

Grace

Unwrapping the Perfect Gifts – Part II

Romans 5:2

Introduction

In his book entitled, *The Finishing Touch*, Chuck Swindoll asked the reader if they have ever thought about the implications of being satisfied with something less than excellence – whether it is in business, or education, or science, or medicine. He wrote,

Thanks to Natalie Gabal, I awoke to a whole new awareness of what would happen if 99.9% were considered good enough. If that were true, her research concluded, then this year alone, 2 million documents would be lost by the IRS; 291 pacemaker operations would be performed incorrectly; 20,000 incorrect drug prescriptions would be written out, and 12 babies would be given to the wrong parents every single day.

The truth is, we do not experience 100% perfection in life. Babies have been handed to the wrong parents; pacemakers sometimes fail to work; the IRS actually does lose some documents.

Swindoll went on to make a comparison between what we expect out of life, but never get, with what God has done for believers when He declared us righteous.

He justifies us – declaring us righteous, 100%. Now remember, justification does not mean you are righteous, because every day you sin. Justification does mean that God declares you righteous and He wipes every sin off your record – every sin you committed before salvation and after salvation.

Anything less than 100% justification and we cannot be declared righteous . . . we'd be almost righteous. Isaiah 1:18 would need to read, "Come now and let us reason together", says the Lord, 'Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be [not white as snow, but] light pink.'" And when Jesus breathed His last, He would have said, "It is almost finished." And we would have to keep working at it, adding to something that Christ evidently didn't finish at the cross.¹

Justified means we are forgiven, 100%. Our hearts and souls are like fresh fallen snow, the stain of our sin is forever washed away. And, according to the word of God, that is just the beginning of what He does for those He justifies!

In Romans, chapter 5, verse 1, we discovered that peace was a perfect gift from God, given to those who believe in the peace treaty Who hung, two thousand years ago, on a cross.

Grace –

A Perfect Gift from God Alone

In the very next verse, the apostle Paul delivers the news that we have been given another perfect gift from God. We have been given the gift of grace.

Notice what he says in verses 1 and 2a of Romans, chapter 5,

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction [access] by faith into this grace in which we stand . . .

You need to understand that this right of access to God was revolutionary to the early New Testament believers. The Jews and the Gentiles were not accustomed to access in their worship; they were accustomed to distance. They were familiar with a series of barricades, not bridges, as they came to worship God.

Temple walls barred access to God

The temple in Jerusalem was designed with several walled courtyards. Access was denied to more and more people as you moved from the outer courtyard toward the interior.

The first temple wall divided the Courtyard of the Gentiles from the interior

1. The first temple wall divided the Courtyard of the Gentiles from the interior.

The Gentiles could only come to the first perimeter of the temple. There were signs that, if they went beyond that wall, they would be executed. The Roman government even upheld this death penalty. There are two signs that have been excavated and are even today, displayed in museums. These signs once hung on the outer temple wall to warn the Gentiles that they could pass no further. Only Jews could pass beyond these signs.

The second temple wall divided the Jewish Courtyard of the Women from the Courtyard of the Men

2. A second temple wall confronted the Jews. This wall divided the Courtyard of the Women from the Courtyard of the Men. At this wall, all Jewish women had to stop.

The third temple wall set apart Jewish priests

3. Beyond that was another wall with golden doors through which only Jewish priests could enter.

The last temple wall divided the Jewish priests from God's presence

4. Then, there was a curtain that separated the holy of holies and God's presence from the Jewish priests. Only the high priest could enter once a year, briefly.

The perfect gift of grace through Jesus Christ gives access to God

However, Jesus Christ, the last Lamb, paid the complete offering for sin, which separated man from the presence of God. And, after He cried on that cross, "It is finished," that curtain suddenly ripped in half by invisible hands – from the top down to the bottom – signifying that the hand of God had removed the ultimate barricade from mankind. Men and women, boys and girls, can now intimately, personally worship Him.

What incredible truth! Peter delivered the breathtaking news, in I Peter, chapter 2, verse 9, that every believer is now a priest! There is:

- no longer a need for a representative,
- no longer a need for a human mediator,
- no longer a need for a confessor.

