

INTRODUCTION

People often say about others, “To know him is to love him!” This is really true of Jesus. To know Jesus is to love him. If you know him, you love him. If you don’t know him, you can’t love him until you do know him. I hope today you will meet him if you don’t know him yet.

Today I am going to continue to talk about the nature and character of God. You know, you can come up with some idea in your own mind about what God is like. You can create your own image of God in your mind, but actually what you are bowing down to is the altar of your own intelligence, or the altar of your own imagination. Instead, let’s see what the Bible says about the character and nature of God. Today we will talk about “The God of Grace and the God of Glory.”

Some of you many remember when you were in school, or perhaps even now, you have studied Homer’s *Odyssey* from Greek mythology. Do you remember the character, Achilles who was almost totally indestructible? In one episode from Homer’s *Iliad*, Hector, a warrior, is leaving his home to go into battle to fight against Achilles. Hector is sharp enough to know Achilles is undefeated, and this could be the very last time he says farewell to his wife and to his young son. Hector is dressed for battle as he goes in to say goodbye to his son,. His little boy doesn’t recognize him because he looks so fierce in his battle armor and won’t have anything to do with him. Instead, he cringes in fear, and he whimpers on his nurse’s shoulder. Hector, realizing his son doesn’t recognize him goes out of the room, takes off his battle armor and goes back in. His little boy sees him and runs across the room and they embrace for their final farewell.

You know that is somewhat the same thing the apostle, Paul, is doing here in Romans, 3:21 because in the first two-and-a-half chapters he as spent the time showing us the fierce nature of the character of God. He is a God of justice. He is a God of wrath. He is a God who punishes sin. We see God in his battle armor. But, beginning here in 3:21, Paul shows God without his battle armor on. We begin to see now the other part of God’s character. He is a God of mercy. a God of love and a God of Grace. This is the turning point in the epistle as he begins to talk about things like redemption, faith, justification, righteousness, forgiveness. Let’s begin reading here in Romans 3:21. He starts out by using that conjunction, “but now” to show the contrast. We have seen all of this about God in the previous chapters, but now let’s look and see what else there is.

But now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and, are justified freely by his Grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.”

Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. Is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of the Gentiles too? Yes, of the Gentiles too since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised

by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we then nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

I don't know if you realize it or not, but that passage of scripture is one of the deepest, meatiest passages in all of the Bible. Entire semesters at Seminary have been devoted to just those few verses because it addresses what I call a bunch of theological jawbreakers—tough things to chew on. Look at it again. The righteousness of God (verse 21). He introduces faith (verse 22); he talks about the glory of God (verse 23); he talks about redemption (verse 24) and the idea of sacrifice of atonement (verse 25). He goes on and on, justice, justification, the wrath of God. So many things are introduced in this passage of scripture.

I'm going to try and clarify something about the character and nature of God. That's why I have chosen to condense it down into just two broad statements about God we see illustrated in this passage and how it applies and relates to all of us.

I. GOD'S GLORY (APPROVAL) IS A TARGET I CAN NEVER HIT

Look at the statement about God's glory. If you want a synonym for glory, use the word approval. God's glory or his approval is a target I can never hit. Have you ever been in a relationship with somebody and it seemed like you could not please them? Some of you I'm sure have been and may be married to people like that. That's somewhat true of God, because if you try on the basis of your own behavior to earn God's approval or his glory, you'll miss the target every time. The Greek word for glory in the New Testament is *doxa*. We get our word “doxology” from it. The Old Testament word for glory means shining or brightness. Probably the best way to understand what glory really is today is the word spotlight or limelight. When you put somebody in the spotlight or limelight of your approval, you are giving them your glory. God wants to put you in the limelight of his approval and his acceptance. He wants to spotlight you, but if you think there is something you can do to earn it, you are wrong.

