

Living By Faith: God's Grace (Part 2)

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This is the second sermon on the subject of grace in this series on “Living by Faith.” I especially want to emphasize grace at this point in the series so that we might be able to appreciate more strongly what God’s grace means to our salvation. I want us to understand grace especially as seen against the backdrop of God’s justice, and that is what He is fully—and I mean *fully*—justified in doing to us. It is a truth that there would be no salvation whatever seeing our consistent disobedience against His rule of us within His purpose.

Now within His purpose, grace is indispensable. Without it, there would be no calling, there would be no justification, there would be no Holy Spirit, there would be no sanctification. It would be possible, I am sure, to go as far back as that there would be no creation without God’s grace. In short, it is *the key* element in God’s entire purpose in terms of our salvation.

In the previous sermon, in laying a foundation for *this* sermon, I strung together a series of scriptures to show that it is impossible for God to lie. It is impossible for Him to misjudge circumstances. Every judgment by Him is righteous love. Nadab, Abihu, and Uzza got what they deserved according to His justice. They were guilty of sin, and the wages of sin is death.

However, we also saw that God sometimes provides mercy, which is *non-justice*. Non-justice does not violate God’s righteousness. No judgment of God violates His righteousness. Always remember that. This is because God judges according to His purpose, and His purpose is righteousness intermingled with His grace.

So where does that leave us? We are every bit as guilty as Nadab, Abihu, and Uzza, but God has a purpose for us that is far greater than he had for them at the time that He executed them. He justly put them to death for their sin. We saw, that at the time of our calling, we were, in God’s judgment, dead to sin.

I want you to turn to Ephesians 2. We are going to be spending a little bit of time here. We are just going to look at one verse right now that will provide a basis for what I just said, that at the time of our calling, we were dead in sin. Verse 1 applies at the time of our conversion. Here is what Paul, speaking to Christians, wrote:

Ephesians 2:1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins.

The Christians were alive when Paul was talking, but just before this period of time they were dead in their sins.

Today we might use a little bit different terminology. What this clearly shows is that at the time of our conversion we were “dead men walking,” and that we needed to be spiritually raised from that state of spiritual death and given life if His purpose for us was to be fulfilled. In order to impress this on us, Christ required that we literally go through a baptism, which is a symbolic spiritual burial in a watery grave, and then we are raised to spiritual life from it, coming up out of the water, and given a new spirit—God’s Holy Spirit.

Baptism is symbolic, and shows to us that we should clearly understand that we are dead to sin, thus buried in a watery grave, and then we are spiritually symbolically raised to a new life. At that time then, at that point—coming up out of the water—we should have in our minds a determined mindset to use the rest of our life, by faith, submitting to God in order to fulfill our part of His purpose for us under the New Covenant.

In order to complete our course we will find today that God's grace is supporting and fulfilling our need all along the way. Did you hear that? *All along the way*. Receiving God's grace *most assuredly is not* a one-time thing that justifies us before God.

There is a cautionary note here, and that is, out there in the world that calls itself "Christian," there is a doctrine that is commonly called "once saved, always saved," which purports that once one has been justified and is under the blood of Christ, it is not possible for one to lose salvation. Now that is very appealing, but one *can* fall from grace.

We will look at something that is very broad here. We should call to mind that God shows us through Israel's experience in the wilderness that many—(in fact so many except for two men)—who began the journey failed to get there. They fell from grace. Is that a lesson, or what? They failed to reach the Promised Land. That is a lesson that is intended to keep us determined. That is a positive effect of that lesson of what happened to the Israelites so that we would know and understand that even as they failed, we can also fail as well. That should be a warning that is intended by God to help keep us aligned to His purpose and relying upon Him, because there are very clear warnings.

I am going to go through those scriptures again as we begin so that we have a foundation—one that is not intended to put us in a state of anxiety. God does not intend it that way, but God is forever the realist. He is not a dreamer. He understands what we are like. He knows it is our nature to forget. He knows it is our nature to dream. He knows it is our nature to relax and to kind of lean back, and to look back from the plowing we have done. Human nature is highly variable.

We are going to be in II Corinthians, and these warnings are scattered throughout the New Testament. Every once in a while they are interjected by the apostle in order to help us to understand that there is something that is required of us.

Turn to II Corinthians 6. Notice how clear this is.

II Corinthians 6:1-2 We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the [a] day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the [a] day of salvation.

Verse 1 is the one that specifically says we are warned, admonished to *not* receive the grace of God in vain, uselessly. Does that not give some indication that there is a possibility, like the Israelites in the wilderness, that we might fall away? God has not *willed* that we fall away, and that is why the warning is given. We have to exercise, by choices, to do the things necessary to make whatever sacrifices are needed to understand, repent, and go on.

II Peter 3:17-18 You therefore, beloved [Christians, fellow brethren in the church], since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; [that we deviate from the way that is right

and true] but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

So Peter, like Paul, shows that there is a possibility to fall away.

Let us go to the book of Hebrews, chapter 3. We are going to look at verse 12 first where this is very plainly stated.

Hebrews 3:12 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief. . . .

Again, remember, to whom was Paul writing? He was writing to church members who already had the Spirit of God. They were converted. But is it possible for those who are converted to have an evil heart of unbelief to form in them? It is possible.

Hebrews 3:12 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

Hebrews 3:19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

This is speaking of those in the wilderness who could not enter the Promised Land because of unbelief.

Hebrews 4:1-2 Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.

I think that is pretty clear. They started out with a high hand. They had a lot of faith going for them, but somehow in the course of time that faith diminished, and as it diminished they turned away from their steadfastness to God. So the warning is there that this can happen to us as well.

This next one is especially clear.

Hebrews 6:1-6 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

This presents something that is pretty strong. These people he is warning have gone pretty far in the wrong direction. Their lives have turned to a steady breaking of God's way of life, and little by little, they lost it. When they get to a certain point, they cannot be resurrected from the grave that they have dug for themselves due to their lack of faith. That is pretty sobering.

Hebrews 10:26 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin.

In other words, the blood of Jesus Christ cannot be called upon for forgiveness.

I am going to make a change here, and I believe that this change of one word is justified. I saw a paper on this several years ago and I noticed they changed one word in it. I thought, “Hmmm,” and decided to chase it out. It is the word “willfully.” It may take you a little bit to think this through, but brethren, every one of us sins willfully to some degree.

Do you know what the word should be changed to? “Willingly.” Same word, just a little bit different sense, because there is a difference between willfully and willingly. A person can sin willfully simply by changing his mind—“I am going to do it anyway,”—but a person who sins *willingly* has no resistance to sin. He just goes along with it as though God had never entered his life. So there is a difference between those two, and I say that the person who changed that to “willingly” was correct.

A person can get to the place where he does not even consider Christ, does not consider the Father, does not consider God’s purpose, does not consider that at one time he had the Spirit of God. He gives in without a fight. He is just like he is unconverted again. In fact he is.

Hebrews 10:26 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.

This is perfectly coordinated with Hebrews 6:6. People who had been converted get to the place where committing sin no longer bothers them, and they are going along willingly without any resistance toward it.

Hebrews 10:29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

I know that everyone of you—mostly everyone of you anyway who is listening to my voice and who spent a great deal of time especially in the Worldwide Church of God, and then United, and then Living, and then Philadelphia, and the Church of the Great God—are hearing these things over and over again, and then you run into somebody you knew back in Worldwide or somewhere else, and they are no longer keeping the Sabbath. Now they are keeping Christmas and Easter. They have just completely reverted to what they were before “B.C.”—before conversion—and they are just going along with the world.

Whether they have lost salvation, I do not know. I do not know whether they were ever converted. I am just saying that you know people this has happened to. Maybe they have not lost it completely; then again, maybe they were never converted in the first place, but they *liked* the church, they liked the fellowship, and so we will leave that judgment up to God. But if they *had* been converted, they have gone through this process, and they have trampled the Son of God under foot. They have rejected the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and God’s offer of grace.

