

Series: **The Scandal of Grace** – week 8 of 11

CDOBC – beginning on 9/10/17

Today's Title: **"Rediscovering Grace"**

October 29, 2017 - Selected passages - 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation

---

**OBJECTIVE:** To help everyone know the power and importance of God's grace in our life.

---

My grandma loved to play Monopoly...but more than playing Monopoly, she loved to win at Monopoly.

And win she did...almost all the time!

She was patient, and it didn't matter if the game was over 2 hours long...she was methodical and could take you out with Park Place and Boardwalk, or with Connecticut, Vermont and Oriental Avenue.

I was never patient enough to be good at Monopoly, but I did love the 'Treasure Chest' cards - especially the "Get out of Jail Free" card.

What a relief to be freed - and back in the game!

A lot of people look for the "Get out of Jail" card in a spiritual sense.

They are looking for something which will lessen their judgment from God, so they can get 'back in the game'.

In the early 1500's, to finance a massive building project to complete the construction of St. Peter's basilica in Rome, the church sent officials around the world selling *indulgences*. If

you purchased 1 or more indulgences, it would lessen your time or a loved one's time in Purgatory.

“Get out of jail free” card.

The Church was born on Pentecost (**Acts 2**), and it's the means by which God communicates and displays His Gospel of grace and truth in Jesus Christ.

The Church is the ordained vehicle of God's grace to the world.

Throughout its history, the Church has done some amazing things in this dark world.

In the early centuries of the Church's history, the Church stood out from the rest of society - it was truly the “salt” and “light” that Jesus talked about in **Matthew 5**. In commenting on the Church, the early Christian writer and theologian, Tertullian said the people of Rome, in commenting about Christians, would often say:

*“See how they love one another!”* (<http://earlychurch.com/unconditional-love.php>)

Through the centuries, the Church has fed and cared for the poorest among us.

When the Bubonic Plague in the Middle Ages spread throughout Europe, it was Christians who put themselves at great risk of being infected as they helped ease the suffering of those being killed by the disease.

Christian hospitals and charitable work in the world's most desperate places has brought life, healing, dignity and hope to millions of people over the centuries.

Of course, greater than the social work of the Church is the spiritual impact of the Church.

Millions of souls have been saved through the Church's proclamation of the Gospel.

From the first decades of the Church as the Apostles spread out over the known world and preached Christ crucified, buried and risen - and as those first churches spread the Gospel through their towns and cities, and eventually as the Church and mission agencies sent missionaries all over the world to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, millions and millions of people have been eternally forgiven of their sins and freed from their sin to live a life dedicated to Christ and His truth.

But the Church has not always been a source of good.

There are chapters in Church history which are very dark - evil - even wicked.

Times where the Church sought political and military power, instead of proclaiming the saving grace of Jesus.

Times where the Church placed a higher value on material wealth and luxury, instead of the vast inheritance we have in Christ.

The darkest of these times is probably the Middle Ages through the 1500's.

Corruption - not conversion - was the hallmark of the Church in those days.

But the Spirit of God - and the grace of God - cannot be silenced or buried - even if the Church tries to do the silencing and burying.

There were a group of men and women, beginning in the 1300's with men like John Wycliffe and John Hus, who stood up to the heretical teaching of the Church in their day. All of the corruption and ungodliness of the popes, the unbiblical teachings of the Church, the cruel treatment of the Church toward those who *protested* against it, all of these things (and more) created a movement - a great *REFORM* movement which forever changed the landscape of the Church. The Reformation - the '*reform movement*' had been active for about 2 centuries, but the break point - the 'last straw on the camel's back' which brought the movement to a point of no return happened on October 31, 1517.

In those days, if you wanted to have a public debate, you would write down the issue(s) you wanted to discuss, and per university custom, you would post them on a public place - in Luther's case, he posted his 95 theses on the Castle Church Door at Wittenberg.

Today is what referred to as “*Reformation Sunday*” - and this Tuesday marks the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Martin Luther nailing his papers onto the Castle Church Door at Wittenberg.

The Reformation was a rediscovery - and return to biblical truth. It’s difficult for us to understand and imagine, but so much blood was shed on these vital and eternally significant issues which the Reformation addressed.

In England alone, the Church of England was in power, and under the reign of Queen Mary (Bloody Mary), from 1555 to 1559, 288 people would die - most burned at the stake - for their Protestant faith. Men, women, church leaders, children - martyred for their faith.

John Rogers was the first English martyr under Queen Mary.

He was a pastor, editor of the first English Bible published (from the work of William Tyndale - called the Matthew Bible), husband and father of 11 children.

In his early years of ministry, England was a relatively safe place for the reformers. But when Queen Mary took power, everything changed.