I grew up playing baseball in South Alabama. I can remember when I was so little I could hardly pick up a bat. That was before we had T-ball. I played minor league baseball, little league baseball and then pony league baseball. Actually, I wasn't all that good when I started out. They put me in right field for my first position. What does that tell you? Right field. My very first game only one ball was hit to me in right field, and that ball went right between my legs all the way to the back fence. My daddy coached all of my baseball teams the whole time I was growing up. After that first minor league game, my dad started a family tradition I still cherish today. After the ballgame was over, we went straight to the “Big R” which was a hamburger hangout there, and he'd buy me a milkshake. That was so good! My dad bought me a milkshake whether I hit a home run or whether I struck out, whether I had three errors, or I had no errors in the game. His putting me in the limelight or spotlight was not dependent on how well I played the game. I've cherished that time when it was just me and my dad when he would look at me and give me his attention, and we would talk about the game. What was he doing? He was giving me his glory He was putting me in his limelight. The most beautiful thing about it was I knew during the ballgame regardless of how I played, I was going to get my milkshake. It got to the point when I just wanted the game to be over. Let's finish this thing! I want my milkshake! I don't care whether we win or not, I just want my milkshake with my dad.

God’s acceptance, his approval or his glory is not based on our performance. It is based upon the character and nature of God. Here’s why I want to say you and I cannot hit the target of earning his glory.

1. I fall short of God’s standard

Look at verse 3:23. Anytime somebody comes to me and says, “Pastor, I want to become a Christian.” I always start with Romans, 3:23. That’s where you start. That’s step number one. You must admit that you are a sinner!

When I was a college student in 1972, Billy Graham came to Birmingham, Alabama, and led a crusade. I was a crusade counselor. It was a wonderful crusade. Literally, thousands of people accepted Christ. But, as an assignment for a preaching class I was in, we took the manuscripts of the eight sermons Billy Graham preached during that crusade, and my part of the assignment was going through all Billy Graham’s sermon manuscripts and find all the statements he made about the sinfulness of man. found in eight messages Billy Graham quoted Romans 3:23 fifty-six times. Fifty-six times he proclaimed to that audience in that stadium, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” You say, “That sounds repetitive to me.” Well, that’s where you start when it comes to becoming a Christian, you must admit you are a sinner.

Look at verse 23. It says, “for all have sinned.” That word sinned is the word *harmatia*, meaning to literally miss a target. It is the picture of an archer who pulls back his bow and lets the arrow fly, but he never hits the target. That’s what the word sin means. God has established the target. The target is absolute perfection. Try as we may, we every one of us, miss the target.

He says, “We sin but we fall short.” You now what that word is from. It’s from an athletic contest. It is a word that was used for someone who was running a race, but yet they fell down and never reached the finish line. This is what the picture is. If it were possible for us to earn God’s favor, or his acceptance, or his glory, or his approval, we would all fall short of reaching the goal.

It’s like this. Come with me for a moment to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean over in South Carolina. Let’s just stand there with our toes right there in the waves for just a moment. What if God said, “All right. You can earn your way to heaven. All anybody on earth has to do to gain access to heaven is jump across the Atlantic Ocean. If anybody can jump from the South Carolina beach over to Europe, you’re in. You get a freebie. You get one ‘get out of hell ticket free’. You’re in heaven for all eternity.” So everybody tries. How far do you think you could jump? I’m looking at some young athletes in this crowd. Some of you look like you might be able to jump twenty feet. Some of the rest of you, I wonder of you could get one or two feet. Some of you are going to jump in ankle deep. Some of you knee deep. Some of you waist deep. Hey, let’s take the greatest Olympic long jumper in the world today. We’ll give him a runway, and let him get a running start. He runs and he jumps; he jumps farther than anybody else. Splash! He gets maybe about thirty feet out there. The problem is we would all fall short by about two thousand miles. You and I stand there in the water of our own failure, and we look back and say, “Well, at least I jumped farther than you did. I did better than you. We compare

ourselves to other people.” One reason you know you cannot hit the target of earning God’s acceptance is because we all fall short of the standard.

2. I can never brag of my goodness

God has set it up so I can never brag about how good I am. Look at verse 27. He asks this question, “Where then is boasting? It is excluded.” Nobody can boast. God has set it up so no one can stand in the water, and say, “Look how far I jumped!” The biggest mistake many Christians make is that we feel so proud because we look at some bum in the gutter, and we say, “I’m better than he is. I’m better than she is.” Here you are driving to church this morning, and as you looked at all those heathen pagans out there who aren’t even coming to church, didn’t you feel good? “I’m going to church, and they are not.” No, you cannot boast about anything spiritual. God has set it up that way. If you are comparing yourself to anybody else, you are using the wrong standard.

A man worked in a factory in a little town. His main job at the factory was to blow the factory whistle at noon and again at 5 p.m. Every morning on his way to work, as he was sitting at a stop sign, he would look over into the window of a jewelry store where a grandfather clock stood as a display. Every morning the men set his watch by the grandfather clock, then went to the factory and blew the whistle. Every morning, set the watch and blow the whistle. One morning he stopped at the stop sign and the owner of the jewelry store just happened to be out there. So, he stopped and hopped out of his car and introduced himself. He said, “Hey, by the way I have a question for you.” He said, “I set my watch every day by that grandfather clock, and I want you to tell me, how do you keep the time on that grandfather clock so precise?” The guy said, “I set it by the factory whistle twice a day.” You think about that. You could get off a long way doing it that way. There are a lot of people who look around at each other, and they compare themselves to one another, but God has set it up so he will not share his glory with anybody.

It is God’s desire for every person in this room to put you in the limelight of his acceptance and his approval, but you will never experience it until you quit trying on your own. Until you admit, Romans 3:23, “I am a sinner. I fall short of earning God’s glory.”

II. GOD’S GRACE (FAVOR) IS A GIFT I CAN NEVER EARN

God’s Grace, and let’s use the synonym *favor*, his favor or his blessing is a gift I can never earn. Now his glory is a target I can never hit, but his favor is a gift I can never earn. We’re so skeptical today. I really do think there are some people in America who have refused to become a Christian because they are so skeptical they can’t accept a free gift. They think there is always something attached to it. Have you ever heard the statement, “There’s no such thing as a free lunch?” Meaning there is always something attached to it. Have any of you ever gone out to one of these resorts where they are selling time shares? You go out there, and because you go out there you receive a gift; golf clubs, or a television or cookware or something like that. That’s not a gift, you earn it. I want you to know going out there for three hours and listening to that high pressure sales pitch, you earn it. That’s not a gift. “Well, they call it a gift!”

We attach that to salvation. We think “Well, surely there has to be something attached to this free gift of grace. There’s something I have to do. The other shoe is going to fall, what else is there to it? We have a hard time accepting it.

Back in the “olden days” when I was growing up, we had it hard. We only had one television in my house. It only had two channels, and you had to get up and walk across the room to change the channel. So, consequently, you know what I watched on television? Whatever my daddy wanted to watch. There was just no question. I do remember an old black and white show some of you folks may remember called, “The Millionaire.” There was a man who must have been a billionaire, who every week would just decide he was going to give a million dollar check to someone. You never saw the man’s face. You just heard his voice and saw him from behind. He had a representative whose job was to take this check every week to some unknowing, undeserving average person on the street. Do you remember what the guy would say? He said, “I have for you a check for one million dollars, tax free.” I wonder how he got around the IRS? Have you ever wondered about that? One million dollars, tax free. Now, some of you who never saw the show say, “You mean it was the same thing every week? The same plot?” Yeah, but you know what made it interesting? The people couldn’t believe it! They were so skeptical. “Now, what do I have to do? Isn’t there something attached to this?” They couldn’t understand it. It’s just free.

Some people have a hard time accepting the free gift of salvation. Some people’s attitude about salvation is their attitude about making a living. Some people say, “I got my money the old fashioned way. I earned it!” They think they can earn their living by the sweat of their brow, but you cannot earn salvation by the sweat of your brow. It’s a gift. It’s a gift you cannot earn.

1. The act: Redemption from slavery

In this passage, Paul is going to address three tremendous topics. First of all, he speaks about the act: redemption from slavery. He’s going to introduce the idea of redemption in verse 24. Redemption from slavery. When I use the word redemption, does it conjure any picture in your mind whatsoever?

Talking about the old days, do you remember S&H Green Stamps? You went to the grocery store and they gave you green stamps with your purchase. My family and I were all-star S&H Green Stamp collectors. I think I ruined my tongue licking so many of those stamps and putting them in those books. We took full books down to the “redemption center,” turn in the stamps and we would get something in return, some object, something to use. Well, when we think of redemption, that’s what we think of, but they didn’t have S&H Green Stamps in biblical times. They had slavery instead. The word “redemption” then meant when a free man would buy a slave and then set the slave free. *That* was redemption. Not just buying and selling slaves, but buying a slave and giving to him his freedom. In many cases the slave who was set free would then voluntarily go and work in the home of the man who had redeemed him. That’s a picture of what salvation is for us because look at what the Bible says. Romans, 6:16 says, “Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one you obey. Whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness.”

Now, you and I have a problem. We are in slave and bondage to sin. Jesus Christ loves me and love you so much that he was willing to come and pay the price for our freedom. Then, because he has set us free, we want to serve him. You say, "Well, he redeemed us, what was the price?"

2. The price: A blood sacrifice

We are also given the price of redemption. It is a blood sacrifice. Look at verse 25. This is that difficult phrase that is hard to understand. "God presented him (Jesus) as a sacrifice of atonement (NIV version)" The King James Version says "propitiation." It is one word in the Greek language, *hilasterion*, which means one and *only* one thing. It appears only twice in the Bible. It means mercyseat. Do you remember the Ark of the Covenant? I've said it before, but if you saw the movie, "Raiders of the Lost Ark", they had a pretty reliable depiction of the Ark of the Covenant. It was an oblong box which held the Ten Commandments, Aaron's rod and a bowl of manna. On top of the box was a solid gold lid. On one end was the figure of a cherubim with its wings outstretched. On the other side was a figure of a cherubim with its wings outstretched. And this area in the middle where nobody ever sat was called the mercyseat. On one day each year, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the high priest would stand outside. They would kill a male lamb without spot and without blemish. The high priest then took a branch of hyssop, which is just a wooden branch with a lot of leaves on it, and he would smear the branch in the lamb's blood. Then he would walk into the Holy of Holies and he would open up a the huge veil that covered it up, and he would walk in there and sprinkle that blood on the mercyseat. That act of sprinkling blood on the mercyseat is the word that's used here.

Why was that priest doing that? Because it symbolically cleansed the sins of the people of Israel for one year. Every year, he came in and did it again. But it was only symbolic. It never worked. It never once forgave one sin. You say, "Well, then why did they do it? What a waste of animals. What a waste of time. What a waste of scripture. Why did God have them do that?" He had them do it because he was trying to condition their minds, the minds of the Jewish people. They were supposed to understand that a blood sacrifice was required to forgive sins, and it had to come from a lamb so when John the Baptist pointed his finger at Jesus and said, "Look! Behold the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world" all the Jewish people should have said, "Okay! I understand it now. The blood of rams and lambs never did anything, but this one man is coming to give his life as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of all the world."

When Jesus died on the cross, do you know what that was? That was God once and for all making atonement. You say, "I don't even know what the word atone means, or atonement." Let me tell you what it means...ATONEMENT...Well, mark out the "ment"...then, between the letters "T" and "O" draw a line so you have the words "at-one". That's what the word ATONE means. You have Holy God...sinful man...when Jesus made AT ONE MENT these two that were separate became AT- ONE. At-One-Ment...that's a good way to understand.

1 Peter 1:18-19 "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." That's God's Grace. God's Grace is what he gave to us because we didn't deserve it. The word "grace" means "unmerited

favor." It's something you need, but you don't deserve. It's God saying, "Listen, I love you so much that although you are a sinner, I am going to pay the price for your salvation."

I love grace. In fact, I love grace so much I named my youngest daughter, Grace. Laura Grace. I told my wife, "I like New Testament doctrine so much, I'm going to name all my children New Testament doctrines." My oldest daughter is named Jennifer Christian Dykes and my second daughter is "Laura Grace Dykes." I told Cindy if we had a boy, I was going to name him "John Justification Dykes." I think she is glad we didn't have a boy.

Grace is such a precious term in the Bible. The word is *charis*. We get our word "charisma" or "charismatic" from the word "grace." It's God's favor in action toward us and that's why he redeemed us and Jesus was willing to pay the price with his blood. That's his mercy and Grace in action.

I heard a semi-funny story the other day. I say semi-funny because it's almost too true to be funny sometimes. A guy died and went to heaven. He stood before the gates of heaven and the angel said, "Hey, we have a new plan now. You have to get into heaven by earning 1,000 points so let's see how many points you have earned. The man says, "Well, that ought to be easy for me. I was a member of a Baptist church for 65 years. For 40 of those years, I was a deacon. For 40 of those years, I tithed my income. For 40 of those years, I taught teenage boys in Sunday School. I went on 15 mission trips around the world taking the good news of Jesus Christ. I was a Gideon and I distributed Bibles. I did all those things. The angel said, "Well, that's nice. Let's see. That's worth one point. You only need 999 more. What else? The man said, "Well, I was married to the same woman for over 50 years. I never once committed adultery, never even looked at another woman, I was faithful to her all of my life. I was an honest businessman. I never cheated on my income tax. People knew me as a good, moral man in my community. What about that?" The angel said, "Well, that's worth another point. Now you only need 998 points. The man says, "You know at this rate it's going to take the grace of God to get me in this place!" The angel said, "That's worth 1,000 points."

3. My response: "Justified" through faith

It's not by works of righteousness we have done, but it is according to his mercy he saved us. So, there is the act of redemption, there is the price of the blood of Jesus, and then, finally, my response: I am justified through faith. That's another one of those theological jawbreakers. What does "justified" mean? JUST-AS-IF-I'D. Justified means when God looks at you it's *just as if I'd* never sinned. His Grace is such that he forgives my sins, and when you stand there in the righteousness of Jesus, it's *just as if I'd* never sinned—and I accept that by faith.

Ephesians 2:8-9, is a great verse that says, "For it is by Grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves. It's the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast." If you are like me, you need to see these things. If a picture is worth a thousand words, let me show you graphically what salvation is. Start at the top and write down "God's Grace comes down from heaven." Then start at the bottom and write "My faith." It is like God tosses his Grace down and my faith rises up to catch it. Even my faith is a gift from God. It's not even something you do yourself. God gives you the ability. When God gives his Grace and I respond with my faith, what

happens in the middle...BOOM! That's when salvation occurs. When God's Grace intersects with my faith, that's when salvation occurs. It takes God's Grace responded to by my faith.

CONCLUSION

When I take groups to Israel, one of my favorite spots is the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem because there is a spot down in a grotto, which is like a cave, where they have the very spot designated where Jesus was born. It's one of the oldest operating churches in history because the mother of Constantine the Great, Helen, went to Israel in about 326 A.D. and she discovered this place and ever since that day, there has been a church there in Bethlehem over the birthplace of Jesus. Actually, today, there are four churches of different denominations that radiate from that one spot where Jesus was born, but there is only one door to get into all of those churches. For years it was a big door, but there were some people who visited the place of the birth of Jesus who would literally rode their horses into the church. Some of them were Christians. Some of the crusaders, some of the nobility who thought they were too important to get off of their horses rode right into that church, and of course some of the Muslim Turks rode through that door to desecrate the church. So, they blocked it. Today, if you go to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the door is only so wide and so high. Whether you are 6'6" or 5'1", to enter into the birthplace of Jesus you have to bend down. That way nobody can ride their horses in there.

Much more interesting to me than the birthplace of Jesus is the door because it is a picture of the Christian life. There are still some people today who think they can ride their high horse of morality in front of Jesus and say, "Here I am. You are sure lucky, God, that I'm on your side" Others ride their religious high horse before God, and say, "God, I've been a Baptist for 50 years. Aren't you lucky, God?" You cannot get to God that way. You have to get down off your high horse of pride and kneel down before Jesus. There is only one way to God and only one doorway, and that's Jesus. You have to humble yourself to enter therein. His Grace, my faith equals salvation.

OUTLINE

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Why? Because I

1. Fall short of God’s standard
2. Can never brag of my goodness

II. GOD’S GRACE (FAVOR) IS A GIFT I CAN NEVER EARN

1. The Act: Redemption from slavery

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For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. *Ephesians 2:8-9*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes