

Living By Grace

Romans 3:21-28

Many believers are absolutely convinced that the Bible says, “God helps those who ... help themselves.” But the Bible teaches no such doctrine.

Everything about the American way of life teaches you get what you earn in life. You get what you pay for. We value work, sweat, effort, and performance. It's called the American Work Ethic. And it's good. The only problem is it causes a difficulty in us relating to God because God does not relate to us on performance. God does not relate to us based on our effort, our work ethic, or how much we try. The Bible teaches that *everything God does in our life, every blessing we have in our life, comes by grace as a free gift.* You don't earn it, you don't deserve it, and you don't work for it. It is just a free gift of God. And the Bible says that everything in your life is a gift of grace.

You say, “Wait a minute. The things I have, I worked for, I earned, and I put sweat equity into it.” You would not have the effort to work, you would not have the brains to work, and you would not have the energy to work if God did not give it to you. Every breath you take is a gift from God. God does not owe you your next breath of life. You are going to take it because it is a gift of God's grace.

The Bible is very clear about this, that God saves us by grace, God blesses us by grace, God teaches us by grace, God uses us by grace, God keeps us saved by grace, and God takes us to heaven by grace. Everything in my life that's good is a gift from God. Listen to how 1 Corinthians 15:10 reads, “Whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out such kindness and grace on me.” John 1:16 says, “From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another.”

I am convinced that far too many Christians are *confused* when it comes to this matter of grace. Why do I think so many believers are confused when it comes to this matter of grace? Because you live like you are *confused*! **You continually think that God *disapproves* of you.** You get up thinking, “God is mad at me today. Or God’s ticked off at me because of what I did yesterday.” Some of you think God is this unpleaseable parent saying, “That is not good enough. Can’t you do any better?” You see Him with a scowl on His face shouting, “What’s the matter with you? Get your act together. When are you going to start doing right?” **You have this constant sense of condemnation and that is why you don’t get to know God because you think He is always *angry* with you, that He is always *mad* at you.** Why? Because you really don't understand grace.

There are many, many definitions of grace. Grace is like a multi-faceted diamond. It has many different sides and shapes. No one definition can adequately describe it. Let me read a couple of definitions, though.

Grace is God’s love in action.

Grace is when God gives me what I need, not what I deserve.

Grace is anything that I desperately need that I don’t deserve, that I could never repay but God gives it to me anyway.

Grace is the face that God puts on when He looks at my failures, my faults, and my mistakes.

Many people confuse *grace* with *mercy* and they are two very different things. Mercy is when God doesn’t give you what you deserve. That’s mercy!

On the other hand when God gives what you don’t deserve that’s *grace*. All the good things in your life you did not earn, like salvation, blessings, health, family, abilities, etc. I could name a million more, but all of these were just gifts of God’s grace to you.

As we do today's study, it is my desire for you to understand what grace really is and how it affects your life. I want you to feel loved by God, to feel His unconditional grace toward you.

What is grace? In order to help you remember this, I have put it in a little acrostic G-R-A-C-E.

G – God's gift to me. It is a total gift of God. If you were to go out and ask ten people, "How do you get to heaven?" you would get the same answers most of the time. "Just work real hard and try to do your best... Be sincere and be nice to people... Just try to do good and make sure that you do more good in your life than you do bad because maybe God grades on a curve and if your good works are better than your bad works maybe He'll go, 'You're a good guy, sincere. Just come on in.'"

That is the way most of the world thinks. But here is the problem. The Bible says the exact opposite. **The Bible says there is only one way you are going to get into heaven.** It is a gift from God. You could never *earn it*, you could never *learn it*, you could never *buy it*, and you could never *work your way into it* or *deserve it* or get enough *brownie points* or *credits* to get into heaven. There is no chance you are going to make it into heaven except by accepting God's free gift of grace. The Bible says this in Romans 11:16, "If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works. Otherwise grace is no longer grace." That just means it is God's free gift to me.