Matthew 12:31 “Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the denial shown by the witness of peoples’ conduct in their life that they have rejected what was so freely given to them at the beginning of their conversion. Why would the apostles write these warnings if there were not the possibility of the failures that are described by these verses?

Now as long as we maintain the faith that we had at the time of our conversion, and grow in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ—maybe not as much as we would like to—but we are faithful, we are in contact with God, we are maintaining the relationship with Jesus Christ, then our salvation is secure. But there are indeed those who will turn away even as some turned away in the wilderness, so there is no “once saved always saved” doctrine. There is a “once saved *always* saved” as long as we are maintaining a good relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

So there is no need for us to be overly concerned and worried about it, that every time we do something that falls short of what we expect of ourselves, it does not mean that God is going to throw us out of the church and that we have committed the “unpardonable sin,” because I John 1:8-10 shows that He is ever willing to forgive those through Christ’s sacrifice if they repent and go on.

It is commonly believed that the word “grace” is derived from the Greek term *charis*, which appears over 100 times in the New Testament. It does, and yet it also does not. The word “grace,” as it appears in the New Testament, is not directly derived from the Greek word *charis*. The key word here is “directly.”

If you look up the origin of the English word “grace” in a book, dictionary, or whatever, it will not report to you that it is derived from the Greek word *charis*. Rather—if it is an honest dictionary—it will tell you that it is directly derived from a Latin term *gratia*, and that Latin word means “pleasing.” It can also mean “thank,” as in “thank you.” It can also mean “praise.” It is a good word, but it is not derived from the Greek word *charis*.

Let me give you an example of how this word would normally be used, and it is to this day used somewhat in this manner. People say grace before a meal. Used in that manner, the word “grace” is derived from *gratia*. What are they doing in *relation* to the term *gratia*? They are giving thanks. That is exactly what the word means. They are giving thanks for what has been given, and at the same time they are also praising God for His providence, and that pleases Him because He is acknowledged in their life. It is a right thing to do, and it is a right use of that word *gratia*, which has been translated “grace.”

Apparently it was the *King James* translators who later made the decision to use the Latin term *gratia*. I do not know that it was a particularly good choice, but at least it had a good sound to it. It was not, though, a direct translation of *charis*. They apparently did that because they could find no English term that was available that was also a good synonym for the Greek term *charis*. So they just decided to use *gratia*.

All of that does not really matter now, and there is a reason why it does not matter now. Through the centuries, since 1611 (whenever the *King James* was given to the public), an evolution of the

meaning of *gratia* occurred so as to give the word “grace” a spiritual significance that it did not have in the Greek *charis*.

Now listen as I explain. *Charis* was secular Greek and indicates a sense of charm and beauty, of being gifted, and therefore by extension “favored.” *The American Heritage College Dictionary* says this: “Of the Greek sense of the word *charis*, it indicates effortless beauty and charm of movement formed from proposition.” Can you see the wide difference of meaning between the Greek *charis* and the Latin *gratia*? That is why I said I did not think it was a particularly good choice that they made, but if you caught what I *also* said, that through the centuries more of the meaning of the actual Greek word *charis* became super-imposed over the Latin term *gratia* (translated “grace”) and therefore “grace” now means more like what the Greek *charis* means.

We are going to continue the definition of the word *charis*, because I think it is fascinating. In secular Greek, it indicates a sense of charm and beauty, and being gifted, and therefore, by extension, “favor.” It indicates refinement; a sense of fitness and propriety; a disposition, an attitude to be generous, helpful, and of good will. There is a lot contained in this word “grace,” or *charis*.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia adds a couple more thoughts. They have gone into it even more deeply. “The original secular sense of *charis* is the quality of anything that brings delight or pleasure, or that wins favor.” They give this example: “Even a good wine could have *charis*.” That is because it gives pleasure. It is a good quality.

