

I. Introduction

- A. It is only because of Jesus, and His death on the Cross, that God can be kind to us, generous to us, loving to us, fatherly to us. Take away the shed blood of Jesus; God is not your Friend. Not your Savior. Not your Lord.
- B. Take the shed blood of Christ, and God can only be your judge.
- C. That is because of an amazing reality that is found only in the Bible, and nowhere else but the Bible: the reality called grace.
- D. Welcome to our fifth and final week in a series called Family Values. We are talking about our legacy as a church. About what we think is most important, most valuable, top priority stuff.
  - 1. We have talked about scripture, community, discipleship, mission, and worship.
  - 2. And today I am so excited to talk with you about my favorite topic of all: grace.
- E. I had a hard time preparing this message, because I didn't know where to start and where to stop. The Bible is so full of grace, I felt like a hyperactive kid stuck in a cotton candy machine. Everywhere I looked there was super sweet stuff, and it just kept coming. It was exciting and hard to put today's sermon together.
- F. So I decided to not pick one, but a whole bunch of Bible passages for us to look at.
- G. Because if there is any single truth that I want us as a church family to get, to really prize in the deepest parts of our souls, is grace.
- H. I believe that the exact meaning of the word grace ought to be crystal clear to every child of God. You should know it. You should feel it. You should prize it. Grace.
- I. We're going in deep, so open your heart and your mind to what God says in His word and realize, I haven't done my job right today unless I've shocked you. So here goes.

II. *Verse 1: 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 (Romans 11:6, NKJV).*

- A. I know this is a hard verse, but I wanted to start here anyway. That's because it gives us our definition of grace, and I like to start with definitions.
- B. This verse says that salvation is either by grace or by works. It's not by both. It's not 50/50. It's either all grace, or all works. If it's by works, it's no longer grace. If it is by grace, it is no longer by works. The two don't mix. If you can mix grace and works, then your concept of grace is no longer grace, and your concept works are no longer works. That is exactly what the Bible means here.
- C. So what is grace? Here are some really good definitions:
  - 1. "Grace is the good pleasure of God that inclines Him to bestow benefits upon the undeserving. It is a self-existent principle inherent in the divine nature and appears to us as a self-caused propensity to pity the wretched, spare the guilty, welcome the outcast, and bring into favor those who were before under just disapprobation. Its use to us sinful men is to save us and make us sit together in heavenly places to demonstrate to the ages the exceeding riches of God's kindness to us in Christ Jesus." -A. W. Tozer (1897-1963)
  - 2. Grace is the very opposite of merit. Grace is not only undeserved favor, but it is favor shown to the one who has deserved the very opposite. (Harry Ironside, Moody Church)
  - 3. Grace is the free, undeserved goodness that God gives to unworthy people on the basis of the Cross of Christ.
- D. There's an old acronym that nails it: God's Riches At Christ's Expense.
- E. If you get nothing else from today's service, get this one truth: **ONLY GOD CAN PLEASE GOD.** That's the whole premise of Scripture.
- F. God is so pure, and we are so messed up, and defiled, and impure—we hate, we cheat, we lust, we lie, we envy, we slander, we boast. We are fallen members of a fallen race, and unworthy of anything from God except condemnation.
- G. But God sent Christ to shed his blood, and to die on the Cross for our sins. That wasn't our good work; that was His good work.
- H. Grace isn't God just being nice. How anyone could look at the Crucifixion of Jesus and declare that God is nice is beyond me. He was wounded for you. He died for you. He took the condemnation, the guilt, the shame, the punishment, and the death for you. He died as a substitute for your sins.
- I. God did to Jesus what He meant to do you.
- J. If Christ had NOT died, God would be your enemy. Because grace never means that God overlooks sins.
- K. Grace is the perfect intersection of justice and love. With justice, God nails your sins to the Cross; blasting Jesus for every last one of them and with love, God binds you to His own heart. Both justice and love. Not just love.
- L. You cannot work your way to heaven.
- M. You cannot work your way to God.
- N. Grace is God's work, not yours; everything that had to happen to connect you with God for time and eternity, **GOD DID IN FULL THROUGH CHRIST AT THE CROSS.**
- O. You don't help Him. There is no synergy here. It is monergy all the way. So the Bible says:
  - 1. *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8, 9, NKJV).*
  - 2. *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, (Titus 3:5, NKJV).*
- P. It's either grace, or it's works, but it can't be both, not even a little.
- Q. The core message of the church of Christ is all about something that God has done decisively, once for all, in Christ. No religion offers it. No god has it. Nobody pays God back for it. It is a free gift of free grace, paid in full by Jesus Christ plus nothing.

