

Growing In Grace

Lesson # 2

“The Free Gift.”

Ephesians 2:1-10

[Sermon ideas from “The Grace Awakening” by Chuck Swindoll (Dallas: Word, 1990)]

“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, (2) in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, (3) among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. (4) But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, (5) even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), (6) and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, (7) that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (8) For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, (9) not of works, lest anyone should boast. (10) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

INTRODUCTION

Warning: Heresy on the loose!. Heresy is a false doctrine, or teaching which denies one of the foundational beliefs of the church such as the Lordship or deity of Jesus. An opinion, doctrine, or practice contrary to the truth or to accepted beliefs or standards. There are many heresies among us; all of them detract from the eternal truths of God. The most dangerous one is the one we hear as the new theme of political speeches and commencement addresses. This heresy is rooted in academia and thrives in prideful minds. This heresy is very evident in popular books, movies and even poetry.

One poet, William Ernest Henley, represents this philosophy in his poem “Invictus”:

*“Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.
In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.
Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,*

*And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.
It matters not how straight the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the mater of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul."*

[William Ernest Henley, "Invictus," in *The Best Loved Poems of the American People*, comp. Hazel Felleman (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing Co., 1936), p. 73.]

What is this charming philosophy of self-sufficiency? The seed of this heresy was first planted in the Garden of Eden when Satan lured Adam and Eve to the fruit for the purpose of not needing God. It is an emphasis on what we do for God instead of what God does and has done for us. It may sound harmless, but if you feed on it very long, you'll be satisfied with yourself and no longer hunger for God.

I. CITY WHO WANTED A NAME FOR THEMSELVES

This philosophy reared its ugly head in a land called Shinar

(Genesis 11:1-4). *"Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. (2) And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. (3) Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made. (4) This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens."*

Note the emphasis on human effort and reputation: *"let us make bricks and bake them, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower, let us make a name for ourselves."* What did it mean that the top would *"reaches to heavens?"* It didn't mean they literally would reach into heaven. Literally, it means *"whose upper part is with the heavens."* Somehow the upper part of the tower was designed and constructed in such a way that it *"represented"* the heavens. Several years ago, archaeologists uncovered several of these *"ziggurats,"* cone-shaped towers with spiral staircases wrapped around them. At the top of these towers, they found signs of the zodiac etched into the stone. This was a representation of the heavens and formed something of a religious shrine. For those star worshippers, it was a way they could cling to religion without emptying their hands of their works.

What did God think of this tower and its heretical ideas? (Genesis 11:5-9). *"before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; (6) but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground. (7) And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. (8) The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. (9) And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow*

that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

This tower emphasized the idea that doing what I ought to do will result in being what I ought to be. An interesting misconception is that God destroyed the tower of Babel, he did not, the worker deliberately left it unfinished. God left the tower as a mute reminder of the futility of that heresy and as a towering indictment against a religion of human works. Unfortunately man has failed to learn the lesson that Babel was suppose to teach.

Have you ever heard anyone quote the verse, *"God helps those who help themselves?"* This is the cornerstone of the American work ethic, pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps. The problem is, this verse is not found in the Bible, nor is anything like it. It's found in Poor Richard's Almanac. The doctrine of grace is not something that is popular today. When we mention that we are reliant on someone else for our salvation, others look at us like we are crazy. We cannot pull ourselves up by our bootstraps into God's throne room. Rather than 'self-sufficiency' we must defend the truth of God's sufficiency this is called "grace". By exalting our own efforts and striving to attain heaven by our own accomplishments is an insult to His grace and theft of the glory that belongs to Him alone.

II. THE MOST COMPELLING EXAMPLE OF GRACE IN THE BIBLE

If there was ever a man who could have pulled himself up by the bootstraps of his own works, it was Abraham. He was wealthy, well-respected, and had a wonderful wife.

Yet he was still completely without hope of ever earning God's favor. Because behind all the possessions and human greatness, was a man who was a lost idolater. He was by birth, but nature and by choice a sinner. Then, out of the clear blue sky, God reached down and sovereignly chose him not on the basis of works, but of grace. (Romans 4:1-3) *"What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh?(2) For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. (3) For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."*

What was it that justified Abraham before God? His

social standing? His sincerity? His service? According to these verses there is no room for boasting before God. As Donald Barnhouse notes in his commentary: *"The day came when, in the accounting of God, ungodly Abraham was suddenly declared righteous. There was nothing in Abraham that caused the action; it began in God and went out to the man in sovereign grace. Upon a sinner, the righteousness of God was placed. In the accounting the very righteousness of God was reckoned, credited, and imputed. The Lord God Himself, by an act of grace moved by His sovereign love, stooped to the record and blotted out everything that was against Abraham, and then wrote down on the record that He, God, counted, reckoned, credited, imputes this man Abraham to be perfect even at a moment when Abraham was ungodly in himself. That is*

justification.” [Donald Grey Barnhouse, “God’s Remedy; God’s River.” (1954, 1959; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), vol. 2, p. 208.]

