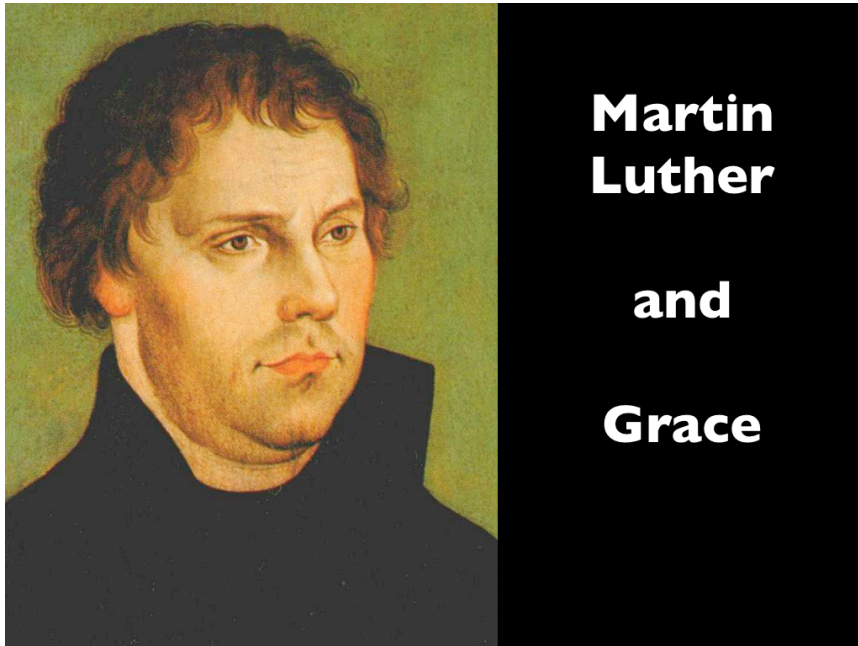


## Martin Luther and Grace (August 12, 2012)



Augustine once rightly said:

Just as there are shallows where a lamb may wade, so there are depths in the Scripture where an elephant may swim.

This is because the Bible contains truths that at first glance seem simple – and yet as you meditate on them – consider them – develop them – you come to realise that the depths of those truths are inexhaustible.

What do I mean?

Consider the Trinity – one God in three persons. Simple – until you try to comprehend what this actually means.

Jesus is fully God and fully man. This sounds fine until you try and grasp how one being can be 100% human and 100% divine.

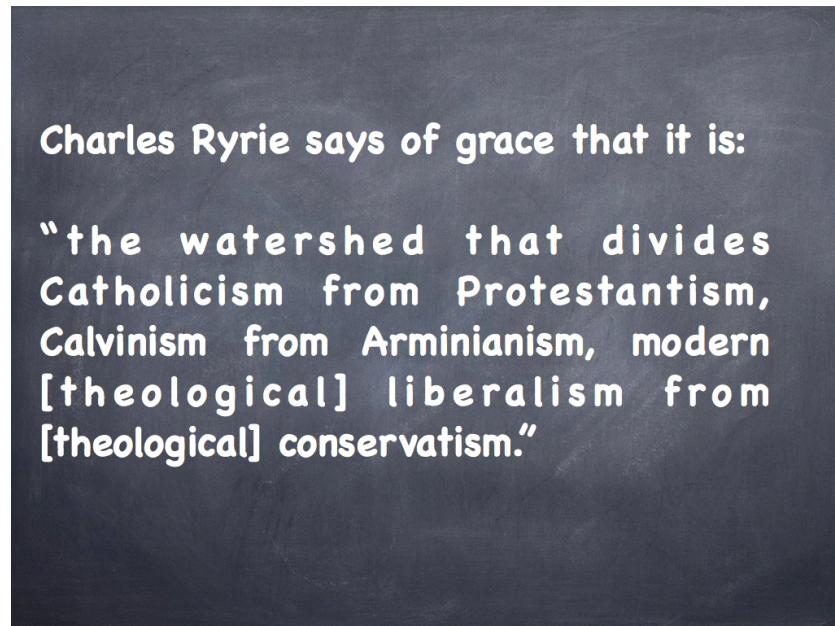
God is eternal. Again, it sounds good until you try and wrap your mind around the concept of a being beyond time and space.

