



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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THE GATEWAY OF GRACE

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Romans 5:1-11; 20b-21

INTRODUCTION

To set the stage, let's see some real life testimonies of lives transformed by amazing grace.

~ Play Sermonspice Video: "Amazing Grace" ~

How many of you have ever felt you got what you deserved?

- "I worked hard → got fair wage."
- "I screwed up → got fired...got divorced...got my "just deserts".

How many of you have ever NOT gotten what you deserved?

- "I got pulled over, should've gotten a ticket."
- "I made a mistake that cost my company a lot of \$...I should've gotten fired."
- "We played with fire...could've gotten caught...somehow didn't. Learned from that."

How many of you have ever gotten what you did NOT deserve?

- "I've been so blessed...look at all the blessings."
- "I've got my daughter / son back. We've been reconciled. God is sooo good!"

The 1st of these is JUSTICE == Getting what we deserve!

The 2nd is MERCY == Not getting what we deserve!

The 3rd is GRACE == Getting what we don't deserve!

Grace is always a pure gift. Grace is not earned. . .nor deserved. It is not an accomplishment or achievement. It is not obtained through manipulation or bargaining or begging. It is just given—for the asking.

When a person works an 8-hour day and receives a fair day's pay for his time, we call that a *WAGE*. When a person competes with an opponent and receives a trophy for his performance, we call that a *PRIZE*. When a person receives appropriate recognition for his long service or high achievements, we call that an *AWARD*. But when a person is not capable of earning a wage, can win no prize, and deserves no award—yet receives such a gift anyway—that is a good picture of God's unmerited favor. That is what we mean by *THE GRACE OF GOD*.

SCRIPTURE

Let's see what the Scripture has to say about it. We're reading thru the New Testament this year; there's also a drop-in discussion group at 9:50. Let's read from **Romans 5: [NLT + NIV]**

vv. 1-2: "Therefore, since we have been justified (i.e.: made right in God's sight) by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith, God has brought us into this grace...this place of undeserved privilege **where we now stand**. And we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory."

Are you *standing in grace* this morning? Or is there something holding you back? Lot of times, it's hard for us to ask for help (e.g.: Caring Network Cell). We all have trouble accepting the radical giftedness of God's grace. But it's the privilege of all who come to Christ by faith.

Let's pick it up at **v. 6 (thru 11)**: *“When we were utterly helpless (i.e.: powerless to save ourselves; just couldn't do it on our own), Christ came and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from condemnation. So now we can rejoice in this wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has reconciled us and made us friends of God.”*

When a top executive is caught for embezzlement or a pastor is involved in an illicit affair, you will often hear the phrase *“fallen from grace”*. We have come to believe that when someone falls into sin, he falls from grace.

But God wants us to know that when someone falls into sin, he does not fall from grace. He actually falls into grace (it kicks in)! And God's grace is there to put him back on his feet.

The Bible tells of prostitutes and tax-collectors—sinners—who fell into God's grace and got back on track. If the sin in their lives could stop God's grace, they would never have been able to receive His grace of healing, help, and power.

If there's one thing I could change, it would be people's views of God as wrathful, vengeful, angry. Like He's always looking to “get you”...condemn you...throw you into hell. [That's really more the M.O. of our adversary, the devil.]

The anger of God against sin is very real. We read about it in **Romans 1:18** — *“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men...”* But that wrath is toward sin (not the sinner).

Truth is, the grace & love of God are all over both the Old & New Testaments. David, after committing grievous sins, came before God and pleaded: *“Have mercy on me, O God, accord-ing to **your unfailing love**...according to **your great compassion blot out my transgressions.**”* [Psalm 51:1] In the New Testament, there is affirmation after affirmation that we are saved by grace [cf. Ephesians 2:8-9]. Grace is the action of a caring God (not an angry God) who stoops to lift us up—not because of any merit in ourselves, but simply because of His great self-sacrificial love.

So, how do we fit these two contradictory views of God together—His love and His wrath. . .or HIS LOVE and HIS JUSTICE? Actually both are co-equal parts of God's nature:

- There's **God's justice** that requires obedience, including judgment or some kind of reper-cussion. Otherwise it makes a mockery of God for Him to say: “I want you to live such-n-such a way”, then ignore it when we thumb our nose. [Parents, does this make sense?]
- On the other hand, there is **God's great love** for we who bear His image. He just wants to see us become all He had in mind when He created us.

This duality creates a mighty tension, dilemma, conflict right within the heart of God:

- Does He destroy the human race in response to all our willful disobedience? That may be what we deserve, but it violates the other side of His nature [love].
- Or does He overlook our sin? That violates His justice. Besides, overlooking sin and wrongdoing isn't really love anyhow.

So, the solution to the dilemma was for one human being—who wasn't worthy of condemnation, who was spotless & pure—the Lamb of God, God's only begotten and beloved Son—to take on the guilt, blame, and punishment for the rest of us.

Isn't that amazing? The One who was offended provides redemption for the very ones who have offended Him? It was the only way the apparent contradiction between God's love and God's justice could be harmonized.

Grace is the big surprise of the Bible. It's not what we were expecting (e.g.: wrath & condemnation). Grace is a gift that costs everything to the Giver and nothing to the receiver.

Romans 5 (vv. 12ff) goes on to describe how sin entered the world through one man—and along with it condemnation and death for all. Of course, that's Adam (& Eve). But then, through the obedience of another (i.e.: Jesus) there is the provision of grace and the gift of salvation for all.

So, thanks a lot, Adam (and Eve), for what you handed down to us. ☺
Thank-you, Lord Jesus, for what you have done for us! ☺

But there are a **couple questions** in my mind (maybe in yours, too). . .

ONE, How can we be declared guilty for something Adam did a zillion years ago? It doesn't seem right for God to judge us because of Adam's sin. To be sure, it isn't Adam's sin (or original sin) that condemns us; it's our own actual sin. But seeing that we are made of the same stuff as Adam and are prone to rebel, we end up confirming our solidarity with Adam by our own sins just about every day.

TWO, Does God blanket the whole world with salvation, so that all will be saved? What I would say is that all may be saved. Christ's atonement is for all. But this grace of which I speak is a gift—in fact, the very word for grace is *charis* (=gift)—and as such must be received. Just as all of us will act on that sinful nature we're born with, likewise all of us must act on what God has provided / offered. God will not force it upon us.

Here's a THIRD question: What about consequences? Does grace mean we'll escape sin's consequences? Not always! I've had more than one student who was very bright and smart, but had trouble concentrating because of earlier drug use. And so they didn't do well on tests. On the authority of Scripture, however, I can guarantee one consequence that will never come your way. In **v. 9**: *If we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, He will certainly save us from God's condemnation.* Heaven is guaranteed to those who are "in Christ".

Sometimes we have a hard time believing / accepting that, don't we?

APPLICATION

This past week, Matt asked me: "What do you want people to get out of your sermon this week?" I've got a list; I encourage you to pick one that's right for you.

- 1) **I want you to marvel at the kindness / graciousness of God.** Brothers & Sisters, we need to put the "amazing" back into grace. We've gotten a little too casual, too laid back—so that we're no longer moved or taken by surprise. You know, sometimes I can't believe I live in the house we do. . .or serve this wonderfully vibrant congregation—that's the kind of amazement I'm talking about.

Do you remember when you first experienced it? When you first became aware of it? The Apostle Paul never got over it. "Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man. . .the grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly" [I Timothy 1:13f]. Once you've had a genuine encounter with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, you never forget. That's why we celebrate Communion every month—to remember.

- 2) **I want you to experience it firsthand—perhaps for the very first time.** If you haven't already, you can receive the grace of Christ right now. Ask Him to forgive, to cleanse you and make you into the person He wants you to be. Maybe you've been sitting on the fence, afraid that receiving Christ

might change your life. Be assured, it will! But in ways you never dreamt possible. The deeper your sin, the greater God's grace. **Romans 5:20b** says: "Where sin abounded, grace much more abounded." One way of reading that is: "Where sins are added one by one, grace is multiplied a 1000 times over."