This is the fundamental difference between Christianity and every other faith or religion. If you were to study all the other religions of the world you could summarize every other religion in one word – "do." Because they believe you have to *earn* your way to God. **Depending on the religion, there is a different list of do's.** The lists differ but every one of them has one thing in common. You have to *earn God's approval*, you have to earn *God's credit*, and you have to

earn *your way into heaven* by doing certain things. And if you do these certain things then God says, “OK! You’re all right!”

That is in stark contrast to what the Bible says. The Bible says the exact opposite. The Bible says *the way you get to know God*, is to *have a relationship with Him*, and *accepting what’s already been done for you*. **Who did it? Jesus Christ.** By faith, you accept what Jesus Christ did more than 2000 years ago on the cross. And if you were to summarize Christianity in one word it would be the word “done.” It has already been done for you. “Do” versus “done.” **Jesus did it all.** That’s the difference. And it is a free gift to you. You just accept it.

What was my part in salvation? Get lost! That was the easy part. **It is God’s part to find me and save me.** Your only part in salvation is simply accepting the fact that it was all done for you and that is called grace. Romans 3:24 puts it this way, “All of us need to be made right with God. How? By His grace which is a free gift through Jesus Christ.” **That is the best gift you are ever going to be offered.** There is no better gift than that. You may get a Rolls Royce and win the lottery but God’s free gift of salvation goes on for eternity and it is through Jesus Christ. It is a *priceless gift and you will never be offered a better deal than that.*

R – Received by faith. Grace is received by *faith*. You don’t *earn it*, you don’t *work for it*, you *don’t deserve it*, and you *don’t do a bunch of things* to get God’s grace like, “If I take communion I get God’s grace... If I’m baptized I get God’s grace...” No, no. **Grace is received by faith.** Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For it is by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not from yourselves...” **That means even the faith you have is a gift from God.** God gives you the faith to believe in Him. Even faith comes from God: “... it is the gift of God not by works so that no one can boast.”

Can you imagine how awful it would be in heaven if everybody could get there by working for it and earning it? Everybody up

there would be bragging. There would be all these levels of how people got into heaven. There would be the cool people part, and then there would be the spiritual moron part, and the guys who got in by the skin of their teeth part. But heaven is not like that at all!

Here's the point: "For by grace you've been saved through faith." Salvation is a free gift. Romans 4:16 says, "People receive God's promise by having faith. This happens so that the promise can be a free gift." Salvation is not based on my performance. It is based on God's promise. It is not based on my merit. It is based on God's mercy. It is not based on my goodness. It is based on God's grace.

The Bible is full of stories illustrating God's grace. One of the most famous ones is the story of the Lost Son or the Prodigal Son. This father has two boys. One day the younger one says, "Dad, I'm outter here. I want my half of the family inheritance right now and I'm leaving." So he takes half of the family inheritance and leaves and he moves to a foreign country and he wastes his life on wine, women and wild partying. And after a series of months he has blown it all, out of luck, out of money, and he ends up feeding pigs at a farm in a pig trough. He has hit the skids, he is down, and he is destitute and broke and busted. Flat on his back he is thinking, "What am I doing here? I know I blew it and it is all my own fault but the people who work for my dad as servants, they live better than this." So he says to himself, "I will go back home and say, 'Dad, I know it. I blew it. I admit it. I wasted half the family inheritance. I do not deserve to be called your son. But just hire me as a slave, a servant, and I'll work for you the rest of my life because even your servants live better than I'm living now.'" Now the Bible says the father was loving and gracious, when he saw the son coming home from a long distance, he ran out to meet him. He gives him a giant bear hug and he kisses him and he smiles and he calls for a celebration, "Go get the best robe in the house and bring it and put it on my boy." He does not say, "Go clean up your act. Go get a bath. Repay me first." He doesn't scold him. He doesn't lecture him. He doesn't give him a sermon. He just hugs him

unconditionally and says, “Bring out the best robe. Put it on his back. Bring the family ring [which was kind of a signet you would use like a credit card, kind of a symbol of the wealth of the family. Unlimited credit.] Kill the fatted calf we’re going to bar-b-que. We are going to party! My lost son has been found.”

