

Living By Faith: God's Grace (Part 4)

It Is Absolutely Necessary

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We are going to begin this sermon by turning to Jeremiah 18. I do not believe I need to say very much, because what God says there is quite clear.

Jeremiah 18:1-6 The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: “Arise and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause you to hear My words.” Then I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: “O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?” says the Lord. “Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!

From here we are going to go to II Corinthians 5. So we jump from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, but you are going to see here in these verses essentially the same things we saw there in Jeremiah 18.

II Corinthians 5:17-18 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

I want you to notice especially, as pertains to this sermon which I have not given yet, that all things are of God, and this in the context of a new creation. If I wanted to, I could turn to Romans 9 where Paul almost directly copies Jeremiah 18. He uses the potter symbol there, and God has the right to make of us—even a marred vessel—a vessel that is fit for good.

This is the fourth sermon on the subject of grace, and we have seen, that in one sense, it is much more complex than we might have previously believed. This sermon in no way exhausts what could be taught on it, but I think that we have at least learned that *grace sets the parameters for our relationship with God* . Please get that. Very simply put, *without it there would be no salvation for anybody* .

Perhaps we can understand grace better with this simple illustration. God is an inventor, and we are His invention. He invented us for a very specific purpose into which He is fitting us. Think of the potter. He equips us—gifts us—with abilities, with powers to carry out that purpose, and that purpose is that His invention—us—will have the same kind and quality of character *He* has, to be just like Him, and to bring us to His glory.

There is a problem though. Even He cannot create character like His simply by commanding it to come into existence. That character must be built through experience over many years of time. It requires us—His invention—to independently and voluntarily choose to cooperate within the experiences that He puts us through. This cooperation must be voluntarily given over a sufficient period of time and experiences in order that the character thus developed remains within us, put into our mind, written on our heart permanently as ours, independent of Him.

In the previous sermon we saw that by using Ephesians 2:4-10 as a base that both salvation and faith are gifts given by God. We then used that as a foundation to understand that everything in God's creative work in us is the gift of His activity in our life. Just like an inventor, He is putting parts together to make a whole—whatever He is inventing—complete. Our works, in effect, are the fruit of His grace—that is, what He gifts us with. Therefore, they cannot earn us what He has already enabled us to do. Ephesians 2:10 clearly establishes that God requires works of us, but their purpose is not to earn salvation, but to glorify Him and to internalize them within our heart as part of His character.

These works take place during that period of time called in the Bible "sanctification," as we become formed by our Creator to the image of Jesus Christ. We then saw that the apostles had a pattern in the Old Testament showing God's faithfulness within the covenant that He made with Israel. This is important to us, because, if He is not faithful to His character, we have nothing to follow, but we must have something that is constantly valuable, so He has to be a constant in our life.

It is helpful to recall that the Old Covenant portrayed a marriage, and God's pattern of behavior within the Old Covenant focuses on the prophet's use of the term *chesed* (pronounced "hesed"). By that term God's attitude and His conduct toward His marriage partner Israel is shown through generosity, patience, mercy, kindness, goodness, and even pity. *Chesed*—to put it into a brief context—illustrates steadfast love within a covenant, an agreement.

Please understand that I am not saying that *charis* is derived from *chesed*. Rather, I am saying that in the Old Testament the apostles had a very strong example of God's faithful character within the Old Covenant. The New Covenant that we have made with Jesus Christ is also leading us toward a union in marriage with Him—practically the last thing that takes place in the Bible.

One of the major differences between the Old and the New Covenant is that the character flaws that are potential destroyers of the relationship between the perfect Jesus Christ and us are being eliminated before the marriage is fully entered into at His return. God's grace supplies us with the empowerment to overcome these flaws.

The difference between *chesed* and *charis* is that *chesed* is used in the Old Testament as a broad generality, but the apostles used *charis* in the New Testament to illustrate specifics. One is broad, the other is more specific in specific ways and means that God's generous and loving character is expressed to us in His plan of salvation.

I want to clarify something before I go on that may puzzle some when reading the Old Testament. This is that the term "grace" appears fairly often within it; however, that term is not referring to grace as we understand its use in the New Testament. This Old Testament translation is the English term for the Hebrew term that is transliterated *hen*. It sounds like a female chicken; however, it is pronounced "heen."

The difference between the Hebrew *hen* and the Greek *charis* is one of emphasis. The Hebrews used *hen* to indicate something received—a gift. But the apostles' use of *charis*—contrary to what we might think of as grace—is almost entirely on the *giver* of the gift, and that of course is God, giving undeserved power for growth and for fulfilling responsibilities. Now today, this is what we are going to look at more closely—the Giver and the gifts, and some of the gifts that He gives to us.

Let us turn to the book of John.

John 1:14-17 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John [the Baptist] bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.’” And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

In the book of John, the apostle used the word *charis* only four times, and all four are in these verses I just read to you. The way he used them is important to our understanding of grace’s importance, and thus our faith.

I want you to notice in verse 14 that Jesus is described as “full of grace and truth.” This is important to understand regarding our relationship with Jesus Christ. So, “full of grace and truth,” as in the Old Testament sense, He was full of generous lovingkindness and benevolent gifts.

John emphasizes “truth” right along side of “grace.” Then in verse 16 John says that from that abundance, from that fullness of grace, *we* receive grace. Verse 16 says—“And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.” He is beginning to show us very clearly that Christ is the source of the grace we receive. That is something we tend to think of in relation to the Father, but this specifically is telling us that the grace we receive is from the Son. This begins to become more important as we go along—important to our relationship with Him, and important to our seeing how important He is to us in the office He now occupies.

That phrase—“grace for grace”—might also be translated in other Bibles as “grace *on* grace” or “grace *upon* grace.” In a paraphrase, it may be rendered as “blessing upon blessing.” It is good any way. Any one of those ways is good. They are all good explanatory words. But the phrase—“grace on grace”—pictures grace as not being a one-time operation, but a continuous series of benefits being stacked one on top the other, or side by side. Please understand this. Grace is a continuous flowing of empowerment from our Savior to us as long as we will accept it and use it. It is not a one-time thing, nor is it given in staggered little bunches here and there. I will prove this as we go along.

We have already seen in the previous sermon that our calling is an act of God’s grace. It is a gifting completely from anything, any merit on our part. We have a tendency to think of grace primarily in regard to justification and the forgiveness of sin, and that is important, and we will get to it later, but that concept of grace is far, far too limiting.

John is showing us that our relationship with God through Jesus Christ is a linkage that is supplying us with a continuous flow of grace, of blessings, of gifts, of favor, of powers, of forgiveness, of knowledge, of understanding, of wisdom, of healings, of protection, and *more* through God’s loving concern. Jesus Christ is an ever-fulfilling source of everything good in spiritual life, and we will see how this works when we get to Romans 5.

Now God is not fulfilling our every desire, but our every *need* for His spiritual creation. That is what is important to Him. It is the creation. It is what He is moving toward. It is His objective, and so He is fulfilling what we need for His spiritual creation of each of us as it moves toward His conclusion. Again, I remind all of us that in order for this truth to be more fully appreciated, it must be understood that He does not owe us even one tiny jot of any of it. It is freely given. That is awesome!

Just as surely as every morning in the wilderness the manna physically appeared to those unconverted Israelites, and the cloud was in the sky by day and the pillar of fire by night, God is supplying our every need in relation to His salvation and purpose. It is all freely given toward His glorification and the purpose of creating us to fill a position, a place in the family Kingdom. The apostles used the term “grace” in many other situations, but most especially in regard to the powers given by God to meet our spiritual needs.

Now watch this truth develop as we follow Jesus through His ministry. We are going to skip a great deal here and go toward the end of His ministry, because things are pretty well summed up at that particular place. So go with me to John 14. This is right after that final Passover, and things were happening in the minds of the apostles. They had become so close to Him, and so dependent on Him in His ministry to them. His ministry was primarily given to them. It was focused on them so that they would be prepared to carry out what their apostleship was going to demand of them.

They were beginning to realize this, and here, all of a sudden, He is talking about dying. What were they going to do? How were they going to get along without Him? He was their support on every side, and without Him they had already had some experience. They knew they were not very strong without Him around. He was somebody who could be leaned upon. He was trustworthy, and He was faithful, and He kept them elevated in terms of their spirituality.

John 14:1-4 “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.”

This instruction in this chapter is helpful regarding living by faith, and that certainly is what is required of us.

Christ told them He was going back to the Father, and so they were mystified and concerned about how they were going to get along without Him; but notice His response in these first four verses. The first thing He does is remind them that there is a place for them in God’s Kingdom. I am sure He said it with such assurance that it helped right off the bat. And then, beginning in verse 5, He tells them, in an overall sense, that they are going to be very busy, and that that busyness will more or less focus on keeping God’s commandments.

Verse 15 says: “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” He is not referring here just to the “Ten,” but applying *all* of God’s commandments that pertain to the Christian way of life within God’s purpose, of preparing to fill their place in His Kingdom. It is much broader and much deeper than the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments are a basis, a foundation, but all the rest of law modifies and explains and expounds the applications. What about all the things that pertain to them doing their preaching? Look at what came out in the apostle Paul’s epistles. He was expounding the commandments of God all the way through as they pertained to Christianity.

Beginning in verse 16 is something very important for us to understand.

John 14:15-18 “If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

Notice He said, “He dwells *with* you.” Who was it who was dwelling *with* them? It was Jesus Christ Himself who was *with* them, and “will be *in* you.” “I will not leave you orphans; **I will come to you**.” He is talking about that time *after* His death and resurrection. “**I will come to you.**”

John 14:23 Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.

John 14:26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

There is a great deal there, and the reason He said what He just did there is because He was giving them comfort and encouragement so they would understand that though they were apparently visibly alone, they were not *really* alone, and that they were going to receive a great deal of help in what He was assigning them to do.

So a little review. In verse 18: “**I will come to you.**” In verse 23: “**We will come to you.**” He is saying this in this manner to reveal to them, and to us, that they—The Father and the Son—are continually and personally involved in the apostles’ and *our* spiritual creation.

I keep asking the question, “Do you see God?” This is the key to understand. He is not kidding. **He really is there!** What encouragement there is! That is a promise. “We will *be* there.” “You are not orphans.” We may *feel* alone—and He knows we feel alone—but we have to go through those things to learn certain things, and He really *is* there.

Their personal involvement by means of His Holy Spirit is all by itself one of God’s most gracious of all of His gifts. This ties directly into John 1:14-18, and John’s “grace upon grace” remark, and it is a place where we begin to see the edges of the fact that grace—God’s gifting—is an enabling power in many forms.

I should point out in passing here that there is something in these verses we just read that is very clear, I think to you and me, that the world tries hard to deny. When He said, “**I will come to you,**” when He said, “**We will come to you,**” after specifically naming the Father, He is very clearly pointing out that it is not a third person in a trinity that is coming to us. It is the Father and the Son. There *is* no third person in a trinity. How can they deny that—“**I will come to you,**” “**We will come to you**”?

From here we are going to go to Luke 24. This took place after that Garden of Gethsemane thing we just read in John 14.

Luke 24:49 Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.”

It should be clear what I am getting to here. Grace is power to accomplish things. God's Holy Spirit is power that is flowing from the Father and Son to us to enable us to carry out our responsibility and to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. "Grace" is a catch-all term that the apostles used for power. The gifting is power to accomplish.

We find that we are going to be endued with power, and so we find in Acts 1 Jesus repeats this.

Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

From here we are going to go to Titus 2 as we continue to see how the apostles used this term so that we understand what it is that is being spoken of here, at least in an overall sense.

Titus 2:11-15 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.

This series of verses will take us in a somewhat different direction, but very important nonetheless to our understanding.

Paul sometimes used the term "grace" as a broad catch-all term to declare the way God acts toward His converted, but still occasionally-sinning children. In every case, whether referring to a singular gift, or a continuing package of gifts that results in salvation, grace must always be perceived as something that is unearned. Here in these verses grace is used as a kind of shorthand for the entire ministry of Jesus Christ through which we are given salvation.

Grace has appeared. How did it appear? In the life of Jesus Christ. It appeared in example, and it appeared in His words, and so it has appeared now just like the manna appeared every morning.

Recall that in John 14:18, Jesus said in relation to the giving of the spirit of truth that "I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you." What you have to do here is connect this teaching there with John 6. Do you know what is in John 6? In John 6 Jesus said *He* was the manna that came down from heaven. Here we have a connection between the children of Israel in the wilderness and the manna.

Jesus Himself makes a direct connection between the manna in the wilderness and Himself, meaning that *He* is the food that we have to graciously partake of. And where do we get this food? We get it out of His Book. We are helped by the Holy Spirit, of that Jesus Christ to understand and to see the applications of it in our life. It has such power when connected to Jesus Christ, Jesus said in that chapter, "If you eat of Me, you will never die." That is pretty wonderful. (I have another sermon that I am working on that involves this. I cannot let myself get distracted with that right now.)

Now back in thought to Titus 2. In Titus the second chapter Paul links Jesus Christ as the personification of grace, but it is more than that. Every one of these—our salvation, our redemption, teaching, the receiving of hope, the instruction and inspiration to living godly lives, of overcoming

and doing good works—as being aspects of the one *huge* gift—the greatest one of all that is continuously flowing through to us at all times.

Even as Paul used Jesus as the personification of grace, he also uses Him as the synonym for grace, and all of its powers and all of its benefits, as though Christ exemplified grace all rolled up into one package, and thus more easily identified, and its meaning to us better understood. Now even if it is only understood in its broadest sense, He is our Savior. That is what Paul said.

When Jesus Christ is used as a synonym for grace, he is pointing to Him to be our Savior. That is how important grace is. Without grace there is no salvation. But Jesus Christ is the personification of what grace is.

Let us notice further what Jesus—that is, grace—is doing. These four verses tell us what Jesus Christ is doing. He is teaching us. And what is teaching? It is empowerment, is it not? It is empowerment. It is wisdom. It is understanding. It is inspiration. It is discernment regarding our responsibilities and being enabled to identify the subtleties of Satan's devious anti-God system.

Understand this: Grace is not an entity. It is not a thing God dispenses; rather, it is a term that epitomizes, that represents, the freeness of God's personal patient and concerned generosity—the blessings He so freely gives of all of His saving acts that are continuously flowing on our behalf to assist us all along the way.

I am convinced, brethren, that if we can understand this one huge thing, we will really begin to see God, and we will have so much to give Him thanks for. It is incredible knowing that the Great Creator God is with us at all times. He never loses track of His children. Sometimes He really lets us get hurt when we really do something stupid, but even then He is exceedingly forgiving, because He is ever there to pick up the pieces, dust us off, and say, "Get going" again. That is what John basically says in the first chapter of I John: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves."

Our biggest problem, since we must do our part in this spiritual creation by faith, is to think about Him, looking for, and acknowledging His benefits in thanksgiving to Him. I do not know how many times I heard Herbert Armstrong say that the first thing he did in prayer was to thank God. Is there anything about life that we cannot thank Him for? If we will think, we will find plenty to thank Him for if we do not have so much pride that we do not even think about it.

In Matthew 5 there is an illustration I think is very necessary for us to know and to understand and to really make it a part of our life. This is because it illustrates what God is like perhaps better than any other thing that we can turn to.

Matthew 5:43-45 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Jesus said what He gave here to help us to grasp the marvelous condescending and most overwhelming generosity and magnanimity of God's approach toward His creation despite all that

we (by that I mean mankind), have done in our thoughtless self-centeredness against Him personally and His creation, and still He gives, and gives, and gives. Why does He do this? *Because that is the way He is!* That is the way He is by nature, and this is what He wants us to become.

He wants us to get away from our self-centeredness and begin looking, first of all, at what He has already given to us in the way of things like knowledge, understanding, and grasping so much of His spiritual purpose and what He has held out to us as a great hope in our lives.

And He gives, and He gives, and He gives, but (and there is a “but” here), do not be misled, because He is not a thoughtless, wealthy spendthrift sap. He does all of His giving with wisdom, and especially so with His children He is now preparing for His family-kingdom. But His giving does not change His nature in His dealings with His children. It is, however, more directly focused on their being prepared for the future.

Yes, He does directly test us, but we are still the “apple of His eye” and this is why I Corinthians 10:13 is in the Bible to provide us with comfort and encouragement, because He always provides a way out. But the promise is there, and if you know His character, you know He is going to come through, and when He does, it will be exactly the right time to get the most out of the trial for you and me.

Let us go to Romans 5. We are going to begin taking a look at justification, because justification is that biblical term in which grace is most obviously and the most number of times associated with. We want to look at this beginning in verse 8.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, . . .

We just saw an example of the love He has toward His creation. We are part of that creation, but we are a very special part of that creation. We are the children that He is forming to be among the first that become part of His family.

Romans 5:8-10 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

There are two things I want to emphasize from these verses, and I will make the second one first, because it fits the theme that we are currently covering. It appears in verse 10 where it says there, “we shall be saved by His life.”

First of all, I want you to notice that it is written in the future tense. That is important to understand. Because a person is justified, it does not mean that he is saved yet. The creation is not done yet, and as we can see, I showed you many verses where it shows we can fall away if we reject God’s gifts. If we reject them, we therefore fail to use them, and if we do not use them, we are not going to be in the Kingdom. That is how unappreciative we are of what He is giving us.

So, at this point that Paul was writing, salvation for those people, though they were justified, was not secure totally yet. “**We shall be saved by His life!**”—meaning we are going to be saved because Jesus Christ is alive! If He were not alive, and if He did not come to us, if He did not make all those promises—“I will be with you,” “I will provide for you,” “I will take care of you,”—there would be

nobody to do that. He is our Savior, and in order to save us, the salvation begins with the calling, the granting of repentance, the giving of God's Holy Spirit, but it continues on out to that following our forgiveness and justification.

What is Jesus Christ's assignment from the Father? It is to save us. It is His responsibility to prepare us for the Kingdom of God. You know very well, just from the things that He has said, for Him it is a "hands-on" work. He is there. He made the promise, and He will not fail us. We may fail Him, but He will not fail us. Please understand: our High Priest, Jesus Christ—this One who rose from the dead—is working *personally* within our life.

The second one (that is perhaps nothing regarding spiritual creation), demonstrates God's gracious and generous freeness, and that is in His total lack of obligation toward us in justifying sinners. Let us understand this "in justifying sinners" rather than morally meritorious saints. He died for us, and we are justified *before* we become good. The emphasis is in the contrast between (as Paul words it here) the word "sinners" and those who think they are entitled to forgiveness because they believe that they are moral beings.

The Christian doctrine of God providing justification by faith rather than by works really set the religious Jews of the apostles' day on an angry edge, because to them it made no logical sense. To them, it was simply another invitation to sin or a discouraging ignoring of what they believed was their sincere efforts to please God. They felt *entitled* to His forgiveness on the basis that they were good.

This charge is true *if* one perceives justification carnally by isolating it so that it appears to occur completely apart from God's entire purpose for salvation rather than seeing it for what it really and truly is, and that is that it is a necessary part of the whole process of being created in Christ's image. And so the important question is, "Why is it absolutely necessary that our justification be by grace through faith?" Now listen carefully. Here is why. It must be, because if we earned justification through our works, it opens the door for human pride to enter one's relationship with God—a deadly problem.

If one is justified by works, then one can honestly claim that God chose us—and our works with us—*because we were good*, and that, brethren, is most definitely not good for our relationship with God and the building of godly character. Now, why? Because it opens the door wide for our pride to become part of the equation within the relationship with God.

Pride is the most subtly destructive of all evils. Remember, it was pride rising in Satan that initiated this entire mess. Now consider carefully what his pride did to that relationship. Boom! It blew it up. Do you know why? Because he felt he was at least God's equal. Do you think that nature is not in us? Oh, yes it is!

Satan has flooded this world with his pride, and it is by this pride that we resist our Creator. So He has to be the One that chooses who it is He wants for salvation. He has already told us He is going to choose these people while they are still sinners so that pride cannot be part of the relationship. God is the Creator, not us, and if pride is part of the creation, you will find we will begin creating character ourselves, and what will it look like? Just look at the world. This world is what Satan created, and given the chance, we would do the same thing with pride that is in us, and for our good God cannot afford to allow that to happen.

We have to be chosen while we are yet sinners, and we have to know that, and we have to *know* that we know that, and it is part of our being, and it is part of our every operation. It is so important I cannot emphasize it enough. God picked every one of us off the scrapings of the bottom of the barrel. “For you see your calling, brethren, . . . that not many mighty, not many noble, are called.” For our own good He cannot allow that to happen, and so we have to understand the workings of grace as it is exhibited in our justification. If we can just understand this, we can begin to understand that every gift of God flows toward us in exactly the same way. He gives us the gift before we need it, and then it is there for us to draw upon if we just have the smarts to be able to do it, and to realize that He has already empowered us to do what we need to do in the circumstance in which we find ourselves. We will never be able to brag that it was done without God. This is awesome to have this kind of an understanding, because God gives gifts to those who are humble before Him.

Now let us go to Romans 3, and we will see at least a part of the foundation of justification by grace and what it entails.

Romans 3:19-20 Now we [Christians] know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. [Why? Because we have all sinned, that’s why.] Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

There is a very simple explanation. The law was never given to save anybody. It has a different purpose altogether. The main one is to show us what sin is, and therefore what we want to avoid.

Romans 3:21-23 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets [In other words, Paul is saying that this was all the way back in the Old Testament], even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

So this series of verses shows us the foundation of understanding justification by faith, and thus where we stand in the relationship. The truth is that regardless of who one is, God owes him nothing but death because everybody has sinned.

Sinners are burdened with a debt they cannot pay, except by death. Sinners are those who are under the law. The law condemns them, making them subject to its power to take the sinner’s life because of their own transgressions against God and His law. And so sin is something that each sinner—all of us—is responsible for. Why? Because God did not make anybody sin! A clear example is Adam and Eve. God obviously did not make them sin. They *chose* to sin.

Romans 3:20 clearly states that no sinner can justify himself through law-keeping. Once one sins, it only takes one sin the very first time, and the very first time we are indebted to the law, and it has more power than we do. It can claim our life legally if it were personified. Keeping it has never saved anybody, because once one sins, everything is seemingly stacked against the sinner. The sinner can in no way make up for what he has done, except by dying, and nobody wants to do that. Therefore, since justification cannot be claimed as an entitlement due to one’s keeping the law, the only alternative if one desires to be justified is that it must be received as a gift freely given by God.

Romans 4:1-8 What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” [because he believed]. Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. [The wages of sin is death. It is a debt.] But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.”

The purpose of justification is to be judged righteous before God. Abraham is Paul’s primary biblical example to us.

Genesis 15:4-6 And behold, the word of the LORD came to him saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.” Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

The “he” is Abraham, and He [God] accounted it, imputed it to him, for righteousness. Do I need to go any further? That is far enough there.

This is the foundation of Paul’s statement on Abraham being justified by faith. Abraham *believed* God. That is as clear as anything.

I am going to go back to Romans 4 again.

Romans 4:8-12 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin. Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only [the Israelites], or upon the uncircumcised [the Gentiles] also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.

Genesis 17:24 says:

Genesis 17:24 Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

Circumcision is being used by the apostle Paul in Romans 4 as a symbol of works. The reason I am giving you what it says here in Genesis 17 is because circumcision did not come on the scene until three chapters after Abraham believed and righteousness was imputed to him. Paul said (and I believe

him) that this is enough to show you that justification cannot be earned, and because the “father of the faithful” was justified in this manner, and God said that all of his children—meaning the ones who are spiritual children—are going to be justified in exactly the same way as father Abraham was—by faith. That is so simple.

I began this section of the sermon by saying this really put the Jews in a tizzy because they, like many people here in the United States, believe that they were entitled to something. The Jews believed they were entitled to be justified on the basis of their works. Well, they said that was not good enough for them, and they later charged the Christians with doing away with the law.

Let us finish with one more verse, also in the book of Genesis. The life of Abraham is critical to you and me. Why? Remember the “law of first mention”? Abraham is the father of the faithful, and what happened to him is especially important for our understanding. We are children of the family that God is building through Abraham, and as we just saw, we are justified the same way Abraham was—by faith. Not by works, but by faith.

Let us notice in Genesis 26, and we will close with this. Let us put the time element together here. Righteousness was imputed to Abraham in Genesis 15. Circumcision—an example of a work, a work of faith (because it was)—did not happen, was not introduced, until Genesis 17. Now we are in Genesis 26. Time is going on. Abraham has already died. We are in Isaac’s life, but notice what it says there. (I think you all understand that Isaac was a type of Christ, and that Isaac was a chip off the old block as far as Abraham was concerned.)

Genesis 26:1-5 There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines, in Gerar. Then the LORD appeared to him and said: “Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you. Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.”

Did our father Abraham believe that the law was done away? Absolutely not! Paul makes this very clear in Romans 6.

Romans 6:1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!

Justification by grace through faith does not do away with the law of God. It is done for the forgiveness of sin in order that we might be free in Christ to keep the law the way Jesus Christ did.