In August of 1553, Rogers preached a sermon on the foolishness of “popery, idolatry, and superstition”. This sermon was a direct challenge to Mary’s vision for the future of the English church. This sermon led to Roger’s

examination and house arrest. Six months later he was transferred to Newgate prison, where he awaited trial for 1 year. The trial was not really a trial, but simply a chance for John Rogers to recant his beliefs. His crime was denying the change of substance in the communion bread and wine (What we refer to today as Transubstantiation). He wouldn't recant, so he was condemned to be burned. He requested a meeting with his wife before his death, but was refused. During the year he was in prison, their 11<sup>th</sup> child had been born - a child he never saw while he was in prison.

On February 4, 1555, he was marched to the stake. Crowds lined the street and gathered to see the spectacle of a public execution. As we walked to his death - in the crowd were his wife and 10 children - she was holding their 11<sup>th</sup> - and for the first time - moments before his death - he saw his 11<sup>th</sup> child.

Before the fire was lit under his feet, he was asked by the Sheriff, "Will you revoke you evil opinions about the Sacrament (communion)?"

"That which I have preached I will seal with my blood," Rogers answered.

"You are a heretic then," declared the official.

"That shall be known at the day of judgment," Rogers assured him.

“I will never pray for you,” the sheriff finished.

“But I will pray for you,” Rogers said, moments before the flames rose. (Foxye - Voices of the Martyrs, 33 A.D. to Today, p. 125-126)

287 more would be executed by Queen Mary in 4 short years.

Many of the Reformation Martyrs would quote from **Psalm 51** as the flames were overtaking their flesh.

Some would recite Bible passages in English - the language of the people. Those performing the execution would hit them and tell them to only quote Scripture in Latin - but they would continue proclaiming the Word of God in the language of the people.

Some praised God as the fires were lit, in anticipation of being in heaven in mere moments.

Why would they do this?

What was so important - that it was worth their life?

Why was this such a big deal?

Because eternal destiny - heaven and hell - hung in the balance.

Because people's eternal destiny was at risk.

It was important enough for God to become flesh and give His life as a sacrifice on the cross.

It was important enough for Jesus to die...and the cost of sin and the blessing of salvation didn't change from Jesus' time to the time of the Reformers - and it's the same in our time.

Don't think that people getting imprisoned and killed for what they believe is a matter of history.

One of the missionaries our church supports and partners with - posted on FB this past week an article - headline: "Nepal Criminalizes Christian Conversion and Evangelism" About 80% of Nepal is Hindu. Prior to 1960, Christians were banned from living in the country. Since 1960, after the ban was lifted, Christianity grew by 10-20% annually... making Nepal one of Asia's most stunning church growth stories.

Today, only about 1.4% are Christian, but apparently, that's 1.4% too many!

The penalty for Christian conversion and evangelism - 5 years in prison and a penalty of around \$770.

(<http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/october/nepal-criminalizes-conversion-christianity-evangelism-hindu.html>)

The world is hungry for the grace of God, and at the same time the world is afraid of the grace of God.

For many centuries, the Church set aside the grace of God in favor of the power and authority of the Church and its leaders.

But grace was rediscovered in the Reformation!

In fact, grace wasn't the only thing rediscovered. The Reformation was a movement which returned to the early years of the Church.



From the Reformation emerged 5 “solas” - 5 prominent, guiding truths. The Latin word “sola” means ‘*alone*’.

Scripture alone...

Faith alone...

Grace alone...

Christ alone...

God’s glory alone...

The grace of Christ, which brings the gift of faith - had been abandoned by the Church - and it was rediscovered in the Reformation.

As I mentioned earlier, many of the Reformers were put to death because of their view of communion.

This is a complicated issue, so please excuse and give me grace as I state things in an overly general and simplistic way.

The Church taught the bread and wine of communion corporally (physically / bodily) changed into the body and blood of Jesus.

The appearance of bread and wine stays the same, but when the words of consecration are spoken by the priest, they become the body and blood of Jesus.

Why is this important? What’s the big deal?

Because the belief was you needed to take communion (Eucharist) - to partake in the sacrifice of Jesus every Mass - in order to receive forgiveness of sins.

If you didn't take communion your forgiveness 'ran out'.  
The spiritual work in the sacrament of communion was what provided the forgiveness of your sins.

To oversimplify it, the grace of God in salvation was put on the shelf - relegated to the initial calling of the believer.

The grace of God is what enabled you to perform the other works necessary to be saved and to maintain your salvation.  
Therefore, salvation was part grace and part merit.

But this flies in the face of Scripture.

One of the verses which propelled Luther was **Rom. 1:17**

"The righteous shall live by faith."

"For the Reformers, theology was not merely an academic exercise, it was a life and death endeavor." *David Platt*

**Beware of the common drift from truth** *Galatians 1:1-10*

*Read Galatians 1:1-10*

Galatians was written around 48-55 A.D.

About 20 years after the crucifixion, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

We just celebrated this church's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary...and Galatians was written around the Church's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Not a really long time...but a major problem had already worked its way into the Galatian church.

Look at vs. 6 - “...you are so quickly deserting Him who called you in the grace of Christ and are returning to a different Gospel...”

Why? Why did they so quickly leave the Gospel of grace in Christ?

Because for some people, grace seems incomplete.

Some have a hard time believing they don't have to do something to earn the forgiveness of God.

Everything else in this life, we have because we earn it - we have because we put in the effort - *“you get what you pay for”*.

The believers in Galatia struggled with this, and when some false teachers came along, and told them they needed to have faith *and* do certain works to have salvation, they swallowed the hook! That sounded good to them - it made sense - *no such thing as a free lunch* - so they bought into this idea of works being necessary for salvation.

***Read 3:1-9***

The church in Galatia was not the only church to struggle with this drift from the truth.

All through the N.T., the writers are warning the churches and leaders in the churches to be on guard - to be vigilant - to be alert for this possibility.

You can say it's not “IF” we ever encounter the forces which promote drifting from the truth of the Gospel, but

“WHEN” we encounter those forces - we must be ready! Beware of the common drift from truth!

**Achieving vs. receiving your salvation** *Philippians 3:9*

Over the past few weeks I’ve talked with 2 or 3 Christians who have made statements about being ‘good enough’ to enter heaven.

They have heard the Gospel, but they haven’t understood the implications and reality of the Gospel. They are still in the mindset of *achieving* their salvation - instead of *receiving* their salvation.

**Philippians 3:9**

“...not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith...”

Salvation cannot be achieved...it can only be received.

It’s a gift from God.

How offensive if you receive a gift from a good friend on your birthday, and after opening it, you pull out your wallet and ask, “How much do I owe you for this?”

It’s a birthday gift - you simply receive it.

How offensive it is to God when we receive His gift of salvation, and then we act in ways where we try and achieve His love!

*“So, when Luther was summoned to account for his actions before his Augustinian order, it was to the themes in the ninety-seven theses that he returned. Aristotle said we*

*become righteous by doing right acts - your identity is the result of your actions. It's something you achieve. Luther said this gets things the wrong way around. In the gospel, our identity is a gift from God. It's something you receive. And then our actions flow from our new identity. Unbelievers can be constrained by laws and peer pressure, but a life of wholehearted righteous living is only possible if God makes us new people."*

(<http://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/10-things-you-should-know-about-the-reformation.html>)

The grace of God not only provides for us the imputed righteousness of Christ - meaning that when we put our faith in Jesus, God not only forgives our sins, but He also imputes to us the righteousness of His Son - so that judiciously - we are not only without sin, but filled up with holiness and righteousness of God Himself!

But God's grace does even more than that.

His grace empowers us and frees us to live more holy lives. It's not by our will to obey, but by the power of the grace we have received!

**Galatians 2:20-21**

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose."

We do not / cannot achieve salvation, we can only receive salvation by God's grace and through the gift of faith.

**Apply it...**

Champion God's grace - be on guard against the pull away from God's grace.

**Illus.** - *Running story from Thursday*

The temptation and pull to walk away from and discount grace in your life is not normally a formal declaration which is easily identified for all to see.

It happens when we practice un-grace in our own life - and we begin to develop a spirit of un-grace - and we begin cherishing rules which are easy to quantify and clarify - and grace gets pushed into the background.

Guard yourself from living and speaking in ways that are contrary to God's grace.

Examine how you treat those who are different from you - those who are on the other side of the political aisle - those who have different values in how they live - are you gracious toward them?

Rest in God's grace.

You don't have to be good enough for God to love you.

You don't have to be good enough to be forgiven.

You don't have to be good enough to keep your salvation.

Jesus said (Matt. 11:28-30)

“Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

29 Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

30 For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”

Why? Because of His grace.

The weight and burden of obeying the Law of God - the weight of doing all the right things - is too heavy for us to carry - it's an impossible standard to reach.

This is what the writer of Hebrews is writing about in chapter 3 & 4 when he talks about entering the rest of God.

We enter His rest - when we believe.

The sin of unbelief - refusing the grace of God and insisting on some standard of human niceness and good works - will prevent you from entering His eternal rest. Rest in God's grace.

*“The law says, ‘do this,’ and it is never done. Grace says, ‘believe in this,’ and everything is already done.”*

*- Martin Luther*

This is why grace is so important...why the Reformers were willing to die for the truth and power of grace.

The challenge before us may not be our willingness to die for the truth and grace of Christ, but, will we live -

every day - with every person - in the truth and power of  
grace?

Close in prayer