Jesus told that story to say that is how God responds to you when you come home. Did you know the Bible says that they have a party in heaven every time one person accepts the grace of God? The angels in heaven, they have a party, every time one person steps across the line.

Do you know why we have so much fun in this church? Why are we so happy around here? In the first place, all our past sins have been forgiven. In the second place, we have a purpose for living right now. In the third place, we have an eternal home in heaven. These are the big three issues that are resolved. Once you’ve got those out of the way, everything else is minor by comparison.

If you have never accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior you do not have a reason to party because you have some serious issues to deal with. They are called the past, the present, and the future. You feel guilty about the past. You feel pressured about the present. And you are worried about the future. And you wonder why you are not happy. But when these issues have been settled by the grace of God, Christians of all people ought to know how to party. And the party that we have here every Sunday is called “The Worship Service.”

A – Available to everyone. It is available to everyone. What does that mean? God does not play favorites. Regardless of your status, regardless of your background, regardless of the color of your skin, regardless of the sins you have committed, regardless of the bondage that you might have, God loves you unconditionally. And God’s grace is available for you.

C – It comes through Christ. That is the only place it is available. It comes through Jesus Christ, as seen in Acts 15:12, “We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved.” **Why through Christ?** Why does grace only come through Christ? **Because He is the one who paid for it.** **Nobody else has volunteered to pay for your sins.** Nobody else has volunteered to pay the price for all the good things you get to have. **Grace is free but it is not cheap because somebody has to pay for it.** **And it cost Christ His life.** That is how expensive your ticket to heaven was. That is how expensive paying the penalty for all the sins you have done and won’t have to pay for. **It cost God His own Son.** That is how much He loves you. Grace is free but it is not cheap because somebody has to pay for it.

If you went home today and found a gift setting on your steps, it’s free to you, but somewhere, somehow, somebody paid for it. And your gift of salvation, your gift of forgiveness, your gift of heaven and eternal life, your gift of a purpose in life, your gift of all the good things somebody had to pay for it. And Jesus Christ did that for you. **Why?** Because He loves you. **Grace comes through Christ.**

One way you could spell grace is GRACE – God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense. On the cross He bought the ticket. On the cross He paid it all.

I don’t know how to say it any clearer than this. **There is nothing that you will ever do, that you could ever possibly do that will make God love you more than He does right now.** You can’t make God love you any more than He already does. **And there is nothing you could ever do that will ever make God love you any less than He does right now.** Why? Because His love is not based on your performance. **It is based on His promise of grace.** Not on your merit but on His mercy. **Not on your goodness but on His grace.**

E – Extended throughout eternity. The Bible says this in Romans, “The wages of sin is death...(That’s the bad news. The good

news is the rest of the verse) the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.” **You might say that grace is the gift that keeps on giving.** Why? **Because “eternal life” is “eternal”!** It is available and extended throughout eternity and the best is yet to come.

What is heaven going to be like? You are going to be reunited with loved ones who know the Lord. **You are going to be rewarded for your faith.** You are going to be released from pain, depression, despair, shame, guilt and you’re going to rejoice and party for eternity. What a deal!

But there is a catch. The catch is you have to accept it.

If you were to find a gift on your table when you got home today and you left it there for the next year wrapped and unopened, that’s pretty dumb. A gift is worthless unless you actually accept it. You must accept God’s grace through His Son Christ.

The Bible says in Isaiah 30:18, “The Lord longs to be gracious to you.” **If you have never received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior He is waiting for you to accept His gift. He enjoys being gracious. He is not mad at you. He is not sitting there ready to scold you. He is saying, “Come home!”**

Some of you know in your heart that you have already been saved, but you have walked the path of sin and disobedience, and the quilt has overwhelmed you. You can get rid of it today. You can walk out of here with a clear conscious.

The more you understand the grace of God, the more you fall in love with Jesus. Why? **Because it is almost impossible to not love somebody who loves you that much.**

Everyone please stand for prayer.

Father,

Thank You for loving me enough to deal with me graciously. I realize that I could never be good enough to earn my salvation. Forgive me for being critical and judgmental of others after all You have done for me. In Jesus' name. Amen.