III. *Verse 2: Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6, NKJV).*

- A. I don't get a lot of grief when I preach salvation by grace. But I do get grief when I preach that your whole life after salvation is by grace too.
- B. Most people think it's salvation by grace and then the Christian life by works.
- C. That's not just a big mistake, it's the devil's lie.
- D. People say that we have to balance out God's grace with our holiness, God's grace with our good works. They say, "It's okay to preach grace, Bill, as long as it's 'in balance.'"

- E. In balance with what? There is no such thing as a balancing truth to grace, as if grace goes on one side of the scales and something else goes on the other side. There is no other side. It's grace on both sides.
- F. To ask for a truth to balance out grace is to deny Philippians 1:6.
1. J. Vernon McGee told a story about a little boy who wanted to be baptized, and to join his church. His pastor wanted to make sure he was genuinely saved, so he asked the boy how he got saved.
  2. The boy said, "Well, I did my part, and God did his part."
  3. The pastor asked him to explain.
  4. God's part, he said, was to send Jesus to die on the cross for his sins.
  5. The pastor asked, well, what was your part?
  6. The boy said, my part was to sin.
- G. If you want a balance, there it is. Grace is the operation of God through Jesus Christ that negates your sin without negating God's justice and truth.
- H. He who has begun a good work in you—who's that? Who began that good work in you? God did. Who began the good work? God. Whose good work is it? God's good work. Is it your good work? No, it's God's good work.
- I. He will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ—who will complete it? God will complete it. Will you complete it? No. God will complete it.
- J. Who does the good work here, you or God? God does the good work here. God's grace is on both sides of the scale.
- K. I told you I wanted to shock you today.
- L. Let's do a little exercise. You received a program when you came in—grab it, and grab something to write with.
- M. There's a blank panel there for notes. At the top of that panel, draw a fluffy cloud, and write God in it.
- N. At the bottom, draw a good looking stick figure of you, and write "Me" by it.
1. Now, in a minute, we're gonna draw some arrows. When we want to represent God doing something good for us, draw the arrow down, from God to us, like this.
  2. When we want to show us doing something good for God, draw the arrow up, from us to God, like this.
- O. So, let's do a psychology test. I'm gonna say six words, one at a time. I'll pause about 1 second, and you draw an arrow. Is that word about what God does for you, draw an arrow down. If it's what you do for God or to God, draw the arrow up.
1. Submit!
  2. Serve!
  3. Give!
  4. Love!
  5. Evangelize!
  6. Pray!
  7. Good Works!
- P. Are most of your arrows pointing up (works) or down (grace)?
- Q. If you're like most people, most of your arrows point up. In fact, most of the time, you come to church expecting to be told what you should do, or shouldn't do, or do more of or do less of, because that's what church is supposed to be about, right?
- R. Let me shock you. The core idea of each of those concepts in the Bible is that it's something God does for you, way more and way before it's very something you do for God.
- S. Let's go over those six words:
1. *Submit: And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:8, NKJV).*
  2. *Serve: "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28, NKJV).*
  3. *Give: For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor; that you through His poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9, NKJV).*
  4. *Love: In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10, NKJV).*
  5. *Evangelize: "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10, NKJV).*
  6. *Pray: Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered (Romans 8:26, NKJV).*
  7. *Good Works: For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10, NKJV).*
- T. We are natural born legalists. We are natural born religionists. We need an epic shift in our whole way of thinking about God. Call it a paradigm shift. Call it repentance. You need a NEW MIND.
- U. Because the Bible is NOT the book of doing your duty for Jesus. It is not the book of your commitment, your dedication, your service, your morality, your giving back, paying it forward, or your changing the world.
- V. Above all else, the Bible is the revelation of the GOD OF ALL GRACE.
- W. In it, God has declared His boundless charity for messed-up mankind. He has revealed His complete forgiveness as the starting point—not the ending point—of all our efforts to be holy. He has lit up the story of Jesus and His incomparable sacrifice as a spectacle to dazzle humans and angels for eternity. And He has linked with unbreakable chains every benefit He sends our way to history's climactic moment at the Cross/Resurrection of Christ.
- X. God has darkened the theater of the cosmos, and aimed His dazzling spotlight on Jesus Christ—on His self-sacrificing love. God has made His own commitment to us the centerpiece of the cosmic story, rendering you and me and everybody else bit-players in the drama of redemption.
- Y. The Bible declares God's nature, attributes, promises, plan, gifts, blessings, mercies, kindness, goodness, benevolence, self-sufficiency, self-sacrifice, riches, and generosity.
- Z. The Bible tells the tale of God's grace unfolding in the real lives of morally bedraggled people.
- AA. The Bible declares the self-revelation of a God who is infinitely more committed to us than we will ever be to Him.
- BB. Why then, do our sermons, songs and books emphasize the imperative? Why do we spend so much time telling people what to do (or don't do) before we have fueled their spirits with what God has done?

- CC. Our proportions are all out of whack. Commit! Submit! Give! Serve! Go! Sacrifice! Be radical for Jesus! Give back! Change the world! Be nice! Be a great husband-wife-mom-dad-employer-employee-friend-church person-greenie-global citizen-scout! These, and a thousand other imperatives, rise off the church like the wavy lines of cartoon stink from a road-killed skunk.
- DD. Don't even bother pointing a single arrow UP till you've already got a thousand arrows pointing down. Grace.
- EE. God who began a good work in you will complete it.
- FF. Are there any conditions there? Are there any ifs, ands, or buts? Is there any so-called balancing truth?
- GG. No. It is a naked promise from a God who couldn't lie if He wanted to.
- HH. Who does the work in that verse? God. All of it, or some of it? All of it.
- II. Grace.
- JJ. But, you say, we have to do something right? Yes, I know. I know you're dying for me to throw you a bone and let you draw some arrows pointing up. No. I won't.
- KK. Because every up arrow is legalism. One hundred percent.
- LL. Does that mean we get saved, and that's it? We never do anything for God? That's not what it means. Here's another kind of arrow.
- IV. *Verse 3: We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19, NKJV).*
- A. Think with me.
- B. All the good works we do, all the serving and giving and helping and building a great church—all of this goes under the heading, WE LOVE GOD. Our love for God. That would be an arrow pointing up IF there were a period after We love Him.
- C. But there's not. There's another word. BECAUSE.
- D. We love him—we serve God, we clean up our lives, we feed the poor, we build hospitals in Africa, we help our neighbor change a flat tire, we put money in the offering plate, we live holy obedient lives—we love God BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US.
- E. Some of you are only half convinced of the love of God. You know it intellectually, but you don't feel it deep inside. You're not convinced. You had a lousy day, and you question if God still loves you.
- F. So you work harder to please him, not because he loved you first, but because you want to get him to love you.
- G. And you've just landed in the stiff working boots of the legalist.
- H. If I want you to love God more, I have to fill you with more of God's love first.
- I. Because that's how God works. The harder he loves you, the better you love him back. And you can only love him BACK. You can't initiate love with him, that's legalism. Your love is reciprocal of his love, or it isn't love. It's legalism, it's narcissism, it's hypocrisy, but it isn't love. He loves first; you love second, every day for the rest of your time and eternity.
- J. That's why Jesus said:
1. *"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing (John 15:5, NKJV).*
- K. For without Christ, without his initiative, his love, his presence, his power flowing thru you, what can you do? Nothing. Nothing. And extra nothing—even if it looks like a whole lot of something.
- L. Here's what I'm saying.
1. When you think good works, you need to think God works through me.
  2. Here's the arrow we're after. Not just up. But down from God first, and then back up from you second.
- M. If grace doesn't blow you away, God doesn't care about your good works. Oh, we Christians will be impressed with how you're helping people and doing all this good stuff.
- N. But God isn't impressed. It's fluff. It's wood, hay, and straw (1 Cor 3:12). It's energy of the flesh. It's destined for the ash heap of heaven.
- O. Even the good stuff you do is a function of grace. Get it? Any obedience not rooted in grace is unsustainable. You'll burn out, and you'll turn against God.
- V. *Verse 4: For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek (Romans 1:16, NKJV).*
- A. If the gospel is anything, it is the story of a gargantuan arrow pointing from God to us. "Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures," St Paul summarizes. "He was buried and rose again, according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). This he calls the gospel. It is the whole gospel. God gives. We receive.
1. "Christ died," that is history - heaven and earth's darkest moment.
  2. "For our sins," that is theology—the theology of substitutionary atonement.
- B. The church's task is to keep telling that bit of history coupled with that bit of theology over and over in words and actions that every generation understands, summoning men and women everywhere to embrace the Savior, Jesus.
- C. I won't quibble over your particular formulation of the gospel, but I will fight like a junkyard dog over which way the arrows point.
- D. He gives, we receive. He died, we live. He sacrificed, we say thank you. He paid the price, we grow rich. He gave his life for us that he might give his life to us and live his life through us. Any other gospel inverts the arrows. Any other gospel is not good news. Any other gospel invites God's curse.
- E. Paul's whole life demonstrated a laser-beam focus: "to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). John announced, "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Jesus called his living water "the gift of God" (John 4:10) and made the gospel challenging enough for a rocket scientist yet simple enough for a child: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16).
- F. Can God be any clearer that the gospel is the story of His commitment to us, ten thousand times more than it will ever be about our commitment to Him?
- G. *It is all grace, without the slightest intrusion of human works. The arrows point entirely from God to us. It is His work, His sacrifice, His cross, His effort, His free gift to an unworthy world of moral train wrecks. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every person who believes (Romans 1:16).*
- H. Search all the world's religions, and you will never find anything like this grace, and you will never find a Savior like Jesus. Study the history books of all the religions of all civilizations, and they are all the same: arrows pointing up: Humans, by human effort seeking the approval of God.
- I. And into that dark scene of labor and effort, explodes the message of Jesus and His matchless grace. A Savior is born.

- J. Sins forgiven.
- K. Righteousness granted.
- L. Heaven opened.
- M. Eternal life offered.
- N. Earthly life renewed.
- O. A pardon for criminals.
- P. Power for living.
- Q. And hope for dying.
  - 1. In the Gospel you have...
    - a) A Savior to forgive you sins.
    - b) A Redeemer to set you free.
    - c) A Regenerator, to breathe life into your dead spirit.
    - d) A Body Guard, to slam Satan to the mat and clear the way for your blessing.
    - e) A Shepherd to watch over you all your days.
    - f) And a Guide to bring you safely home at last.
  - 2. This is the gospel of grace, this is who we are. This is why we are. This is what we are.
  - 3. Grace yesterday.
  - 4. Grace today.
  - 5. Grace tomorrow.
  - 6. And grace the next day.
  - 7. And when the sun grows dim, and our planet stops spinning, and when this old universe gets rolled up like a scroll... when the ages of eternity roll on...
    - a) Every person who has laid hold of God through the matchless grace of Jesus—we'll be standing before Him in heaven—shouting and singing and dancing and celebrating the One Savior and the One God and the one Gospel of Amazing grace.

#### VI. Conclusion

- A. And I'm wondering if there's anybody here today who's ready to believe. Ready to make that paradigm shift from works to grace, from self-effort to Christ's finished work on the Cross.
- B. It is not your commitment to Him; it is His commitment to you.
- C. It is not you holding on to Him, it is letting Him hold onto you.
- D. It is not you giving anything to Him, it is Him giving His life for you, and that He might give new life to you, now and forever.
- E. Are you ready to receive Jesus?