

Grace Through Faith

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[0 : 00] Most of you probably have been to a funeral at least once in your life, by this point in your life. It's always a sobering thing.

There's a sense of finality. And especially if it's a loved one, the sense of loss is very real, right? Even if you know that that person is in heaven.

But I suppose to ease our grief, when funeral homes take the corpse in, they try to kind of mask the harsh reality of death, right?

So I don't know if you've been to a funeral where they have the viewing of the deceased. They leave the coffin open so they can see the deceased. And of course, they're not leaving the corpse unadorned and decaying in the coffin like they put makeup on it.

And maybe even close the eyes, right? And just put the hair done right. And so everything, the person actually looks quiet, content, alive.

[1 : 08] Going through and viewing the deceased. But the truth is, of course, even though that corpse is dressed in her best clothes and has makeup on and all of that, there is no life at all in that corpse.

The corpse can't lift a finger. The corpse has no will of its own. You can't think. You can't do anything. The heart has stopped beating, right? So it's no longer supplying oxygen to its body cells. The calcium has leaked into its muscle cells, causing bigger mortis. So the body's stiff. There's no will. There's no brain activity.

So there's nothing that the corpse can do. She is completely disposed to the will of others. In this passage we just read, Apostle Paul tells us about the spiritual condition of people outside of Christ. But unlike the funeral homes that dress up the dead body, Paul doesn't dress up his truth at all. He tells us that we are spiritually dead. And the reason why he's so grim is because we can't grasp, we can't understand the exceedingly great reality of God's salvation in rescuing us unless we get the gravity of the condition we were in.

[2 : 32] That we were dead in our trespasses and sins. That we were hopeless. Of course, he's not referring to a physical death. But in a similar way to the physical death, there's nothing that spiritually dead people can do to save themselves.

They can lift a finger to save themselves. And this is hard for us to admit, right? People are willing to admit that, oh, you know, I was foolish and immature when I was young.

Oh, maybe I was a little sick, maybe spiritually sick, ill. But, you know, but that's not what Paul says. That's not enough to admit that you were maybe a little wrong, had a little error, maybe had a little sin.

What Paul wants us to get is that we were dead in our trespasses and sins. And there was nothing we could do to save ourselves. And to that end, Paul first describes our hopeless condition. And then secondly, he describes God's merciful action. And then third, he describes God's ultimate purpose for his saving action. In order to teach us, and this is the main point of this passage, that God saves hopeless sinners to display his sovereign grace.

[3 : 42] God saves hopeless sinners to display his sovereign grace. So let's turn first to verses 1 to 3, which tell us about our hopeless condition. Verse 1 tells us that we were dead in our trespasses and sins.

Trespass, another translation says transgression. It's a violation, transgressing of a standard that God has set. Boundaries that God has placed around us and we transgress and we go beyond it. The same thing, sin, likewise, is a word that refers to a violation of God's commands. His explicit commandments in his laws, we violate it. And at the heart of every sin and every transgression or trespass is unbelief and pride.

And we see that in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sin against the Lord. It's that we disbelieve, we doubt God's word, we disbelieve his word and think that we know better. So there's unbelief, there's pride, and we rebel to do our own way, to pursue our own will as opposed to being submitted to God and living according to his will. And Romans 6.23 teaches us that there's only one lawful consequence to that kind of activity, to sin and trespass, and that's death.

[4 : 51] The wages of sin is death. That's why it says in verse 1 that we were dead in our trespasses and sin. And then in verses 2 to 3, Paul tells us what our spiritual death looked like with three descriptive phrases, participative phrases.

First, we were following the course of this world. Second, we were following the prince of the power of the air. And third, we were carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.

So this is what theologians have historically called the world, the flesh, and the devil, the three enemies of the soul. Now let's take a closer look at the first description in verse 2. It says that we were once following the course of this world.

It literally means following the age of this world. It refers to various non-Christian or anti-Christian ideologies, values, philosophies, systems, fashions, pressures that govern our world.

Worldliness. And there's only two courses you can follow. You're either following the course of God, the heavenly course, or you're following the course of this world.

[5 : 58] And Jesus says in Matthew 12, 30, whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. Right? Even if you pride yourself in being different from the rest of the world, even if you stick out like a sore thumb compared to the rest of the world, if you're not following God, then you're squarely in the pattern of this world.

You're like everybody else following the course of this world. You're worldly in the most profound sense of that word. But a Christian follows another way. And the phrase age of this world highlights the radical break that takes place when a Christian gives himself, his life to the Lord.