They add, “Persons have *charis* when they are delicate, tactful, or artful.” The *Encyclopedia* gives this example: “Kindness, generosity, and helpfulness are *charis*.” It further adds: “*Charis* has a sense of benevolence, and surprisingly, of power.” Now why “power”? Why would this word *charis* have a sense of power?

They go on. “Why power? Apparently because people observe that those who are so gifted tend to be quite persuasive and influential.” I think you will relate to this in just a minute. Those who are gifted with *charis* tend to be quite persuasive. They have power that way to persuade others. They are influential. Now taken together, the person with *charis* is said to be, as the Greeks might say, “a person favored by the gods.” Believe it or not, this influence or power is still made use of today by people in advertising.

Now *charis*, understood in its secular application, illustrates those qualities expressed or shown by handsome men and beautiful ladies. Boy, are they persuasive! So where do you *see* these people? Almost every day, every minute, you can turn on a television set, and there is a handsome man, or there is a beautiful woman, and he or she is selling automobiles, soap, medications, clothing, or even Cialis.

Advertising knows what sells, and these people are powerful motivators for people to buy the product very often on the basis of the person who is selling the product. There is a personality connection between the seller and the buyer, and the seller influences the buyer to buy. As the Greeks would look at it, it would be *charis* that persuaded the person, not necessarily the product itself. And so their gifts tend to subtly make them influential. They are good salespersons.

God has a warning in His book about this, and it appears in Proverbs 31:30. And what does God say? “Charm is deceitful.” And He goes on to say, “Beauty is vain.” It is just a warning: “Be careful!” In that context He is talking about the perfect wife, and so He is warning the men to whom the book of

Proverbs is really addressed to, “Be careful that you’re not being sold on this person just because she’s beautiful. Be careful that other qualities are in place.” That is what the warning is. Just be careful, and hopefully, fellas, you do find the girl beautiful. In your eyes she is beautiful, but that she also has other qualities of character that are, in the long run, far, far more important. So, be aware.

What we are getting at here is a foundation for why the apostles used this term *charis*. They did not relate it to a beautiful woman or to a handsome man (which is what the Greeks would do in a secular situation), but rather they applied it to God, because there is a power there that is helpful to the children of God.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia further states that *charis* has three basic uses in classical Greek. They are:

- 1) A charming quality that wins favor with others.
- 2) A quality of benevolence that gives favor to inferiors.
- 3) It prompts a response of thanksgiving for the favor that these people bestow on others.

In brief then, beginning with that thought that people with *charis* are gifted and tend to be influential, it was the second sense—“a quality of benevolence that gives favor to inferiors”—that appears to have been the sense that motivated the apostles to use it so frequently to indicate a benevolence of God toward His children.

So what does He do with this? God gives *power* to His kids. That is what grace is—its bottom line. It is the power to go on, the power to keep moving forward, the power to continue to grow, the power of leadership in any position into which God has placed this person—male or female, young or old—in the church. God gives us the power—His grace—to succeed.

It does not apply just to forgiveness at justification. In fact, brethren, it does not really even start there. That is a little bit down the line with the grace God gives to us, and so what the apostles did (especially Paul) was use this rather delightful Greek term. They anointed it with wonderful spiritual significance by using it in context where its usage clearly indicates unearned favor and gifts bestowed by the Creator God.

Now in contrast to the long description I just gave to you, mostly for that word in secular usage, I am going to give you grace’s short theological definition. It is brief, and it is to the point, and it is meaningful, and it is much different from the secular usage. I did not get this out of a Bible dictionary. I just got this right out of a secular English dictionary—*The Merriman Western Dictionary*. It says, “Grace is the unmerited divine assistance given humans for their regeneration and sanctification.”

That brief definition covers literally scores of different applications shown in both the Old and New Testaments. The key word in that definition (for right now, anyway) is “unmerited”—meaning that grace, this divine assistance, this giving a power is in no way earned. So in regard to our spiritual well-being, this particular aspect is *very* important to understand.

Our salvation is benevolence—gifting by God from beginning to end. From start to finish, the whole thing is led and directed by God. Brethren, mostly all we do is respond. We recognize and respond in

thankfulness to what we can now see He has done by preparing the way for us to make the right choice, and *do* what is right, even though it may involve some sacrifice on our part to follow through. I am not saying that God necessarily makes the choices easy, but He does make them easier because of our response, which we now interpret as love—a gift to us so that we can do what He asks.

You can see there is a tie between *gratia* and *charis*, and though there was no particular word the translators could come up with that exactly matched or paralleled the Greek *charis*, the closest they felt they could come up with was *gratia*. And now, you and I have the benefit of the evolution that took place in the word as it appears now in the English language to you and to me. Our salvation is benevolence. It is a gifting by God from beginning to end.

As we continue through this sermon (and perhaps maybe even one more), I am going to spend some time showing you that every step along the way is preceded by God's grace, and if He did not gift us, we would never get through the wilderness. That is what the parallel in the Old Testament with Israel showed. Every day the manna was out there. That was grace. Every day the cloud was out there. Every day the pillar of fire was there. The lesson we get from that is, all along the way, all 40 years till they got to the Promised Land, God was there. He was present, and He was doing His part to enable these people to make it.

Now why does He give grace—His gifting? Our salvation is benevolence from beginning to end. Grace—the divine assistance—is in no way given because God is obligated. Please understand. *This is very important to how we respond to God.* This divine assistance is in no way given because God is obligated. He is not compelled or forced. He is not duty-bound to us to do so. He gives grace freely, not by constraint. This is why I went through God's justice just before this thing on grace began. All God literally owes to us is death, except for His purpose. If His purpose for us individually was not to save us, all He literally owes us is death, because the wages of sin is death, and every one of you knows, it is witnessed in your life, that you have sinned since your sins were forgiven.

So what does God then require when we have knowledge that we have sinned? He expects us to go to Him, and in a repentant spirit ask Him to forgive us once again, and again, and again. That is how *inconsistent* we are. On the other hand, God is very consistent, and His attitude, His nature never changes. Ours does, because human nature is so unstable. It is so self-centered, and were it not for God and His merciful kindness to us, He would at any moment be justified in putting us to death. Why does He not? Because He has a purpose He is carrying out, and because His nature never changes.

We can make a statement that is factual, that He gives grace because that is what He is like in His character, His nature. He gives it because of *His* purpose being worked out, not because He owes us for what we think we have earned, or for what our pride is demanding for us because we believe that we are entitled to what we desire. It is not like in the United States where an awful lot of people believe that they are entitled to things from the governments of men, and so they demand them.

I heard a particularly sad thing this week, and it was sad in a way simply because it has happened. I am telling you this because I am a former union man. I worked in a steel mill. I was a member of The United Steel Workers of America for sixteen years all the while I was there.

In the state of Wisconsin they elected a Republican governor because he promised the people in Wisconsin he was going to make changes that were going to result in good changes in terms of these

peoples' taxes and so forth. He was good to his word, but in order to do it, he antagonized all of the union state workers in the State of Wisconsin—the school teachers, etc., and all of those who did business with the state of Wisconsin, but mostly those people who are receiving compensation from the state of Wisconsin through their retirement funds, etc., etc., etc.

Along with the governor was elected a Republican Senate and a Republican House, and they were able to push this through. The governor signed it into law. Now guess what is happening? All of these union workers feel that they are entitled to that money. But do you know what the truth of the matter is? Most of the money in their compensation plan was contributed by the state. In other words, the cost was spread out through the population of the state of Wisconsin, but now that has been cut off, and now they have to contribute to their own pension fund. That is almost unheard of in that kind of a situation.

Here is the sad part. What is happening now is that the union workers in Wisconsin are trying to organize union workers all over the United States of America to come to their aid by contributing money in order to recall this man who has balanced the budget. He has not only balanced the budget in Wisconsin, taxes have gone down, and now the cities and so forth actually have more money to work with than they ever had before. Not only are the state taxes going down, so are the city and county taxes going down, and so forth. So they are trying to recall this man and boot him out of office, and it is all on the basis of their feeling as though they are entitled to it.

Can you imagine if something like that happened to the entire United States of America if this was implemented federally? We might have a revolution on our hands if something like that occurred.

I know you would like your taxes to go down. I would like my taxes to go down, but if something like that occurs, there is going to be a cost, and there would be a great deal more economic and social instability. In other words, these people are fighting back for their rights because they feel that they are entitled. There is no such thing with God.

Those entitlements do not exist between us and God. Salvation is by faith through God's gift—His grace. We are going to see more and more that this grace is the power He gives us to enable us to respond to His requirements.

It would be incorrect to say that the biblical grace has no connection whatever to the secular usage. However, spiritually, its application takes on vastly greater dimension in two areas: (1) ***God's grace is the single most important aspect of our spiritual and eternal salvation***. Nothing exceeds it in importance. Nobody would be saved but for God's grace. (2) God's giving of grace to us is completely and totally unmerited. It cannot be earned.

It is very important to our getting hold of our pride and humility factors. Remember, those were two of the aspects we covered in this series on "Living by Faith." Human pride and humility have to be understood, and they have to be under control if we are going to make the right choices in life to meet the requirements that God has laid before us.

Maybe the greatest enemy we have is our pride. It is pride that makes us feel that we are entitled to things, and so our pride demands that we be taken care of. It is important that we understand that God's gift—His grace—cannot be demanded. We can, in humility, ask for help before Him, telling

Him, "Father, I think that I need help for this problem I'm having. I need Your help." We can appeal. That is very much before us, and God expects us to take advantage, but demand we cannot. I might say it turns Him off, because what is really speaking there? It is our pride, and it is not under control.

It is very important to our getting hold of our pride and humility factors, the truth that He owes nothing to us. There are no automatic entitlements, and again, here is why, brethren. Nadab, Abihu, and Uzza are perfect examples. Every sin that we committed is against Him and His Son *personally*. Somehow, that has to be learned, that our sin is against Him personally. We tend to say, "I love God," but we still break His law. Now if we really loved Him, we would not break His law. That would be an expression of love because that is what love is. It is expressed by the *keeping* of God's commandments. We fall short.

I am not trying to rub this in in any way. I am trying to help us to see the logic that is involved, and why grace has to be understood as unearned and unmerited. God is very willing to give it, but He looks at the attitude in which things are asked for and the conduct that would back up that attitude. It is then important we understand that every sin that we have committed is against Him, and Him personally. It is against two personalities—the Father and the Son.

If we had not sinned against the Son, He would not have had to die to pay for our sins. We can be redeemed only by the life of the Creator who died the death that we should, that we are entitled to have to suffer.

Now consider this about the Father and the Son. If we think of the Father, He is our Creator. He did this through Jesus Christ, and so Jesus Christ is involved. It is He, or They, who have given us life. They have given us a reason for hope of something that is far better. Without what They have freely given us, we are nothing. We do not even exist.

I am going to go into two series of verses here. One is by the apostle Paul, and the other is by the apostle John. We are so familiar with the one in John 6:44. We will go back to a beginning. I want you to understand from this section that we are going to here, how that we were personally, individually chosen by the Father and Son for salvation, and that is why this thing about sin is against them personally. They are personally involved in this. In John 6:44 Jesus said the following:

John 6:44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him [there is the Father's involvement in our calling]; and I [the Son is involved in this too] will raise him up at the last day.

When we sin, we sin against the One who created us, who called us, personally and individually. Your calling, my calling, was not done with an air of detachment. "Oh well, let's throw the message out there and see what happens!" Oh, no, brethren; not at all! God is directing what is going on, and who receives the message, and who responds to the message, because He has plans for you personally, individually. This is not helter-skelter in any way, shape, or form. Let us see that confirmed in the book of Romans.

Romans 9:9-11 For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son." And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls).

Now begin considering yourself.

Romans 9:13-16 As it is written, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.” What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.” So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

Can I put your name in there? I can, because what God is doing here is showing us the pattern He follows in His choice of whom He is going to call, and when the calling is going to take place.

Romans 9:16-18 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, that My name may be declared in all the earth.” Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

Remember I told you that the word “grace” has a sense of power within it. What am I saying in direct application to you and to me? That the power He showed in calling Jacob rather than Esau, it was *He* who did this and began to bestow on Jacob those gifts he needed to fulfill the responsibility to which he was being called.

Now when did this all take place? He determined to call Jacob and not Esau while they were both still in the womb. There was no possibility whatever that Jacob had any influence with the calling of and by himself. There is nothing that would give any indication that anything that Jacob did in the way of a work influenced God to call him rather than Esau. It was totally God who did that.

Why am I saying this? Brethren, I want us to be impressed, because I believe it is entirely possible that He is showing you and me that the same pattern which He used in order to establish Jacob as the one upon whom He was bestowing the benevolence, He did it in such a way so that we would understand that the same general principle is going to apply to *all* that He calls. He is going to call us in situations by which He will be able, if we want it, to show us that He called us in a situation where we had absolutely no influence on Him by anything we did.

Now how could that take place? Is it entirely possible that we too were called from the womb? It is. That, brethren, is thrilling! I want you to tie it to something, and that is that when we sin, we are sinning against the One who planned from the time we were conceived in our mother that this was a one that He was going to empower later on to be in His family.

There is enough information in the Book that this is a very distinct possibility. In Jeremiah 1:5, Jeremiah was called to that position while in the womb. In Luke 2, the same thing occurs with John the Baptist. In Psalm 139, David said things in such a way that he understood that he was formed in the womb by God to later be the king of Israel.

How does this have application to you and to me? God is not doing things helter-skelter. He is doing things according to patterns so that we will understand in the right framework, and really be pleased, gratified awesomely, and be humble before Him because He has been planning from the time that we were in the womb to put us into the body of Jesus Christ. Do you think God cannot do that? We tend to think of ourselves as being nothing. We *are not* nothing! We need to be filled with gratitude to what He is planning out. We are not here by accident.

What I am getting at here is that God's grace—from the very beginning of our life—is being poured out to empower us to be in His Kingdom.

You might be familiar with being in construction. I worked in construction for a good part of my life. I know that these men who work in construction can open up a blueprint and will see on that blueprint practically everything that is needed for doing the job in which they are involved in putting it together. That blueprint will show all of the details. It will show the nuts, the bolts, the washers, and the poles. It will show everything where a building is supposed to be bolted, where it is supposed to be welded, and who figured this out.

If men (the architects, the engineers, and the draftsmen who put it all together) can do something like that, why cannot God? He is constructing a family. All of those drawings that go into the construction of a building are a gift to the men out there in the field who are actually doing the work so that they can do it according to the design.

To me, that is easy to understand, having had a background in that kind of thing, that kind of construction and so forth. Is there anybody who has designed things better than God? Do you know that Paul used this illustration in I Corinthians 12 in talking about the body of Jesus Christ? God designed each part of the body, and so Paul says, "Is everybody an apostle?" Of course not! The body does not need all that many apostles. How about evangelists, pastors, teachers? What does Paul say? That God designed every part, and every part is gifted by God to carry out responsibilities within the body, and each one of those people, and all of their gifting, is a result of God's grace.

I am beginning to lay the groundwork here so that you understand that God's grace is not limited merely to justification. God's grace permeates every aspect of the body of Jesus Christ—the Holy Temple of which we are a part, and it is necessary for us to recognize this, and to give ourselves willingly over to Him and to use the gifts that He is giving to enable us to fulfill our responsibility.

He is ever-willing, by nature, to forgive us, but we cannot demand things of Him. We can ask, and then we leave it up to Him to respond to us as to how and when the gift is actually going to be given to us and to be used. So let us take heart in that, and know that God, in His mercy, is continuing the gifting all the while the building of Christ's body is undergoing. It is undergoing right now, and it will continue.