Similarly grace is a concept that might seem easy to grasp – but it is anything but. Grace is a difficult concept because the Bible describes it as a gift from God – in which our efforts play no part – and yet our sinful hearts keep trying to add our works and efforts to the equation. It is difficult because God does it all and something inside us struggles to accept that.

Remember that the word grace is used in the Bible in many ways – but in this message, I am using it in terms of the grace that leads to salvation. I am using it as Paul did in Ephesians 2:8:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.

Rightly understood, this grace is one of the most important concepts in Scripture. Charles Ryrie says of grace that it is:



"the watershed that divides Catholicism from Protestantism, Calvinism from Arminianism, modern [theological] liberalism from [theological] conservatism."<sup>1</sup>

However, while grace is crucial, even defining grace is not easy.

I suspect that if I asked all of you to define grace, many of you would probably quote the acrostic we all learned early in our Christian life.

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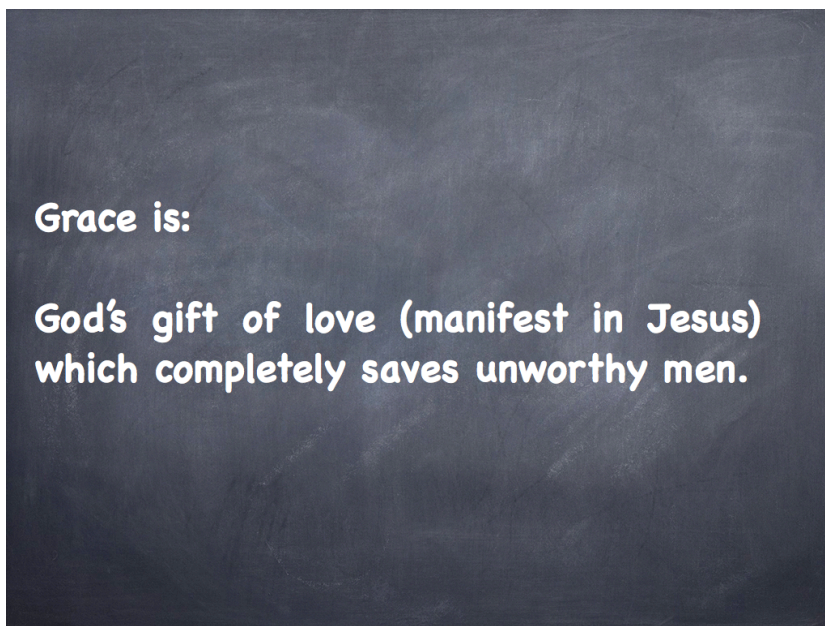
<sup>1</sup> Ryrie, Charles C. *The Grace of God*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963), pp. 10-11.



Grace is **God's Riches At Christ's Expense**.

While this does tell us *what* grace gives us – God's riches, it fails to tell us *what* those riches are – or *how* we get them at Christ's expense.

So to help set the platform, here is my uninspired attempt at a definition. Grace is:



God's gift of love (manifest in Jesus' sacrifice) which completely saves unworthy men.

How precious this truth is.

It is a gift – we can't earn it.

It completely saves us – our salvation does not rest on our pitiful attempts.

The gift is manifest in Jesus – God Himself.

And yet – here is what I want to convey this morning. Something inside our pitiful twisted hearts – perverts grace – and wants to return to the failed inadequacy of works.

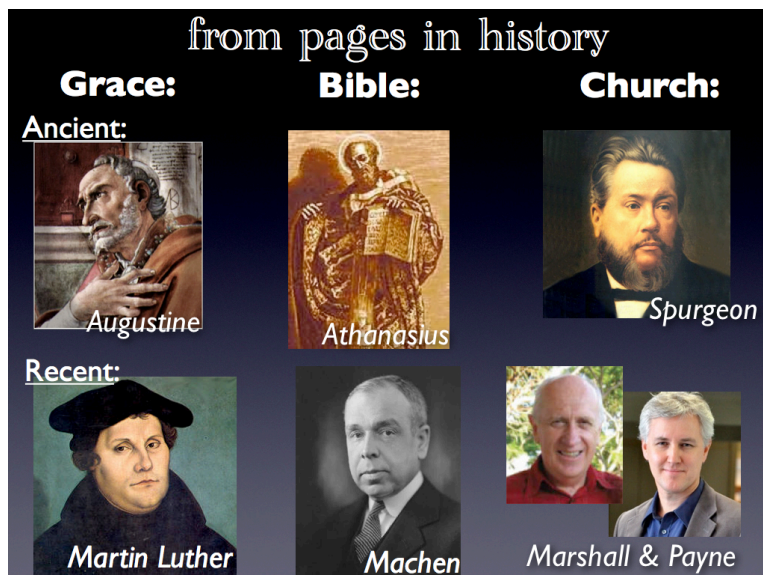
Why are we looking at Grace?