When he's united with Jesus. Because a Christian no longer belongs to this age. The priorities and the values of the Christian shifts so drastically that it's almost as if the Christian no longer belongs to this age.

No longer belongs to this world at all. What would be some examples of following the course of this world? Right? For one, the pervasive materialism of our age.

People don't pay attention to God and his word. People are walking in the course of this world are blind to the eternal spiritual realities and are fixated on the temporal, physical realities.

[7 : 17] They're more concerned with their physical appearance than their spiritual character. They're more concerned with their material possessions than their heavenly treasures.

They're more concerned with their opinions of their online virtual friends that they don't ever see than the verdict of their creator.

Another example is deep-seated naturalism of our culture which tries to explain away everything with natural causes without any acknowledgement of God anywhere.

So then people lose sight of their ultimate purpose as people who are created by God for his glory. So we live with the worldview that's men-centered, not God-centered. And so in everything we do, we live without reference to God.

We seek to accomplish everything through human planning, through human ingenuity, through human power, and through human programs. Without relying on God and His power. Our world is, the diamond worldview of our age is godless.

[8 : 28] There's no place for authority of God's word. And because beliefs in God, in spiritual truths are considered or basically demoted and relegated to the realms of private opinions.

There's no central anchor that holds us together. We drift in the sea of relativism. I mean, I can name, you guys can name a lot more.

I can name a lot more, right? You see, in our world, people divide along various lines of identity and disdain those who don't belong to that identity or share that identity. Whether it's systemic racism or ethnocentrism that leads to ethnic cleansing in places like Myanmar.

Or just classism here in Cambridge and Boston. The course of this world wrongly devalues people who are supremely valuable because they're created in the image of God.

And we divide and disdain and dispute. In these ways and more, we were all once following the course of this world, the age of this world.

[9 : 37] And the second way in which we were dead in our trespasses and sins, as Paul describes, is that we were, in verse 2, following the prince of the power of the air. What does that mean? This sounds like some kind of sci-fi supernatural stuff, right?

The prince of the power of the air. The next clause gives us a clue. The prince of the power of the air is described as a spirit. In the same Greek word that means spirit can also be translated as wind. The wind is in the air. And the kingdom of the air is the invisible world of spirits, which people in this age largely saw as the realm above. The airy realm, they called it.

And he is called a prince because he can only act within the bounds of God's ultimate sovereignty. He still has a sort of a rule over this world. And John describes him consistently in his gospel as the ruler of this world.

Satan is his name, the accuser. And these forces are in the air, so to speak. It's pervasive. It's pervasive. But this is often overlooked.

[10 : 42] Why? Precisely because it's the realm of the air. It's invisible. You don't see it. It's like carbon monoxide poisoning. Orderless.

Tasteless. Colorless. You die killed by it without even knowing that you are being killed by it. Spirit. Satan.

Demons. And this is so important for us to recognize whether you're a Christian or not here at this place. I mean, when you see, read in the news about human trafficking, right?

People being enslaved, abducted, enslaved, and sold for, and used, abused. We are rightly indignant. And we want to right that wrong. And we want to see the evildoers punished.

But when it comes to Satan and his minions, they are doing this every day. We are spiritually abducting, abusing. And yet, we don't even protest.

[11 : 47] If we knew that, if we lived with that reality, how different would our posture be toward people who are being dragged to hell and enslaved by Satan? And the consequence is eternal death.

Separation from God. As Christians, to use the modern slang, we need to stay woke about that reality.

That's the ultimate reality that we need to be aware of. As Ephesians 6, 12 says, We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Are you aware of the spiritual battles that are being waged in and around you right now? The pervasive and insidious influence of the prince of the power of the air.

That's the second way. We were dead and not trespassed in sin. And the third way in which we were dead and not trespassed in sin is in verse 3. It's that we live in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.

[13 : 00] Paul's not condemning all passions and desires that we have, right? But he's referring to everything within us that is inclined toward evil and toward rebellion. That's contrary to God.

It's what God described in Genesis 8, 5 before he sent the flood judgment. He said that every intention of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually. That's what it's describing here.

Those passions of the flesh. Galatians 5, 19, 21 gives us some examples of these passions of the flesh. Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.

And people sometimes think that indulging these desires of the flesh and living without any kind of constraints from God's word as freedom. Living it up.

You have only one life to live. Do what you enjoy. Do whatever you want. But that can't be further from the truth. There's no freedom in that kind of a lifestyle. There may be the sensation of freedom, but there is no life there.

