



The Grace of Faith

Romans 1:5-7

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Please give attention to the reading of God's Holy Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely inerrant, the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient, and the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative. Romans, chapter 1:

"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Let's pray for the Lord's blessing upon his Word. O Lord, please use your Word in our midst. By the power of your Spirit, open up our eyes. Open up our hearts. Open up our ears, that we might see Jesus. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen.

What is faith? If you've ever been to a church or talked with someone about the Bible you have certainly heard people talk about faith, but it's often one of these things we speak a lot about but don't take the time to determine exactly what the word means. We're called to have faith, but what does that mean for us practically? What I would like us to see this morning is that faith at its most simple is trust. Faith is looking beyond me to the Lord our God.

As Paul opens up this introduction to his letter to the Romans, he has started out by speaking about the gospel. It's the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is proven in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now he is going to tell us how important faith is to following Jesus. So, this morning I would like us to see two main headings in our text.

First, we see that *faith looks outside myself*. By definition, to have faith I must be looking outside myself. As faith does this, it looks at three things. First, *faith knows we deserve condemnation*; secondly, *faith receives the grace of God*; then thirdly, *faith obeys the gospel command*. If faith is not going to look within, it must look without. The second thing I'd like us to see is that *faith looks to God*, and as faith looks to God, first, *faith sees God's calling*; secondly, *faith sees God's love*; and finally, *faith sees God's glory*. Faith looks beyond ourselves to a God who saves and calls us to himself.

Faith Looks Outside Myself

Let's begin, then, by looking at the outward nature of faith, that faith looks beyond me. There is a strong connection Paul uses here between grace on the one hand and faith on the other. Paul puts it this way: "We have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith." This is typical for Paul. Twelve times in the New Testament he pairs together grace and faith.

He does this even in the book of Romans later. In chapter 4 he says it depends on faith, that the promise may rest on grace. Then in chapter 5 he says we have access by faith into this grace. Perhaps one of the best known verses in all of the Bible is Ephesians 2:8 where Paul says, "By grace you have been saved through faith." So there is an obvious connection between the two. Why is there this connection?

We start, first, by thinking about the nature of grace, that grace is undeserved favor. It's something we don't deserve that God gives to us. You've experienced this in life. Someone comes up to you, and they may say, "They gave me an extra cupcake for dessert. Here, *you* take it." You say, "Well, I didn't do anything to get this. Thank you." Or when you're in line at a fast food restaurant the teller says, "Well, the last person paid for you. They wanted to pay for not only themselves but the person behind them." You don't deserve it.

I want you to think about grace to take it a step further. It's not just something we don't deserve; it's actually the *opposite* of what we deserve. To use our examples, it's not just getting a free cupcake; it's getting a free cupcake after you have punched the giver. It's not just getting someone to pay for your meal at a restaurant; it's getting them to pay for it after you've stolen their wallet.

Grace comes to us not just undeserved, but we deserve condemnation and wrath because of who we are and what we have done. So how do we get grace, then? If we could earn grace, the Bible tells us it wouldn't be grace anymore. That's the definition of grace. It's unearned. It's free. This is where I think the connection comes in: grace comes to us by faith, we trust God in his promise to be gracious, and we receive God's grace by faith. This means faith begins with understanding our need.

After all, if we thought everything was well in our lives we wouldn't need grace. If we thought we had earned God's favor it would not be grace. This is what describes the attitude of most of the world, especially in the United States. We think, "We're just fine. We'll get along. We don't need God. It's always nice if God kind of clears the way a little bit ahead of us, makes our path a little bit smoother, but we've pretty much got it together. We're nice people. We do good things. There's nothing wrong with us."

This is the problem, because most people don't look for God because they don't think they need him, so they never seek him. Paul gives us a very different picture. Paul gives us a biblical picture. He starts out showing his need for grace and God. You know the life story of Paul. If there was anyone who at this point had it all together, it's Paul.

When I speak to you about the New Testament and its writers, what's the first name that comes to mind? It's Paul. He wrote half the New Testament. When we talk about the book of Acts and the expansion of the church and the planting of churches, what's the first name that comes to mind? It's Paul. You see, Paul is everything we would hope to be as we read our Bibles. Paul wants us to remember that he, even he, even the Paul of the Bible, needs God's grace.

As Paul starts this letter talking about the gospel of Jesus Christ, he begins to speak about his role in the gospel, and he says he's an apostle. To be an apostle meant you had seen the risen Christ and were one of 12 men who were the foundation of the church. Again, Paul is the most of the most important. He's actually called by Jesus to be the chief apostle to the Gentiles that make up the bulk of the world.

So we ask...*How does Paul need grace? Why does Paul need the grace of God?* The answer is that Paul by faith understood his own need and that he deserved condemnation. He knew who he was. He was cruel. He was selfish. He was self-righteous. He was wicked before he met Jesus. Paul in himself was a sinner. He was plucked out of that life by Jesus and shown the truth of the gospel, and as a result, he saw who he was.

There is this wonderful chain of understanding we see in Paul throughout his writings. First, in 1 Corinthians 15 he describes himself as the "least of the apostles." That's still pretty good company. Right? You're still an apostle even if you're number 12. Then he says in Ephesians 3, "I am the least of the saints." Well, that's still not too bad, because you're a saint.

Then as his life goes on, he begins to see himself as a sinner just like anyone else, and then as his death approaches, in one of the last things he ever wrote, in 1 Timothy, he describes himself as the "chief of sinners." In the Greek he actually says, "I'm first in line of the sinners." Paul saw who he was and that he needed grace. So I ask *you* this morning...*Do you know you need the Lord?* Do you trust that what God says in his Word is true, that what God says about *you* is true?

The first step of faith is to understand that you are without hope in yourself. Otherwise, you're always going to hedge your bets. You're always going to think you're covered no matter what. Faith knows you are justly under the condemnation and wrath of God. That's where faith begins, but faith doesn't stop at hopelessness. Hopelessness asks, "What can I do to be saved?"

You remember the famous story in the Scriptures of the Philippian jailor, how when the earthquake hit the jail and he assumed all of the prisoners had run and he knew his life was up, he was about to kill himself, and Paul stops him, and he says, "Sir, what must I do to be saved?" That's what hopelessness drives us toward. "What can we do to be saved?"

If I can't solve my problem, I have to look outside of myself. That's what the jailor was doing. The solution, Paul tells us, is not to be active but to be passive. All other religions emphasize what you should *do*. *You* have

to take action. *You* have to be in control. The Bible instead tells us we have to *give up* control. The solution comes *to* us from God. It's not something we do. Paul tells us this clearly.

In verse 5 he says, "We have received grace and apostleship." Paul is using the pronoun *we* there in a formal sense of the letter. It's almost like the royal *we*. He's talking about himself. He says, "I need grace, and I received it and my apostleship from God." Grace is given to us. It is not deserved. Otherwise, it wouldn't be grace. The life story of Paul bears this out.

So what does this mean for you? If the first step of faith is to know you can't save yourself, the next step is to trust that God *can* and *will*. That is why Paul uses his life so much. It's as if he's saying, "If God can save someone like *me*, he can save *anyone*." Paul's life was a complete wreck before he met Jesus, and God forgave him in Christ and gave him grace and used him.

The best way to think about faith is not something we do. I think sometimes we run with an old translation of the Bible that says in Hebrews, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for," and we think faith is like this kind of thing we have to get and gather up and maybe even hoard, and we use it, we put it up almost as a weapon or as a resource. That's not what faith is.

A better way to think about faith is like this: an empty hand. Faith isn't something that empowers us. Faith is an empty hand that receives the gift of God. In this sense, faith is passive. Even though we are active in believing, faith receives from God. It's like the old hymn says.

All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and thou alone.
Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling.

Faith not only knows we deserve condemnation and that we have received God's grace. Faith also obeys the gospel's command. Paul says he received grace for the purpose of bringing about faith. What this means is, first, that faith initiates with God and then, second, that God requires faith of us. If we begin with the fact that God initiates our faith, that it starts with him because we are unable...

