



How God Works in You - Part 1

The Grace of God

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If you hang around church for a while, eventually someone's going to ask you to give your testimony. And if you are new to the church and don't know church lingo, Christianese, and you just look that up on your phone, you might be a little freaked out that testimony, at least the dictionary definition, is that you are going to give a formal statement in a court of law. You might think, well, they're asking me to give a testimony to this church in the middle of a lawsuit or what's going on here with that request. Well, of course, that's not what Christians mean when they say give us your testimony. They're asking for you to recite and recount three basic things. Every testimony has these three basic things and that is like this. Number one, what was your life like prior to becoming a follower of Christ? How did God get a hold of your life and you became a Christ-follower? And then what has your life been like since you've been following Christ?

I mean that simple outline has been going on for centuries. We find it all the way back to the book of Acts where the Apostle Paul, as we are studying the book of Acts, gets to Chapter 22 and gives his testimony. It's one of two times he gives his testimony. Of course, Luke, the physician, who's also a historian, tells the story of his conversion, how God got a hold of his life there in Acts Chapter 9. But we've been studying through the book and finally here in Chapter 22 he formally gives his testimony. And it happened to be before a lot of people who were jurists in Israel and were part of the courts. But the reality was that he's going to walk through what happened prior to him becoming a Christian and then how did he become a Christian and then what his life has been like since. And he'll do it again in Chapter 26. Different audience, but he'll give his testimony again.

And that's a good thing that he does. That's a good thing that we do that and we should think through our testimony if you are a Christian. You should be able to see the clear three elements of what it is to recite how you became a follower of Christ. And if I were to say, well, how did the Apostle Paul view all of this, I wouldn't have to really guess at it. The story can be told as, at dinner I got asked that question this week, and I gave my testimony, and the guy across the table gave his testimony, and we shared our stories. And depending on how much time we've got, it can be a ten-minute story or a 30-minute story. But if it had to be summarized in one word, I should get some help from the Apostle Paul himself. I hear him lay out the facts in Acts 22 and Acts 26, but he is good at summarizing what he like would distill Christianity to be, and what it is to be a Christian, or to become a Christian in all the letters of the New Testament that he wrote.

Of course God utilized him and enlisted him to be the agent of giving us 13 books of the New Testament. And as he gives us these 13 books of the New Testament, he uses the epistolary formula of having salutations at the beginning and benedictions at the end. And in these 13 books, in every single one of them, though they're varied in how they're worded, he includes in every single one of them, 26 references, in starting the letter and ending the letter, he always includes one word. And that one word is the word that always surfaces whenever we



think about and should think about, not only in his testimony, and he does and I'll prove it to you, but certainly even in our testimony as we think about what it was like in that first component part of our testimony, and that is what was our life like before we became a follower of Jesus.

If we were to think about that, what does that lead us to? How would we put that in one heading? What would be the rubric over that one section of my story, what would that one word be? And Paul certainly is going to reiterate this word over and over again, becomes such a buzzword, such a red-letter word that represents everything that our hearts should be filled with when we think about our lives before becoming a Christian. Now, I would love to go through the whole testimony, but then you'd be here until about six tonight. So we're going to... Well, you would leave at some point, I'm sure, but I would still be preaching the whole time were I to cover the whole thing. But we just are going to get that first component part. So I want you to take your Bibles and see if we can not only understand what this word means, but maybe deepen our understanding of it, have an enriched understanding of what Paul's constantly saying in his benedictions and his salutations, and say, okay, I want to think more like the Apostle Paul about my own salvation as I think about this first component part, which is the first five verses of Acts 22, as he's giving his testimony.

Now, I gave my testimony at dinner in an Italian restaurant, and it happens all the time that people ask me for my testimony. I ask for other people's testimonies, and I think it was the other way around. I asked for the guy's testimony, he asked for my testimony, and off we went. But this was more than a testimony. It is a testimony and the outline is there, that three-point outline we ask you for in our Partners manual, for instance, in chapter one, if you've gone through Partners, our discipleship manual. We have to think in these categories. But it's more than that. And you'll see here in verse 1, he utilizes a word that's translated "defense." And that word defense is the word that translates to a Greek word that's been transliterated into a whole heading in our study of Christianity. And that's the word "Apologia." Apologia is transliterated into the English word "apologetics."

And in a real sense, he's giving a defense or an apologetic for the mess that he's in. And he's in a mess right now, humanly speaking, he has been dragged out of the Temple Mount. You might remember when we were at the end of Chapter 21, and it was the Roman officials who had to give him safe harbor to get him even off the Temple Mount to the steps heading into Antonia's Fortress on the corner of the Temple Mount in the first century. And as they're dragging him here, they had already bound him in two chains and they're basically carrying the Apostle Paul off. He's going to stop and ask to address all these people who had accused him. They accused him of denying the law of Moses and for speaking against the people of Israel. That was the charge. At least as it's recorded. That was at least the tip of the iceberg of their animosity toward the Apostle Paul. And as he's being dragged off, we start in verse 1 of Chapter 22, in him addressing the people.

And so we've got to know that the things that he says in this particular reciting of his testimony really has an undercurrent of trying to defend himself against the accusations of the people there. So that's going to flavor this whole thing as we study it in this new series that I've



entitled God's Work in You. Because just like God was at work in the Apostle Paul's life, I trust he is at work in your life, which is a big claim, but we're going to look at that and we're going to think about the context of him now addressing the crowd. And so let me read it for you. The first five verses, which is really the first category of every testimony, and that is telling us about your life before you became a Christian. And Paul's about to do that and Luke is going to record it in five verses. So are you with me on this? It sounded like a really complicated introduction. Well, did it sound complicated to you? No, easy, you're used to all this. And I wasn't even talking that fast. You've heard me talk a lot faster than that, haven't you?

Verse 1. I'll read from the English Standard Version. Acts 22. It's printed on your worksheet. I prefer you have a Bible open on your phone or your laptop or whatever you got there with you, or the old Gutenberg-style Bible that's actually printed with ink. Perhaps some of you, three of you have one of those here this morning. And I got a lot of heat when we took them out from underneath the chairs. Right? And if you see that there's no Bible beneath the chairs, it's not because we're not into the Bible anymore around here. Some people have accused me of that. It's that few people were using them there anymore because they've got it on their phones and everything else and that's great, but they're always stacked up at the back at the door. You can always grab a Bible. We've got plenty of Gutenberg-style Bibles around here if you want one and you can just take one home with you if you need it. But I'm just trying to give you time to get to Acts 22. Are you all there? Okay.

