

Amazed by Grace

Sermon by Terry Lortz

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Opening Prayer

Good morning! I would like to begin with a quick prayer asking for God's blessing on the subject I wish to share with you today.

(Short Prayer)

Introduction

A week ago yesterday I attended my grandmother's funeral services with my family. During the services they played her favorite hymn **Amazing Grace**. It is one of my favorites also because it reminds us of how truly amazing is God's gift of grace through Jesus Christ's sacrifice.

John Newton wrote the song **Amazing Grace** in 1789 after repenting of his sinful past as a deplorable slave trader and when he became a pastor who preached the rest of his life about God's great gift of forgiveness and grace.

The message of God's Good News or Gospel of Grace is so amazing we should be eager and ready to share it with others, as God provides the opportunities.

In Apostle Peter's first letter to the many scattered churches he praised God for giving us a Living Hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. **(1 Peter 1:3)** In a few weeks we along with Christians around the world will celebrate the importance of Christ's resurrection.

Peter goes on to admonish the believers to *"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,"* **(1 Peter 3:15)**

Specific Purpose Statement

This morning I want to help us be better prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that we have. Let us strive to learn more from God's Word so we are able to explain God's Gospel of Grace to others through our personal understanding and testimony.

I will quickly review this subject of God's wonderful gift of grace and more specifically our understanding of this important subject in the past, the present and our future expectations through the references found in God's Word.

Body

A. In The Past

Most of us have a past in this church where the Law and legalism were strongly emphasized. Before my 40+ years in this church I was a baptized 7th Day Adventist and Doris grew up as was a Catholic attending parochial school where she was taught by nuns. Both of those religions, as do most others in this world, stress the need for legalistic works to help earn our salvation. Religions often require the rigorous keeping of Holy Days and religious traditions, keeping the 10 Commandments, burning candles or more demanding acts of contrition and personal sacrifice.

Our intentions were good but in error and contrary to God's will. Relying on our personal "righteousness" (which God calls "filthy rags") which takes away the due credit from Jesus Christ who has already paid the price with His blood for everyone's salvation.

In **Isaiah 64:6** God's word states: "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all of our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away."

As Paul explains in **Romans 1:17**, the main theme of his letter is the doctrine of justification through faith apart from works - that believers are declared to have a right standing with God not on the basis of our inherent righteousness, but on the basis of Christ's righteousness received by faith alone.

God's word states that it was through the first Adam we all lost our salvation and through the 2nd Adam (Jesus Christ and Him alone) we are given our salvation.

*"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."
– (1 Cor. 15: 22)*

B. Present Understanding

We are very thankful that God has opened our spiritual eyes in this church in recent years to better understand the Gospel of Grace. This new improved understanding is one of the most important reasons we decided to rename our church, **Grace Communion International**. Our new church name better reflects to the world that we understand that the Gospel is of God's grace and the importance of our communal personal relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In Webster's dictionary, one of the first definitions for the word **grace** is *"Unmerited divine gift or favor of sanctification, mercy or pardon."*

Webster's dictionary goes on to define **sanctification** as *"the act of sanctifying, which is the setting apart for sacred purpose, purifying, freeing from sin."*

It may be helpful if we remember the following acronym for the Grace to assist us in sharing God's Good News with others when God provides opportunities.

G = God's

R = Reward

A = At

C = Christ's

E = Expense

In **Luke 23:43** Jesus was able to say to the criminal on the cross, who had led a life full of sin, “ I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” This was only possible because Jesus paid it all, which is the message of the Gospel or Good News. Many people have a problem with this because Jesus gets all of the credit and we get none. Our carnal nature desires part of the credit, we want salvation the old fashioned way....we want to earn it!

We need to drop any deep-seated thoughts of legalism and the fearful thoughts of doubt. We need to avoid pretending to be worthy and righteous and admit to ourselves that we are hopeless sinners without anything to our credit, and put our full trust in Jesus Christ, for whose sake God justifies the ungodly as stated in **Romans 4:5-6**.

C. The Future is Bright for the Faithful

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (**Ephesians 2:8-10**)

Some critics of Grace, in error, say that grace would mean we could “just go out and sin all we want since we’re already forgiven.” Nobody who trusts God wants to willfully sin. When you truly trust God to love you and forgive you, you want to be like Jesus; you don’t want to sin. But when we do sin, in spite of the fact that we don’t want to, we have Jesus as an advocate with the Father.

God’s Word makes this truth clear in **1 John 2:1-2** *“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”*

This is similar to what Paul told Titus - *“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and*

Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good”. (Titus 2:11-14)

The 10 Commandments are not ignored once we are aware of God’s gift of grace but Jesus raised the bar of obedience to unreachable levels for mankind and in His life fulfilled them. In **Mathew 5:21-22** Jesus says the Law says do not murder but Jesus explains that anyone who is angry or hates another is just as guilty and subject to the same judgement. Then Jesus goes on to say in **Mathew 5:28** *“But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”*

The Old Covenant commandments helped people know what sin and ungodliness is but it is the New Covenant gift of grace that teaches us to say no to ungodliness. It’s grace that makes us eager to do what is good. Knowing we’re already forgiven and accepted does not lead us into the devil’s workshop, but into deeper fellowship with our Lord and Savior.

We used to believe that **Faith + Good Works = Salvation** but God has helped understand that it is **Faith + Salvation = Good Works**

Conclusion

Jesus did not bring some “new and better” type of religion. He brought the Gospel of Grace, which is good news for sinners, which we all are.

We are all sinners, even all we religious, God-fearing, church-going Christians. Always have been, always will be, in this life. It is only by God’s pure and unrestricted grace, as demonstrated once for all through Jesus Christ, that we are made something else — righteous — and not by avoiding sin, but by faith and trust in Jesus.

We hold in trust the Good News of all good news — God gives free grace to sinners for Christ’s sake.

Let us be prepared to share this Good News with others, as God provides the opportunities, so they too may experience the true peace that comes from building a trusting personal relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit through God’s Amazing Grace!