Many years ago when we were looking at names for our church – we considered many trendy contemporary names – but we settled on – *Grace Bible Church*.

Because these three words encapsulate most of what our church stands for.

And behind each word there is so much history. Men and women have lived and died that we might understand what *Grace*, *Bible* and *Church* actually mean.

And so we have begun a six week series looking at *Grace*, *Bible* and *Church*.



We wanted to look at how in the course of history – men of ancient and more modern times – have turned to the Scriptures to firmly root the teaching and practice of the people of God in a right understanding of the truth of God.

One of the greatest difficulties Dave and I faced was how to limit this series to six men – because these truths are constantly under fire. Men of every age have had to fight for them.

As George Santayana wisely noted:



*"Those who cannot remember the past  
are condemned to repeat it."*

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

There are truths worth fighting for – and if history shows us anything it is that every generation has to fight afresh to preserve those truths.

History also helps us see where the attack comes from and how to defend it.

Grace is one such truth. Grace is always under attack. It is under attack today. And the task of preserving this truth now falls to us.

When you read the Old Testament – grace is everywhere. God's gift of love which completely saves unworthy men. The author of Hebrews walks us through the Old Testament to show how grace is a dominant theme.

And yet by the time the Lord Jesus entered our world – biblical grace was a lost truth.

Liberal Judaism did not believe in grace. Pharisaic Judaism had replaced grace with works. And so when Jesus appeared – so much of His teaching – so many parables were infused with the truth of grace as an undeserved gift leading to salvation.

The writers of the New Testament picked up the baton and hammered grace again and again.

They had to do this because as the church grew – man's inclination was to return to works. Read Romans, Galatians, John's Epistles, Peter's Epistles, Hebrews. Grace was under siege.

However, one might think that once the New Testament was written. Once churches had the truth in their hands – grace would stay above the fray.

Here is what churches had in their hands. Ephesians 2:1–10:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

One might think that with such a clear, unambiguous outline of grace this would end works as a means of salvation – but no.

Our pride is such that we want to have some role – small or large – in our salvation. We say – grace yes – but works too. And in this we undercut the work of God and the message of salvation.

And so over the next few centuries after Jesus – the works of the early fathers show a deterioration in grace and a rise in reliance on works.

This deterioration was halted for a time by Augustine.

Last week Dave looked at the life of Augustine and how he grappled with his sin, the holiness of God and found the answer in the grace of God.

Augustine became a dominant figure in the early church.

In the fifth century AD various church councils condemned the teachings of Pelagius and endorsed Augustine's theology. Augustine's teaching on salvation by grace were in theory the standard for the church in the western Mediterranean.

Unfortunately, Augustine's writings were not translated from Latin into Greek, so his theology did not influence the church in the eastern Mediterranean. So to this day, the Orthodox churches took on a different concept of original sin which does not require the doctrine of justification before God.

However the West fared little better. Unfortunately, while councils had declared that Augustine's teachings on grace were biblical – they failed to implement that teaching and then politics got in the way.

Rome asserted its primacy and in the political machinations that followed – theology – the Queen of the sciences – was neglected.

But God was about to move in mysterious ways. To understand the impact of this – let me set the scene for you in Europe nearing the end of the fifteen century.

The thousand years from 500 to 1500 AD has well been called the Dark Ages. This time has been well described as 'a thousand years without a bath.'

When the Emperor Charlemagne died, Europe descended into feudalism. The landed aristocracy ruled. The rest served. A Carolingian law in 847 made it mandatory for every freeman to place himself under the rule of a lord.

The life of the average peasant in Europe was one of filth – literally and spiritually. Accounts from the time describe the smell and grime of medieval Europe.

The squalor led to frequent outbreaks of disease. Infant mortality was very high. In 1338, the Black Plague raced across Europe killing forty per cent of the population in the cities. Death was a fact of life that everyone lived with.

While the people lived in filth, the church was no better.

The worship of Mary and the saints flourished. What had been forbidden until the fourth century now actually became mandatory.

The Bible was placed on the list of forbidden books and anyway few could read.

Immorality was rife in the church. Boniface wrote this of the church in the mid 700's:

Young men who spent their youth in rape and adultery were rising in the ranks of the clergy. They were spending their nights in bed with four or five women, then getting up in the morning ... to celebrate mass.

Peter Damian writing in the 11<sup>th</sup> century noted that profligacy among the clergy of his time was universal. In fact he said that the clergy were a menace to the wives and young women of the parishes to which they were sent.

And the Popes were usually numbered among the most immoral and wicked men of the day. Pope John the XII, a tenth century Pope was one example. Liutprand wrote of him:

Pope John is the enemy of all things ... the palace of the Lateran, that once sheltered saints and is now a harlot's brothel, will never forget his union with his father's wench the sister of the other concubine Stephania ...

Women ... fear to come and pray at the thresholds of the holy apostles, for they have heard how John a little time ago took women pilgrims by force to his bed, wives, widows and virgins alike ...

Rodrigo Borgia became Pope Alexander VI. He freely boasted he had committed his first murder at 12 and continued the murders throughout his life.

Priestly nepotism was rife. Being a leader in the church was totally based on power not Christlikeness. The papacy was universally obtained by the man who could provide the largest bribes or the one with the largest sword.

Money usually bought the papacy. John Burchard kept a diary of the election of Rodrigo Borgia. At that time a cardinal's hat could be bought and sold for a king's ransom. At the election, all of the cardinals came to see how the bribes lay. Burchard reports that at the election only five of the votes were not bought. He said Borgia bought the papacy with villas, towns and abbeys. To buy off his greatest rival Cardinal Sforza, it cost Borgia four mule loads of silver.

At other times wars were fought between rivals with the winner claiming the papacy. One consequence of this was a very unstable papacy.

At one time there was a papacy in Rome and a rival papacy in France. There was a period when three men were all reigning as the Pope and all had support from various factions of the Catholic Church.

With men like these leading the Roman church, it is not surprising that the simplicity and beauty of the Gospel had long since been lost.

So in the midst of such godlessness – how could anyone think they were saved?

The answer lay in a perverted theology of grace.

Grace came to be viewed almost as a substance – have enough of it and you get to heaven.

You could get it by good works, following the sacraments of the church – or by buying it through indulgences.

The Catholic Church developed a theology of a treasury of grace – which was made law by Pope Clement VI.

The idea is that the greatest saints – the ones much godlier than you and me – through their works they accumulated merit or grace – which is stored in a heavenly treasury of merit – which the church had the right to dispense.

The theory was if your acts of piety were not enough to get you to heaven you could augment your grace by buying some from the Church. The Church was willing to part with some of its surplus in exchange for earthly gold.

You could buy some grace for you or for your loved ones, enough to get them out of purgatory and into heaven.

If you controlled the church – you controlled grace. If you weren't holy enough – that is OK – you can tap into the treasury of merit and use some of the grace earned by saints.

By the thirteenth century even Rome realised things were getting out of hand.

Under Thomas Aquinas the Roman Catholic Church set out to more clearly outline its theology. To try and reign in some of the abuses.



Unfortunately some loose thinking by Augustine had opened the door to seeing justification – becoming right with God – as a process. Aquinas – added the concept of the church holding the keys to the process of justification.

This led to a restatement of the belief that if you wanted to get right with God – the path did indeed lie through the Catholic Church.

The Church was affirmed as God's agent dispensing grace to those it chose. They reaffirmed that grace came through works, the sacraments and indulgences.

But they did pare the thirty sacraments down to seven – baptism, confirmation, the Mass, penance, extreme unction, marriage and ordination. But all remained the exclusive right of the church of Rome to bestow.

And they reaffirmed the sale of indulgences.

An indulgence was the practice whereby one could purchase from the Catholic Church grace for the remission of sins. Parts of Europe were sold like franchises in which the purchaser could collect the indulgences. Those who bought them could wring every penny out of the people. They would then keep half and send the other half to Rome.

The franchise for Northern Germany in the time of Luther was purchased by a man named Albert of Hohenzollern. He appointed Johan Tetzel to preach on indulgences and collect as much as he could.

Tetzel would travel from town to town and set up a large chest. He would play on the need for the people to help their departed loved ones to be freed from purgatory. His catchcry was this:

As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.

This exclusive right also gave the church great power. As an example, King John of England, the signer of the Magna Carta, defied Pope Innocent III and appointed John de Grey as archbishop of Canterbury when the Pope had ordered Stephen Langton to take the position.

Innocent slapped an interdict on England and Ireland. Priests were forbidden to administer any of the sacraments except extreme unction. The nation was cut off from grace.

Fear of hell – and believing Rome held the keys to escape was incredibly powerful.

The nobles forced King John to travel to Innocent. Innocent made him wait three days on his knees in the snow. He then demanded he hand over control of England and Ireland to the papacy in return for lifting the interdict.

The dispensing of grace had evolved into a giant mechanism for raising money, wielding power and keeping the masses ignorant.

Today, we wonder why no one rose up earlier to confront this abomination.

But remember, most priests could not read – and even if they could most did not own a Bible.

If they did – it was a Latin Vulgate and probably they only had a few portions of the Scriptures.

They did little study to become a priest – many simply paid a fee.

And when you are told to question the church is to lose your salvation – few have the courage to rise up.

The few that did – men like Jan Hus and John Wycliffe – were martyred.

So the status remained. The attempt at reform largely failed – the church remained perverted and corrupt.

This was the world Martin Luther was born into.

As one historian quipped – Luther was born in the Middle Ages but he died in modern times.

Luther was born in Germany in 1483. Let me put that in perspective. That is the same year that Christopher Columbus entreated King John II of Portugal for funds to finance a trip across the Western ocean to the Indies. When Luther was nine, Columbus stepped ashore in the New World.

Luther's father was a copper miner who had high hopes for his boy. He was determined that he would become a lawyer. In 1502, at the age of nineteen he received his Bachelor's degree, ranking a rather unimpressive thirtieth of fifty-seven in his class. In January 1505, he received his Master of Arts at Erfurt and ranked a more respectable second among seventeen candidates.

But it was at this time the Lord intervened.

On July 2, on the way home from law school, he was caught in a thunderstorm. Suddenly, there was an ear-splitting crash – lightning struck right at Luther's side, killing his friend instantly and throwing Luther on his face in the mud. Luther raised his hand to heaven and implored, "Help me, St. Anne and I will become a monk."

Luther did survive and determined to keep his word. His father was furious that the son he had invested so much into would now become a priest.

Luther joined an Augustinian monastery at Erfurt. But soon after joining – a great turmoil erupted in his soul. His near death experience had brought home the reality of God and heaven. Now Luther wanted to make sure that when it was his time to die – he was right with God.

While the monastery was Augustinian – they did not teach what Augustine did. They told Luther he would find peace with God through works – fasting, penance and prayer.

But he had a problem. He was a man's man. He was loud, he had a filthy mouth, he liked the things of the world. It seemed that to him – these were the things stopping him from being saved. And he could not accept that a few good deeds would wipe the stain of sin.

But Luther tried incredibly hard to live a life pleasing to god.

“In the monastery,” he said, “I did not think about women, money, or possessions; instead my heart trembled and fidgeted about whether God would bestow His grace on me.... For I had strayed from faith and could not but imagine that I had angered God, whom I in turn had to appease by doing good works.” ... He said, “If I could believe that God was not angry with me, I would stand on my head for joy.”<sup>2</sup>

Luther thought that if he could purge himself of sin – then he would receive the grace of God.

He confessed his sins – often six hours a day. On many occasions he beat himself with a whip until he was a bloody pulp, unconscious on tile floor. He still struggled with lust and thoughts of the world.

He determined to be the best monk possible. He tried staying out all night in the snow trying to purify himself. He prayed by himself for hours. One time he prayed for six weeks barely eating, barely sleeping.

But the sin was still there. He felt separate from God.

His theology told him – he was a monk – he was part of the church – he was doing good deeds – he should have the grace of God – Luther knew he did not.

He confessed his sin repeatedly to his fellow priests. He confessed for hours – was told he had received absolution but then sometimes he would not even make it back to his cell before he remembered a sin he had omitted and would rush back, to the utter consternation of the priest.