This is part and parcel of Paul's theology. He tells us we are dead in our sins. We're not sick; we are dead. He tells us God reached out to us while we were *yet* sinners. Not having *been* sinners but right now we are sinners and God reaches out to us. The best biblical example of how God reaches out and gathers his people is the incident of Jesus with Lazarus.

Now, we don't expect Jesus to wait until Lazarus comes halfway to him. We're not mad at Lazarus because he can't take himself from all the way dead to just mostly dead. No, Lazarus is dead, and what do dead people

do? Nothing. Yet when Jesus calls Lazarus he comes to life. He takes off his graveclothes. He comes to Jesus and finds newness of life.

Jesus strips away the deadness from us and gives us new life. We have to be made in Jesus' image. We have to hear the gospel and obey it because of what God has done. This requires a new you. It's not unlike what some of us experienced or saw after Harvey. You remember as the floods came through... I was telling some people this week I never would have imagined how much damage a foot of water could do. It's really not just a foot of water, is it?

If you leave flood-damaged walls alone, what happens? The mold comes, and where does it go? All the way up to the ceiling. If you carefully try to remove some of the moldy and flooded furniture and leave some, what happens to the new things you bring in the home? They get ruined. The only way to save the home is to rip out everything, take everything that is moldy, everything that is damaged, everything that is old out and put all new in. That's a picture of what Jesus does for his people.

He rips out not some, not the majority of, but *all* of our sin and gives us new life. He gives us new righteousness. He gives us a new being, and we can go forward in Christ because of his work. Now because faith is passive... Paul talks about receiving, and it starts with God. Often we think about it only from *our* perspective. Paul uses an interesting phrase here to focus us. He talks about the *obedience of faith* in verse 5.

What does this mean? Some people think it means it's the obedience that faith produces. Others think it means believing obedience. That is, we have to do things as we believe. The problem is both of these instances seem contrary to the idea of God's initiative, that we receive from God. I think it is better to understand it *this* way: obedience; namely faith. Or let me make it simpler: obedience = faith.

You say, "That doesn't make any sense, because faith is believing and obedience is doing." No, no, no. You see, God commands you to believe. You must obey God and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved. You can't negotiate with God. You can't say, "Well, I don't really want to do this believing on Jesus thing. Can't I just give money to charity? Can't I just open up my home for sick puppies and cats? Can't I just drive a jalopy around and give money away to people who need it?" No!

God has said you must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. You must believe that he took your place, that your sins were placed upon him, that the wrath of God was poured out on Jesus on the cross so you might escape God's wrath. More than that, that the righteousness of Jesus Christ in all of his perfection has been taken and placed upon you. This is the only way of salvation.

True faith understands that sin is disobedience to God. True faith understands that sin is rebellion against God, and then faith is obedience to God's command, his command to repent and renounce sin. Paul describes

this later in Romans in Romans 10 when he's describing those who do not believe. He says, "They have not all obeyed the gospel." What does that mean, Paul? He says, "I'm glad you've asked."

"For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?'" Do you see Paul putting on both sides of an equation obeying and believing? It's because the command comes from God to believe on Jesus. The gospel is gracious, the gospel is merciful, but it is a command. Today God is calling upon you to believe. Faith hears that command and obeys. Trust the Lord today and obey the call to believe in Jesus.

Faith Looks to God

The second thing we see is that if we do not look within, where do we look? We have to look outside of ourselves, faith says, so faith looks to God. If I need grace, where does it come from? If I have to obey this command, how do I do that? How am I able? This is something that confuses many people. They say, "How can God command me to believe, to do something I can't do? That's not fair." Well, let me tell you.

First of all, we have the wrong idea of fair, because we are the ones who have rebelled against God. We are justly deserving of his wrath. Remember that? The whole idea of grace is that it is unfair. We don't deserve it. You don't *want* fair; you want grace. So the need to see God's grace comes to us even in his command.

Augustine put it so well. He prayed, "Lord, command whatever you will and give what you command." You see, God gives a command, and then he provides to us the ability to obey that command. God knows we are unable to respond, and that's why he not only provides the solution for sin in Jesus; he also provides the ability to receive the solution.