Acts 22 verse 1 reads from the English Standard Version. Here's how it reads. "Brothers and fathers, hear the defense," apologia, hear my apologetic, "that I now make before you. And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet." Now, I already told you what the charge was. You might look back there, scroll back to Chapter 21. That was the charge. You're speaking against the law and you're speaking against the Jewish people. And so it's really strategic as an apologetic to say well, now I'm going to address them in the language of the Jews. Right? He's not speaking now in Koine Greek, which is the assumption. Right? The marketplace language. He is not speaking in Latin, though he could to the Roman officials who are dragging him off. He's going to turn to the people and he's going to speak to them in Hebrew. Now, some of your commentaries and study Bible say, well, it's Aramaic. I'm not sure it's Aramaic. Aramaic is a dialect of Hebrew that was used in the households of Jews, but he is there on the temple court and the sadducees, the Pharisees, the Sanhedrin, all the educated classes, of course, they knew classical Hebrew, which is Old Testament Hebrew and perhaps he's speaking in that. I don't want to debate all that. I don't know.

But the point is, it's now no longer in Greek, the language of the modern era, modern in the first century. It's an ancient dead language now, but we have to learn it because we need to know the language of the New Testament. So he's speaking now in Hebrew and that hushes the crowd. "And he said: I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel, according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers." You can see where all that piled on is already making this bridge to I'm like you guys. I'm a Jew, I'm born of a descendant of Abraham. So I'm part of your ethnic group. I'm not only part of your ethnic group, I was educated at the feet of Gamaliel, who we met in Chapter 5, who's a



member of the Sanhedrin, the highest ruling class in Israel. And I studied as his disciple. I mean, I was all about knowing the law. Not only that, I was learning it according to the strict manner of the law of our father. I took it seriously. I was a conservative when it came to Old Testament theology.

And not only that, I was "being zealous for God as you are all this day." Bridge, bridge, bridge, bridge, bridge. I, in my life, prior to becoming a Christian, was just like you in many ways to his audience. He's building a bridge and highlighting things that relate to that crowd. Smart. How zealous were you, Paul? Well, verse 4. "I persecuted this Way to the death." Now even that is going to have some appeal. Just scroll back up now to Chapter 21. Look at the end of verse 30 of Chapter 21. "They seized Paul and they dragged him out of the temple and at once the gates were shut," verse 31. "And as they were seeking to kill him." How zealous were they to defend the law of Moses and the people of Israel assuming that he was speaking against the law of Moses and against the people of Israel. They were so zealous they wanted to kill him. This is exactly what he's going to talk about here. I wanted to kill people who were threatening the law of Moses and threatening the people of Israel.

If you're talking about now the Gentiles included in this Messiah, that's the Israeli Messiah, and now he's all about Gentiles. I mean, he felt the same way. And he's recounting that he was just like them in their opposition to Christ. "I persecuted this Way to the death." Way. That's the phrase that typifies, it's the nomenclature, the name given to Christianity because Jesus said in John 14, "I'm the way, the truth and the life." And so he is the way. And they like that, right? Because if you want to get to God, "no one comes to the Father except through me." He's the way, he's the door, he's the portal. And all of that becomes this name, the nomenclature for early Christianity. And he says I wanted to stomp it out. I saw it as a threat. I was "binding and delivering to prison both men and women," which, by the way, that's exactly what was going on here. I mean, look at the bottom of Chapter 21, right? The crowd was shouting, two chains, verse 33. Verse 35, he had to be carried away. The violence of the crowd, "the mob, they were crying out, 'away with him.'" He was saying away with Christians just like they're saying away with him, a Christian. Are you following the parallels here?

"As the high priest and the whole council," verse 5 back in Chapter 22 now, "of elders can bear me witness. They know it because I came here to get permission to go to foreign places, to put the people who are Christians in jail. I wanted to kill them. "From them," middle of verse 5, "I receive letters to the brothers, and I journey toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished." Just like they had had him bound and were bringing him to be punished. I know what it's like to be against Christianity. I know what it's like to not follow Christ. I know what it's like not to be associated with Jesus. I know, I know, I know. I was there, I was there too, just like you guys are. This is kind of what testimonies are like, right?

What's your story like when you're telling it, particularly to a non-Christian? Right? There are a lot of places of identification. All of us have different stories, I understand, but there was a time when you were not a follower of Christ. No one is born into Christianity. You may have been born being dragged to church into the cry room and all that when you were a little kid,



you didn't know anything about going to church on the weekend, but you were not born a Christian. So we need to think, just like Paul is thinking, about our non-Christian path. And if there's one word that's going to summarize the non-Christian path before we get to celebrating the thing that Paul is always saying in every salutation, in every benediction, right? The word that leads to that is the word that characterizes the non-Christian life. And I got to get us thinking about that word as unpleasant as it is in the 21st century in Southern California where everyone is polished and all trying to look nice and fresh and new. Here's the thing though, we got to talk about this word and it's so important.

So jot it down. Number one, let us think about your past before you became a Christian. And let's note it with this word, this adjectival use of a word that you don't like. It's the word sin. And let's put it this way. Number one, "Understand Your Sinful Past." You have to understand it and you have to understand it as sinful. That's the way it is. Now, the reason you don't see it as easily as sinful as we want it to be is because we rushed to the word that Paul says, and you've already figured it out, it's in our subtitle of the sermon this morning if you weren't sleeping through all this. The word that Paul uses over and over in every salutation and every benediction is what word, guys? Grace. That's the word he uses, right? Think about it the way he traditionally words it, "grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus." Grace, grace, grace. He ends every letter that way. He starts every letter that way. Grace, grace, grace.

Now, here's the thing about grace. You cannot understand grace without understanding your past as sinful. You have to understand your sinful past, right? You know the old song. We just sang it. John Newton's old hymn. Right? "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a..." favored child like me. You know how that goes, right? It's something like that. I don't remember the details. "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound who saved..." someone God loved so much like me. Is that how that goes? I know it's the 9:00 crowd, but tell me if I'm getting this wrong. Is that wrong? "Who saved a..." Now, if I said to you I was coming into the church and some guy stopped me in the parking lot and said you're the most deplorable, despicable person ever. You'd probably feel bad for me. You wouldn't say, well, you know what, I totally deserved it because that's totally me. Here's another word for it, "a wretch." Right? Now, you don't use that word much, right? Unless you've been through the flu season recently. You don't use the word wretch very often.

But wretch describes, much like you feel when you have the flu, something that is awful, something that is rejectable, something that is bad, right? To be a wretch. Here's the thing. It is not a sweet-sounding word. It's just a theological word on a page until you get the word sinful clearly in your emotional life. You've got to feel the reality of your past being sinful. And a lot of you sit here today and you're not Christians. You're not Christians because you don't see yourself as a sinner. And frankly, a lot of you are very immature Christians if Christians at all, because this doesn't even bother you. You don't even really want to call yourself honestly a wretch because if anyone else were to call you that "them are fighting words," right? Because you don't feel like that. You defend your honor, you protect your dignity, and you think you're an all-around good guy. You don't think you're an object of grace because you don't see yourself as in need of grace because you think you're a good person. You're not a



wretch. You're not deplorable. You're not awful. You're not a scoundrel. And that's what the word means.

And the reason it is an appropriate hymn for us to sing is because that's how Paul saw himself before he became a Christian. And you'd say, well, that's because he was doing bad things. Go to First Timothy Chapter 1. Let's just look at one way he looks back in one of his epistles, his letters, as he talks about his past. Go there please, with me, please. First Timothy Chapter 1. Take a look at this on your phones or your Bibles, your Bibles on your phones. Look at verse 12. "I thank him who has given me strength." Who is that? "Christ Jesus," our boss, our king, "our Lord because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent opponent." I opposed it. "But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost."

That picture of himself is not just bloviating on a page and trying to kind of make himself seem like a self-deprecating leader. He recognizes something about his past that you need to recognize about your past even if you sit here today and you know you're a Christian. Your past to God was awful. "No, no, no, no. I didn't do anything like Paul. I wasn't a blasphemer. I wasn't a persecutor. I wasn't really an insolent opponent." Yeah, you were. "I didn't put anybody in jail. I didn't go to Damascus to try and persecute people all the way to death. I did not oppose Christianity like that. I had no blogs against it. I was just a normal... Matter of fact, I'm like a lot of people I know in my small group. I grew up in church. I was a pretty good kid." You do understand that it doesn't matter how culturally acceptable your expressions of insolent opposition were. All of us are born as opponents to the truth of Christ.

Let me put it this way. Let me build a little outline here. You need to see sin not as total debauchery, because you're always thinking about someone to the left of you who's so messed up that you think, "Well, they're the real sinner, and I'm not all that sinful. I wasn't really all that sinful. I was a good church kid. And weren't you pastor Mike? Didn't you grow up in church?" I did grow up in church. I grew up in church. When I was a kid. I went to all the programs. I learned all the verses. I did all the stuff. I even became the president of my youth group. That's who I was, whatever that meant. I have no idea what the responsibilities or the privileges were, but I got the title for some reason. And all of that I can tell you this: I was an insolent opponent to Christ. I was not a Christian. And I'll tell you what you may say as you pat me on the head as I was a 12-year-old, or a 14-year-old or a 16-year-old, you'd say you seem like a pretty good kid to me. I just wish my kids were like you because you're not taking drugs. You're not in the backseat of a car with a girl. You're not out there drinking and getting drunk like all those other kids in your public high school. You're a pretty good kid. And I'll tell you this on the outside my expressions of insolent opposition to God may have been culturally acceptable to you as some Orange County resident, but it was not to God because all of us are born rebels against God.



Let me prove it to you. Just build a quick little outline. You need to see sin as waywardness. That'd be something worth jotting down. Sin as waywardness. And by that I mean let's think of the components that we need to see sin for what it is just to maybe start to say I was a wretch. How was I a wretch even though I might be in the category of a socially acceptable childhood, or teenage life, or adult life, when I was just kind of cruising through before I was a Christian and I wasn't all that bad? Well, you were all that bad. And we need to think about the basic components. Here's one. Let's talk about Psalm 100 verse 3. Just jot it down, but I'll just quote it for you. It says that God is the shepherd. He's the maker of all people. I should read it so I don't just have to paraphrase it. Psalm 100 verse 3. Is that what I said? "Know that the Lord," Yahweh, that's his proper name, "he is God." That's a title. He's in charge. He's the ruler and maker of all things. God, Yahweh, is God. He's in charge. Okay? "It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture."

Okay, now, God, if we think rightly about this, there's someone who created us. You did not figure out where the veins and arteries should go in your arm. You didn't. Or how the synapse in your brain functions, or how your heart, you know, works, or how your lungs oxygenate your blood and keep you conscious. You didn't design any of that. You don't know anything about it. If I chopped your arm off, you couldn't put it back together, right? I'm just telling you, we are created beings. Dependent beings. God created all of that. He is in charge. He's the maker. And because he is the maker, then we are his just by definition. God is in charge and he owns us by virtue of being our creator. That's just a basic fundamental fact that you live by in the world and in your garage. Right? And God lives by it in the universe. And so we are "the sheep of his pasture," which is a great picture, a pastoral picture of the fact that you, created by God, in his world, should be looking to him to do what he says. Okay. That's how this is described in the Bible. Maker. He's in charge. Because he's in charge we should do as he says.

Now here's another verse I know you know, but jot it down. Isaiah 53 verse 6. Isaiah 53 verse 6, "All of us like sheep have gone astray; each of us has turned to his own way." Well, you know what? I wasn't the guy ever asked to give his testimony in youth group because I wasn't this horrible person. I didn't have this sordid past. I wasn't drinking blood out of a skull at Ozzy Osborne concerts or whatever. So, you know, I wasn't that. I was a good kid. No one cared about my testimony because it wasn't that exciting, right? We could line up everyone in this room and we could start over here with socially acceptable non-Christian lives, and we could move all the way to the ones where grandma's going to gasp at the stories of how horrible you were. Those are the people they enlisted to do those youth rallies, right? So you could line everyone up in this room. And I don't mean to say you on this side are the culturally acceptable and you on that side are the deplorables. I'm trying to say you're all deplorable. You're all unacceptable before God. But I'm just saying, no matter what you were on this spectrum, the reality is, when it comes to who you were at birth and on until you became a Christian, you were wandering sheep, right?

Waywardness is what sin is about at its core regardless of how you wander. You could wander like I wandered, like some lamb that's got his nose in the grass and wants to just do whatever it is that might be best for me, which in my context, with a strong set of parents in a



church context, was just to do whatever they told me to do at church. Now, the externals of my life might have seemed to be all in check and it's like a nice little lamb there, seems like a nice little Christian boy, but in fact, my heart was nowhere other than serving myself and making it good for me. That's what we do. We go our own way. We do what we think is in our best interest. That's what sin is all about. What is in my best interest. Right?

Now, in your best interest, if you're sitting on this side of the room. I'm just kidding. If we lined everybody up according to the sordidness of their testimonies before Christ, we would say, well, you were much more bold and intrepid about your sin, right? You sinned boldly. Now I get that. But you did the same thing that I did in looking out for my best interest in doing what I thought would be best for me. All of us do that. That's why I'm sick of hearing your testimony about "Oh, I was born a Christian." You were not born a Christian, right? No one is born a Christian. "Well, I grew up in a church." I don't even want to hear that if it's the first line of your testimony, right? It doesn't matter where you grew up. It doesn't matter if you kept the rules of your parents. You had reasons to keep the rules of your church or your Sunday school teachers because you had a self-interest as a wayward sheep to go your own way. You decided to do that. Not like we read on the Daily Bible Reading this week. Are you keeping up with the Daily Bible Reading? We're right at the beginning, you should be keeping up at this point.

In the Daily Bible Reading we read in Matthew Jesus' words and he said something just jaw-dropping. He said, "Do not think I came to bring peace on the earth." Did you read that this week and go whoa? But you should every time you read this you should pause. "Do not think that I came to bring peace. I didn't. "I came to bring a sword, division to turn family members against each other." Now that's never going to make it on a greeting card in our bookstore. It should just remind us that that's how Jesus came to intend to mess relationships up here on earth because he's calling all of us to a sacrificial, self-sacrificing, carrying your own cross, self-denial kind of relationship and loyalty to him, the shepherd, the Good Shepherd, follow the shepherd.

Yeah, well, my little flock isn't going in that direction, right? Oh, it doesn't matter. We follow the shepherd even if it makes problems for my best friends, my parents, or even the people in my church. I'm going to do what God tells us to do. That's the calling. We should all be, as first Peter 5 says, we should all "as straying sheep," wandering sheep, "be returning to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls." And that means that you don't care what everybody else thinks. You don't care what your friends think. You don't care what your family think. You don't care what your wife thinks. You don't care what your husband thinks. You don't care what your kids think, and you don't care what your parents think.

Which, by the way, let me just make a little plug here as long as I'm wound up already about your suspicion of childhood piety. You'd better have it. I'm tired of us listening to our children parrot back some Christian thing they learned in Sunday school or Awana and us patting them on the heads and saying, "See there? They're good with God." You know, if you raise them in some hardened LGBTQ pro-rally march kind of thing, guess what they would be doing, right? Kids are kids. They like to fit in. They like to do what mommy and daddy like until



they hit some rebellion fueled by some hormones that they get hit with and often then they say, I don't care what my parents think. And they go to continue to do what they've been doing from birth, and that is doing whatever I want to do and I think is in my best interest. And I'm telling you, if you just listen to children in their childhood expressions of piety, you are a fool. You're a fool. And as a parent, you're a fool. You cannot believe it. You have to have a healthy suspicion of a child who's raised in a church and told you will get applause and praise every time you take some step toward Christ, and they parrot some step toward Christ, and we go, "Oh, good, Johnny."

And then we change our theology when they bail out on it. Once they do get hit with the hormones at 16. Is anyone tracking with this conversation right now? And they walk off and they flip you off and say, I don't care anything about that. You go, "Well, Johnny's backslidden." And then you go to the pastor and say where are those verses on being backslidden? You start to desperately want some new theology that's going to hope that Johnny's okay with God. Johnny is not okay with God. Johnny has never been okay with God. "Yeah, but he walked an aisle, but he prayed a prayer. But he went to camp. But he said these great things. He even gave his testimony in the youth group." It doesn't matter. "They went out from us," First John 2, "because they were not of us; if they had been of us, they would have remained with us."

If you don't understand the endurance of the saints and the principle of reality, of regeneration, which is a guarantee of the inheritance and the people who are saved, they track with God all the way through. People who aren't saved track with the culture they're in. The pressures of external conformity to Christianity are godless and childhood piety is the thing you should trust the least, parents, grandparents. I know it feels good, but it's deception until you see the work of God changing people's lives from the inside out, not the outside in. And as one who grew up in church and had all the lines down and did everything they told me to do, I can assure you it's doable to dupe everyone, including your parents. You have to have a regenerate heart that ends up saying, even if this costs me a relationship with my church, my parents, or my friends, right? I'm hearing the voice of the shepherd and I'm going to follow it.

To understand sin as waywardness is a good place to start, not just drug addiction and being a drunk and being a foul mouth, you know, cussing sailor, right? To say, well, that sin but I wasn't that. You were all born sinful. Am I making this point strongly enough on a Sunday morning? I hope you're catching that and the passion that I'm saying it with, I'm just saying that for your own good. We have to retool our thinking about the reality of our pre-Christian life. And our pre-Christian life is always something that alienates us from God. "Your sins," Isaiah 59:2, "have made a separation between you and your God." How? "Because it's hidden his face from you." God's face is hidden from every single cute baby in our nursery, every single one of them. The common grace? I'm all about that. I understand that. The gift of life, I get that. But every single child is born a rebel, and what they need is the act of grace of conversion. Next week we'll talk about it. Today we're talking about our pre-Christian life and I just want you to say I was a sinner. I was a sinner. I was a sinner.



It's so important that we don't say, "But I've always been a Christian." You haven't always been a Christian. No one has always been a Christian. And God has no grandchildren. You didn't ride it on the coattails of your amazing parent. If you were a pastor's kid, a missionary kid. It doesn't matter. We all have to do that heart check of saying, wait a minute, if he's the king, I'm going to follow the king even if I have to take up a cross to follow him or deny myself or anything else, or my family. That's the kind of work of the grace of God that changes everything. And if we understand our sinfulness and we recognize how bad it is to rebel against the Good Shepherd, we'll get it.

By the way, if you're conditioned in neo-Marxism here, I just want to talk to you for a minute. You have all those DEI, you know, seminars at your work and you kind of thinking that it kind of makes sense. And that's good. I want to be like that. Do you understand how all of that works? Right? New Marxist thinking is basically that you think whoever has the power is the bad guy, and whoever doesn't have the power is the good guy, the victim. And so I'm always pulling for the underdog. If you think that way, let me just tell you this: you'll never get biblical Christianity then because the God of the universe has all of the power. He is the absolute monarch. He is the dictator of the universe. Look up God in the dictionary, right? Even the word itself. "He is the ruler of the universe," I think Merriam Webster's dictionary defines it. He's the ruler, ruler, ruler. Guess what? He has all the power. And I know what that makes us think. Wow, he's the oppressor. You know, that's why liberal theology has to take him down from the heights of being the dictator. He is the dictator. He's the dictator of the universe. He makes all the rules. He is the judge of every person.

