

OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

TRANSFORMED BY GRACE
THE TEST FOR GRACE
SEPTEMBER 23, 2018



SERMON OUTLINE

September 23, 2018
Pastor George Budd
The Test for Grace
Matthew 18:21-35

THE STORY

The Debt

The Outrage

The Necessity

Ephesians 2:4

Ezekiel 18:23,32; 33:11

2 Peter 3:9

1 Timothy 2:4

Matthew 7:1-2

Matthew 6:14-15

The Test of Grace:

Have you experienced a Heart Change ?

Genesis 4:23-24

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What should I do with what I've heard today?

What do I need to do with what I have heard today?

MAIN POINT

Failure to personalize God's grace has dire eternal consequences.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. When was the last time you said, "that's not fair"? What were the circumstances that led to this response? How might your response have been different to this situation had you looked at it with the perspective of grace?

2. Would you say you have a hard time accepting the gift of grace from others, or even from God? Explain your thoughts.

Leader: By nature we are a prideful people, and our pride often makes it hard for us to accept the generosity and grace that other people extend to us. Sometimes we flat-out refuse to accept gifts or services, while other times we accept them but do so begrudgingly. More often than not, we feel like a debt is owed in response. These feelings carry over into our relationship with God. Pride and shame (or a sense of inadequacy) are two of the most common reasons people fail to personalize God's grace. However, the failure to personalize God's grace—to truly understand that we are undeserving but rescued by God—is tragic and has dire eternal consequences.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

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> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 3:9-20.

3. In your own words, briefly summarize Paul's description of humanity in Romans 3:9-20.

4. Do you think most people in the world would agree with Paul's thoughts, especially when it comes to themselves? Discuss why or why not, especially some of the reasons why people might disagree.

Leader: Paul spent a good portion of Romans helping Jews and Gentiles alike understand their need for God's grace. In fact, the first 11 chapters of Romans are a lengthy presentation of the gospel, God's great rescue. The truth that all people stand condemned for sin means that Jews and Gentiles are equally guilty before God. Verses 9-18 are the culmination of Paul's teaching that everyone is unrighteous; everyone is sinful to the very core of their being. No one can be justified by the works of the law, which is why everyone needs Jesus.

5. Which description from this passage reminds you the most of yourself before Christ? Why?

6. What are some reasons why people miss God's grace, or fail to personalize it? What are the consequences of failing to embrace God's grace, like we heard about in the sermon this weekend?

7. How would you explain to someone their need for God's grace and rescue? As a group, let's create some different conversational opportunities for us to communicate God's grace to others.

Leader: Share some situations we may find ourselves in where we have an opportunity to communicate God's grace to others. Examples to get started might be:

- You are in a coffee shop and run into someone who begins to share with you the dysfunction in their family. How can I communicate God's grace?
- A friend shares with you their battle with depression. How can I communicate God's grace?
- You invite someone to church or have an opportunity to share your faith and they respond by telling you that their past is unforgiveable. How can I communicate God's grace?

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- As a group, what other situations might we be in to communicate God's grace, and how might we best respond?

Leader: These verses from Romans are a sobering reminder that we are all separated from God, and apart from His grace we will remain that way. The consequence of missing God's grace is eternal death, or eternal separation from Him. Paul also helps us see that we are all undeserving of God's grace, but that doesn't change the fact that God has offered us His rescue. Rather than just sweep our sin under the rug and ignore it, God has dealt with it by sending His Son to bear the burden.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 3:21-26.

8. In your own words, briefly summarize the good news of Romans 3:21-26.

Leader: With verse 21, Paul's letter takes a turn from the negative reality of sinful humanity to the positive picture of God's work: "But now . . ." God knew everyone deserved His wrath, but that is not what He wanted. He wanted to restore His people back to the relationship He had with them in the garden, before sin broke the fellowship He had with His creation. With that desire in mind, God made a way for unrighteous people to become righteous. Through faith in Jesus, God redeems His sinful people. By grace through faith in Him, people can experience salvation.

9. As we have talked about being transformed by grace over the past few weeks, how has your understanding of the gospel grown?