In the final analysis, it was not the result of Abraham’s hard work that he received the favor of God, it was completely the result of God’s grace. Justification, then is the sovereign act of God whereby God declares righteous the believing sinner while he is still in a sinning state.

(Romans 4:4-5) “Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. (5) But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,”

These two verses state it even more clearly. In today’s economy, everything is based on merit: you work, you earn a wage the more you work, the more wages you receive. If you really believe that we are saved by work, please tell me when we have worked enough. God’s economy works on the opposite premise. Everyone is justified in exactly the same way, on the basis of grace; it is a gift. Paul tells us in (Ephesians 2:8-9)

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, (9) not of works, lest anyone should boast. (10) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

No one thanks his boss for his paycheck because it is earned. There’s no room for boasting, all the credit goes to God.

III. HOW THIS GRACE IS APPLIED TO US AS A FREE GIFT—NOT AND EARNED WAGE

(Romans 5:1, 12-14) “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,... (12) “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—(13) (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. (14) Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.”

Adam’s sin released a terminal disease on all of us for all of eternity. There is no one who can escape this disease and cannot save himself from it. The Law classified sin and intensified our guilt. Just as a “Keep Off The Grass” or “Wet Paint” sign increases our desire to trespass, so the Law stimulates our desire to sin (v. 20a). The sign and Law has no power to make us obey. But there is a cure for this epidemic (Romans 5:18-20a) *“Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. (19) For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous. (20) Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound.”*

We are justified before God by faith, not works! The result is that we have peace with God. The means is through our Lord Jesus Christ. Why do we need this peace?

The Law was never meant to be a stairway of moral steps to climb our way to heaven. It was meant to be a light to reveal the sin that cowered in the dusty corners and dark closets of our lives. It could only reveal it couldn't rescue. Because we were shackled in our sin and our selfish ways, grace came to the rescue. (Romans 5:20b-21) *"...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."*

No matter how great our sin, God's grace is able to abound!

CONCLUSION: EXPLAINING GRACE FOR THE SINFUL

Our condition is outlined in (Ephesians 2:1-3,12). As we have already seen in Ephesians 2:1-3, *"And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, (2) in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, (3) among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. And now look at the twelfth verse of the same chapter, "that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." We were separated, excluded, strangers, without hope. What a desperate condition. Our condition is bad news, like a doctor telling us we have a terminal disease. But the Gospel is good news.*

But God's solution is found in (Ephesians 2:4-9) *"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, (5) even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), (6) and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, (7) that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (8) For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, (9) not of works, lest anyone should boast." Compare with (Titus 3:3-8). "For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. (4) But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, (5) not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, (6) whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, (7) that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (8) This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men."*

As the words of the old hymn say, *"Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling."* Many will come up with convincing arguments about how we must do in order to be

saved. Before you come to God, you must quit, stop, give up, commit to, etc. On the contrary, when you believe, God justifies you and gives you the power to quit, stop, give up and commit to! (Eph. 2:10) *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*"

We are not invincible captains of our souls. Our salvation is a gift of God, not of works, and we have no room to boast. Instead we should bow our heads in homage to the One who is the true captain of our souls, Jesus Christ.

Dorothea Day, answered "Invictus" with this poem, "My Captain"

*"Out of the light that dazzles me,
Bright as the sun from pole to pole,
I thank the God I know to be
For Christ the conqueror of my soul.
Since his the sway of circumstance,
I would not wince nor cry aloud.
Under that rule which men call chance
My head with joy is humbly bowed.
Beyond this place of sin and tears
That life with Him! And His the aid,
Despite the menace of the years,
Keeps, and shall keep me, unafraid.
I have no fear, though strait the gate,
He cleared from punishment the scroll.
Christ is the Master of my fate,
Christ is the Captain of my soul."*

[Dorothea Day, "My Captain," Best Loved Poems of the American People, pp. 73-74]