

“Three Pivotal Truths About God’s Grace”

Romans 3:21-31



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INTRODUCTION

The story is told of an immigrant who enlisted in the United States Army during World War II. Being a foreigner, he had great difficulty with the English language. One day as the troop prepared for inspection, the men realized that unless they gave this soldier some help, he would flunk, simply due to his difficulty with English. So one of the men said to him, “Now look. In a few days, the general is going to come around, and unless you are extremely careful, you could fail inspection simply due to your problems with the language. Let me tell you the questions he’ll probably ask and the answers you need to be prepared to give.

“The first question he’ll undoubtedly ask is, ‘How long have you been in the army?’ When he asks that, simply answer, ‘Two years.’ The second question he will undoubtedly ask is, ‘How old are you?’ When he asks that, answer, ‘Twenty-two.’ The third question he will surely ask is, ‘Have you been receiving good food and good treatment?’ When he asks that, tell him, ‘Both.’ Two, Twenty-two, and Both. As long as you can remember these three answers you should have no difficulty. But whatever you do, don’t forget: Two, Twenty-two, Both.”

The day of inspection came and, sure enough, the general did ask three questions. The only problem was, he did not ask them in the order in which the soldier was prepared to answer them. Instead, he said, “I’d like to ask you a few questions. First, how old are you?” The soldier answered, “Two years.” The general looked at him and said, “Well, how long have you been in the army?” and the soldier answered, “Twenty-two years.” The general looked at him and said, “What do you take me for - an idiot or a fool?” And the soldier answered, “Both.”¹

I’m certain that all of us are delighted that we didn’t have to stand in the shoes of that poor soldier when it came to the day of inspection. Yet each of us is keenly aware that one day soon we are going to participate in a far greater inspection, because we are going to stand before the Creator of the universe and give an account of ourselves. *“It is appointed for men to die once,”* says Hebrews 9:27, *“and after this comes judgement.”*

People’s thoughts vary when you mention the day of judgement. Some people fear it. Some look forward to it. Some scoff. Some are hopeful. Some are hopeless. I would venture to say that most people get about as excited about the day of judgement as they get about their dentists appointments.

Yet, it doesn’t have to be that way *if* you understand the Scriptures. More specifically, there is a particular *doctrine* you need to understand. I refer to the doctrine of *God’s Grace*.

¹ Larry Moyer in *Biblical Sermons*, pp. 203-204, edited by Haddon W. Robinson.

Most of us mention the grace of God from time to time, but I wonder if we really understand it. My observation is that quite often we don't. Yet, if we continue to stand in the presence of God at judgement, it will be solely on the basis of His grace.

Since the Bible doesn't explain grace in the form of a one sentence definition, let me give you the most highfalutin definition of grace that I could find among my books on theology. I've printed this in your handout notes: *Grace is the eternal and absolute free favor of God, manifested in the vouchsafement of spiritual and eternal blessings to the guilty and the unworthy.*

That's a pretty good definition, but if you're like me, you'll probably have to run it by a few more times before you begin to catch on.

Some thoughtful disciple of Jesus somewhere once said that grace is *God's Riches At Christ's Expense*. That helps a bit more, though it doesn't explain every nuance of the subject.

Someone else has said that grace is simply *Unmerited Favor*. That definition has always helped me understand grace just a bit better.

In this message I want to try to help you understand God's grace by sharing with you what I believe are *three pivotal truths about it*. Each one of them comes right out of your New Testament. Please join me in Romans 3:21-31...

(Read Romans 3:21-31)

While much more could be said of this passage, I want to point out three truths about grace.

The first truth we need to understand about grace is this:

I. IT'S FREE



Verse 24 says, "*being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;...*"

If someone gives you a gift, how much does it cost you? Nothing! It's *free*. If you paid for it, it wouldn't be a gift, right?

Verses elsewhere in the New Testament show us this free nature of God's grace, as well. Romans 6:23 says, "*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

Ephesians 2:8 says, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God...*"

In John 4:10, we read where Jesus said to the woman at the well, "*If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.*"

God's grace, salvation, eternal life, are all *free* according to clear statements of the New Testament.

That can be confusing, however. It can cause trouble with our theology because elsewhere, in the same New Testament, in Luke 14:28, for instance, we read that Jesus said that we should "*count the cost*" before deciding to sign on with Him.

Now wait a minute! I thought that if it was free, that meant that there was no cost! What is going on here?

Furthermore, we find that the New Testament teaches the necessity of *obedience*. For instance, John 3:36 says, "*He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.*" If it's free, why are we told we must obey? If it's free, why do we need to count the *cost*?

The way some people deal with this is to accept one of the concepts and ignore the other. They just forget that the Bible says grace is free and they stress duty and obedience. As a result, they often fall into a merit system of salvation, believing that, if you want to go to heaven, you must do it the "old fashioned way." You must *earn it*. Or they take the opposite position. They forget that the Bible says we must obey and stress that, since grace it is free, there is nothing we can or must do. As a result, they frequently fall into a system of license. "Do whatever you like. It doesn't matter as long as, at some point, you accept Jesus into your heart."