[14 : 15] It's a sign of death, as Paul described. It's not unlike, I hope no one in this crowd does this, but it's not unlike climbing, rock climbing while unroped, right?

Climbers call this free soloing, right? And those who do it mention getting hooked to the adrenaline rush, right? The sensation of being free from any constraints, being alive.

But if you climb anywhere above 30 feet, you mess up and it's death. And so if you look up the statistics on climbing, the fatalities from free soloing is disproportionately high.

And the list of top world-class climbers who have died free soloing grows every year. Sure, wearing a harness and being tied to a rope and using an anchor might feel like inhibitions, but it's these

safety mechanisms that enable climbers truly to enjoy their climb, to climb freely without fear of exchanging a thrill for death.

Similarly, indulging in the passions of our flesh may offer a sensation of freedom and life, but there's no life there. It's death. And some free soloing climbers survive, but sin has 100% fatality.

[15 : 53] And this is how we all once lived. There are no exceptions. Look at verse 3. 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.

There's no exception. Every single one of us, no matter your upbringing, no matter your heritage, no matter your background, we were all once dead in our trespasses.

And so we were objects of God's wrath. And God's wrath, don't think of it as this capricious, you know, this arbitrary, maybe anger, or pitiful, you know, petty anger of the pagan gods, of the Greco-Roman world.

This is the expression, God's wrath is a manifestation of His commitment to His holiness, and justice, and righteousness, and it is just anger, righteous anger, wrath that we fully deserve because of His righteous judgment.

All of us were dead like that, and some of us are probably still dead in our trespasses. And what is required then is not a partial renovation, but a radical new birth.

[17 : 22] J.C. Ryle, a 19th century Anglican pastor, writes, puts it this way, it's not a little mending and alteration, a little cleansing and purifying, a little painting and patching, a little turning over a new leaf and putting on a new exterior that is wanted.

It is the bringing in of something altogether new, the planting within us of a new nature, a new being, a new principle, a new mind.

This alone, and nothing less than this, will ever meet the necessities of man's soul. We need not merely a new skin, but a new heart. All things must pass away, and all things must become new. Man must be born again, born from above, born of God. The natural birth is no more necessary to the life of the body than is the spiritual birth to the life of the soul.

And if you are not a Christian this morning, you have a tremendous opportunity this day to be born again from death to life. And don't despise your desperate need for salvation by pointing to and comparing yourselves to weak, feeble, hypocritical Christians that you see in your life.

[18 : 35] Sure, they may be less accomplished than you. Sure, they may appear even less moral than you.

But there is an unsurpassable gap between the Christian and the non-Christian because the one is alive while the other is dead. The magnificent sculpture of David by Michelangelo, even though it looks in every appearance to be alive and it's beautiful and it's magnificent, but even that does not compare to this feeble and weak life of a child born prematurely in a neonatal cato unit.

Why? Because that statue is dead, but that baby is alive. The weakest member of God's family has more life in him and thus, therefore, more precious to him than the most successful, beautiful, athletic, intelligent, and moral unbeliever.

So you need Jesus today. You need to be born again. But how can that which is dead be brought to life?

What can those who are dead in their trespasses and sins do? To be short and blunt, nothing. Absolutely nothing.

[20 : 02] There is nothing you can do. That's what death means. The dead tell no tales. The dead can't save themselves.

Christian author Paul Tripp compares putting on the appearance of life on oneself apart from Christ to trying to staple apples onto a dead tree. Sure, it might look great for a little bit, but there's no life to sustain and nourish that fruit.

We may be able to change some of our habits, but we cannot change our hearts. We may be able to take up a new lifestyle, sure, many people have done that without Christ, but you cannot take on a new nature.

Only Christ can do that. I hope you will crush this morning because that's what I'm trying to do.

Crushed every dash, every last bit of hope that you have in yourself because there is no hope apart from Christ.

And the reason why I do that is not so that we can be depressed, but so that we can appreciate and appreciate God's mercy. That brings us to our second point.

[21 : 24] Notice the descriptions, notice the important word in verse 2 to 3, we were once dead. Right? There's hope. There's some in our midst who are no longer dead.

That's the description of their past. It's our past, not our present. Why and how did that happen? Verse 4, read it with me. But God, that has to be the most glorious, hope-filling, and life-infusing use of the adversative conjunction in literature.

But, there's hope, but God. It doesn't say, but we pulled ourselves up from our own bootstraps. It doesn't say, we labored diligently and earned our salvation.