All believers are now priests themselves! Every believer can worship God immediately, continuously, personally, intimately, transparently.

This was precious truth to the Roman believers. It was so radically different and new.

This is what the reformers called the individual priesthood of the believer. There are no more walls to keep us away from the inner sanctum; no more barriers. There is only one Bridge; one Mediator – Jesus Christ Himself.

The Orthodox church prays to God through their patron saints. The Catholic church prays to God through Mary. I have friends in these churches and they all tell me the same story that, if you want your earthly father to give you something, you would most likely go to your mother or a close friend and have them ask for you and then, you are more likely to get it.

My answer is always the same. Suppose I was your friend or maybe even a relative of yours, and your children were hungry and thirsty and they came to me and said, "Please go and ask our father to give us something to eat." How would you feel if your children did not come directly to you to ask? What kind of father would that make you? What kind of relationship would that reveal?

Our Heavenly Father is no less offended that we would ever go to someone else and ask them to ask Him to grant us what He already knows we need and is waiting to hear us request.

There are today, thousands of Protestants who are naively hoping their needs will be heard in heaven

through televangelists and pastors who claim to have God's true anointing. The claim of these people is that, if you will send your prayer requests to them, along with a little money, they will lay their anointed hands on your requests and God will really pay attention to you!

Is your right to worship something to be bought?!

Listen very carefully. One of the key, revealing characteristics of false religion and false teachers is that they violate the doctrinal truth of the individual priesthood of the believer. In other words, their religion teaches that for you, the ordinary believer, there are still walls that stand between you and God. They teach that they have a special connection and you just need to come and confess through them or make your requests through them and God will finally listen.

I Timothy, chapter 2, verse 5, says that,

. . . there is . . . one mediator . . . between God and men, the man Christ Jesus

Hebrews, chapter 12, verse 24a, says that,

. . . Jesus, [is] the mediator of a new covenant . . .

Introduced to the grace of God

Paul says in Romans, chapter 5, verse 2, that Jesus Christ has provided direct, personal access, and my translation reads that,

[He has given us] our introduction . . . into this grace.

This word "introduction" is a very special word that, in the original language, referred to being personally introduced to royalty.

Erwin Lutzer, the pastor of Moody Church, wrote about this verse in one of his books that I have in my library. He talked about speaking at a conference in Washington, D.C. In the audience, there was a member of the President's secret service detail. He came up and asked if Dr. Lutzer and his family would like to tour the White House and the Oval office, since President Bush was out of town. They agreed. The next morning they met at one of the gates at the White House. Lutzer wrote,

When we stopped at the first guard station, one of my daughters offered her purse to the officer for inspection, but he waved her on. "You are with him," he said, nodding to the agent, "go on in." Then, as we entered the White House, we met another assembly of

guards. They looked at the agent, glanced at us, and said, "You are with him, go on in."

The analogy is obvious. We shudder when we realize the awesome holiness of our eternal God who is high and holy. We know we are sinful creatures and that surely some angelic sentinel will obstruct our communion with God the Father. We know that surely the Father Himself will send us away. However, He looks at the One who has brought us near and the message is clear, "You're with Him, the worthy Lamb, my Son, the Savior, come on in."

Just think of that future day, when we die and are ushered toward that magnificent city, where the gates are pearls, the walls are jasper, the streets are shimmering gold, and the glory of God is the brilliant light of heaven. Could we ever hope to get past the angels who, according to Revelation, chapter 21, are assigned to each of the twelve gates and who, in their entirety, number in the tens of millions? Could we ever dare to hope to enter in as those angelic sentinels turn their blazing eyes toward us when we approach those everlasting gates? They will see Him, the One who introduced us to grace; the One who gave us access to heaven and, at that moment, access into heaven, and they will look at us and say, "Oh, you are with Him, come on in."ⁱⁱ

I think the apostle Paul, who was dictating this letter to the Romans to Tertius, his friend and scribe, is pacing back and forth, clapping his hands at the this thought. "Think of it Tertius,"

. . . we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult [shout with joy] in hope of the glory of God.

I will bet that Tertius said, "I've got to stop a minute and get up and walk around on that one. Oh, man!"

I will bet they had a praise service right then and there.

Impacted by the grace of God

Paul has revealed that believers have been introduced to the grace of God, but I want to point out, secondly, that we are to be also impacted by the grace of God.

Notice he says, in verse 2, that,

. . . we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand . . .

The Bible often talks about the believer “standing”. Each verse gives us a little different nuance of the different derivatives of this Greek word “histemi” (ἵστημι). Paul writes:

- in Romans 11:20,
. . . you stand by your faith.
- in Romans 14:4,
. . . for the Lord is able to make him stand.
- in I Corinthians 15:1,
Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand
- in II Corinthians 1:24,
Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm.
- in Ephesians 6:11-13,
Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.
- in Colossians 4:12,
Epaphras . . . sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.
- And, in I Peter 5:12, Peter writes,
. . . I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!

It is interesting that both believers and unbelievers are said to be standing before God at one point or another.

To the believer, Jude writes in verse 24 of his little letter,

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy

To the unbeliever, however, the Bible warns in Revelation, chapter 20, verse 12,

And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

In other words, one day the believers will stand before God with great joy, while the unbelievers will stand before God with great judgment.

To every one of you today, what will it be? Will you stand with joy . . . or with judgment?

It is not too late today, to ask Christ for your pardon and to be saved from hell and the judgment of God. It is not too late to join those of us who believe in His Son and have found in Him the promise of everlasting joy.

Application – Challenges Presented by the Gift of Grace

Now, when Paul used the word for “stand” in Romans, chapter 5, verse 2, he was not talking about some sort of new strength or commitment; he was talking about the believer’s new status. He was literally talking about our state; that is, we were once living in the status or state of law, but now we are living in the status or the state of grace!

Can you imagine being asked, “Say, what state do you live in?” and answering, “I live in the state of grace.”? You do!

Let me apply this verse by giving two challenges that emerge from living in the state of grace.

Grace is your new state – enjoy it!

1. The first challenge is that grace is your new status or state, so enjoy it!

So what is it like to live in the state of grace? It is a lot like living in the state of North Carolina. We have our state borders, our charter, our seal, our statutes. We even have our own accent and unique style of barbecue!

If you live in the state of North Carolina, you pay taxes to this state and not to any other state. You also respect the laws and ordinances of this state that are unique. You watch the weather channel and want them to hurry up and talk about this state . . . your state. You live here, work here, and go to school here. You are a resident of this state.

If you live in North Carolina, you cheer for the sports teams of this state. I am a Carolina Hurricanes fan. One of the players goes to our church, which is how I became a fan. The other night, I could not believe what happened when they played the New Jersey Devils, an appropriately named team. At one point, the referee got in the way of our defense man, which allowed New Jersey to score. Did you see that? It was unbelievable . . . it was unlawful . . . it was probably ungodly too!

I have three teenagers. One is a University of North Carolina fan, one is a North Carolina State University fan, and the third, my oldest daughter who is fifteen, has become a Duke University fan. My daughter even has a sweatshirt that says, "DUKE" on the front. We are looking into a foster home for her! We are wondering where we went wrong!

When you live in the state of grace:

- you cheer for the advancements of grace;
- you invest money in the efforts of grace;
- you watch the news and interpret it in the light of grace;
- you love nothing more than the fact that your status is grace;
- you have membership in the community and fellowship of grace!

Grace is your new spirit – express it!

2. There is a second challenge and that is in the fact that grace is your new spirit, so express it!

The word "access," or "introduction," has another nuance in the Greek language. It was used, in late Greek, to describe the location where ships came in. It was a harbor or a haven where ships could safely stay out of the tempest.ⁱⁱⁱ

Is that the description of the believer? Are we safe harbors for others who need shelter?

Is the church a haven for those who have come in from the storm? Do people come into our church and breathe a sigh of relief, knowing that they will find grace? Is this:

- A church where gossip is replaced with words of grace?
- A church where giving people the benefit of the doubt is the rule instead of the rare exception?

- A church where everyone else considers the other person to be more important than themselves?

Frankly, we are not sure we are really up to that kind of grace, are we? The truth is, most of us are prone to understand what the anonymous poet wrote of, when he wrote these humorous lines that say it all,

To dwell above with saints we love,

That will be grace and glory.

But to live below with the saints we know,

Well . . . that's another story.

Paul wrote in Romans, chapter 12, verses 10 through 13,

Love each other with brotherly affection and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy in your work but serve the Lord enthusiastically. Be glad for all God is planning for you. Be patient in trouble, and prayerful. When God's children are in need, you be the one to help them out. (The Living Bible)

There is no way this can happen without the supernatural impact of God's grace on the lives of those of us who are then willing to express it.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are not standing in grace because we deserve it. And, we do not act with grace toward others because they deserve it. If they deserved it, it would not be grace, for grace is unmerited, undeserved favor.

Because of God's grace, Jesus Christ became a servant to meet your deepest needs. Are you a servant of others or are you waiting to be served?

You:

- have been totally forgiven . . . do you forgive others?
- have been granted mercy . . . do you offer mercy to others?
- have been given undeserved honor . . . do you honor others?

Grace is your new status . . . enjoy it!

Grace is your new spirit . . . express it!

This is like the grace of the little boy that I read of who was going to be in his elementary school play. In fact, his entire second grade class would be involved in some way in the play. He was so excited about the play, but his mother was worried because she knew he might not get a speaking part. She did not want to see him disappointed, so she waited for

him as he arrived home from school the day they announced who was playing the various parts. He came in, all smiles, and said, “Mom, I have been chosen to applaud.”

What would the church be like if people came, ready to applaud and cheer someone on?! Sunday should look more like a pep rally than a funeral procession. We should have the choir break out some pom poms periodically. Wouldn't that be a sight?! That would really confirm the wild rumors about our church!

I talked to a couple who have been coming to our church for several weeks. They hesitated to come because of some rumors they had heard. One was that if you wanted to join this church, you had to disclose a full financial statement to the elders which showed what you make and how much you were going to give. After they visited for four or five weeks, a friend of theirs asked them, “Where are you going to church?”

They said, “Colonial Baptist.”

He said, “Oh I wouldn't go there . . . they're dancing in the aisles over there.”

Dancing in the aisles?! We are trying to get people to sing above a murmur. We have not had to hold anyone down yet.

It would be nice if somebody accused us of having too much joy. It would be nice to hear, “They smile too much over there . . . you're not supposed to laugh in church. I don't know why they're so happy!”

I would love for that rumor to get around.

So would the apostle who wrote, in Hebrews, chapter 10, verse 25, paraphrased,

Don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together, as some have; but come, ready to provoke one another . . .

Yea, we know how to do that alright! The word “provoke” is “parakaleo” (παρακαλεω), in the Greek, which has the meaning, “to put courage into another; to literally cheer one another on to love and good works”.

Why all the joy? Because, for one thing, believers have escaped the judgment. And, because they have received some incredible gifts.

Believers have received incredible gifts like this one! We have been introduced to grace and we have been impacted by this grace. We now live in the state of grace and have the spirit of grace . . . and we rejoice in the hope we have in the glory of God.

So, cheer up everybody . . . and cheer someone else on! Well, what are you waiting for? There is someone near you in need of a good cheer. Find out who they are, how you can pray for them, talk to them awhile, and welcome them to this family of grace.

You know that a rumor will start that the ladies in our church choir wear cheerleading outfits and wave pom poms and that our tenors do back flips on the stage during the offertory. Let them believe it.

Let us sing about the amazing grace of God.

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound

That saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found,

Was blind, but now I see.

What great lyrics . . . written by a man who never fully recovered from his conversion. Filled with joy, overwhelmed by the grace of God, sing that stanza one more time.

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound

That saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found,

Was blind, but now I see.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 1/19/2003 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Charles R. Swindoll, The Finishing Touch (Word Publishing, 1994), p. 38.

ⁱⁱ Erwin Lutzer, Ten Lies About God (Word Publishing, 2000), p. 38.

ⁱⁱⁱ William Barclay, The Letters to the Romans (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 73.