Luther did not know where to turn. We might say – look to the Word – that was just not part of their thinking.

During his time at the monastery, an amazing event happened. Here is how Merle D'Aubigne described it:

One day – he had been two years at Erfurt ... he [Luther] opened many books in the library one after the other, to learn their writers' names. One volume that he came to attracted his attention. He had never until this hour seen its like. He read the title – it was a Bible, a rare book, unknown in those times. His interest

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<sup>2</sup> Cited in Piper, J. (2006). *The legacy of sovereign joy: God's triumphant grace in the lives of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin* (84). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

was greatly excited and he was filled with astonishment at finding other matters than those fragments of the Gospels and epistles that the church had selected to be read ... during public worship ... Until that day he had imagined that they composed the whole Word of God. Now he saw many pages, many chapters, many books of which he had no idea! His heart beat fast as he held the divinely inspired Volume in his hand. With eagerness and with indescribable emotion he turned over those leaves from God.<sup>3</sup>

This was a major turning point. Luther now became a student not of the church – but of the Word. However, it took some time for Luther to discover the teaching of grace – and his should remained in turmoil.

In 1507 he was ordained as a priest. Yet, when he came to celebrate his first mass he was in turmoil because he realised he was yet filled with sin.

Johann von Staupitz was the head of his monastery. In 1511 he decided to send Luther to Rome as an Augustinian emissary. Maybe Rome could help this difficult case.

Luther was so thrilled, he could hardly contain himself. For surely, there in the holy city of Rome, he would find that peace with God which he needed.

When he saw the outline of Rome in the distance, he fell to the ground and thanked God. He rushed like some mad pilgrim from shrine to shrine, saying his prayers and trying to earn a blessing.

He went to the Scala Sancta – the Holy Stairs. Supposedly these were the stairs Jesus climbed to face His trial before Pilate.

Helena – the mother of Constantine had them shipped to Rome in 326. The Church taught if pilgrims climbed them on their knees doing penance – they would receive grace.

Luther tried this. It did no good. He s said to have recalled the Bible verse, “The righteous shall live by faith” and abandoned his climb. But he still could not put it all together.

He was shattered that Rome wasn’t holy at all. The people were utterly immoral and the priests were the worst of all. It was filled with unbelief, skepticism and immorality of every form. Even the Pope was boasting about his illegitimate children.

Luther was shocked to the core of his being. He wrote:

- If there is a hell, Rome was built on it.
- Let me get out of this terrible dungeon.
- I took onions to Rome and brought back garlic.

How was a man to become right with God?

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<sup>3</sup> From *‘The Life and Times of Martin Luther’* by Merle D’Aubigne

Finally, through study of the Word and prayer, the Lord opened the eyes of Luther.

In 1517 he nailed his 95 theses to the door of the church in Wittenburg.

Then two years later, in his own words this is what happened as he studied Romans:

I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But up till then it was ... a single word in Chapter 1 [v. 17], "In it the righteousness of God is revealed," that had stood in my way. For I hated that word "righteousness of God," which according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they called it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, "As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteous wrath!" Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted.

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" There I began to understand [that] the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which [the] merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. Here a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory....

And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word "righteousness of God." Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise.<sup>4</sup>

Luther simply could not understand Romans 1:16–17:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the

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<sup>4</sup> Cited in Piper, J. (2006). *The legacy of sovereign joy: God's triumphant grace in the lives of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin* (90–92). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

Paul says the gospel reveals the righteousness of God. He became stuck on that one phrase – the righteousness of God.

Paul says the gospel – the good news – reveals it. To Luther this made no sense. God being righteous is not good news – it is terrible news.

If God is righteous – then God must punish sinners. When Luther thought of the holiness and the justice of God – he didn’t feel joy – he felt an overpowering dread about standing before a righteous judge.

Luther understood enough of the Bible to know that no man is holy – all are sinners.

What Luther faced – what we have to face is the realization that while men are sinners – God is holy. So perfectly holy – that any sin – one lustful thought – one white lie – one flash of anger – was enough to disqualify us from heaven forever.

No praying, fasting, whipping can deal with sin.

He was flattened by the teaching in Scripture that the standard for entry to heaven was perfection. God’s righteousness became a sword that had to fall with omnipotent wrath upon sinful men.

