

AMAZING GRACE – Part 6

'The Power of the Gospel (2)'

by Rev. Robert Griffith

In his letter to the Church in Ephesus many years ago, the Apostle Paul wrote these words:

Ephesians 2:8,9 *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast."*

And to the Roman believers Paul wrote this:

Romans 1:16-17 *"I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the Gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith."*

A little later that this letter Paul made the gospel even clearer still when we wrote:

Romans 3:21-25 *"But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood - to be received by faith."*

'Amazing Grace' is not just the title of the most sung hymn of all time and the title of this teaching series. 'Amazing Grace' explains and encapsulates the Christian faith and brings everything back to God and His dealings with mankind. The whole problem facing humanity from the very beginning, comes back to the nature of God. The most terrifying and confronting truth in all of Scripture is that *God is good*. What's terrifying about God being good?

Well, the answer is simple. It's terrifying to know that God is good, because *we are not*. If we want to understand the Gospel, the good news, we must first understand the bad news and that is, God is good, but we are not. God is good because He is holy. Because God is holy, He is just. Because God is just He cannot do anything other than condemn and purge that which is unholy ... and that puts us in the firing line.

So the problem for God from almost the beginning of humanity, is that He is good and we are not. God cannot violate His attributes. He cannot do something that contradicts Who He is. God is a righteous God, and that is a good thing. We certainly would not want an evil God to be in charge of the universe, would we? It is a profoundly good thing that God is good, righteous, pure, holy and just. However, herein lies a huge problem for God. If God is just, then what does He do with us? What does a good God do with sinners like us? We have sinned against God; we have sinned against each other; we have sinned against creation; we are sinners by nature and all of creation calls for our condemnation.

So if this holy, pure, righteous God is truly just then what does He do with us? If a just God simply pardons the wicked, He is no longer just. What do you call a judge who sweeps your crime under a rug? Righteous? No, he is corrupt! In the same way, if a holy God calls the wicked to Himself to have fellowship with Him without dealing with their sin, then He's not a holy God.

Therefore, the greatest question running through the whole Bible and all of human history, is this: how can a just God pardon wicked men and women and still be just? Or to put it another way - how can a holy God call unholy sinners into fellowship with Himself for eternity and remain holy? The answer is found in the cross of Jesus Christ. In that old rugged cross we see the unique revelation of the fullness of God's attributes. God is just so He must condemn sin - but God is also love. So in order to satisfy His justice, God's love compels Him to become a man and He then does what none of us could ever do - He lives a perfect, sinless life as a man. Then He goes to the cross - where He Who knew no sin, became sin for us as the justice of God, the full wrath of God that we deserve, came down upon one man, Jesus Christ, God's Son and our Saviour. The exact measure that was required to fully satisfy the justice of God, was brought against Jesus. As He took His final few breaths as a man, Jesus declared, "*It is finished.*" That means Jesus has done *all* that was needed to pay the price for *all* sin. So let me ask you again the question from last week: what are you saved from? You are saved from the judgement of God on all sin - past present and future - hallelujah, what a Saviour!

Consequently, *you are also saved from shame*. Shame has to do with not being good enough, being defective, falling short, sinning. You always have and always will fall short against the perfect law of God - so stop looking in that direction. Turn and look to the cross of Christ, the gospel, the good news, the power of God for salvation, and accept that your standing before the law of God and your sinfulness in relation to the law of God, is utterly irrelevant in your relationship with God. There are lots of good reasons why you shouldn't sin and I'll get to those later - but you need to know that your personal sins have nothing to do with your relationship to God. If you get this - you are going to be utterly free of shame for the rest of your life!

You are also saved from self-righteousness. That's what the Pharisees were, right? There were puffed up with pride and full their own 'rightness'. They looked down on 'sinners' and they felt good because they measured up to what they believed was good and right and proper. We still have self-righteous people like that today. But let me ask you something - what do you call people who feel unworthy, who feel that they don't measure up, the ones that the so called self-righteous people look down on? They grovel, they mourn - they cry out, "*I have sinned, I am not right with God, woe is me, worthless worm that I am.*" What do we call them? We call them self-righteous too!

Don't think for one minute that God will bless the arrogant, proud, self-righteous person because he feels good according to the law; but nor will God bless you for grovelling according to the law. All the blessings of God are already free in the gospel - independent of your boasting or your grovelling. When you compare yourself to a standard of righteousness - whether you compare well or not so well - it's all self-righteousness and it's all abhorrent. That's what religion is all about. That's certainly not New Testament Christianity!

Can you just imagine the energy and the power which would be injected into the Church if we didn't spend any more time or effort trying to '*get right with God*'. Let that sink in - all the energy, time, emotional strength and spiritual might we would have left over if all believers simply accepted that '*rightness with God*' is a gift. Instead of working our butts off trying to please God and earn that gift, we would just receive it and respond accordingly: '*God - You loved me. Freely You gave to me, now how can I freely, with no obligation, manipulation or guilt, give back to You?*'

Even if only a handful of people really got that truth in every part of the Church across our nation . . . such a revelation would spread like a fire! That's the power of transformation! That's what births revivals. That's the power of the Gospel - a gospel which says "*I'm O.K., because God has made me O.K. I don't have to spend any religious energy trying to be right with God any more, I'm given that as a gift. Now I get to respond in gratitude and work my butt off for God because I want to, not because I have to.*"

When we truly understand the Gospel then we will declare every day with the Apostle Paul:

1 Corinthians 15:10 "... by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them - yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me."

Just imagine what that would do to our relationship with God from our end if we really believed that and lived that. Imagine the gratitude, the emotion, the affection, the passion we would have for God as the reality of what happened on the cross for us really hit home. He loved us so much He gave His only Son to die for us so that He could share life with us for eternity. Imagine the change that would come in how we related to other people.

Imagine if we thought for one minute that God loved everybody else just as much as He loved us; and gave His Son for them just like He gave Him for us; and that they too are right with God because of what God has done for them - not because of their behaviour (which we may not accept). Imagine as that reality hit us, the love and acceptance that would flow from our hearts to everyone.

Are you catching a glimpse of how the real Gospel will change people's lives, change Christian's lives if they will just believe it and live it? Do you see why the enemy has gone to such lengths to camouflage the true, radical, free grace of God behind a lot of legalistic, religious 'do's and don'ts'? The true gospel of Jesus Christ scares Satan to death and he will do anything he can to deceive, distort and drag you away from the truth, because he knows that the truth shall set you free - forever!

"I'm not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes ... and as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.' Do you want to know what righteous living by faith is? I'll show you, if you have a good imagination.

Turn your head to the left and imagine you are looking at a big stone tablet or ancient scroll containing the holy law of God – a long list of requirements: *Thou shalt love the Lord your God with everything that's in you.* Let me put your score next to that: F - failed. *Thou shalt love every other person in the world as you love yourself.* Another F. *Thou shalt never worry about anything again.* Failed again. *Thou shalt forgive your enemies every time.* And so on you go down the list of requirements to fully obey the holy, perfect law of God 100% of the time. Your true score will be hopeless - utterly and completely hopeless.

Now turn and look in the opposite direction and ask the Holy Spirit to give you a fresh revelation of Jesus dying on the cross for you. *Holy Spirit, I ask you to come and make real to us now, the cross of Christ. Give us a revelation of the Son of God - wounded and bruised, His blood flowing for our sins.* Look at Him ... and as you do, understand that you are seeing the One who kept all those laws on your behalf. He loved God with all His heart, soul, mind and strength. He loved His neighbour to the bitter end – even dying for them. He always forgave His enemies. He met God's standard for you.

Behold the Man. Behold the righteousness of God – beaten, tortured, spat on, pierced for your transgressions, bruised for your iniquities, brutally nailed to a cross because you could not, cannot and will never be able to meet the holy standards of the Law of God. This man gathers up all of your sin and everything you've failed to do and to be and takes it all upon Himself. If you have ever felt guilty about your sins - then look at His wounds.

There is the punishment for everything which brings you shame - everything. There is the justice of God! There is the judgement of God and there is the love of God. Look at Him. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a fresh revelation of what that means.

Do you want to know how to truly live by faith? I just showed you. Every day of your life you look in one direction at the law of God and say - not a chance! I'm dead before I start! Then you look in the other direction at Jesus, the cross and an empty tomb and say, *'He is the way, the truth and the life!'*

So if you want to be happy in your life of faith, in which direction are you going to be looking every single day? You will look to Jesus; you will remember Jesus; you will meditate on Jesus; you will read about Jesus; you will pray in Jesus' name; you will embrace the mission of Jesus; you will worship Jesus! You will turn your eyes upon Jesus and look full into His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and His amazing grace! That's what living by faith looks like.

The Gospel is the message of God's grace to fallen, sinful mankind. The perfect obedience of Jesus is applied to our account in heaven; the punishment which we deserved was borne by Jesus and His death was credited to us also; in rising to new life, Jesus then made the way for us to have life, too. This gift of God is totally free to us – we neither earned nor deserved it - and yet it sets us free and empowers us to live a life pleasing to God as we believe in His Son for our salvation. Put simply, the Gospel sets you totally free from all the 'got to' demands of religion and replaces them with the 'get to' privileges of life in relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Religion says: *"You've got to read your Bible. You've got to be part of a Church fellowship. You've got to serve in ministry. You've got to give 10% of your income. You've got to pray. You've got to worship ..."* and the list goes on.

The Gospel says: *"Now you get to read your Bible. Now you get to be part of a Church fellowship. Now you get to serve in ministry. Now you get to give 10% of your income. Now you get to pray. Now you get to worship ..."* and the list goes on. What was once a law and an obligation is now a privilege and a blessing. What was once a legalistic duty now becomes the fruit of God's grace in your life.

As we move on in this teaching series we will see how and why the Old Covenant was powerless to deal with sin, or to give life, but demonstrated our need for a Saviour, and foreshadowed the New Covenant in Christ. A clear understanding of the Old Covenant and the New Covenant and the difference between the two, is absolutely essential. The Scriptures are abused millions of times every day as people pluck verses out of the Old Covenant to justify or explain their actions and God's actions under the New Covenant. When we understand the difference, we will treat both with a new respect and we will be able to counter much of the nonsense that masquerades as the gospel today. Only then can we begin to understand God's grace in all its truth. Only then will we know the depth and breadth and power of the freedom which is ours in Christ.

Speak Lord, Your children are listening. Remove the scales from our eyes and empower us to bring this gospel to all those who so desperately need to embrace the power of Your love and grace. Amen!

1. Read through this week's sermon once without taking notes or highlighting anything ... just to get the big picture. Go through the text more closely. Highlighting or underlining key phrases or paragraphs which stand out as significant to you. What single statement impacted you the most? How will that now change your life? Write down what you need to do to respond to God's truth today.

2. Ponder the following statements from this week's sermon. What practical implications could or should flow from each of these statements? If you ask "How then shall I live?" in light of each of these truths, what would be your answer?

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Can you imagine the energy and power which will be injected in the Church if we didn't spend any more time or effort trying to 'get right with God'.

Do you want to know how to live by faith? . . . You look in one direction at the law of God and say - not a chance! Dead before I start! Then you look in the other direction at Jesus, the cross and an empty tomb and say, 'He is the way, the truth and the life!'