But here's the point. The reason it is so bad for me to rebel and wander away from the Good Shepherd's direction. Here's why. It's because he's a benevolent dictator. He is a gracious dictator. He is a loving dictator. How much of a loving dictator is he? Right? "No greater love has anyone than this, that a man would lay down his life for his friends." And here's the point. The wayward sheep are going their own way. And I'm quoting now from John Chapter 10. And you know this Sunday School grads, right? The Good Shepherd is a good shepherd because he lays down his... What is it, money? No. His time? His effort? He stays late? "He lays down his life for the sheep." I just want you to think about that. This is called the Way, he's a part of the Way, right? The Way, and I even quoted John 14, "the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

The writer of the book of Hebrews picks that picture up of the Way, the portal, the only way we can be with God, and he uses to his Jewish audience the schematic of the temple. And he says what it is, is we need to be right with God and God is, symbolically at least, in the temple, he's displayed there in the glory of the Holy of Holies, that little cubed room in the temple. And to get through it there was a gigantic curtain. And the curtain, as Josephus tells us, was four-inches thick. It was a thick curtain. I mean, it was like, it was better than a door. It was insulated in itself. It was this huge tapestry that hung there on big beams that kept you out of that place, and you couldn't even get into the outer court unless you had the right credentials, let alone the inner court unless you were a priest. Or you couldn't get into the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctum unless you were the high priest, and that only once a year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.



But here's what the writer of Hebrews says. Christ provided a way through "the curtain of his flesh." I just want you to think about that. Here are you a wandering sheep going your own way whether you did it in Sunday school or whether you did it, you know, in your sowing your wild oats out in culture. The bottom line is you were a wandering sheep, and God "wanted you to return to the Shepherd and Overseer of your soul," First Peter 5. But to do that there had to be a price paid for your sins. And the way that it was paid was the barrier that kept you out because your sins have made a separation between you and your God is there had to be a payment, a tearing of the barrier which took place literally, the four inch thick Josephus-described veil that kept you from the outer holy place to the inner sanctum, the Holy of Holies. It was torn, the Bible says, from top to bottom. Even if you were going to pull it and try and tear it from bottom to top, which Josephus, the Jewish historian said, you couldn't do it if you had it attached by ropes to two horses running in different directions. You couldn't tear that. But it was torn from top to bottom. And here's the writer of Hebrews saying, you know what was torn? It was his own flesh.

The Father is such a benevolent dictator that he said my wayward sheep need a relationship with me. That's the only time they're going to get any good, any good, any blessing is going to be coming from me. They need a relationship with me. So I'm going to send my own Son, my own beloved, righteous, sinless Son, and I'm going to have him tortured on a Roman execution rack, and I'm going to have him absolutely beaten to where he wasn't even recognizable, according to Isaiah 52. And I'm going to have him there, so beaten, so marred, more than anyone, so that those people can be back into my flock. And I'll use the language there of John 10. "He is the door, the door of the sheep." And the sheep now can come in and find pasture and be a part of the flock.

You know why I'm all against neo-Marxism and every form of Marxism. The bottom line is because I realize the one with the power in this case, the ultimate power in the universe is the best person we could ever be subjected to. I'm willing to take up my cross and follow him because he has all the power and he's a good God. He's a good God who loved me so much "that while I was still a sinner, he died for me." And that's the thing that should amaze us. That's why John Newton wrote the song "Amazing Grace. How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me." And I just want to take a minute to think about that. I want to be amazed at that. I mean, basically, I've tried to summarize the waywardness of Paul. We've already read it. We read it with some commentary, and he says that in verses 3 through 5. But in verses 1 and 2, he's telling this to the people and what is his intent? I know this from Romans Chapter 9 verses 1 and 2. He wants to see his kinsmen according to the flesh, his Jewish relatives, he wants to see them saved. He has anguish in his heart to see them saved.

The whole point of getting up and giving a defense, why? I mean, why don't I want to just plot an escape? He doesn't want to do that. He wants to see them saved. This is why he's risking even more abuse from them by starting with his testimony. And he's going to get to the fact that all of this is going to lead to here's how God got a hold of my heart, and here's what my life has been since. And you know what? I want you to have what I have. And he goes on to say that in Chapter 10 of Romans. Right? I want them to have what... If I could give up my



salvation for them to be saved I would do it. And Paul wants them saved, and he is so overwhelmed by the grace of God in his own life, to use John Newton's words, he's amazed by grace, and I think you should be too.

Number two, you should just jot that down. Let's just think about that. "Be Amazed at Grace." Paul was so amazed at grace that he was willing to declare his amazement at it and want more people to experience it. And I want you to know it's a kind of grace that you and I know nothing of in this life. Right? If I said you're a gracious person, you know what we mean by that? I mean, think about how we utilize the word grace. The non-Christians at your workplace they use the word grace, they mean that person is really gracious. What do they mean? Here's what they mean. Nice. That's what they mean. To be gracious is to be nice, right? God's not nice, right? That's just an insult even to say God's nice. Even if I think about his wrath, his judgment, his rulership I know there are hard edges to that and it doesn't feel nice. But when I get into the niceness of God, the mercy of God, the grace of God, it's way more than nice. Nice is like an insult.

And Paul says this so clearly in Romans 5. He's even trying to describe what is it like to have the nicest person I know sacrifice for someone else. Well, you might have some people do some pretty nice things, but grace is much bigger than that. Turn to Romans 5 and look at this great line. You might know it. It's such a classic text from the book of Romans, but I want you to see it in relation to being amazed by grace because it's divine grace. It's not human grace. It's costly grace. Look at Romans Chapter 5 verse 6. Look at the words that read, "While we were still weak, at the right time," Romans 5:6, "Christ died for the ungodly." He didn't just spend some time with us. He didn't just go the extra mile for us. He didn't just spend the extra dollar. He spent his own blood. He died for us and we were weak. Now "one will scarcely die for a righteous person," one wouldn't die for some weak person, "though perhaps for a good person," which is better than a righteous person in the nomenclature and the definitions, lexical definitions of the words "good" and "righteous," even for a good person or a super righteous person, "one would even dare to die." Maybe I could see that.

I mean, maybe for your wife or your kids you would lay down your life because you love them. You think [they are] great people, "but God shows his love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." So weak. Right? We're ungodly. He died for the ungodly. We're sinners. Look at verse 10 now, "For if while we were," here he adds another word, "enemies we were reconciled to God by his death." So weak, ungodly, we were in verse 7 sinners, and now in verse 10 we're his enemies. Just to pile up all the sin in the equation of my life and then just say, what kind of "niceness" does God give us? Well, way more than just being nice. Grace means something different than the world means when they use the word "that person is gracious." God is so gracious he was willing to suffer and die. It's a divine... You don't know anyone this gracious. This is ultimate grace. This is amazing grace. This is extreme grace. This is massive grace to say you were my opponent. Your sins were hostile toward God. You were his enemy.

That's why the whole word "reconciliation" is appropriate in our thinking about our salvation. Grace and reconciliation. Those as a combination of two good words. Because to be



reconciled means you were the enemy. And guess who was wrong? When you need to be reconciled with your friend, you're like, you know, it's like the insurance company after an accident. Well, you were 70% at fault and you were 30% at fault. Listen, that's not how this works. It's like when you get through your accident and you get that wonderful letter, it says you're 0% at fault. They're 100% at fault, right? With God. It's always that way. Your sin you are 100% responsible for. I know we're good at excusing our sin and rationalizing our sin, but we just need to accept the fact that the God who had no fault in this was willing to suffer and die for the weak, the ungodly, the sinners, and his enemies. And all of our sins that were hostile to God he was willing to get out of the way by punishing his own Son in the way in which we should be punished.

And because he's God, it's an infinite kind of punishment, the kind of punishment that we should have in, "Depart from me. I never knew you." And here he is, God the Father, turning on his own Son. Not just a way in a passive kind of neglect. Right? What you can see in the words of Psalm 22, which Jesus quotes from the cross. But it's an active kind of punishment as he lays down the sins of you and I on him. "God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us," Second Corinthians 5:21, "so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." That is an amazing transaction. Amazing grace is God going to the most extreme length. Like, what would you do for me, right? You might even think I'm a pretty good guy. What would you do? I mean, this is extreme. I will suffer and be tortured and I know I will have my Son be suffering and tortured and die and have the most excruciating pain because you are a wayward sheep and you need to be back in the fold. I'll let my Son's life be torn to be a portal for you to be right with me. Amazing grace. And it's sufficient grace.

Can you go back to Romans 5? As long as we're in Romans. Look at verse 17 in Romans Chapter 5. Romans Chapter 5 verse 17. Actually let's start in verse 15 just to get the repetition of this phrase. "But the free gift is not like the trespass." Now, okay. The whole point of this parallel in Chapter 5 is it is like the trespass. The trespass was done by one person and it had all these cascading effects on other people. Right? Adam and Eve sin and out of Adam's sin comes death, even to infants. Right? Think about that. Right? How can you die if death is the wages of sin? Well, it's because Adam's son, even if a child didn't morally, consciously do the same thing that Adam did, still gets the penalty. So the imputation of the penalty comes through one person. And so it's like the imputation of righteousness but in our case it's the free gift, it's a gift and that's a good thing. And why? "For if many died through one trespass," verse 15, "how much more the grace of God," this gift of God, this acceptance of God, this painful, excruciating price of saying, I will suffer so that you will not be imputed all that sin. "How much more the grace of God and the free gift by this grace that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many."

Verse 16, "And the free gift," so this is the third time now, "the free gift is not like the result of one man's sin." Well, it's just the opposite. It's the same in the sense that the equation works, the paradigm works. But it's good instead of bad, right? "For the judgment following the one trespass, it brought condemnation, but the free gift," that's the fourth time now he's used that phrase, "following many trespasses brought justification," as though I haven't... Think about that. I, at the minute my trust was put in Christ, everything about my non-Christian life, it may



have in conformity to an external church standard, but my life was rebellious against God. I was looking out for me. I wasn't looking out for Christ. I didn't live for his agenda. I lived for my agenda and it just happened to be in a church context. It could have been in any context for you, but the reality is I didn't live for him. But everything about my non-Christian life was now seen in God's eyes as justified. That I am now innocent, that I am now one as though I hadn't done any of that. That's huge.

Verse 17, "For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who have received the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ." The imputation of the righteousness to you, I love this, is described this way, "as the abundance of grace." God gave you something amazing. You should sit sufficiently satisfied in your own heart that everything you've ever done, no matter what your sin was like, whether it was covert and socially acceptable, or whether it was the most awful thing you've ever done and you killed 15 people, just for fun, right? The grace of the sufficient abundance of God's mercy toward you is all you need because all the payment for every sin you've ever done has been absolutely satisfied in Christ. It's an amazing thought.

So much so, verse 20, "Now the law came to increase the trespass." And the more you learn about the Bible and the more you learn about what God expects, the more you say, I've blown it, I've blown it, I've blown it. And that's true. The law, the rules, they come and they get into your brain and you recognize, man, I really got a lot more sin than I thought I had. "But where sin increased," and I saw everything about my past as awful. You may be saying this sermon is awful because it's making me think about all this. Well, great. It may be that thinking about sin is awful, but "grace abounded all the more." There is nothing that the grace of God, even if you're a persecutor of the church, a blasphemer, and an insolent opponent of the newness of Christianity, and you're putting women to death for just trusting in the Messiah and you were completely wrong in that ignorant unbelief. I'm just saying this, all of that is completely covered by the abundance of grace in Christ, and it's as though you've never done it. It's the thing that makes you 100% qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. There's no purgatory. The guy in the funny hat in Rome is wrong about this. There's no purgatory. You're not going to some moral car wash to have your sins burned off because they all got burned off on the cross.

Do you understand how this works? You're completely forgiven. That's an amazing grace that puts us all on level footing. It doesn't matter what your kind of sin was. It doesn't matter how your waywardness expressed itself. We're all completely innocent before God. That's the word "justification." And it was all paid for in Christ. And that's a huge assurance. It should change our lives.

As long as reading in this passage he gets on to this. If grace is going to overshadow no matter what sin, he asks the question then in Chapter 6 verse 1, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" If the non-Christians don't like grace because I'm saying that some pedophile in some prison somewhere in California can on his deathbed put his trust in Christ and be completely innocent before God, they're going to hate



that. They hate it. If you really put Grace under the microscope and you say grace means that no matter how bad we are, no matter how horrible we are, God forgives it with the faith that is placed in Christ. They hate that. They hate that because they want their righteousness the old-fashioned way. How's that? Got to earn it. I want to earn it. You can't earn this. It's impossible to earn it.

So we have to get in our minds the reality of this: if that really is grace then why not just sin more? I mean, sin's kind of fun, let's just do more sin. Let's just do more stuff we want to do. "By no means," verse 2, "how can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us have been baptized," "Baptizo," placed, "into Christ Jesus we're baptizo," placed "into his death? We were buried therefore with him by the baptizo," by being placed into his death, "in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." Here's the point. Baptizo here, I'm trying to say the Greek word, even though it's a transliterated word. Hearing the English word is hearing the Greek word, baptism is to be placed... We're not talking about water here. We're being taken in God's accounting ledger, your life is now seen in Christ. How do I get righteous? "Well, I'm in Christ." No, no, no. You got to go through the portal of his death. There's not a Christian in the world who doesn't know that he's really saved and has their sins forgiven, doesn't know about the death of Christ. The death of Christ is the sobering reality that on Christ's cross he suffered for my sin.

So in my mind, I start to identify with what God did. God the Father took my sin and put it on his cross. And so he is suffering for me. Even as Paul says to the Colossians, just like the charge over his head were all my trespasses and he was suffering for that, because Pilate didn't even know what to write. Well, just write "King of the Jews." That's why the jealous, envious Pharisees are crucifying him. He didn't know what to write and they hated that he put that. There was no charge. That's not a charge. It happened to be true. And I think the Pharisees even knew it deep down that it was true. But the reality is, he was dying for your sins and mine, for everything you have done that is sinful and falls short of the glory of God, dying for you. And in that you think I've been placed into that. If I know what it cost to have my sins forgiven. That's why this is costly, grace. People talk about free grace. It is a free gift. It's given you freely. But how much did it cost? It cost everything. It cost God the Father everything to do this.

Well, if I'm baptized into his death, well, then how in the world could I continue in sin? That makes no sense. Don't I love Christ, the one that I'm serving? Well, he suffered but I wouldn't want to think about more of my sin being laid on his cross. And since all sin has to be laid on his cross I would never want to do that. I would want to walk in newness of life very carefully. Circumspectly to use that old word. I want to be very careful about what I do.

How do I respond? Let's just put this in words. Number three, "Thoroughly Respond to God's Grace." I don't have verses 1 or 2 or 3 through 5 on this because I just want to think reflexively on biblical texts. Well, how do we respond? Well, we've got one that we've just provided here in the context of amazing abundance of grace. Right? Let's just put it this way. We work hard to be holy. That'd be one. We work hard to do right. We work hard to avoid sin.



There are people I know in this church who probably think on a Saturday night, "Well, why don't I just do it? It's fun. I want to do it and God will forgive me. I'm going to church in the morning and it's all about singing 'Amazing Grace. How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.' And here's an Exhibit 'A' last night, so it doesn't really matter. God's a God." As one person once famously said, "It's my job to sin. It's God's job to forgive." Well, I'm just saying you don't understand grace. If you understand grace and all that it took to give you this amazing grace you would say response number one to "Thoughtfully Respond to Grace" is saying I'm going to work hard to avoid sin. That's sanctification. That's trying to do the right thing in the Christian life. Okay?

Number two and this is a good one, let's turn to this one. It's so important. First Corinthians Chapter 15, First Corinthians 15. Are you still with me on any of this or is it tracking on this sermon? We're almost done. If you don't like it it's almost finished. Verse 10, giving you time to get there. Actually look at verse 9 because this is the context, right? "I am the least of the apostles." I don't think this is bloviation, right? It's not exaggeration. "Unworthy to be called an apostle." Why? "Because I persecuted the church." He can't help but think about his past and knowing how bad it is to think about how amazing grace is. "But by the grace of God I am what I am." I'm writing New Testament books. I am preaching the Gospel of Jesus, right? "By the grace of God ... and his grace toward me was not in vain." What does that mean? There must be some expectation tied to grace. "On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them." Right? Any of the other apostles. Verse 9, any of them, right? "Though it was not I," because I realized this, I can't do it if I didn't have the "grace of God that is with me. Whether it was I or they, so we preach gospel and so you believed." We're doing the work whether it's Peter, whether it's Apollos, whether it's me, he says, the bottom line is, I just want to tell you, the grace of God was not in vain. It was given to me, this free, abundant grace because it was motivating hard work.

Now, I said the first thing, Letter "A." Hard work to do right. And let's just expand on that. Hard work to advance his agenda. That's what he's doing. He is wanting to represent Christ. Some of you do not speak about Christianity at your workplace, and you don't because you're afraid of what it might cost you. I'm just saying you don't understand Christianity then. The whole point of your past pre-Christian life is that's how you lived. You're not living that way anymore. You're responding to amazing grace by saying, I am like the Apostle Paul, saying that grace toward me was not in vain. It is producing good, and the good in my life is not only avoiding slaloming through this life to avoid sin, but it's also making sure I do the things I know I'm supposed to do and advancing his agenda. I am to represent God as salt and light in this world. I'm his ambassador to quote Second Corinthians 5 again. And as his ambassador I'm going to work, work harder. He says, I worked hard because that's what the grace of God does.

Not only teaching us, as Titus says, to renounce sin, evil, lawlessness, but to do the work God's called us to do. Why are you in that neighborhood? Why are your kids on that team? Why are you meeting those other parents who don't know Christ? Why is it that at your job you're surrounded by non-Christians? Because God's got a task for you. You should respond to amazing grace by working hard to advance his agenda.



I turned you earlier to First Timothy 1. That was the first cross-reference I turned you to. Let's turn back there really, really quickly. First Timothy Chapter 1. We stopped in verse 15. "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost." He feels the weight of his sin. "But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patient as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life." So I am even seeing God's grace toward me as something now that, as I said, is advancing his agenda and having other people saved. But then immediately he breaks into a doxology, the Greek word for glorifying God. He breaks into worship. 17, "To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." Then he's back to charging him in verse 18, hey, Timothy, more and more and more and more.

Verse 17, I just want you to see this, is this parenthetical expression of thanksgiving to God for his amazing grace. In the middle of a sentence, talking about something else here, you break into worship? What is worship? It's ascribing to God greatness for something great that he has done. And the greatest thing he's done is save you, at least from your perspective, to grant you grace. And all I'm saying is it ought to be not only working hard at avoiding sin, not only working hard to advance his agenda, let's put it down this way, Letter "C." It's working hard to thank him. It's thanking him. It's even being motivated emotionally to explode with a sense of God is great. He saved me. That'd be a third thing.

