

The Gospel of Grace
Eph. 2:8-9

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Intro

Last week I shared four awakenings that prepare a person to receive the gospel. Gospel means “Good News.”¹ When a person has been awakened to the four realities we talked about last week, the Gospel comes as good news. Without those awakenings the Gospel is little more than an interruption. If I am drowning and I know it, then it is good news to be grabbed by a lifeguard and pulled to shore. If I am just taking a swim, then leave me alone! People must know their need before the offer to meet that need has much significance.

The four awakenings are generally progressive, but not absolutely so.

- (1) Awakening to the Existence of God
- (2) Awakening to Moral Accountability
- (3) Awakening to Personal Transgression
- (4) Awakening to Pending Judgement.

The purpose of the Law is to awaken us to our own sinfulness and the consequence of that sinfulness. The Law is perfect and that perfection is not attainable by mortal man.² We all come short of the demands of the Law. Therefore, we all stand guilty before a holy God. No matter how hard we try to do good, we fall short.

Bottom line: The Law is designed to bring us to the end of ourselves—the end of our own sufficiency; the end of our self-righteousness. The Law is designed to bring us to the foot of the cross and show us our need a Savior.

The Gospel is good news because it tells us a Savior has come. Jesus has come and paid the penalty for our sin. He offers to us forgiveness and acceptance before God.

My subject today is the Gospel of Grace.

I. The Gospel is good news because it offers salvation that is free.

Free is good. People flock to a store that offers something free. When someone offers me something free, I’m very careful about receiving it because what people say is free is not always free. I think that is sometimes people’s response to the gospel. This gospel sounds is too good to be true. When you really, really hear Paul’s gospel of grace, it sounds too generous, too merciful, too magnificent to be true. But, in fact, it is true. John Newton called it “Amazing” grace—“how sweet the sound.”

Eternal life is free to all who will receive it in Christ. Rom 3:24 “*being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*”³ Being justified means you are declared not guilty before the throne of God. An easy way to remember the meaning is to think of justified as just-as-if-I’d-never-sinned. Because of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross you can be forgiven of your sins and made right with God freely—as a gift of grace; no strings attached.

¹ GOSPEL (from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright (c)1996 by BibleSoft)

² Romans 7:7, 12; 3:23.

³ All Scripture quotes are in New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

The Greek word translated grace is *charis*. We get our word Charismatic from it because *charisma* is a gift of grace, an undeserved benefit. **Grace is the undeserved, unmerited favor of God.** It is the lovingkindness of God expressed toward people absolutely free. Its only motive is the bountiful love and benevolence of the Giver.⁴

John 3:16 lays the foundation for our understanding of grace. “*For God so loved....*” That is the one and only motive behind grace. “*God is love*”; that is His nature. And grace flows out of His nature.

Grace is love expressed in a particular way. It is favor extended without any expectation of return. Joseph Cooke was a missionary to Thailand a generation ago. He illustrated grace this way. Picture a happily married couple in which both husband and wife are all that either could ever wish the other to be. The husband always respects his wife’s feelings, always treasures her individuality, is never unkind, never overbearing. He never forgets their anniversary, he is a model father to their children, helps with the housework, is genuinely and sincerely concerned about her happiness and welfare. She, for her part, returns respect for respect. She anticipates his needs, provides a home that is a haven of rest for him, never nags, never undermines him. She supports and encourages him on a regular basis. The love between them is always there. It is genuine, unmistakable, and free. It flows back and forth between the two of them effortlessly and magnificently.

But what about grace? There is no occasion for it! Both husband and wife are so perfectly loveable that each could scarcely help but love the other. Now suppose that one of them falls victim to a horrible disease. This disease causes his body to break out in putrid sores; the smell is almost unbearable. Not only that, but it also brings on fits of depression and irritation. He is unable to care for himself, let alone contribute to her happiness. In his pain and frustration he becomes demanding and obnoxious.

Then suppose that she continues to love him just as before. With tenderness and warmth she treats his wounds on a daily basis. When he lashes out at her, she never responds in kind. She continues her thoughtfulness and concern toward him. That would be grace! If the love in the first situation had real depth, it would continue undaunted in the second. Genuine love, when the occasion arises, will always be gracious. When real love encounters the undeserving, it becomes even more beautiful than it was before. It takes on the new glory of grace.⁵

Sin brought man into a horrible state. There is nothing in us to warrant God’s goodness toward us. It all flows out of who He is. It is all a result of His goodness. “*For God so loved....*” That love was manifested in the most unselfish act of human history, on a cross 2000 years ago. That love was expressed by Jesus when He prayed on the cross, “*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they do.*”⁶ “The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen could ever tell. It reaches beyond the highest star. And reaches to the lowest hell...O love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong! It shall forevermore endure, The saint’s and angel’s song.”⁷

⁴ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament* (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, Inc., 1994) p. 1469.

⁵ Joseph R. Cooke, *Free for the Taking: The Life-changing Power of Grace* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company) p. 24.

⁶ Luke 23:34.

⁷ F. M. Lehman, “The Love of God,” *The New Church Hymnal* (Lexicon Music, Inc., 1976) p. 16.

Rom 5:8 "...*God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" Favor was freely given to us though we were absolutely undeserving of it.

Eph 2:8 "*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.*" The gospel is good news because salvation is free.

II. The gospel is good news because God's grace is greater than all our sin.⁸

Rom. 5:20-21 "*Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, 21 so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*"

Why did God give the Law? "...*the law entered that the offense might abound.*" The Law does not create sin; it manifests the sinfulness of sin. The Law awakens our awareness of sin and the judgement associated with it. "*But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more...*" God's grace is stronger than your sin. Is anyone glad about that? Eph. 2:7 says that God will show the "*exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us....*" God is rich in grace. He's got more grace than you've got sin. Charles Spurgeon said, "You can only sin as a man, but God can forgive as a God. You sin as a finite creature, but the Lord forgives as the infinite Creator."⁹ Sin is no match for the grace of God.

Did God know the failures you would make as a Christian, the day you were born again? Has any of your stumblings taken Him by surprise? Some people think of salvation as a second chance. "You were a dirty rotten sinner. I forgive you of all that past; but you had better perform well now." If we have a 2nd chance, we will fail. If we have a 3rd chance we will come short of the glory of God again. If we have 10,000 chances, we still couldn't measure up by our performance. It is the performance of Jesus that qualifies us. It is the gift of His righteousness that gives us standing before God. By grace alone (*sola gratia*) comes salvation. Where sin abounds, grace much more abounds.

Paul was so radical in his teaching on grace that the question naturally surfaced in Rom. 6:1 "*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?*" God's grace so abounds toward us that maybe we should just live in sin and grace take care of it. Let me make two observations about this question. (1) If our understanding of God's grace does not naturally raise this question, we probably have a watered-down version of what Paul is talking about. "...*where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.*" The undeserved favor God has toward His children is an abounding grace, not a stingy grace. (2) Paul's answer to the question. "*Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?*" is a resounding no! God forbid! I will talk more about that next week. But get it established in your heart, God has bestowed favor on you that far exceeds anything you could ever earn. It is a grace that is much, much bigger than your puny failures.

There are two weaknesses in the American pulpit. On the one hand, we are too soft on sin. We fail to press the seriousness of transgression. We fail to bring the Law to bear on people's conscience. Therefore, we see little conviction of sin. On the other hand, we are too reserved about the grace of God. We mix it with works and dilute its power. God's grace is lavish and

⁸ Julia H. Johnston wrote the hymn, "Grace Greater Than Our Sin," *The New Church Hymnal* (Lexicon Music, Inc., 1976) p. 394.

⁹ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia, Vol. VIII* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978) p.284

abundant. *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.”* The gift—the gift of eternal life—not just the gift of forgiveness—but full acceptance before the throne of God. Not just a 2nd chance, but the full journey to glory. By grace, you are now in a rich relationship with your Creator.

It only happens *“in Christ.”* Eph. 1:7 *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”* He that climbs up any other way is a thief and robber. There is salvation in no other name, but the name of Jesus.¹⁰ Undeserved favor comes to us *“in Christ”* and no other way. Eph. 1:3 *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”* When we’re *“in Christ”* we are in covenant with the eternal Godhead. We are blessed because we are *“in Him.”* This blessing comes on us because of our faith in Jesus. It is not the results of our performance. *“Abraham believed God and it was accounted unto him for righteousness”* (Rom. 4:3).

The key issue is this: What are you trusting in? I’m not just talking about when you were born again. I’m talking about right now. Are you relying upon your own performance to gain and maintain God’s blessing and favor? If so, your faith is in the wrong place; and you will be very frustrated. Are you relying upon the work of Christ and His merit for your blessing? Then grace will bring you into that blessing. When we pray *“in Jesus’ name”* we are declaring our faith in His work in our behalf. We are declaring our faith in the favor He has brought on us through His relationship with the Father. We are declaring our faith in the authority that belongs to Him and that He shares with us.

Fanny Crosby taught us where to place our faith in the song *“Pass Me Not”*. The 3rd verse says, *“Trusting only in Thy merit, Would I seek Thy face; Heal my wounded, broken spirit, Save me by Thy grace.”*¹¹ That’s the Christian’s cry. Yes, it was our cry the day we were born again. But our trust does not shift from Him to us after we’re saved. We continue to trust in His merit. We continue to rely upon His grace.

So, II. The gospel is good news because God’s grace is greater than all our sin.

III. The gospel is good news because it is by grace and not of works.

Works always comes short of the standard. Grace alone qualifies.

Eph. 2:8-9 *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.”* The Greek word for *“saved”* in the New Testament is *sozo*. It is a very big word. It includes more than being born again. That’s the beginning. But then there is a maturing process that we are all experiencing in our lives. We are growing in grace (2 Pet. 3:18). We are learning the ways of God. By grace we are being prepared for God’s eternal purposes. What we have to understand is that we are born again by grace; we are sanctified and equipped on a daily basis by grace; we will one day be glorified by grace. From beginning to end, it is all by the grace of God. Paul said, *“I am what I am by the grace of God”* (1 Cor. 15:10).

The Galatian church made the mistake of beginning in the grace of God; and then trying to proceed based on their own works. Paul marveled that they were (Gal 1:6) *“...turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ...”* He talks with them about Abraham

¹⁰ John 10:1; Acts 4:12.

¹¹ Fanny J. Crosby, *“Pass Me Not,”* The New Church Hymnal (Lexicon Music, Inc., 1976) p. 450

and the righteousness He found by faith rather than by works. He asked them the question in Gal 3:3, “*Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?*” Are you going to receive your initial forgiveness by grace and then try to perfect yourself by working hard in the flesh?

A common mistake that I have seen in the church over the years is the idea that God is very gracious to the unbelievers who come to Him in their initial experience; but then God is very “put out” with the Christian who staggers and stumbles in his walk with God. Is that really the way God looks at it? Paul puts that in perspective in Rom. 5:8-11 “*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. 10 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.*” Would you be harsher to one of your own children than you would be to your worst enemy? What is your attitude toward your children? Don’t you think God might be at least as gracious as we are? We need to clearly understand what Christ has done for us. “*In Christ*” we are fully accepted as God’s own children.¹² We are invited to “*come boldly to the throne of grace and receive help in time of need*” (Heb. 4:16). We have to know who we are in Christ as a foundation for our daily walk with Him. The problem is we all have a natural bend toward legalism; and it comes very early in life.

Rena was 3 years old when she went to her first baptismal service. It was new for her and a bit mystifying. As events transpired, she looked up at her father with surprise in her eyes, “Daddy, he pushed that guy under the water? Why did he do that?” The father tried to quietly answer her question during the service; but his answer did not satisfy little Rena. So when they got home he attempted a fuller explanation. “Well people do bad things; and they are being baptized to let everyone know they are now going to be good. The water symbolizes Jesus’ washing people’s sins away. When they come out ‘clean,’ they are going to try to be ‘good.’” Rena thought about that for a moment and then asked the simple question, ‘Why didn’t Pastor Bob just spank him?’¹³

The more serious we are about serving God, the more vulnerable we are to trying to perform for Him. We want to please the Lord. We try hard; and if that doesn’t work we try harder. What we must know is that “*in Christ*” we are already pleasing to Him. He is teaching us how to walk in holiness. But that doesn’t happen through our efforts. It happens as a result of His grace working in our lives. “*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.*” Eph. 2:9 “*not of works, lest anyone should boast.*”

There will be no boasting in heaven. Every crown will be cast before His throne. Every song will be “*You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power*” (Rev 4:11). Without Him we *can do nothing* (John 15:5). Anything good that comes out of my life is a fruit of the grace of God working in me. It is a gift from God that I am even in His kingdom. It is the flow of His grace that enables me to serve Him. It’s only logical that all the glory go back to Him who gave the ability. I’m not earning brownie points by being at church this morning. I’m drawing upon the grace of God and enjoying His presence.

¹² Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:6-7; Eph. 1:5-6.

¹³ Bob Beasley, *Perfect Illustrations for Every Topic and Occasion* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Printing, 2002) p. 112.

We can't have it both ways. Either we are saved by grace or we're saved by works. Rom. 11: 6 makes that abundantly clear. *"And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work."* The two are mutually exclusive. If God is giving to me out of His kindness, that is grace. If God is indebted to me because of my good performance, that is works.¹⁴ It's not 98% grace and 2% my best efforts. It's God's grace that carries us through the whole journey.

I have never been on a cruise; but I have watched people board a luxury liner. That ship may carry the passengers all the way to the beautiful beaches of Hawaii. And the passengers arrive simply by boarding the ship. And I understand it can be a very enjoyable trip. Can you imagine swimming from Los Angeles to Waikiki Beach? Not pleasant; and not even possible! Legalism is me swimming across the Pacific Ocean. Grace is me riding the luxury liner. Not only am I carried safely to the desired destination; but everything I need is provided along the way.¹⁵

"There remains therefore a rest for the people of God." Heb. 4:9-10 *"For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His."* A revelation of the grace of God settles a lot of anxieties in our lives. Do I want to please the Lord? With everything that is in me, I want to please Him. Can I do that in the strength of my own willpower? No, I am absolutely dependent upon the flow of His grace in my life. *"It is God who works in you both to will and do His good pleasure"* (Phil. 2:13). We can count on Him doing that. We can rest in His goodwill toward us. Board the ocean liner of grace and enjoy the ride. Swimming across the Pacific is not a viable alternative.

¹⁴ Rom 4:4 *"Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt."*

¹⁵ 2 Pet. 1:3; Isa. 63:9