

The Place Of Grace

Overcoming Pride to Receive Salvation and Blessing

We're definitely going to need amen practice, amen. I'm sure there are some who grow weary of my persistent insistence on church attendance, my relentless prodding and encouraging of people to alter their schedules to accommodate special church services. Yes, you alter your schedule to accommodate special church services, as well as my constant nagging, if you call it that, about church membership, believer baptism, and involvement in our church's discipleship ministry under the oversight of the pastor, as opposed to the evangelical world's lone ranger approach to what they estimate to be ministry without accountability of pastoral oversight.

There's a reason why apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor teachers are referred to as gifted men, and they are to address that mindset. Turn in your Bible to James 4:6, please, standing when you find that verse for the reading of God's word. James chapter 4:6. I'd like you to concentrate your attention on the final phrase of the second sentence of that verse, where we read, "God resisteth the proud." Do you insist on coming to church only when you decide to come to church and involving in ministries only that you decide and it's what you decide to do and what you're going to do? Understand, God resisteth the proud. He arrays himself, it's a military term, like on a field of battle, he arrays himself against you. Well, so what? So let me ask you, how's that working out for you so far? How's that working out for you? God resisteth the proud, but he giveth grace unto the humble. Now, please turn to 1 Peter 5:5. Again, focusing your attention on the second half of the second sentence of the verse, for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Again, I would ask, how's that working out for you so far? Please go ahead and be seated at this time. Thank you so much for standing for the reading of God's word as a way of showing respect for him.

There is much dispute among commentators concerning the Old Testament passage James and the Apostle Peter lifted this truth from. They got it from the Old Testament. Some, of course, claim they are paraphrasing Genesis 6:3-7, or expressing the sentiment of Exodus 20:5, or perhaps Deuteronomy 32:11-19. Others think the statements are quite similar to Proverbs 3:34, where Solomon declared that the Lord scorns the scorers, but gives grace to the lowly. That said, no one disputes that throughout God's word, throughout God's word is saturated with the principle that God actively resists those who are proud, which is to say, those who resist God-ordained leadership, and that he gives grace only to those who are humble. If my goal this morning was to deliver an exposition of these two verses, I would first try to thoroughly explain what is meant by God resisting the proud and what it is to be proud, and then

turn to explaining what is meant by God giving grace to the humble and what it is to be humble. However, even so simple a sermon as that would take more than we have time for in one service. Therefore, to defeat the mindset, and this is spiritual conflict we are engaged in at this point, 2 Corinthians chapter 10, this is spiritual warfare going on here, to defeat the mindset that we know what we are doing without God's explicit guidance in scripture. Remember, there is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death, Proverbs 16:2. I ask again, how's that going for you right now?

So, to defeat that mindset, I will limit this message from God's word to three lines of thought for your consideration. First, the necessity of grace. The Greek word translated grace is "charis." Unbelievers of James and Peter's day used the word charis when referring to that which delighted them, and it is a term found on inscriptions and ancient monuments as a reference to a ruler's favor. Centuries earlier, during the golden age of Athens, the word was used to refer to the favor of the gods, being, of course, polytheists as they were. In the Old Testament, the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, uses the word charis in Genesis 33:5 to describe God's gift of children to Jacob as gracious. You may not think that of your son while you're correcting him, but he is the result of God's grace in your life. And according to Psalm 119:29, the Lord is gracious with the law. Throughout the New Testament, of course, grace is intimately connected to God's favor, and the understanding that what God graciously does, he does not have to do, but does so sovereignly. Misunderstood about God's grace, three very simple items related to grace that are profoundly important to grasp, and I mean profoundly. This is not hyperbole, this is true. First, what is called in logic, the law of the excluded middle. As you're turning to Romans 11:6, let me assert that there is nothing in the Bible that is illogical. There is paradoxical, yes, but never illogical. There is much that is supra-logical, beyond our grasp of the logical, but nothing found in God's word flies in the face of logic or goes against logic, nothing. This is a crucial concept to appreciate in light of the irrationality and the illogic of the non-Christian worldviews that plague every unbeliever. Every lost person is, at foundation, illogical and irrational, and is similar in some respects to Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, atheism in its various forms like Marxism, socialism, and communism. Were you aware that Karl Marx repudiated logic? He stood against logic. He said it was a bourgeois tool against the proletariat, and that all communists and socialists, at the bottom of their thinking, deny logic. No surprise, since the unsaved condition is ultimately illogical.