The one thing these two extremes share in common is that they are both wrong! You cannot deal with Scripture that way. Statements by Christ, His Apostles and His prophets must harmonize or you've misunderstood them.

So how do we sort this out? Follow me for a few moments and let's see what we can do.

A. First, let me say positively that *no one can merit salvation*. Said another way, salvation cannot be earned. Titus 3:5 says, "*He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.*"

This is true of both our *initial* salvation and our *continued* salvation. We cannot earn salvation because we have nothing with which we can pay. The penalty for even one sin is death. We have only one life, so if we've ever sinned even once, we're finished. We're broke. We have

nothing with which to pay. Unless God provides us with the means, we're lost. That is why salvation is by *grace*. That is why, if God is going to give it to us, it has to be free.

B. Secondly, however, *salvation is given in order to bring us into a relationship with God.*

After Adam and Eve sinned in the garden and were cast out, the whole point of the rest of the history of God's dealing with man is that He wants to restore that *relationship* - *if we want it*. You see, the trouble is, He has given us a free choice in the matter and He won't force it. If we don't want a relationship with Him, He will ultimately leave us alone with our choice.

Now, in any good relationship, are there obligations involved? Think about it. When I married Kathi back in 1969, I didn't have to *pay* for her. She came to me freely. Her dad, after paying a tremendous amount to raise her to age 19, brought her to me, handed me her arm in the presence of a preacher and some close friends, and said, "Here she is. She's all yours!" Now, I didn't get a bill for her three months later for 19 years of expenses. I got the relationship for free. But does that mean there was no cost involved or that I accepted no obligation when I married her? Not at all! I remember the preacher saying some heavy things like, "for better or worse, for richer or poorer." He made me promise to love her and cherish her for the rest of my life. But wait a minute! I thought it was free!

You see, freedom does not nullify responsibility or obligation. The free nature of God's grace and mercy brings us into a *relationship* with Him. Like any other relationship, if I want it to continue, I need to do my part. No. That's not so I can earn the relationship. That would be an entirely different thing. A relationship based upon love has to be between two parties who come willingly and give willingly of themselves.

God's grace is free but there is a resulting obligation. It is an obligation of a loving relationship. Can you see how those two things can coexist?

Think of a close friendship you might have. Your friend isn't there because you pay him is he? ("Hey buddy! Would you to be my friend for two months? Here's \$500 for your services!") That wouldn't to be a friendship at all because friendship is a relationship based upon love and mutual consent. But are there obligations involved! Certainly! You do things for your friend and he does things for you. If that isn't happening, the friendship ultimately dies. The difference between a friend and someone you hire is that you do things *willingly* for your friend.

My point in all this is simply what I said in the beginning. God's grace is *free*. No matter what you may have done in the past, no matter what you might to be into now, if you want a relationship with Him, He will accept you if you come. He will wipe away any sin. He'll cleanse you and make you as guiltless as the day on which you were born.

If you have drifted away from him, the situation is the same. Don't think you have to buy His favor once again by good deeds! He loves you. He longs for your friendship once again! He

even misses you! Simply come to Him, and, like in any loving relationship, confess your wrong and He'll put you right back where you were before you drifted away.

His grace is *free*, my friends! It's *free*!

Secondly, regarding God's grace,

II. IT'S BIG.

How much grace does God have to cover our sins? Is there any danger that it will run out? Some of you may say, "Well sure there is. We all know God is a holy God who hates sin."

Verse 22 of our text says, "[*...even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe...*](#)"

According to this verse, there is enough of the righteousness of God available to cover the sins of *all those who believe*. That takes in quite a few people. That's a lot of sin-eliminating power!

But that isn't the whole of it. John the Baptizer, when he pointed out Jesus as Messiah, said in John 1:29, "[*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*](#)"

There would to be enough of God's grace to take away the sin of every person in the whole world if those people really wanted it. Can you imagine how many sins that would involve? Suppose we took a pencil and some paper and wrote down every sin that was committed on the earth today. How long do you suppose the list would to be? Pretty long, don't you think? What if we wrote down all of the sins of the past month or the past year? How about the whole duration of man's history?

And how disgusting do you think the things on that list would to be to God? Do you think he would to be pretty disgusted with the "ethnic cleansing" that is going on in Bosnia right now? How about some of the shameless molesting of children in our own country? It would to be a pretty disgusting list wouldn't it? Yet, my Bible tells me that Jesus was willing to die for *all* of it if that is what it took!

Of course, we all know that the whole world doesn't want or care about God's forgiveness, but if they did, you can to be assured that God's grace would to be big enough to cover it.

Sometimes we get the idea that our sin is just too much for God. Yes, maybe if He had caught us a little earlier in life, before we messed things up so badly, He might have been willing to forgive us. But not now. There's just too much wrong that we've done. Or perhaps if we weren't so weak and we hadn't failed Him so many times already.

My friends, if that is the way you are thinking, then you have a puny, stunted, pint-sized, runty, anemic view of God's grace that needs to be corrected!

