoot our wounded.

Galatians 6:1-2 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. **2** Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

"*caught in a sin.*" overtaken, surprised

"*restore him gently.*" This is a present tense command

"*restore him gently.*" with humility

"*But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.*" This is a present tense participle. "To watch" or "to look out for"

"*Carry each other's burdens.*" This is a present tense command. "To pick up," "to carry," "to bear"

1) Because there is nothing, I can do to make God love me less and there is nothing I can do to make Him love me more I can serve Him with all my being in the midst of my weakness and failure. The enemy wants to shout in our ear, "You are not worthy." Because of God's grace we are worthy!

2) Because I have received God's grace I can stop hiding and pretending that I have it all together. I need other believers with whom I can be real. We have men's groups and women's groups. You may ask, "What if people see me for who I really am?" Maybe that will open them up to be real as well and healing will begin to take place in our lives. This has always been very important to me wherever I have been. If you didn't already realize it this pastor is flawed and still in desperate need of the grace of God.

3) Because of God's grace I have been forgiven much and therefore have the reason, power, and motivation to forgive others. We need to build bridges and not walls.

SO WHAT???

*Have I come to know God's grace through salvation?

*Am I standing in God's grace as I live for Him?

*How am I being an avenue of God's grace?

*With whom am I locking arms in this journey of God's amazing grace?

*Am I willing to study God's grace in the Bible?