That said, and understanding logic to be rational and therefore governed by immutable laws, we find in Romans 11:6 an example of the Apostle Paul making use of what is called the law of the excluded middle. The formula for this law is understood by almost everyone, while being routinely violated by unsaved people, and it is, everything is either A or not A. That's the law in its simplest description. It's either A or not A, it either is or it ain't. How important is the law of logic? How important is the principle of rational thought? It is part of the basis that governs the calculating and decision-making capability of every computer known to man, mechanical, analog, and digital. Violate this law of logic, and you are irrational, illogical, and wrong. If you are a computer, you simply do not function without compliance with this law. Romans 11:6, "And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then

it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." Referring to salvation from sins and the establishing of a relationship with God through his son Jesus Christ, Paul informed his readers in this verse that if salvation is based upon grace, God's undeserved favor, then it is not based upon works, good deeds. But if salvation is of good works, good deeds, it is not by grace. Thus, it is one or the other, not both. A or not A, not a blending of the two.

Now that you see this law of the excluded middle and recognize that salvation is either by grace and not works, or by works and not grace, now turn with me to Ephesians chapter 2:5, looking at the phrase enclosed in parenthesis, "by grace ye are saved." Let me point out something that is frequently overlooked. Paul's use here of the perfect passive participle form of the Greek verb for salvation, "sozo," means that not only have believers been saved, and will be saved, but that believers are presently being saved. Thus, the notion that someone who claims to be a Christian, therefore pretends to have been delivered from the penalty of sins, while presuming to anticipate someday being delivered from the presence of sin in heaven, while giving no ongoing evidence of being delivered from the power of sins presently, makes no scriptural sense whatsoever. You say, "Well, I know somebody that got saved 30 years ago and has been to church four times in the last 27 years, but he's a Christian." No, he's not. No, he's not. No, he's not. No, he's not. No, he's not. No, he's not. No, he's not. He claims that he got saved from the penalty of sins in the past, he presumes to someday be saved from the penalty of sins in the future, but there is no ongoing evidence of being saved from sins in his present. No, he's not. No, he's not. No, he's not. No, he's not. No, he's not. And to let those kind of people hang around your kids harms them, because it gives them a misconstrued, distorted, and perverse concept of what salvation is.

It is more than interesting to note that there is only one belief system in existence anywhere in the world that embraces the notion that salvation is not the result of works, doing good deeds. Of course, that is the Christian faith, as it is revealed in the word of God. The Bible, only Bible Christianity, posits that salvation is by grace and not works. Not Hinduism, not Buddhism, not Islam, certainly not socialism, and not even such denominations within Christendom, such as Roman Catholicism, the various Greek, Ukrainian, and Russian Orthodox Churches, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Mormons, the Jehovah Witnesses, the so-called Church of Christ, and the Seventh Day Adventists. Not. Well, I don't like your exclusivity. I didn't write this, I just read this. Non-Christian religious faith systems, and not all so-called religious groups, but only Christianity that recognizes and embraces the Bible doctrine of salvation by grace, differs from all other worldview positions in asserting that the salvation of any person is graciously given by God through the person of his son Jesus Christ. Thus, grace is needed by every sinner who seeks to escape certain damnation, and to then know with assurance that he has salvation by ongoing evidences, ongoing evidences of God's grace in his life. To state the matter another way, grace is something you must have, and cannot face death without, unless you are resigned to spending all eternity in the lake of fire, which burns with fire and brimstone.

Deny the existence of God, refuse to deal with him in the manner he prescribes in his Bible, pretend that you experienced a one-off salvation event without ongoing evidences of a relationship with Christ, and you will face death and eternity without the grace you so desperately need. And like the Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians, "Have I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" I don't want to become your enemy by telling you the truth. I want to be your friend. I want to be your ally.

Next, the importance of humility. Consider, first, the preeminent display of humility in God's word, who was, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ. Turn with me to Philipians chapter 2:1-8, where the Apostle Paul wrote, "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels of mercy," in other words, if you have any feelings for him whatsoever, "fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." Treat other people like they're better than you are. If you have any feelings for Christ, treat everybody in your life as if they're better than you are. If you don't, then you have no feelings for Christ. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." The word "humbled" in Ephesians 2:8 is the same Greek word as is found in James 4:6, and pertains to being lowly, undistinguished, and of no account. This is not a description of someone who needs to be recognized. You know how some people do something, but they have to have an attaboy, they have to have the acknowledgement, they have to have the good job, good job. Please, do not good job your kids every time they do something that kids ought to do for nothing. You pick up your underwear off the floor, don't say good job. They ought to pick up their clothes off the floor. Don't say good job, good job for emptying the trash. Kids ought to empty the trash. That's not an above-and-beyond kind of thing that requires a compliment. So, we're not talking here about someone who needs to be recognized, who requires receiving credit, who craves acknowledgement. Raise your children without them craving acknowledgment. You grow up being an adult who has to have acknowledgement, you are warped. There's something wrong with you.

Seeing humility displayed by the Lord Jesus Christ, we now recognize that God has always insisted on humility from those who interact with him. 2 Chronicles 7:14, very familiar to many of you, I'll read it, "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." And then, 2 Chronicles 34:27, "Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord." 2 Chronicles 7:14 shows God's demand that the nation of Israel humble themselves as a first step in seeking

God's blessing for their nation. 2 Chronicles 34:27 records the Lord's response to young King Josiah's humble pleas to God. Contrary to the thinking of many people, humility cannot be a bad thing. So, how do you know that the Savior humbled himself? How can it be a bad thing if the Son of God did it? Therefore, what complaint could any sinner have about the urgency of humbling himself? The second person of the triune Godhead did it. That means it's okay. Humility is very much a necessary attitude, since the absence of humility requires the presence of pride, which God hates to the point of resisting everyone with pride. Even if you're his child, if you display pride, he's against you. Who do you think you are? Who do I think I am?

Third, humility was not only displayed by the Savior and desired by God, it is also directed in scripture. Matthew 18:4, "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 23:12, "And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted." You humble yourself, you let God lift you up, amen. James 4:10, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up." So, why do you suppose the Savior and scripture are so adamant about the importance and the necessity of humility? Read through God's word, and you'll see that God shares glory with no creature, and therefore has no interest in providing grace to anyone who is proud, and who will then claim credit for his own success. Look what I did, look what I did, look what I did. God doesn't want any of that from anybody. Therefore, what role humility ought to play in our decisions to attend or not attend church services, to serve or not serve in church ministry, to avail or not avail ourselves of the means of grace we so desperately need, and God sovereignly dispenses via the means he has chosen. God has decided, this guy needs grace, and I'm only going to give him grace if he involves himself in this, and if he doesn't involve himself in this, he's not going to get it. I have grace that I'm going to dispense to people on Sunday night, but those that don't show up Sunday, they're not going to get it. And I decide who I give grace to, and I decide how I give grace to, and I have decided that I'm not going to give certain grace to people that do not show up at a certain time. Your call. And you can live without it, right? Because look how good it's going so far, amen.

And finally, we see humility defended in the Bible. Job 22:29, "When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, There is lifting up; and he shall save the humble person." Psalm 9:12, "When he maketh inquisition for blood, he remembereth them: he forgetteth not the cry of the humble." Psalm 10:17, "Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear." In Psalm 69:32 and 33, notice, I'm not commenting, I'm just reading, you're interpreting. "The humble shall see this, and be glad: and your heart shall live that seek God. For the Lord heareth the poor." When people are cast down, when it is time for God to judge each person righteously, he prepares the heart of the humble person, he hears the desire of the humble person, and he saves the humble person. James and Peter sum all of this up when they declare that God gives grace to the humble.

And, finally, the means of grace. Means of grace is a phrase frequently used by the Puritans to describe the various mechanisms by which God sovereignly shows favor to

sinner, the practices sinners are to engage in by which God shows his favor and deals with us about spiritual matters. In other words, God ordinarily does not come to a man sitting on a rock, doing nothing, and suddenly impart grace to him so that he turns from his sins and comes to Jesus Christ by faith. He does not normally impart grace to that guy who sits home with the remote in his hand. God usually works through various means to impart grace to salvation. That said, employing the different means of grace, be it reading scripture, crying out to God, listening to a gospel sermon, attending a worship service, or a Bible study, must be done with humility. Let me mention four, only four, there are many more, let me mention four prominent means of God's grace. First, preaching and teaching is a means of grace. Without a doubt, the preaching of God's word is the single most important means. Sitting under the preaching of the word of God is more important than reading the Bible, it's more important than praying. There is nothing, there is nothing more important than sitting under the preaching of the word of God. There is nothing more important than that. And God ordinarily uses it to bring about the salvation of sinners. Consider 1 Corinthians chapter 1:18 and 21, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved, it," that is, the preaching of the cross, "is the power of God. For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Factor that into the next time you calculate whether or not it is worth your while to attend a preaching service, and whether or not you can do without it. Romans 10:17 also sheds light on the means of grace, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." However, when God's word is preached and taught, it is highly unlikely that faith will be imparted by the Spirit when the hearing of the word of God is not accompanied by the right attitude. James 1:21, "Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." Meekness in this verse being synonymous with humility, and recognizing that I must have this truth in my life, and without it, I am helpless. With that attitude, then, sitting under the gospel and hearing God's word preached, the Spirit of God imparts faith to respond to the truth. 2 Corinthians 4:13. However, everything that occurs, the opportunity to hear the truth, the preacher, the teacher, the attitude of the listener, the convicting and faith-imparting work of the Holy Spirit, and even the final response to the gospel, is the result of God's grace given by means of preaching. Is that true, and you still have no plan to worship with us this evening? Of course, it is your decision to make. It is also your responsibility to address.

Second, meditating on God's word is a means of grace. After his servant Moses died, the Lord said these words to Joshua in Joshua 1:8, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." If you want to do well spiritually, you must meditate on God's word. That means, of course, that you must first hear or read it. No one does well spiritually who lightly regards God's word. No one. However, more than that is needed. You must ponder, you must reflect, you must consider, you must turn it over in your mind, and you must chew on it, like a cow chews its cud. I feel sorry for city kids, because they don't know what that means. No one does this who is proud, since only the humble see their need of God's blessing, value the importance of

God's word, and recognize how utterly each of us depends upon God's word. Memorize, memorize. Memorization is good, but it is not meditating on the word. Meditating is more important than memorizing. Memorizing hides God's word in your mind, while meditating fixes God's word in your heart. Psalm 119:11, "Thy word have I hidden in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."

And third, prayer is a means of imparting God's grace. Acquiring God's grace, prayer is pleading with God, asking of God, begging of God. Excuse me, prayer is not a conversation with God. Well, I just had a good talk with God. Then you didn't pray. That implies that it's a peer-to-peer interaction. There is no peer-to-peer with God. It's this way, and my arm is not long enough. If you are an unbeliever, there is no guarantee that God will hear you, unless you humble yourself, as we saw earlier. What is prayer? Prayer is an appeal to God to provide or to supply something to you or for you that you cannot supply on your own. It is not asking God to help you, really, so much as it is asking God to do something that you cannot possibly do yourself, or do for yourself. Additionally, prayer, real prayer, heartfelt prayer, is itself a humbling of oneself before God. Therefore, whether you have a guarantee of being answered or not, by what right does any creature presume to stand proudly before God? So much the better, then, for every person who humbles himself before God by means of prayer. Isaiah 55:6 declares, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near." This verse implies what is found elsewhere in God's word, that God is not always accessible. He is not always accessible by means of prayer. Therefore, you need to get to it while you can. The Lord Jesus Christ prayed often. The apostles were all men of prayer. Paul directed the new believers in Thessalonica to pray without ceasing, 1 Thessalonians 5:17. In Hebrews 4:16, believers are strongly urged to pray, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." What pride is exhibited to the great cloud of witnesses by any of God's creatures who think they have no need to obtain from God through prayer what they do not have, but desperately need, which is grace.

Finally, and perhaps surprisingly to some, conversation and discussion can be a means of grace. Despite what some people fancy to be true, and avoid making courageous decisions, they're just too afraid to talk to people. You are affected by who you talk to, and who you hang around, and the kind of conversations you expose yourself to. In 1 Corinthians chapter 15:33, Paul pointedly told the Corinthians, "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners." Who you hang around influences you. With that in mind, consider Ephesians 4:29, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." Did what just came out of your mouth build that person up, or tear that person down? Paul encouraged church members in Ephesus to minister grace to those who heard them. Just as important, however, is the person on the receiving end to make sure, you need to make sure that you are listening to the right person talking, the one who seeks to bless you with what he or she says. One of my best friends, the best thing he ever did to me while I was in Bible college, something was coming out of my mouth, and in a moment, he turned and walked away, as I was mid-sentence. You know how he walked away? He discerned that what I was saying was not ministering grace to

anybody. And here I am, 50 years later, remembering the lesson. He walked away from me when it was appropriate to walk away from me, and he taught me that there are times you need to just walk away, say nothing, just walk away. You don't need to hear your wife talk like that, walk away. You don't need to hear your husband talk like that, walk away. You don't need to hear your boss talk like that, walk away. You don't need to listen to your friend talk like that, walk away. Make sure that your ears are only for hearing ministry words. Why? Because a person can either minister grace to you, and thereby bless you, or minister error and rebellion and dishonesty and disharmony and wickedness to you, and thereby curse you. You want somebody to bless you or curse you? Consider those who encourage pride and encourage self-sufficiency. Reflect on those who are rebellious and opposed to the gospel. I have these lifelong memories as a kid of my mother always shrieking at me, shrieking at me, shrieking, and what kind of a mom shrieks at her kids all the time? My mother would shriek at me and howl and screech and gripe and complain and shriek all the time, screaming and yelling. What kind of a mother who does that loves her kids? Had I known, I should have walked away. Reflect on those who are rebellious and opposed to the gospel. Do you not think they will influence your thought life and affect your willingness to humble yourself in the sight of God?

We human beings like to think that we are logical and rational in our decision-making, but the truth is that we are frequently the most irrational of creatures. We fly in the face of reality for reasons that are utterly laughable, and we usually do so, we, I say we, I'm including myself, we usually do so because of pride. Cain had no illusions about the power and majesty of Almighty God, yet he refused to offer up an acceptable sacrifice to God, complained when his sacrifice was rejected, slew his younger brother Abel, and then bellyached that God's punishment of him was more than he could bear. Does any of that sound reasonable, rational, or logical, or was it an example after example after example of pride in action? Pharaoh was confronted by Moses with demands to allow the Jewish population they had enslaved, but were fearful of, to leave. Miracle after miracle occurred in an astonishing display of God's power over 10 of Egypt's false gods. There was no denying the might of the one true and living God that Moses served, yet Pharaoh still hardened his heart, broke his word about allowing the Jewish people to leave, and doomed his army in a failed attempt to follow the Israelites through the parted waters of the Red Sea. Does any of that sound logical, or was it example after example of pride in action? The Amalekites, the Moabites, the Canaanites, the Philistines, the Assyrians, all fell to the God of the Israelites after knowing what he had done to preserve his people from annihilation by the Egyptians. Why did they take the foolish courses of action they followed to their destruction? Why did they do that? Were their decisions rational? Were they logical, or were they in any way reasonable? No, they were, in each instance, motivated by pride and not humility.

On an individual level, consider such men as Nebuchadnezzar in the Old Testament and Saul of Tarsus in the New Testament, both men of great pride and arrogance. In each case, God mercifully humbled them, Nebuchadnezzar by temporary madness, and Saul of Tarsus by the personal appearance of the glorified Savior. Each man, once humbled, was only then graciously dealt with by God, ending in their conversions.

However, it is far more the case with most individuals that God providentially works in their lives to bring about humility of mind and heart, so they will be kindly disposed to listen to the truth that Christ promised would set men free. There are as many different ways this is brought about as there are individuals whose lives have been transformed by the gospel. The two necessary factors always present, however, always present, however, are humility and grace.

Do you see the necessity of grace? God's grace, apart from God's grace, no sinner's sins can be forgiven, no eternal life can be given, and no blessings for the living of life after conversion are granted. Every good and perfect gift comes from God, yet God has no obligation to so bless us. That he does bless us is a token of his grace. However, there is grace associated with sunshine and rain, good health, and sufficient employment, lovable kids, and freedom to live your life without much interference. That is one kind of grace that is extended to pretty much everyone, at least in this country, during our time. Another kind of grace is actually way more important, because it is associated with salvation from your sins, new life in Christ, and an eternity in heaven instead of the lake of fire. That grace, that specific grace that has to do with salvation and cleansing and growth as a Christian, is withheld from the proud, while being made available to the humble. So, what kind of a person are you? Do you recognize no need of God, no requirement for your sins to be forgiven, no cause for regret after neglecting God and not fearing him? Is your life one of self-centered satisfaction from doing your own thing? How's that going for you? That, my friend, is pride and not humility. Humility recognizes that God made you with an end in mind, while also recognizing your inability to achieve that end on your own. Humility recognizes that you are helpless, that you are hopeless, and that you stand in harm's way without the protection and provision of the Savior.

The Lord Jesus Christ, will you humble yourself to accept God's word is true, that sin damns the soul, and that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of sinful men's souls? There's no other way. Only the Lord Jesus Christ ever claimed to be the Savior. Only Christianity ever claimed that salvation was by grace, meaning anyone could be saved, so long as he was humble enough to receive God's grace. Therefore, only Jesus Christ saves, yet he only saves by God's grace to you who are humble. Humility is the place where grace is found.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for your goodness. Lord, I know this message has been a little long, but I pray for the patience of the folks who heard, that you might minister grace to them, that you might work in their lives, that they might humble themselves, that they might take stock of where they are and where they're headed, and how desperately they need Christ, how desperately we all must have this one as our Savior. Bless to that end, in Jesus' name, amen.