It says, it's not we who worked hard to perform good works to become alive in Christ. It says, but God saved us. Not you. Not me.

Why? Read the verse 4 to 4 to 5 with me. 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.

[22 : 42] By grace, you have been saved. And notice the jarring contrast between verse 3, which talks about God's wrath, that we are objects of God's wrath, and verse 4, which talks about God's mercy and His love.

Right? Paul puts them intentionally side by side, and the contrast is not a contradiction. God still resolutely opposes and condemns our sin and judges us for our sin, but not unlike a parent who, while simultaneously despising the willful rebellion of their child, still loves them, still corrects them, and instructs them.

So God's wrath, God's mercy and love, they coexist. God loves us. It's because of His love for us. It's because of His mercy that though God has wrath toward us in our sin, He provides the means for us to be rescued and delivered from that wrath.

That's incredibly good news, and that's how He makes us alive together with Christ. And that phrase, with Christ, repeated emphatically three times, verses 5 to 6, these are the three things that God does for us that correspond to the three ways in which we were dead and our trespasses and sin, the world, the flesh, and the devil.

This is what God does first. God made us alive together with Christ. Second, God raised us up with Him. And third, God seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

[24 : 07] God made us alive with Him, raised us with Him, and seated us with Him. All of God's saving activity happens with Christ. So there's no salvation apart from Christ.

And what this means is this, why with Christ, with Christ, what He's saying is that we're participating in Christ's death and resurrection and ascension and session, His reign, being seated next to the Father's right hand and reigning over all authority, rule, and power, and dominion.

We get to be partakers of that because as we were singing, He took our place. He took the punishment that we deserved as sinners so that we can take place, His place, as the righteous, beloved Son of the Father.

that's what baptism represents and signifies. That's why that's the sacrament of Christian initiation. You go into the water, that signifies your death.

You're buried, you're dead to sin, and you rise again with Christ in His resurrection power, with new life, being born again in the family of God.

[25 : 19] That's why we do baptism. So how specifically did He deal with those three things? Look at verse 5.

First, He deals with the passions of our flesh. He says, He made us alive together with Christ.

Right? So the fact that we participate in His resurrection means we participated in His death.

Galatians 5, 24 to 25 puts it this way, those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

The passions of our flesh, crucified, nailed on the cross. Now we're dead. We were once dead in our trespasses and sins. Now we are dead to our trespasses and sins.

I hope you guys think about it this way. There's a radical break that we're Christians. That's no longer who we are. That's not how we live anymore because that doesn't define us anymore.

[26 : 19] I mean, that's a very powerful idea, mentality to have. I mean, think about it. Sometimes when my elder daughter asks me to spoon feed her food for her meal, I tell her, girl, you gotta feed yourself because you're not a baby anymore.

You're not a baby anymore. And that often works for her because she thinks about it for a second.

Oh yeah, I'm not a baby anymore. Yeah, so I should feed myself. It's like, that's what my baby sister

does. I mean, it's recognizing, no, we are born again into Christ's righteousness, into His kingdom. We are no longer defined by our trespasses and sins. So why linger then? Why live in it? That's not who we are. We're new people. We have a new father. We have a new family. We have a new identity. And there's so much power in appropriating that grace of God in Christ for ourselves.

Some of us wrestle with guilt, lingering guilt a lot of times and you wrestle with a lot of sins that you have, seem to have no power to kill. And maybe you're telling me at this point, well, you might say that we're dead to trespass and sins, but my sins and trespasses seem alive and well in my life, right?

[27 : 35] And if that's the case, then this illustration might be helpful for you. When you're farming or doing gardening work, right, you have to take care of the weeds. I do this every week.

And you have to uproot the weeds, right? And once you take them out and remove the root and you take the weeds out, they will still, for maybe a day or two, still have a semblance of life in them, right?

It'll still be green. It'll still be a little flexible, has some water left in it. But that's a dead weed. There's no way that weed survives.

It's dead because it's uprooted. It's just a matter of time. In the same way, when Christ decisively defeated sin on the cross on our behalf, He killed it.

He was victorious. And it's just a matter of time before we're fully delivered from even the presence of sin in our life. That's why increasingly every believer's life is characterized by sanctification, becoming holier day by day, year by year because sin is dying.

[28 : 50] It's dead. This is how Christ deals with our flesh, but He doesn't stop there. He also deals with our world because as participants of His death and resurrection, we're also participants in His ascension.

It says in verse 6 that God raised us up with Christ. And because we have been raised to new life above with Christ, we no longer live by or are defined by the age of this world.

Our hope is not here anymore. It's in God's kingdom. It's with Christ. 1 Peter 1, 3-4 says, God has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

That's what we look forward to and live by. That's our hope. This world tells us that wealth will bring us happiness. happiness. You should accumulate more and more and more so you could spend more and more and more and be happy.

But because we have been raised with Christ above this world, we no longer lay up for ourselves treasures here on earth where moths and rust destroy, where thieves break in and steal, but instead we lay up our treasures in heaven where moths and rust do not destroy, where thieves do not break in and steal.

[30 : 22] This world tells us you are what you eat. Eat organic, stay fit, so you can be healthy and look good and attract the other sex.

But 1 Corinthians 6.13 tells us food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord and the Lord for the body.

Eating well and exercising are good things, sure, but that must never be the driving concern of our lives because we have been raised with Christ above the course of this world.

There's more to us than our bodies and more to life than enjoying food and sex. So not only does Christ save us from the flesh and the world, He also deals once and for all with the prince of the power of the air.

He does this by making us participants in His session. His ascension and His session, He's being seated at the right hand of the Father which means He's enthroned and He's reigning over all authority, rule and power and dominion.

[31 : 39] We now reside with Him and reign with Him. That means we are no longer under the tyrannical reign of Satan in our lives. Remember from last week that Christ is above every name that is named so we don't have to name any other name.

That's us. And for the Ephesian believers who at the time were living with perpetual fear of what these aerial spirits can do to them, this is a liberating reality.

You're not under His dominion anymore. So stop doing His being. You're not a slave. You've been free at the highest cost of the blood of Jesus Christ.

God's a complete sinner. He delivers us from the world, the flesh, and the devil but that leaves us one lingering question. What's in it for Him? Why?

Our final point, God's ultimate purpose but before I get to God's ultimate purpose, let me tell you about God's penultimate purpose. It's still one of His purposes but not the ultimate purpose, the purpose just before that.

[32 : 50] And He says, we all once walked in trespasses and sins in verses 1 to 2 but now He uses the same word walk and it says this in verse 10, we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Note the repetition of the word walk. So we used to walk this way but God saved us so that now we walk this way differently for good works as God's workmanship.

That word means it's creation. That means we are God's new creation. He created us for His purpose and as created beings we serve the will and desire of the Creator, His purpose.

And what this means is that contrary to what a lot of people say, oh if God saves you freely by God's grace, well then you don't need to do any good works. No, God saved us for good works. What do you mean we don't do any good works? And that's what every Christian does because that's what we've been saved for, that's what we've been consecrated for so we live and do good works every day.

[33 : 55] So if you're a Christian and that's the thought that you have had and if in your life you do not give evidence of the fact that you have been transferred from this kingdom of the dominion of Satan to the dominion of Christ through your good works, through your life, then you're still dead in your trespasses and sins.

If you don't give evidence of the fact that you have, you're dead to your trespasses and sins, that you no longer follow the desires of the flesh but you follow the desires of your Lord Jesus Christ, then you are not alive in Christ.

The true Christians must show evidence, show proof of their salvation in the way they live because that was the purpose for which God saved us. Saved us for good works, not by good works.

The prepositions are so important when it comes to talking about these theological issues. We're not saved by good works. We're saved by grace through faith but we have been saved for purpose, good works.

But that's only the penultimate purpose and the ultimate purpose is this, God saves hopeless sinners to display His sovereign grace.

[35 : 09] See this clearly in verse 7. So that purpose, in the coming ages, He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

That's His ultimate purpose. He wants to show case to all the generations for eternity, His grace and kindness toward us. He continues this thought in verse 5.

Paul says, by grace you have been saved. And then now he repeats that in verse 8 and then explains what he means by that. For by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God.

Salvation is a gift. Do you really believe that? Can you imagine getting a gift from someone and then a week later getting a bill?

Come on. That's not a gift. It's in the very definition of a gift that it is freely given with nothing expected in return.

[36 : 23] So why do we live with insecurity like God gave us a loan? Oh, here's a loan.

Now you do everything for me. If you don't I might take it back. Why do you live like you owe Him something when He gave it to you freely and said this is a gift because I love you because I want to show you my grace and kindness.

That's why I saved you. Why do you live like you owe Him something? Sure, in love we owe Him everything but you don't have to pay anything back. God paid for it.

It's a gift. And that brings us to another one of the five core principles of the Protestant Reformation. Grace alone.

we're saved not by our works but by grace alone. We're not saved through penance. We're not saved through the sacraments.