10. How does God's grace alter your perspective on sin? How does it change your relationships with others?

Leader: Jesus is our Rescue, and when we put our trust in Him we have the burden of our sin completely removed and we receive the blessing of His righteous standing before the Father as our own. When we have a better understanding of God's great grace, our grief over sin grows and we take on a posture of repentance. We also gain an appreciation for the urgency of the gospel message. The consequence for missing God's grace is dire, so we must make sharing the gospel a more important part of our day-to-day lives and relationships. When we truly appreciate everything God has done for us through Christ, we will want the same for others.

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

11. How has God's grace made a difference in your life? Be specific.

Leader: There may be people in your group who have missed or refused God's offer of grace. Keep that in mind during your discussion, and encourage anyone who may feel like that is them, to reach out to you or a staff member this week. Reinforce the urgency to recognize and respond to God's grace in their lives.

12. The proper response to God's grace in your life is to repent and embrace it, while thanking Him for it. How can we do that together as a group? How will you do that on your own this week?

PRAYER

Close your group meeting with a time of silent prayer, giving group members the opportunity to confess and repent of their sins. Then close this time by offering a prayer of thanksgiving to God for His undeserved rescue and a reminder of the urgency in accepting His gift of grace.

MEMORIZE

²³ For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:23-24).

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

ROMANS 3:9-26

Paul uses his summary of Jewish accountability before God to remind his readers that all—Jews and Gentiles alike—have demonstrated their unrighteousness before God.

3:9. Some of Paul's fellow Jews contended they enjoyed a privileged status as God's people that

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precluded their being subject to judgment. Paul returned to that theme with stark pronouncements that sin has infected every person. Though the Jews have had the advantage of receiving God's words, they have no privilege when the subject is sin and are not any better with regard to salvation. Not at all could actually be translated as "not altogether" or "not in every respect." This would allow for the one advantage Paul cited in verse 1 and others he anticipated with the phrase "considerable in every way" in verse 2. Paul's focus in this present verse, however, is on sin and salvation. In this respect Jews could expect no favoritism.

3:10. The solemn formula as it is written again calls attention to God's Word to prove Paul's argument. The words in verses 10-12 come from Psalm 14:1-3 or Psalm 53:1-3. Paul had studied the Hebrew Bible in his training. Also he apparently had a Greek translation of the Old Testament available, which this quotation closely follows. A Jewish audience would have been receptive to the Scripture, so Paul quoted this psalm to indicate the universal sinfulness of humanity. Written by David, the psalm shows racial distinctions do not matter with regard to sin. Those who trust in their own righteousness to bring salvation need God's clear word: There is no one righteous. The quote is written as a couplet, one phrase repeating the thought of the previous phrase. This method of "rhyming" characterizes Hebrew poetry.

3:11. A second couplet underscores Paul's argument. Understanding translates a word that indicates the ability to use reason to comprehend a given concept. No one seeks God indicates a person who holds on to sin or to reason alone will never find God. In our age we often hear about people who are searching for God. People who undertake this search using only the faculty of reason will end up with the biblically indefensible position of "many paths to God." The path to God is walked by faith, not reason.

3:12. A third couplet adds the idea that not only are people unrighteous and pursuing the wrong path, they consciously have turned away from God. God provides plenty of signposts. If we choose to ignore them, we are doing the same thing as turning away.

3:13-14. In verses 13-14 Paul cited passages that deal with the throat, the tongue, the lips, and the mouth. The ungodly display their fallen nature when they open their mouths to speak. God provided us with the gift of communication so that we may honor and praise our Creator. We tend to take the gift and place it in the service of our own sinful nature. The throat of the unrighteous is an open grave. Others understand the expression as a reference to the deadly effects of the psalmist's enemies. Their tongues were used to deceive. The poison of vipers was on their lips. Their mouths were full of cursing and bitterness. Jesus said that "out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt 12:34).

3:15-18. The feet of the unrighteous are swift to shed blood (v. 15). Their natural instincts encourage them to kill. The desire to prevail at any cost leads to suffering and disaster. Evil inevitably overreaches itself. It creates the conditions for its own collapse. In a moral universe wickedness earns its own sentence of personal retribution. The way of peace is unknown to those who turn from God. Their lives are marked by unrest and lack of genuine satisfaction. They live out their days haunted by a dim vision that there must be something in life that would satisfy their deeper longings. They do not venerate God or hold him in esteem.

