

'Truth and Lies About Free Grace'

Monday, October 3, 2022

SCRIPTURES:

"I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life." (John 5:24)

"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." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

KEY POINT:

Free-Grace theology really matters!

READING:

Have you ever wondered why there are so many different Christian churches and denominations? I'm sure you're familiar with some of the major denominations... Baptist, Methodist, Bible Church, Lutheran, Catholic, Quakers, Brethren, Pentecostal, Episcopalian, Apostolic, Mennonites, Presbyterian, and many more. A recent study discovered that there were over 200 different Christian denominations in America, and as many as 45,000 denominations globally. In fact, even within the Baptist denomination alone, there are currently 65 major branches that are quite distinct from each other in doctrine and practice. Does this surprise you?

Now spread out amongst these various denominations, there are also quite a variety of theological systems (ways of understanding and integrating the Bible). These include... Lordship Theology, Prosperity Theology, Calvinistic Theology, Arminian Theology, Charismatic Theology, Reformed Theology, and Free-Grace Theology. I recognize that a vast majority of Christians are not familiar with the meanings and nuances represented by these different branches of theology... and most don't give it a whole lot of thought. In fact, you, yourself, may wonder: *"Aren't we all Christians anyway? And does it really make all that much of a difference which theology you believe?"* Good question!

At Hill Country Bible Church Georgetown, we adhere to what is known as Free-Grace theology. And what difference does this really make? That is what we're going to explore in this series. But I'll leave you with one major distinctive of Free-Grace theology. We believe that salvation (God's gift of forgiveness and eternal life in heaven) is by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. This means the moment a person places his/her faith in Jesus, they become a part of God's family and there is absolutely nothing they can do to lose that standing. And believe it or not, this is the only theological system that gives you complete, 100% assurance of your salvation. That means, if you have placed your faith in Jesus as the One who has forgiven you of your sins and granted you eternal life... you never again need to doubt your position as a Christian. In other words, when you place your head on the pillow at night, you can be absolutely sure that if you die in your sleep, you'll wake up in heaven. No ifs, ands, or buts. And that, my friends, is some majorly good news!

QUESTION:

Are you 100% sure that you have been forgiven and you will be in heaven when you die? Do you ever doubt this fact? If so, why?

APPLICATION:

Make a commitment to be at church or watch/listen attentively to each sermon in this series. It'll help you to better understand why we believe Free-Grace theology is the best way to understand and interpret God and His Word.

Tuesday, October 4, 2022

SCRIPTURES:

"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law." (Romans 3:28)

"It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression." (Romans 4:13-15)

KEY POINT:

Salvation is not by works (the law), but by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

READING:

Have you ever asked the question: *How can I be accepted by God? What can I do that'll please God, so He'll accept me into His kingdom?* There are quite a variety of ways people try to save themselves, and make themselves acceptable to God, aren't there? But if you break it all down, you could categorize them into three primary groupings; three different ways people try to get to heaven:

The first way is to **earn it**. You work hard and follow rules, regulations and rituals. Most of the world believes this is the way to salvation. If I just work hard enough, and in the end my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds, then I'll make it to heaven. The second way people try to get to heaven is by **belonging to the right group**. You might call this: 'salvation by affiliation'... *'Well, I'm a Baptist.'* Or *'I'm Methodist.'* The idea here is that God smiles on you if you follow the right crowd. And the final way people try to get to heaven is by **faith alone**. Nothing else. Not faith plus baptism, not faith plus good deeds, not faith plus going to church - just faith alone. In Romans 3:28, the Apostle Paul summarizes this truth: ***"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law."*** The word 'justified' here is a legal term, a term used in a courtroom. It means: *'to declare not guilty.'* It's been said that to be justified, is to be *'just-as-if-I'd never sinned.'*

In Romans 4:13, Paul uses Abraham as an example: ***"It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith."*** Abraham was somebody who was saved without keeping the law, because Abraham lived 430 years before the Ten Commandments were even given. So Paul uses Abraham to say: *Those of you who think you get to heaven by keeping all the rules of the Bible, wake up! Abe had it made before the law was even given.* What then was the purpose of the Law? Romans 4:14-15 says: ***"For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression."*** If there is no law to break, then you can't pinpoint lawbreakers.

There's something about human nature, whereby the moment a law is established we have a desire to break it, right? When God told Adam and Eve: *'You can eat anything in the entire garden except that one little tree,'* which one did they want to go taste? It's like signs that say: *'Don't touch the wet paint!'* or *'Keep off the grass.'* Paul said: ***"Where there is no law there is no transgression."*** This means the only way we can keep from breaking the law is to have no law. So the purpose of the law was never to save anyone – it was to show us where we blow it, and to prove we don't measure up.

QUESTION:

Do you find yourself more tempted when someone tells you not to do something? Why or why not?

APPLICATION:

Laws do not save us or make us acceptable to God, but they do serve a purpose in this world. Come up with a list of five ways that laws are beneficial.

Wednesday, October 5, 2022

SCRIPTURE:

"What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him." (Romans 4:1-8)

KEY POINT:

We don't become acceptable to God by doing good works.

READING:

Paul says: *'If you could be saved by working for it, then it follows that you could boast about it...' "...but not before God."* You may be able to brag before people, and they may be impressed - but God's standards are so much higher that it doesn't impress Him one iota. Donald Gray Barnhouse once said: ***"Christ sends none away empty, except those who are full of themselves."*** Let's just be honest - we don't impress God! No matter what we do, we don't impress God! Why? Because God sees beyond our outward actions and into our hearts. He knows our true motives and He's not impressed. But there is a way to find acceptance with God. Romans 4:3 says: ***"What does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness."*** Abraham's faith made him righteous.

Back in Genesis 15, God appeared to Abram in a vision and told him he'd become a great nation. Now Abe was in his 80's and didn't have any kids at this time. But the Bible says in Genesis 15:5-6: ***"He [God] took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars - if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness."*** This is the first time the word *believe* is used in the Bible. The word in Hebrew means: *'to say Amen; so be it; I agree.'* God said: *'Abram you're going to have lots of children and descendants.'* And Abram said: *'Amen God. So be it.'* He believed God and his faith was *credited* to him as righteousness. Now did Abram earn this privilege? No. The Bible says God just chose him for this role.

In Romans 4:4-5, Paul adds another illustration - ***'Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.'*** When you work a job and your boss gives you your paycheck, do you consider that a gift? No, that's not a gift - it's wages - you earned it. So how could salvation be a gift if you work for it? It can't be. God justifies us as a gift. Why does Romans 4:5 say that God justifies the wicked? Because that's all there is! There are no righteous people running around. So God justifies those who don't even try to work. God accepts a wicked, immoral person with faith above a moral person with no faith.

QUESTION:

If you were Abraham, do you think you would've believed God's promise? Why or why not?

APPLICATION:

In what area of your life do you need to trust God, even though the situation doesn't look good at this time?

Thursday, October 6, 2022

SCRIPTURE:

"Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised."
(Romans 4:9-12)

KEY POINT:

We don't become acceptable to God by religious rituals.

READING:

In this passage, Paul talks about the Jewish rite of circumcision. This was the most important symbol in Israel. The first century Jews thought: *If you're not circumcised, you're not a true believer.* And they also thought that the ritual of circumcision was an instant passport to heaven. Well Paul says that's an error for two reasons. First, in Romans 4:9-10 we read: ***"Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised or before? It was not after, but before!"***

If you look over at Genesis 15:6, it says: ***"Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness."*** But Abraham was not a Jew at this point. He didn't become a Jew until he was circumcised. And when did that happen? 14 years later! Paul is blowing the minds of the Jews who believed the only way you get to heaven is by being circumcised. He's saying: *Read your Bible, guys! Abe was considered righteous 14 years before this ritual of circumcision was even developed.* Abraham was a Gentile when he was justified.

Paul says *'circumcision is a symbol of your faith, not a cause of your faith.'* On meat (hamburger, pot roast, steak), there's a seal that says USDA Approved. Now does that seal make the meat acceptable, or does it simply show that that meat is acceptable? Obviously the latter. Well that's what all rituals do.

The modern-day counterpart of circumcision is baptism. Baptism doesn't make you a believer, it shows that you are a believer. It's like the wedding ring of the Christian life. A ring doesn't make you married, it shows that you are married. The ring is the outward sign of an inward commitment. Rituals are signs, seals that say: *'This has been approved.'* So Abraham is not only the father of the Jews, he's the father of everyone who believes - whether they've gone through a Jewish ritual or not.

QUESTION:

Do you know people who believe some sort of ritual has saved them (baptism, confirmation, etc.)? If so, how would you explain this truth from God's Word to them?

APPLICATION:

Have you ever been baptized as a believer? If not, pray about whether God might want you to take that step of faith and obedience.

Friday, October 7, 2022

SCRIPTURE:

"Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring - not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all." Romans 4:16

KEY POINT:

The only way we become acceptable to God is by faith.

READING:

At the end of this passage, Paul addresses one final question: **Why did God make our acceptance based only on our faith?** And Paul's answer is... **to demonstrate God's grace.** Romans 4:16 says: *"Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring - not only to those who are of the law [Jews] but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham [those who believe today]. He is the father of us all."* Salvation is by faith so it can fully demonstrate God's grace. The word 'promise' is key here. When God makes a promise, it's guaranteed. And this promise is not based upon your performance. God doesn't say: *If you keep working, I'll keep saving.* No. You accept it by faith and it's yours - whether you ever perform or not!

Paul says salvation comes by faith *"... so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed..."*

You've been given a written guarantee by God. Once you exercise faith, you're saved – for good – that's a promise. Now if your acceptance was based on your performance, how could you ever be certain that you were going to be saved? You couldn't. You'd always be wondering - *Have I done enough? What if I sin, and all of a sudden die in the middle of that sin?* You'd live in a constant fear of: *I wonder if I'm doing enough?* Your acceptance is based on grace, so it can be guaranteed.

Now can we take advantage of God's grace? In some ways we can. But that doesn't mean we should add things to the gospel because we're afraid of permissiveness. Some people worry that preaching grace will give people permission to do all kinds of terrible things, and then simply claim God's free gift of forgiveness. But we must remember that God will not be mocked. Even though we won't go to hell for our sins, that doesn't mean God won't discipline us when we sin.

The bottom line is this - we may be worried about extending free grace, but Jesus wasn't. He wasn't afraid of giving the prodigal son a kiss instead of a lecture - a party instead of probation. And he proved it by bringing in the older brother at the end of the story and having him raise some of the same objections we do. The older brother accused his father of lowering standards and ignoring virtue - that music, dancing and a fattened calf will just give more license to sin. And to that, Jesus has the father say: *"Cut it out! We're not playing good boys and bad boys anymore. Your brother was dead and he's alive again. The name of the game from now on is grace, not bookkeeping."*

Let me let you in on a little secret that God knows... when it comes to wooing people to live life God's way, grace is a much more powerful tool than the law. Grace touches our heart and inspires us to serve God out of love and gratitude - rather than out of fear and duty. Love and grace are the most powerful, inspiring forces in the universe. And God proved that, in Jesus.

QUESTION:

Why do you think some people struggle with teaching the message of salvation as an absolutely free gift of God's grace, received by faith alone?

APPLICATION:

Think of someone you could extend love and grace to, rather than being critical and judgmental.