- 3) **I want you to stand in grace.** That's your privilege according to Paul. Live in it. . .walk in it. But:
 - **Don't expect to be perfect.** Next time the devil says to you, "Certainly you're not still expecting God's blessings after what you did, said, or thought this morning?" Your reply: "Yes I am! I know what I did was wrong. I confess it. I am undeserving, but I plead only the grace of God." Turning the coin over. . .
 - **Don't make a mockery of grace either** (cf. **Romans 6:1**). He calls us to holy living, but He provides the power + the direction of the Holy Spirit to pull it off.
- 4) **Don't only take it in, but give it out.** Share it with others. Become a grace-filled, grace-full person who relates to people the way God has related to you.
- 5) **Let it become the message we give to the world.** Tell the world that disdains Christ and Christians—and only think of God as wrathful, et.al.—the story of God's kindness. Tell them that if there was a point system to get into heaven, none of us would make it. Tell them if it took 10,000 points, all of our collective good works might add up to 2-3. Tell them that pastors are just as much in need of God's grace as the ruthless corporate boss who is a liar + a thief. But by the kindness and grace of a loving God: "He saves us, not because of the righteous things we have done, but because of His mercy. He washes away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. Because of His grace, we are declared righteous which in turn gives us confidence that we will inherit eternal life." [cf. **Titus 3:4-7**]

We'll never find favor with God by all our trying, doing, and measuring up. IT'S NOT THE DO BUT THE WHO! It's not your good works; it's what Jesus Christ has done for us! If you're into "performance religion", trade it in for a relationship with God who loves you uncondition-ally. He may not love your sin, but He loves you. . .and has made a way for you be reconciled.

STUDY GUIDE for Romans 9 – 13

Monday: Read Romans 9. Recounting Israel's Covenant Relationship with God (1-29). Note verse 16 "It does not depend on you desire or effort, but on God's mercy." God's promise rests on His promise, not on our works or inheritance. God is sovereign, yet humanity is viewed as responsible. **God is free to act** (14-22), and God has chosen to have **mercy on the Gentiles** (23-33). Have you ever wondered why God chose you to be a part of His plan to save the universe? Suppose salvation did depend on our desire & effort. What areas of your life have you worked hard in? What areas do you still need to give to God?

Tuesday: Read Romans 10. Israel's Rejection of God (1-21). Paul wants his own people to believe & be saved! Verse 3 explains the problem though, "they did not submit to God's righteousness." Israel was not willing to approach God by faith, insisting on using the Law. **The Gospel Again** (5-10). Memorize verse 9 "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Have you "called on the name of the Lord" (13)? What is one major way your confession of Christ as Lord has influenced your life? How can you bring the good news into the life of a family member or friend this week?

Wednesday: Read Romans 11. A Remnant Remains (1-10). Important: Israel has not been completely rejected. How is it possible for someone to try so hard to please God that they actually resist His love for them? **A Restoration is Coming** (11-24). Paul states the day is coming when Israel will be grafted back into that original tree of faith. How has arrogance between Christians hurt your church experience? When have you shown this attitude to others? **A Redeemer Will Return** (25-36). Paul goes to the Old Testament promises and their fulfillment, and ends with a doxology of praise over the complexity and powerful mystery of God.

Thursday: Read Romans 12. Finally, a chapter that we can understand! ☺ **Living Sacrifices** (1-8). How

does the world squeeze you into its mold? What pressure points seem strongest for you? How are you being transformed in your mind? ARE YOU, OR ARE YOU NOT USING YOUR GIFTS FOR GOD? Love of Another Kind (9-21). How can you show love in a practical way today?

Friday: Read Romans 13. Submission to the Authorities (1-7). As Christ-followers, we are called to live as good citizens. Government is commissioned by God to restrain wrongdoing. God is Building a New Community (8-14). We live in an urgent moment. We are to “*clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*” (14). Talk about not being conformed to this world! Have you ever thought of “putting on” Christ, like playing dress up? How would it look in your life/job/family?