Paul's portrayal of the unrighteous person may seem overly pessimistic to many contemporaries. However, Paul was making a specific point and was under no obligation to mention all the extenuating circumstances. Then, of course, we participants in this fallen world tend to minimize the difference between our own conduct and the expectations of a holy God. In view of what God intends, humans fall lamentably short (cf. Rom 3:23).

3:19-20. Paul declared that all have sinned (3:9). The Old Testament declares that all have sinned (3:10-18). And finally, the law declares that all have sinned (3:19-20). The law here has a dual reference in Paul's words. First, it simply refers to the verses he has just quoted, showing that the law speaks to those who are under the law. Paul is not asking the Jews to give heed to

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the sacred writings of some other religion, but to their own. If you claim these writings, he says, then receive their claim upon your life. Do not own them without letting them own you. Receive their verdict without objection.

Second, however, Paul says that the law's purpose is to let you know that the law cannot make you righteous. Rather, it is through the law that we become conscious of sin. In other words, when the law says, "Do this or that," it is really saying, "You can't do this or that." The law wants you to know that you are guilty of not being able to keep it, and that your righteousness will never have its source in the law. The law tells you of your unrighteousness; the gospel tells you of the righteousness of God.

Paul has concluded his words concerning his beloved kinsman (Rom. 10:1-3). He has brought the church at Rome to the point where they understand that they are unrighteous (Jew and Gentile), the Romans are unrighteous, the "barbarians" in Spain and beyond are unrighteous, that there is no one righteous, not even one (3:10). He is now ready to tell them who is righteous—God alone—and more importantly, how a bridge may be built upon which they may move from their unrighteousness to the righteousness of God. This he will do beginning in 3:21—"a righteousness from God ... has been made known."

Rom. 3:21 Paul had established that all people have sinned and that the law is inadequate for salvation. Apart from the law God has revealed His righteousness. The law diagnoses the spiritual disease of sin and testifies to God's means of salvation.

Rom. 3:22 The phrase in verse 21 "attested by the Law and the Prophets" is parenthetical, and Paul returned to his point in this verse with the words that is. He clarified that God's righteousness is through faith in Jesus Christ. Righteousness is first and foremost an attribute of God, but it is also an activity of God. He is in the business of making us righteous. God desires fellowship with us, and in order to enjoy that fellowship He makes believers right. How is this righteousness imparted? Faith is the answer to the question and is the key to salvation. The offer of salvation is available by faith. Faith involves intellectual assent as well as a thorough commitment of a believer's life.

Rom. 3:23 Paul repeated the need for salvation. People of every race and gender need to be saved because all have sinned. Our sin renders us completely incapable of reaching God. The task of righteousness, of accessing the glory of God, is completely beyond our ability. Glory is a difficult word to pin down but essentially means "the full weight" of God's attributes. Through Jesus Christ, God is restoring His glory in His people.

Rom. 3:24 This verse clarifies the result that "all who believe" (v. 22) enjoy. Justified means "to be declared right with God." Freely translates a Greek word meaning "gift" and underscores the difference between the attempt at salvation by works and the free offer of God. This offer of salvation is the pinnacle of His grace. Being declared right with God comes only through His grace. The means by which God grants justification is through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. Redemption has a twin focus of deliverance or emancipation on the one hand and payment of a ransom to secure that freedom on the other. The word clearly emphasizes the freedom from sin that believers enjoy.

Rom. 3:25 The supreme offer of salvation through Jesus Christ is the focus of this section. All the rich gifts are made possible by His work. That God presented Him literally means God "set Him forth publicly." "To propitiate" means "to appease or to allay anger." Once sin is removed, the object of God's wrath is removed. Thus propitiation refers to turning aside God's wrath and to making peace with God. Through Jesus Christ we are delivered from God's wrath, we have our sins removed, and we receive mercy.

Rom. 3:26 Righteousness clearly is God's focus. God both possesses it and presents it to

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humanity as His gift. He will declare righteous anyone who accepts Jesus.