Initially, Luther like all of us automatically rejected this. Why? Because it seems so unfair. We know that everyone sins.

If this were true – it would mean that no one measured up – no one reached the standard – no one was going to heaven. This just couldn’t be right.

And so – a struggle ensued. Luther tried to be good enough. Despite his best efforts – he failed.

The Bible taught that we are sinners – and this means that heaven cannot be attained in full or in part by my works. I just can’t meet the standard of perfection.

It is like me trying to jump to the moon – it is impossible.

But opposing this our fallen hearts whisper – you are not that sinful. You aren’t perfect – but you deserve heaven. You can make it to heaven by your works.

The result was a struggle.

Every religion in history can be divided into two.

On one side – aided by the deceitful whispers of our fallen heart is the view that heaven *can* be attained in full or in part by my works.

On the other side – heaven *cannot* be gained in full or in part by my works.

On the works side comes every religion that you can think of – Pharasaic Judaism, Catholicism, Islam, Buddhism, Mormonism.

But here is the truth that changed the world. The truth that transformed the first century world – and the truth rediscovered by Luther in the Tower of Wittenberg.

On the other side – there is *one* and *only* one entry – Christianity. Christianity is the *only* religion, philosophy, way of life – that says – you can't make it to heaven by your works. You can only get there by the grace of God.

Paul sums all of this up in Romans 3:20:

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

This was the truth that was causing Luther to despair. He could never be a good enough man or monk.

But the gospel showed the way.

Romans 3:21:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law.

This righteousness from God comes – not through works – but through faith.

Faith not in yourself, or your works – but in what Jesus did on the cross.

Finally, Luther saw the truth – the gospel is not about telling us God is righteous – but it is about telling us how men can receive from God His righteousness. We receive it as a gift through faith.

Luther rejoiced and the world was changed forever.

W. H. Auden wrote a sonnet called “Luther.” Its last four lines are these:

All Works and all Societies are bad;  
The Just shall live by Faith,” he cried in dread.  
And men and women of the world were glad  
Who never trembled in their useful lives.

If you read Luther – grace becomes the centre point of his life.

Let me give you a taste of how Luther saw grace. Here are his *Smalcald Articles*:

The first and chief article is this: Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins and was raised again for our justification (Romans 3:24-25). He alone is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29), and God has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6). All have sinned and are

justified freely, without their own works and merits, by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, in His blood (Romans 3:23-25). This is necessary to believe. This cannot be otherwise acquired or grasped by any work, law, or merit. Therefore, it is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us...Nothing of this article can be yielded or surrendered, even though heaven and earth and everything else falls (Mark 13:31).

In a sermon on Titus 3:4-8 he wrote:

Yes, dear friend, you must first possess heaven and salvation before you can do good works. Works never merit heaven; heaven is conferred purely of grace.

The delusive doctrine of works blinds the Christian's eyes, perverts a right understanding of faith, and forces him from the way of truth and salvation.

He who does not receive salvation purely through grace, independently of all good works, certainly will never secure it.

Truly, then, we are saved by grace alone, without works or other merit.

Augustine – Luther. Why look at their lives?

Because in every age – grace comes under attack. Pervert grace – and you pervert the gospel – and men cannot be saved by a false gospel.

Are we in danger – yes.

I doubt anyone here will fall for buying grace. Or will they. Do you ever give a bit extra hoping God will grant some prayer or make life easier?

I doubt anyone here thinks Dave and I can dispense grace. Or do you. If we tell you that you are OK – is that what matters?

If our lives are not as holy as we want – and something bad happens – we wonder if God is withholding His grace.

Grace comes under attack in every age.

Works finds its way in somehow. Today we have the new perspective on Paul – a teaching finding its way into many churches today. A way to add a slice of works to the cross of Christ. And it resonates with us. We like the idea of earning some grace. We tend to see ourselves as having good in us.

It may sound minor – but if history teaches us anything – it is this – add works to grace – in any way – and the gospel is at risk. Once you remove the purity and centrality of Christ alone – the gospel, the church our spiritual life is at risk.

And so we learn from the Scriptures and the giants of the past – where the attack comes from and how to defend it.



Grace gives all the glory to God. Grace is the way of salvation. Grace is worth fighting for.

And now the baton of grace has come to us. Ours is the task to preserve it for this generation and pass it on to our children.

May we be faithful in this task.