In His book, *Our Sufficiency in Christ*, John MacArthur tells the following story:

One day the English preacher, Charles H. Spurgeon, was riding home after a heavy day's work, feeling weary and depressed. A verse came to his mind, "*My grace is sufficient for you.*" In his mind he immediately compared himself to a little fish in the Thames River, apprehensive lest drinking so many pints of the water each day he should drink it dry. Then Father Thames says to him, "Drink away, little fish. My stream is sufficient for you."

Next he thought of a little mouse in the granaries of Egypt, afraid lest its daily nibbles exhaust the supplies and cause it to starve to death. Then Joseph comes along and says "Cheer up, little mouse. My granaries are sufficient for you."

Then he thought of a man climbing some high mountain to reach its lofty summit and dreaded lest his breathing might exhaust all the oxygen in the atmosphere. The Creator booms His voice out of heaven saying, "Breathe away, oh man, and fill your lungs. My atmosphere is sufficient for you!"

So let's rest in God's wonderful grace, knowing it will be sufficient for us! ²

Can you, as an individual, exhaust God's grace by coming to Him in confession and repentance when you have sinned? I don't think so!

Jesus said in Luke 17:4 that we should be willing to forgive someone who comes to us seven times a day and says, "I repent." Now that's a lot of forgiving! Do you think He would require that of us and be unwilling to do it Himself?

But there is one more thing you need to know about God's grace, and that is,

III. IT'S STRONG

I can sense a few of you getting a bit uneasy about now, wondering if I have gone to preaching what is commonly called "cheap grace." "Cheap grace" insinuates that, since God's grace is so big and so free, we should just keep right on sinning and never worry about it since there is enough grace to cover it all. Said another way, "The more sin, the more grace, so let's just pour on the sin." Let me assure you, I am not promoting that false teaching. On

² - *Our Sufficiency in Christ*, John MacArthur p. 256.

the contrary, the message I am preaching, if it were better understood, would go further toward promoting personal holiness than any message of fear I could ever bring.

Years ago there was a TV show called “The Millionaire.” Do any of you remember that program? I was just a boy when it was being aired and it was one of my favorites. The premise of the show was an anonymous millionaire (whose face we never saw) would give a one-million dollar gift to someone each week, no strings attached. The people who received the gifts always had a hard time believing it was a gift - no stings attached, no hidden catch.

Now, a lot could be said about such a gift, but the thing I want to point out was that, though it was free, *it always made a big change in the recipient's life*. That was the driving force (and the fun) of the whole show - seeing how this one-million dollar gift changed its recipient.

That's how grace is. When you receive it, fully understanding what it is about, it changes you like nothing else could ever do.

Look closely at verse 31 of our text: *“Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never to be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.”*

You see, Paul was concerned that people might object to this teaching of God's grace being free and big by thinking that, if people really understood it, they would be more inclined to ignore God's law and sin even more. That's why the question, *“Do we, then, nullify the Law through faith?”*

Paul says, “No! Not at all! Such teaching about grace *upholds* or *establishes* the law.

Later in Romans (6:1) he makes this point again. *“Shall we continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never to be! How shall we who have died to sin still live in it?”*

To suggest that God's grace encourages moral laxness is an admission that one doesn't know anything about grace. Grace doesn't encourage us to sin. It drives us *toward* moral purity.

Someone once said, “Because of God's grace, I sin all I want!” Then he paused for several seconds and said, “No, that isn't true. Because of God's grace I sin *more than I want*.”

You see, if I *pay* for a relationship, I feel no sense of obligation other than the money I paid. If the other party doesn't like that, hey, so what? He got his wages! But if that relationship exists on the basis of a price the *other* party has paid, and it has been offered to me freely, I'm grateful for it and that has an effect upon my actions. I treat it with respect. I'm concerned about keeping it right. I'm truly sorry if I do something to jeopardize it.

Grace, therefore, based upon love and gratitude for it, is a much stronger motivator toward holiness than law could ever be. Law says “you get what you pay for and you pay for what

you get.” You feel no further sense of loving, concerned obligation under law. The result is a cold, calculated, sense-of-duty type relationship that satisfies no one. God is held at arm’s length and often viewed as a crabby old man who loves to spoil our living.

Under grace, I sin *more* than I want because I don’t *want* to sin! The grace of God is *strong*. It has the power to change us all like nothing else ever could.

CONCLUSION

A long time ago, an aging preacher and apostle of Jesus named Paul wrote to a young preacher named Titus and told him how he should deal with this subject of grace when he taught it in the church. I consider his words to be addressed to me and any other teacher dealing with the subject today. Here is what he said. It is recorded in Titus 2:11-15...

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.”

God’s grace is *free* and available to you and me 24 hours a day, seven days a week - as long as we are alive and capable of responding to it. My fear is that you will ignore it until it is too late to get it. Please pay attention! Please accept God’s grace while you can!

God’s grace is also *big*. There is no sin that it will not negate if you will accept it and the relationship that it brings. This is true whether you are a Christian or not. My fear is that the Deceiver will talk you out of that understanding and convince you that somehow your sins are bigger than His grace.

God’s grace is, finally, *strong*. If you try to please Him by any other means, you will fail miserably. Ultimately, you will lose heart and quit trying. Don’t do that. Let God change you by responding to His grace! You won’t be disappointed.