How about this? Romans 3? We'll round this out. Last thing, last sub point. Go to Romans Chapter 3 with me, please. And I'm going to say this for those of you in this audience who think you understand grace and you kind of excuse the sin that I'm about to identify because you think it's being really self-deprecating and humble. You think, "I'm doubting whether or not I'm accepted before God because I'm just that kind of nice, humble person." I just want to show you that the amazing grace of God needs to be responded to by believing it, and that's going to lead to assurance. It doesn't matter what your sin was. You need to respond to the amazing grace of God by saying, "I stand assured." So important. Look at the bottom of Chapter 3 here. Start in verse 21. "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law." But really, I get more of it if I did keep the law and if I wasn't that bad, and I feel like I got a lot of it if I wasn't all that bad.

No. "Apart from the law." Apart from the rules, God has given you righteousness. How righteous are you? You're as righteous as any other Christian before God. I'm talking about objective truths regarding justification. You are as righteous as you can possibly be. That's why purgatory is a joke. It's worse than a joke. It's a horrific satanic heresy. Why? Because you are acceptable before God as you can possibly be if you're a child of God because you're clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and every sin you've ever committed has been extracted from you and placed on the cross. That's just such an important thing for you to catch. And that should leave you assured because it has nothing to do with what you did last week. It has nothing to do with what your testimony is. I know people in this church, they are so strong, "I had an abortion," right? "I fathered children out of wedlock. I did terrible things." It doesn't matter what your terrible thing is. It doesn't matter. If you understand amazing grace



you are absolutely assured, there's no doubt in your mind, that because of what God has promised you are righteous. You are forgiven. You are before his throne 100% acceptable. Fully qualified.

Again, to quote Colossians. "Fully qualified to share in the inheritance with the saints in life." Fully qualified. That you have to accept that because it's "apart from the law, although the law," the Old Testament, "and the Prophets they bear witness to it -- the righteousness of God through faith," do you have faith in Christ? "Through faith in Christ for all who believe. There is no distinction: we've all sinned, fallen short of the glory of God." Maybe you think you've fallen shorter than I have or whatever it might be, but we're all "justified by his grace, by his amazing grace, "as a gift," it is given to you, "through the redemption," the purchase, "that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation." I'm glad it was left in there, because we're all going to scratch our heads on that word. Propitiation, a payment that was satisfactory. That's why Jesus said on the cross " Tetelestai" in Koine Greek, tetelestai. And I do think it was in Koine Greek, by the way, tetelestai. Right? Paid in full.

This is absolutely a propitiation, a satisfaction of all that God required for every Christian, including the thief on the cross, another deathbed conversion story that non-Christians hate about the grace of God being provided to someone who lived a raunchy life all the way up to the very end. Everything that is needed for that sinner to be in heaven is satisfied by Christ on a cross. Propitiation, "redemption that is in Christ, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood," by that death on the cross, "to be received by..." hard work. No, "received by faith." Every religious system in the world is about that, right? Just to get a little bit of instruction in your life and do better. Christianity is by faith. It all starts by faith. Does it result in me trying to slalom through sin? Yes, absolutely. Because I understand amazing grace. It's not a license to sin. It's a motivation to stop sinning as much as I possibly can. But in this context, I'm just focusing on the justified side of it all "to show God's righteousness. because in his divine forbearance he passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Christ." He is absolutely righteous and he becomes the one who makes us righteous through trusting in Christ. Amen.

So Chapter 4 verse 1, "What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? If Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scriptures say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted,'" it was imputed, "to him." A Greek word "Logizomai." It was like, this is an accounting word. It was like he just got rid of it. If I put money into your account, I'm going to put \$5 million in your account today at Chase. Right? Better get an account at Chase really fast. I'm going to put \$5 million in there. Right? The moment I put it in there it's in there. It is now attributed, is logizomai, it is accounted to you as righteousness.

Verse 4, "Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift." And that's the whole point. The repeated phrase free gift, free gift, free gift. But it's counted "as his due" I got to have it. I worked for it. "And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly," well, then, "his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts as righteousness apart from works." This is Psalm



32 now, "Blessed," or happy, "are the ones whose lawless deeds are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin." I'm just telling you, you have to have your response to amazing grace going, "I believe it is amazing. Amazing enough to cover my sin." And it's not because of what I've done or haven't done, it's because I've trusted in Christ. If I get hit by a car and killed on the way home from church today, you're going immediately into the presence of God, and one day you get your body back, glorified, and you will live in his presence with all of his blessings. That's the whole point of Christianity. That's the whole reason you come to church is to hear about and make sure that you're in this thing called Christianity, because that's all that's going to matter 100 years from now. And the reality is it's all been counted to you as righteousness because Christ is righteous and he's given it to you by your faith and trust in Christ.

We sang Newton's hymn as we started. Right? There's a line in that, the second verse, "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved." That juxtaposition of that contrast is super important for us to catch. And I've done a little of that, I hope, in this sermon, by focusing on your sin of your pre-Christian story, and you ought to see that as bad, horrifically bad, and it should teach your heart to fear if you understand grace. Right? But the other thing is you flip the coin over and it's also the grace that your fears relieve that you have no fear. Romans 8:1. "There is no condemnation for those in Christ." This is a great thing. It gives me that sobriety about sin and what it should cost and that is my eternal punishment. But instead I flip it over and the grace then has relieved my fears. That's where I want you to leave this church with a sense of relief. If, in fact, your trust is solidly in Jesus Christ, a kind of faith that leads to saying, I'm loyal to my Good Shepherd's voice wherever it leads me, I don't care who cares about what I'm doing. It doesn't matter if it divides my family. My trust is in Christ. I hear his voice and I follow him. That's what real faith is all about. When your faith is in Christ you're 100% qualified to be absolutely in the presence of the Most Holy being in the universe, our benevolent dictator, the God and maker of all things, who's laid down his life, his Son's life for your forgiveness, the propitiation and payment for your sin. That's good news. We are to celebrate that amazing grace.

Pray with me. God, let us have a kind of assessment of our own pre-Christian life, even though it's different than Paul's. I know he's got a different story than we do, but our life is a life that is apart from you and like wayward sheep we wander into our own path and do what we think is best for our own advantage, our own self-interest is clearly in the forefront. And yet there comes a time when we realize as sinners in need of your grace that we cry out and say, have mercy on me a sinner. And just like Jesus said in the first usage of that word by Jesus in at least recorded in the Scripture, that man went home justified when he said that, "Have mercy on me, a sinner." It's grace that teaches our hearts to fear and grace our fears relieve. And I pray today there might be people in this church who leave with a set of sins and that guilt and that pain and the fear of judgment completely relieved as their trust is firmly, squarely placed in Christ. May you do that today in our hearts, even afresh, if we've been Christians for decades. Let us recognize the amazing nature of grace.

In Jesus name. Amen.