Paul describes this in the call he mentions here. He says in verse 6, "You who are called to belong to Jesus Christ." Then again in verse 7: "Those who are called to be saints." This speaks of a relationship we have with Jesus even before we are aware of it. There is a sense in which there is a general gospel call. You are experiencing it right now. I am standing here telling you to repent and believe, but I have to tell you that call is not always effectual.

If every time I stood up and gave a call to the gospel everyone without exception was saved, I don't know that I would ever sleep. I certainly would lose my voice. We all know that's not how the world works. People reject the gospel. People reject Jesus. It's one of the things that tears at our hearts, especially if we have loved ones and family members who have not accepted the Lord Jesus Christ.

But there is also a second kind of call, an effectual call, a call that doesn't come from a weak-minded, speaking man like me. It comes from the Lord himself, and it's *this* call that attaches us to Jesus. It's that call that makes us alive in Christ, and that's what Paul is talking about. It is God who takes away all of our barriers between us and the Lord. This is, again, the connection with grace. God makes all the difference. It's not who we are. It's not what we know. It's God's grace that saves.

You may say to me, "Pastor, how do I know if I'm called? How do I know if God has given to me that effectual call so that I have a relationship with Jesus?" Well, it's easy. Believe. No one can believe except they are called, so don't worry about whether you've been called. Believe on Jesus. That's evidence A. You don't need any other proof. If you believe on Jesus Christ, God has given you that ability. He has given you faith to receive his grace.

We also see that Paul describes those at Rome as being called to be saints. Faith also sees this calling as being set apart for God and for his work, because when the Lord calls his people he changes them. I want you to notice the important order, though. They are called to be saints. They're not saints so they can be called. The order makes all the difference.

You see, it's not that Paul says, "Well, clean up your act, make sure you're holy, and then maybe you can get an interview with God." No. Instead, God calls us and sets us apart and makes us holy and uses us. God is at work first. Are you looking to God and his call today in your life? Do you hear his call today? Will you believe on Jesus and trust him, forsaking all others?

Faith also understands the personal nature of our relationship with God. Faith sees God's love. Paul tells the Romans they're not only the recipients of grace, they're not only called by God, but they are loved by God in verse 7. This is a special word, and it's actually a special word because it means special. To be loved by God means to be special in his eyes. It's an adjective that describes God's people. They are defined by God's love.

Notice, again, that the specialness and the definition here comes from God, not from us. It is God who put his love upon us that makes us special. It's not that we are special and, therefore, God should love us. We are dear to God and loved by him, the Bible tells us, when we are at our most unlovely. Faith understands that God's mercy extends beyond forgiveness. In fact, forgiveness is actually a result of God's love. Why did the Father send his Son? Because he so loved the world. When you understand God's love you see God's grace.

Finally, faith looks to God and sees his purpose in salvation. Now when we first focus on salvation, it's hard for us not to focus completely on ourselves. It's all about us. Right? It's about our need. It's about our blessings. Paul wants us to see that faith has a final purpose, that faith looks beyond us to God, that we receive grace, that grace brings about our faith, and that's why we obey the gospel.

But why did God bring the gospel? Have you ever wondered why God gives his people the gospel? Yes, he *has* set his love upon his people, but we have to understand that God doesn't *need* our love. God doesn't even need a relationship with us. God is perfect in all of his ways for all eternity. That's the whole point behind the Trinity. The three members of the Godhead exist in perfect love and perfect harmony from all eternity.

God doesn't need us. It's not as if God needs a pet or a project. No. So why would the Father pay the price of sending the Son to redeem sinners like you and me? Paul gives us the answer in verse 5. He says it is for the

sake of his name. The gospel glorifies God. He is proclaimed in all the earth as the one who saves. The gospel expressly proclaims "Jesus is Lord."

So faith never stops looking to God. The more we know about our salvation, the more we look to God. The more we experience our blessings, the more we look to God. Faith sees the glory of God in my salvation, and it praises God for that. You know the old hymn.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me;
I once was lost but now am found
Was blind but now I see.

How many of you know by heart the last stanza where Newton takes us?

When we've been there ten thousand years
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Then when we first begun.

Our salvation is by grace through faith to the glory of God. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ.