

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-9
JOY IN GRACE!

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to Philippians chapter 3 as we continue our in-depth study of Paul's letter to the church in Philippi.

Our focus as we go through this letter is going to be – **JOY!**

And, as I have said, this letter is known as – ***THE EPISTLE OF JOY!***

Why is this so important?

Because this is what should be seen in our lives, this joy of the Lord that is overflowing and people are seeing.

Think about that for a minute.

Imagine that you are in line to see a movie and as people are exiting the movie theater from the show you are going to see. And as they leave they are murmuring, complaining how bad it was, the theater was cold, the sound was bad, the movie was horrible.

In hearing that, in seeing their faces, are you now going to go in and see that movie?

I hope not!

Now let's apply that to our faith. What do people see in our lives as we live out our faith?

Are we murmuring and complaining about this, about that? Because, if we are, why would anyone want what we have? They wouldn't.

That is why I believe this letter is so important for us today. That our lives are not just filled with the joy of the Lord but overflowing. That we have a joy that is full, and people are seeing it!

Last week we began our study in Philippians chapter 3 and Paul's focus was the – ***JOY OF THE LORD!***

He had no confidence in his flesh, even though it would be easy for him to be very prideful about all that he had.

In fact, when you look at the resume of Paul, it was impressive!

Paul had it all!

He was a good Jewish boy!

Circumcised the eighth day!

He was from the stock of Israel!

He was from the tribe of Benjamin!

He was a Hebrew of Hebrews, or he was not a Jew who embraced the Greek culture!

He was a Pharisee!

He had a zeal for God, but without knowledge!

He fought for God by persecuting Christians! (He was not fighting for God, but for what he thought was right)

He thought he was blameless because he kept the Law!

And when Paul met the Lord on the road to Damascus, it changed his life. All that he was looking for through good works or the Law and he could not attain, was now before him in Jesus, the grace of God!

Please understand that Paul did not think that Jesus was better than the Law, then all these things that he had going for him. All those things were bad, and they kept him from having a true relationship with the living God!

Here's the thing. False religion deceives the mind and consequently damns the soul! It makes you feel good that you are doing this and not doing that, thinking that God will accept you now, and He won't!

All the good we do in this life does not negate the bad and that is the problem! And yet, people are very sincere in doing good to get to heaven!

Let me show you what I mean about sincerity and a group who desire to get closer to God, but they are going in the wrong direction.

Several weeks ago I saw a large group of men, women and children who had gathered before the statue of Mary by the Catholic Church on Menasha and Waldo road. There must have been a few hundred people bowing before Mary.

From what I understand, it was part of the "*National Eucharistic Pilgrimage*", and they are traveling "*the Marian route.*"

For the life of me, I don't think Mary, the mother of Jesus was in Wisconsin, but it is a pilgrimage that they are making all the way to Indiana!

Here is what is said of this, "*A goal of the pilgrimage is to bring more awareness of the Catholic doctrine that Jesus is literally present in the consecrated bread and wine worshipers consume at Mass.*"

You can see their hunger to know God, to draw close to Him through this, but like Paul trying to attain a relationship with God through the Law, it is not going to happen!

Jesus is present with us, not through some bread or wine that we partake of, but He is present with us because of the grace we have received by faith!

In fact, that is the title of our message – *JOY IN GRACE!*

When you look at the religions of the world, the thousands of them, what you find is that they all have a works-based salvation. That you have to do this, and you can't do that!

And if you adhere to those things, you will make it to heaven or wherever they think you go when you die.

Here's the thing, because even some who say they are Christians adhere to this works-based salvation.

If that is true, and it is not, we can't work our way into heaven, but if we could, how much work do we need to do?

I think that is an important question, don't you?

I mean I don't want to miss heaven by not doing one good work! That would be horrible.

“Joe, you did good, but you missed it by that much! Sorry!”

The problem for mankind is that they missed heaven by millions of miles and there is no way they can work their way into heaven.

The wonderful news, the Good News is that Jesus has completed the work for us, and we can enter in by faith in Him.

It is all about - ***GRACE!***

Let me show you what I mean. We are told,

The boy stood with back arched, head cocked back, and hands clenched defiantly. ***“Go ahead, give it to me.”***

The principal looked down at the young rebel. ***“How many times have you been here?”***

The child sneered rebelliously, ***“Apparently not enough.”***

The principal gave the boy a strange look. ***“And you have been punished each time have you not?”***

“Yeah, I been punished, if that’s what you want to call it.” He threw out his small chest, *“Go ahead I can take whatever you dish out. I always have.”*

“And no thought of your punishment enters your head the next time you decide to break the rules does it?”

“Nope, I do whatever I want to do. Ain’t nothin’ you people gonna do to stop me either.”

The principal looked over at the teacher who stood nearby. *“What did he do this time?”*

“Fighting. He took little Tommy and shoved his face into the sandbox.”

The principal turned to look at the boy, *“Why? What did little Tommy do to you?”*

“Nothin’. I didn’t like the way he was lookin’ at me, just like I don’t like the way your lookin’ at me! And if I thought I could do it, I’d shove your face into something.”

The teacher stiffened and started to rise but a quick look from the principal stopped him.

He contemplated the child for a moment and then quietly said, *“Today, my young student, is the day you learn about grace.”*

“Grace? Isn’t that what you old people do before you sit down to eat? I don’t need none of your stinkin’ grace.”

“Oh, but you do.” The principal studied the young man’s face and whispered. *“Oh yes, you truly do . . .”*

The boy continued to glare as the principal continued, *“Grace, in its short definition, is unmerited favor. You cannot earn it - it is a gift and is always freely given. It means that you will not be getting what you so richly deserve.”*

The boy looked puzzled. *“You’re not gonna whup me? You just gonna let me walk?”*

The principal looked down at the unyielding child. *“Yes, I am going to let you walk.”*

The boy studied the face of the principal, *“No punishment at all? Even though I socked Tommy and shoved his face into the sandbox?”*

“Oh, there has to be punishment. What you did was wrong and there are always consequences to our actions. There will be punishment. Grace is not an excuse for doing wrong.”

“I knew it,” sneered the boy as he held out his hands. *“Let’s get on with it.”*

The principal nodded toward the teacher. *“Bring me the belt.”*

The teacher presented the belt to the principal.

He carefully folded it in two and then handed it back to the teacher. He looked at the child and said. *“I want you to count the blows.”*

He slid out from behind his desk and walked over to stand directly in front of the young man. He gently reached out and folded the child’s outstretched, expectant hands together and then turned to face the teacher with his own hands outstretched.

One quiet word came forth from his mouth. *“Begin.”*

The belt whipped down on the outstretched hands of the principal.

Crack! The young man jumped ten feet in the air. Shock registered across his face, *“One”* he whispered.

Crack! *“Two.”* His voice raised an octave.

Crack! *“Three . . .”* He couldn’t believe this.

Crack! *“Four.”*

Big tears welled up in the eyes of the rebel. *“OK stop! That’s enough. Stop!”*

Crack! Came the belt down on the callused hands of the principal.

Crack! The child flinched with each blow, tears beginning to stream down his face.

Crack! Crack! *“No please”*, the former rebel begged, *“Stop, I did it, I’m the one who deserves it. Stop! Please. Stop . . .”*

Still the blows came - Crack! Crack! One after another.

Finally it was over.

The principal stood with sweat glistening across his forehead and beads trickling down his face. Slowly he knelt down. He studied the young man for a second and then his swollen hands reached out to cradle the face of the weeping child.

“Grace . . .” he simply said.

That is grace! That is what our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ has done for us! He took our punishment and paid for our sins on the cross of Calvary, the work is finished and now He extends this grace gift to us!

In saying that, we should have – ***JOY IN GRACE!***

I have broken down the verses we will be looking at this morning into the following main points. They are,

JESUS IS EVERYTHING – PHILIPPIANS 3:7-8

GOD’S GRACE – PHILIPPIANS 3:9

With that as our introduction, let’s begin reading in Philippians chapter 3, beginning in verse 7 and let’s see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word and look at this topic - ***JOY IN GRACE!***

PHILIPPIANS 3**VERSES 7-8**

All the good works that Paul was doing for the Lord, the keeping of the Law, he now saw in the light of Christ.

The Law tends to make people angry and bitter people while grace brings joy to our lives!

Let me show you what I mean because maybe some of you may not agree with me on this.

Remember in Acts chapter 7 as Stephen is before the Sanhedrin or the Jewish religious council defending his faith in Christ before them.

In fact, when he was first arrested, we are told in Acts 6:15, “**And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.**”

Here are all these pious religious leaders, I am sure their faces were not happy, and they look at Stephen and there is so much joy in this man’s life that he looked like an angel!

And Stephen shares with them their history and brings them all the way to Jesus, the Messiah of Israel!

And notice the response of these pious religious leaders to what Stephen told them, not the face of angels, not even close.

We are told in Acts 7:54, “**When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.**”

They looked demonic because they refused to allow the Word of God to draw them to the living God, to Jesus! Not the face of an angel and that truly is the Law.

Not that the Law is bad, the Law of God is perfect. The problem is that we are not perfect, we can't keep the Law and thus, it makes us angry that others can do things we can't do and we tend to look down at them with anger, as we see here with these Jewish religious leaders towards Stephen!

As they are taking Stephen out of the city to stone him, they placed their clothes down by a young man named – *SAUL!*

Listen to what we are told happened next. In Acts 7:59-60 we are told, “**And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep.**”

Keep in mind that Paul did not just watch the clothes of those who were stoning Steven to death. He was also consenting to his death. (Acts 8:1)

What's my point?

My point is this.

Saul, later to be known as Paul, saw this relationship that Stephen had with the Lord, and it was something that he desired with all of his heart. And yet, as much as he desired it, he could not attain it through the Law!

Those things he was holding onto, the Law, were in the way of Paul having an intimate relationship with God.

And instead of repenting of his sins and receiving the grace of God that is found in Jesus, he began persecuting Christians, trying to destroy their faith!

And then, on the Road to Damascus to arrest Christians, Paul came to saving faith. He now understood that the Law could never save you, it could never make a person righteous.

Thus, he counted them as a loss, as nothing. They were not helpful in his relationship with God.

As Philippians 3:8 opens up, he does so by saying, “**But indeed . . .**”

Now it is not that big of a deal in English, but in Greek, Paul is emphasizing this point.

In fact, one writer helps us to understand this better by telling us, “*The translation of five particles, which latter are literally translated, ‘yea, indeed, therefore, at least, even,’ and show the force and passion of Paul’s conviction.*” (Wuest)

What is Paul’s point?

What is Paul so passionate about that he wants them to understand this?

He wants us to understand that – ***JESUS IS EVERYTHING!***

I am sure if I was to ask you, “***Is Jesus important to you?***” that every one of you would say, “***Yes, He is!***”

But is He everything to you?

Is He more important to you than anything else in this world?

And that is where it gets difficult for us. We can let things get in our way in our relationship with the Lord.

But specifically here Paul is speaking of religious things getting in the way. For Paul, all those good works, the keeping of the Law he put aside because – ***JESUS IS EVERYTHING*** that he needs, and He is everything that we need!

Let me show you something that maybe you have not thought about. It is in regard to the difference between the first century church and the church of today, the twenty-first century church.

The first century church demonstrated to the world how much Jesus could do through them. It was their love for the Lord that was manifested outwardly.

The twenty-first century church is busy showing the world all that we can do for Christ! Maybe you don't see the difference, so let me explain it like this.

I can go around and tell people all that I do for my wife. I can put up posters and get tee shirts made telling people all that I do. It would have to be on the front and back!

Not that I don't do those things, I do, but I want the world to see all that I do for her, so I am showing them by going on talk shows and the like. That is much of the church today.

But, if I were to display my love for my wife by loving her and just doing what I am doing, you know what? Others will see how much I love my wife; I don't have to advertise!

There is a vast difference between the two!

Not only that but legalism, going back to a works salvation or mixing Law and Grace together is not acceptable. In fact, it is incompatible, and we will see that as we deal with God's Grace in a few minutes.

But let me share some things that people do to earn their way into heaven. And please understand you can't work your way into heaven. If you could then God would owe you a spot in heaven. Please understand that God does not owe you heaven, it is a gift given to us through Jesus. And yet, the world is keen on this works-based salvation as we are told.

By nature and by training we all seek solutions to our problem of sin. To varying degrees, these solutions include *doing something* - law-keeping, good works, etc. - to please or appease or satisfy the God who is one day going to judge us.

The idea of contributing to one's own salvation is universal. It's the engine which propels every religion.

But you may say, *“I’m not that religious.”*

Well, even people who are *“not religious”* feel this way - and their feelings are based on some version of being good.

Now there are many flavors of works-based salvation.

Let me mention ten of them:

1. The Work of Philanthropy

“I’m going to give money. I’m going to contribute. I’m going to give to the poor. I’m going to see someone in need, and I’m going to meet that need. I’m going to make charitable gifts, and as I give I really cannot imagine in the final day that the Almighty would damn me. After all, look at all the money I’ve given.”

2. The Work of Service

“I’m going to volunteer. I’m going to pitch in. I’m going to give my time. I’m going to use my skill and expertise. I’m going to get my hands dirty for Jesus, or for whatever deity I think is in charge. I’m going to work, to do good, and to serve - whether it’s shoveling my neighbor’s walk or going to a food pantry. And, on judgment day, I just can’t imagine that God would watch a video of my life, of me serving on Thanksgiving Day with the homeless, and still send me to hell.”

3. The Work of Ritual

Confession. Confirmation. Communion. Baptism. Prayers. Beads. Candles. Church attendance. Pointing a mat toward a city and bowing down five times a day in the direction of that city. Whatever. Some sort of a ceremony is going to get me right with God.

I've been to funerals and so have you where the clergyman has stood and said, *"We know that the dearly departed is going to one day be in the presence of God because they were baptized."*

4. The Work of Comparison

"Alright, I'm not the best guy in the world but I can point you to a million people who are far worse than me. If we're looking at a bell curve, I'm on the plus side. By comparison, I'm in."

5. The Work of Comprehension

"This whole thing is a riddle. And I'm going to figure it out and when I figure it out then I'm going to be in God's good graces. If I learn enough about the Almighty, then I will be accepted. I understand and can articulate the salient points of the gospel; therefore, I'm a recipient of salvation."

There are many today who are unsaved and on the way to hell and yet have a very correct understanding of the gospel.

6. The Work of Decision

Walk that aisle, sign that card, pray that prayer. Well-meaning Christian pastors will tell you that if you simply make your decision to ask Jesus into your heart as your personal Savior then you are saved and you can doubt no more.

There's that ridiculous story of the farmer who is standing in the field and doubting his salvation. He says to himself and to the Devil: ***"I'm going to make it secure right now and he takes a wooden post and pounds it into the ground."***

And he looks to that post and says, ***"Right here, this is the time I made sure that Jesus is my Lord and Savior."***

Other days, he'd be working in that same field, having doubts about his salvation, and he'd simply tell the Devil to look at that post which marked the day Jesus became his Lord and Savior.

The man is trusting in a post in the ground. It's unwise to rely on a monumental, emotional decision that you made years ago as the ground for your assurance.

7. The Work of Restitution

"I've done a lot of bad things in my life so I need to go back and take care of it."

I had a man tell me once that he went several years without tithing and now he is paying God back. ***"I've hurt some people in my life and I need to go and ask their forgiveness. I've stolen from people so I need to go to them and make things right. I need to go back and take care of the wrongs in my life. Once I've done that, then God will forgive me."***

8. The Work of Affliction

This looks like beating yourself up, or penance. *“If I give myself hell here and now, then God won’t give me hell later.”* Martin Luther, in an attempt to be saved, used to beat himself with a whip, literally, he used to flog himself until he realized that the just shall live by faith.

9. The Work of Meditation

“I can just go on a retreat and be quiet and still before God. He connects with me when I clear my mind. When I’m poised and quiet, God comes and meets me where I am.”

10. The Work of Seeking Affirmation

“I don’t know whether or not I’m saved but if I can get the elders to say that I am, or if I can get anybody else who is saved to tell me that I am, then I will find rest before God.”

Unsaved people add countless other contributions to their resumes in order to be right with God. By nature, we all feel like we need to do this. Our sinful prides says that, with God’s help, we have what it takes to get there. We just need to apply ourselves because, after all, I’m me.

But as reasonable as this seems, it’s wrong. In fact, it’s the opposite of the truth because even a drop of ink dropped on an Elvis autograph renders it trash.

And any work which you try to contribute to your salvation, your justification before God, annuls the grace of God and insults the God of grace. You have absolutely nothing that God wants. So come to Christ, but come to him with nothing.

You see, it is all about Christ and what He has done, paid the penalty for what we have done – sinned! Thus, why are you holding onto dung?

I don't think we think of it that way, but Paul did.

The ancient Greek word for rubbish used there in Philippians 3:8 had one of two uses.

It could describe excrement from the body or table scraps that were fit only to be thrown to the dogs.

We may suppose that Paul would be comfortable with either meaning in this context.

Paul counted all his religious things as a loss, but he also counted all things a loss when compared to what we have in Christ.

Think about that for a minute, what things are getting in your way of an intimate relationship with Jesus, of growing in Him?

Paul said they were not just worthless, but they were offensive as dung, as I have said!

Paul, his past life; his past reputation that he spoke of, was counted as loss because of all he now had in Christ!

What is my point?

My point is this – ***JESUS IS EVERYTHING!***

Which leads us to our next point – ***GOD'S GRACE!***

VERSE 9

Please understand that grace is unmerited favor or God is giving to me something that I don't deserve – eternal life with Him through the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary!

One of the best-known definitions of grace is only three words: *God's unmerited favor.*

A. W. Tozer expanded on that and said, *“Grace is the good pleasure of God that inclines him to bestow benefits on the undeserving.”*

It is God's gift to us, even though we don't deserve eternal life with Him!

But, as I have said, man thinks that he can be good enough, righteous enough to get into heaven. The problem here is that man does not understand the kind of righteousness that is required for them to get into heaven, what God requires!

Listen to what Paul wrote in Romans 10:1-4, **“Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”**

Did you notice that Paul, in speaking of the Jews being ignorant of God's standard of righteousness, have come to the conclusion and they think they can attain it by doing this or doing that, keeping the Law.

Here is the problem for them and anyone who tries to approach God by their good works so that they can be righteous before God.

The righteousness of God is – ***PERFECTION!***

There is no sin in God!

There is no darkness in God!

He is light!

He is just!

He is fair!

Okay, I can go on but to get back to the point – ***GOD IS PERFECT!***

The Law can't save you; it has no power to save. All the Law can do is show you that you are a sinner and as Paul tells us in Romans 3:23, "**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**"

What is my point?

My point is that we are not perfect, we can't attain the righteousness of God in our lives!

God is the standard, not man and yet we look and compare ourselves to those who are not as good as we are and thus, we think we have attained some kind of righteousness. I guess that is true, a righteousness that we have attained, but not the righteousness of God and thus, we miss the mark of perfection, and we are damned.

And, if you truly want to work your way into heaven, and you can't, you will get paid for your effort. Now this payment is not what you think. Listen carefully to what that payment is as Paul tells us in Romans 6:23, "**For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**"

There are the choices. Try to work your way into heaven, try to keep the Law, and in the end, because you can't, you will suffer death or eternal separation from God!

Or you can receive the free gift of God, His grace extended to you by faith, and you will enter into eternal life with Him!

It seems like a no brainer and yet, many reject the gift and they try to do it on their own, and in the end, they will fail!

Now let's think this through for a minute. Do you think Jesus wants a relationship with us that is based in the Law, with the 613 commandments to follow?

No, He wants us to love Him and what the Law ends up doing is making us prideful and pious, looking down upon others because we are doing this and we are not doing that, not like the others.

Very much like the Pharisees of Jesus' day and Jesus rebuked them for their hypocrisy!

Let me show you what I mean by looking at some verses.

First of all, in Luke 16:17 Jesus said, **“The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it.”**

Well, if the Law and Prophets were until the time of John the Baptist, what do we have now?

Well, John tells us in John 1:17, and just in case you missed it, listen carefully to the point that John is making, similar to what Jesus was saying.

He wrote, **“For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”**

That truly was the problem for the Jews, the Law was beating them up, it showed them that they were failures, and it is the Law that points us to our Savior, to Jesus Christ!

In Romans 8:3-4 Paul tells us, **“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”**

Again, in Romans, Paul tells us in Romans 10:3-4, **“For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”**

Is Paul saying that the Law is over?

Not exactly.

What he is saying is that our relationship with God through the Law is over, the Law for righteousness and now it is believing in the Lord Jesus Christ!

In Galatians 2:20-21 Paul said, **“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”**

If you are trying to live by the Law to get God to love you more, good luck with that one. You will only become frustrated, discouraged or you will become proud of how well you are doing. And compared with the righteousness of Christ, you are not doing well at all!

Here’s the thing. God loves us in spite of ourselves. He loves us and that love is unconditional, it never changes.

