

Growing in Grace

Lesson # 4

Isn't Grace Risky?

[Sermon ideas from "The Grace Awakening" by Chuck Swindoll, Chapter three]

Introduction

Isn't the gospel of grace risky? You bet! I am walking on sacred ground when I speak of salvation by grace alone. Even now, some have turned me off because of what they have been taught in the past. Grace is a very dangerous doctrine! It can be misunderstood! If a preacher preaches legalism—a message of salvation based on the merits of one's works—no one will ever bring that charge against him. But if he preaches grace—salvation by faith alone—then that is risky homiletical business.

Martin Lloyd-Jones, pastor of England's Westminster Chapel for 30 years, noted this risk in his commentary on Romans: *"If it is true that where sin abounded grace has much more abounded, well then, 'shall we continue to sin that grace may abound further?' First of all let me make a comment, to me a very important and vital comment. The true preaching of the gospel of salvation by grace alone always leads to the possibility of this charge being brought against it. There is no better test as to whether a man is really preaching the NT gospel of salvation than this, that some might misunderstand it and misinterpret it to mean that it really amounts to this, that because you are saved by grace alone it does not matter what you do; you can go on sinning as much as you like because it will redound all the more to the glory of grace. That is a very good test of gospel preaching. If my preaching and presentation of the gospel of salvation does not expose it to that misunderstanding, then it is not the gospel. Let me show you what I mean: if a man preaches justification by works, no one would ever raise this question. Obviously a man that preaches in that strain would never be liable to this misunderstanding. Nobody would say to such a man, "Shall we continue to sin that grace may abound?" Because the man's whole emphasis is just this: that if you go on sinning, you are certain to be damned and only if you stop sinning can you save yourselves. So that misunderstanding could never arise. Nobody has ever brought this charge against the church of Rome, but it was brought frequently against Martin Luther. Indeed that was precisely what the church of Rome said about the preaching of Martin Luther. They said this man who was a priest has changed the doctrine to justify his own marriage and his own lust and so on. "This man," they said, "is an antinomian¹[1] and that is heresy." That is the very charge they brought against him. It was also the charge brought against George Whitefield 200 years ago. It is the charge that formal dead Christianity, if there is such a thing, has always brought against this startling, staggering message that God justifies the ungodly."*

THE REALITY OF THE RISK

Romans 5:1 "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Justification is the sovereign act of God whereby He declares righteous the believing sinner while he is still in a state of sin. It doesn't mean that the believing sinner stops sinning or that the believing sinner is *made* righteous in the sense of being perfected. It means the person is *declared* righteous. He hasn't joined a church, given up all to follow Christ, promised to give a tenth of his money to the church, promised to live a great life, etc. Justification doesn't mean "just-as-if-I'd" never sinned. Justification means this; *Even though I still sin periodically and have found myself unable to stop sinning on a permanent basis, God declared me righteous when I believed.*

(Illustration: Suppose you had a six year old son who was brutally murdered. If you did everything possible to get back at the man to pay him back for what he did to your son, that is vengeance. If you are satisfied to sit back and let the courts do their job, bringing down the punishment upon him, that is justice. But if you forgive the man, bring him into your home and adopt him as your son, that is grace!)

God takes the guilty, albeit believing sinner, and extends the gift of grace to him. To believe and live in grace means that some will take advantage of it. It is the fear of many a minister to stay away from grace because of this misunderstanding. People will think it is cheap grace. Cheap grace = God justifies the sin. True grace = God justifies the sinner.

What are the alternatives to the RISKS of teaching and living in grace?

1. Emphasize works instead of grace. Becoming an obedient, submissive disciple of Christ follows coming to faith in Christ. Works follow faith. Behavior follows belief.
2. Provide performance lists for people to live up to. Just because we have been able to work out a list in our lives about certain things, that doesn't mean it is divinely inspired as a list for everyone to live by.
3. Leave no room for gray areas. Our lists of right and wrong are more important than relationships. We first check their areas of wrong before we determine if we'll fellowship with them or not. We want to be "right" (as we see it), more than loving our neighbor as ourselves.
4. Cultivate judgmental attitudes towards those who disagree with us. Some of us have attitudes of judgment that won't even allow us to relate to our own brothers and sisters. There is something very un-Christ-like about that. *John 8:32, 36 – "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (36) So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."* Freedom comes through grace!

THE INESCAPABLE TENSION

Romans 5:6-15

“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. (7) For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. (8) 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. (11) And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. (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. (15) But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.”

We have been freed from sin's slavery. This creates a tension to take our liberty as a license! We can take our liberty to such extreme that we again become slaves to sin—that isn't liberty, it's license. The freedom we have in Christ is not a freedom to do anything we want and to not do anything we should, but to be everything God created us to be.

Many Christians opt for legalism less they be tempted to live irresponsibly. If you have a car that has a speedometer that read 200 MPH, does that give you the right to drive at 200 MPH through the streets with reckless abandon?

Gal 5:13 – “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

Some Christians will never know the pleasure of living in grace. Some people want the preacher to make their decisions about what is right and wrong in all areas. But it is not the pastor's job to dictate to the congregation what you should and should not do in every situation. It is the pastor's job to teach the truth and to model to the best of his ability, a lifestyle that pleases God and let the congregation apply the truth to their own lives.

We are no longer bound by our fleeting impulses or our flaming desires! That is what we were slaves to before God showed us his grace. We are freed to make good objective choices. Before we were led to God, our choices were always bad. We are able to think independently without the tyranny of needing to compare ourselves with others. We are able to grow toward greater flexibility and maturity into the person God wants us to be. We don't have to live by a list for someone on else.

TELLTALE SIGNS OF BEING IRRESPONSIBLE

Freedom isn't freedom from responsibility. Some Christians have interpreted freedom to be absolute, and without restraint or responsibility to others. These libertarians are easy to spot:

1. *There is a lack of love and concern for others. (Galatians 5:13) "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."*

2. *There is a rationalization of sin.*

3. *There is an unwilling to be accountable. (Galatians 6:1) "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted."*

4. *There is a disregard new converts and those weak in the faith.* Weaker brothers do not know their convictions and are looking to learn, while legalists ("Professional Weaker Brothers") know full-well their convictions and they ought to be yours.

Gal 1:6-9 I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, (7) which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. (8) But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. (9) As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed." Some have taken grace out of the gospel."

(Gal 2:4-5) "And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), (5) to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you." People are "spying" on our freedom in Christ—DON'T GIVE IN!

ESSENTIAL NECESSITY OF BALANCE

One end of the balance pole on a tightrope is license and the other is legalism. The middle is liberty. Liberty keeps us balanced on grace.

Romans Chapter 14 has a lot to say about balance.

1. Accept those who are weak in the faith—This does not mean to surrender to the legalists. (vv. 1-5) *"Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. (2) For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. (3) Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. (4) Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master*

he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.(5) One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind."

2. Don't give in to judgmentalism and don't intentionally put stumbling blocks in others' way. (vv. 13,14) *"Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way. 14 I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean."*

3. Do everything to try to lead us to peace and building each other up. (v. 19) *"Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another."*

Conclusion

Practical suggestions for guarding against extremes:

1. Enjoy the freedom grace provides. You may have difficulty at first going beyond the NO Trespassing signs placed by legalists, but don't be afraid. Give yourself permission to be free without the fear of someone looking over your shoulder.

2. Treat grace as an undeserved privilege rather than an exclusive right. Live gratefully, not arrogantly. Have fun, but don't flaunt it

3. Remember, while grace came to you freely, it cost the Savior His life. There was no cheap grace that flowed from the veins of Christ on the cross. If properly value that gift, you will never have to worry about abusing grace. He died that you might live...and that you might live FREE!