[37 : 33] We're not saved through our good works. We're saved by grace alone. And don't be misled into thinking that it's our faith that saves us.

Remember I told you the prepositions are important. We're saved by grace through faith. Faith is the instrument of our salvation. It's not the cost. It's not the basis of our salvation.

Let's say this. Let's say you apply to an incredibly prestigious law firm that you're completely unqualified for and have no business applying to. But let's say that your dad is the president of this law firm and he makes all the hiring decisions.

Well of course you're going to get in. Did you get in because your application was stellar? No, you got in because of your father's grace.

The application was just the means. It was not the basis of your entry, of your induction, of your acceptance. So then as those who were once dead but made alive in Christ by God's grace, it's appropriate for us as people to display his sovereign grace, the ultimate reason for his saving us.

[39 : 07] And that's why God saves us by grace through faith so that we don't boast but that God gets the glory for it because if God's completely responsible for our salvation from the beginning to the end, there's nothing we can do to exalt ourselves in God's, before God's throne.

As verse 9 implies, it says, if our salvation were a result of works, then we could boast. Then we'd have something to boast about. We deserve some credit and glory but it's because our salvation is not a result of works but the gift of God we may not boast.

Well, going back to the illustration, if you had graduated as a valedictorian from Harvard Law School and you aced your bar exam, well, when you get into that firm, who gets the credit for that? Well, you do because everybody sees it and says, oh, you are eminently qualified. It's when you have no qualifications but you get in because of your father's grace, that's when he gets the credit. Of course, in that example, he'd also be accused of nepotism probably but that's not the point of the analogy because our salvation is not a result of works. Church historian Richard Loveless writes this, that he said, many Christians below the surface of their lives, they are guilt-ridden and insecure and draw the assurance of their acceptance with God from their sincerity, their past experience of conversion, their recent religious performance, or the relative infrequency of their conscious willful disobedience.

[40 : 45] when we do this, when we rely on our own sincerity, on our own past experience of conversion, on our own recent religious performance or experience, or on our relative infrequency of sin in our lives, then we're robbing God of his glory because then when we are relying on that, we're saying to ourselves, well, God loves me because I do my devotions every day.

Well, God saved me because I was more sincere and full of faith than those people. Well, God loves me because I haven't sinned that badly in a long time.

Stop robbing God of his glory. When we say to ourselves, God saved me, a hopeless sinner, utterly hopeless sinner, not because I'm great, but because his love is great.

When we tell others in our lives, God saved me, a hopeless sinner, not because I was so deserving, but because of his mercy, that gives glory to God.

That's why he saves us by grace through faith. Does that seem too good to be true? It's true.

[42 : 09] I have one last story to tell you that hopefully drives that hopefully drives this home for you. I had a professor at seminary. His name was Haddon Robinson. He just recently passed away. He was a preaching professor.

He was once a president of Denver Seminary. And while he was president of Denver Seminary, he did what presidents are supposed to do, which is fundraise. And in that particular time, he had to fundraise about \$20,000 for a new phone system for the seminary.

And he had this golden opportunity with a very wealthy Christian businessman. And the businessman cut right to the chase when they met to talk about this. He says, so how much would you like me to give you?

Haddon Robinson didn't want to be presumptuous, so he said, how about \$1,000? A lot of money for most of us. And it wasn't a lot of money for him.

He didn't bat an eye. He cut a check for \$1,000 and handed it to him right away. And as he did that, he told him this. You insulted me. The comment stunned Robinson, and so the businessman continued, you asked me for \$1,000, but you needed \$20,000.

[43 : 24] Either you felt that I wasn't able to give you that much money, in which case you underestimated how I'm doing financially, or second, you believed that I had the money, but didn't

think I would give it, in which case you insulted my generosity.

Do you think that God's grace for you is too good? Are you doubting the rich reserves of God's mercy for you? He's rich enough in mercy for us, all of us, no matter how deep we have sinned, no matter how lost we have been.

Or do you doubt his generosity, that he's willing to forgive, that he's willing to give, but he doesn't want it? He has great love toward us, great love, rich in mercy, great love toward us.

Ask, and it will be given to you. Receive, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. Ask today for much grace, and receive it from him. As God saves hopeless sinners to display his sovereign grace.

Let's pray together. Father, humble us as your people, so that we make much of you and your grace and salvation, and not much of ourselves.

[45 : 09] so that having received mercy, grace, great love toward us, we may be stirred up and grow in our love for you, and our love for us.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.