We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone! He can’t love us anymore than He already does, as hard as that is to believe. It is true!

Paul said in Galatians 3:11-12, **“But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for ‘the just shall live by faith.’ Yet the law is not of faith, but ‘the man who does them shall live by them.’”**

In other words, if you live by the Law you will die by the Law because all the Law can do is point to your failure, your sin!

It can’t do anything about that problem!

The Law is like a mirror, and it shows us our imperfections, our sin!

I wish I had a mirror like George Jetson. You know, you get up in the morning and look into the mirror and it recognizes what you need, and it corrects all your imperfections, it cleans you up.

But that is a cartoon and not real life.

There is only One who can cleanse us from our sin and that is Jesus!

And, to prove his point, Paul quotes out of Habakkuk 2:4, which says, “**. . . But the just shall live by his faith.**”

In this passage, Habakkuk is reminded by God to look to Him rather than the circumstances that faced him and the nation, the Babylonian invasion of the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

For us, the just shall not live by the Law but by faith. Don't look at the circumstances but the Savior and you shall live!

Think of it like this. If a ship is moored to a dock by a chain, as strong as that chain may be, if one of the links is weak, when a strong storm comes, it will break, and the ship will break away and go out to sea.

If you try to come to God by your own perfection, by works, that is a very weak link, and it will break, and you will be lost forever!

Please understand that if Christ did not save us completely from our sins, if He did not redeem us, then there are no good works that we can do to finish the work! In fact, we are dead in our trespasses and sins and we have no hope to rectify that problem!

But the wonderful thing is that Christ has finished the work of our salvation, and He is seated at the right hand of the Father not only showing us that the work is completed but that the Father has accepted the sacrifice for our sin, all of our sins! (Ephesians 1:20, Hebrews 8:1)

And in Galatians 5:4-6 Paul wrote, **“You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.”**

The Law ends up condemning people, even us, because we fall far short. And, really what we have been talking about here, **“faith working through love.”**

That truly is it. When you realize that you have been saved by grace, when you understand how sinful you are before a holy and righteous God, you can't help but love Him and reach out to others with that same kind of love, in our words and in our deeds!

It is **“faith working through love.”**

In Colossians 2:13-17 we are told, **“having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”**

That was the Law, it was against us. We are all guilty before God!

But Christ has wiped out that penalty for sin for He paid our debt of sin in full. It was nailed to the cross of Calvary!

And notice, don't judge someone because they worship God on this day or that day, on the Sabbath or new moon, or feast day or not a feast day.

All those things in the Old Testament were just a picture of what was to come, and the substance is ***CHRIST!*** Never forget that.

The Law ends up taking us back to the picture instead of the substance, instead of Christ!

Also, in Ephesians 2:15-16 Paul said, **“having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.”**

You see, the Law of God is what separated Jew and Gentile. The Jews looked down upon the Gentiles because the Jews were keeping the Law, and the Gentiles were not.

At least that is what they thought. They were not keeping the Law; it was impossible to do!

And instead of judging them, they should have been shining the light of Almighty God to the Gentiles.

That reconciliation is found in Christ, not the Law. It is a grace gift given to us by God. And now He has put to death this enmity that was between Jew and Gentile, something the Law brought about, and now that reconciliation is found in the grace that God has given to us!

And in Acts chapter 15 I think we have the case settled for us!

At this point in church history Gentiles were getting saved and the issue was, put forth by some believing Jews, that these Gentiles need to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses.

So, they met for the first church council meeting in Jerusalem, James was the head of the church in Jerusalem.

And Peter got up and said this, in Acts 15:7-11, **“And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: ‘Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.’”**

Peter is telling them, *“Look, why are you trying to put this heavy yoke of the Law upon the Gentiles. We could not even keep it and now you want them to keep it!”*

And he ends by saying, **“But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.”**

In other words, we Jews are saved just as the Gentiles are saved, by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

If Peter said that Gentiles are saved just as the Jews are saved, there may be some confusion. Some may think that you need to keep the Law of Moses as well to be saved. But Peter made it very clear that Jews are saved just as the Gentiles are being saved, through grace! Make no mistake about it, it is not by works.

And if there is still doubt about this, listen to what they did to help these Gentile believers out.

We read beginning in verse 22 of Acts chapter 15, **“Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. They wrote this, letter by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, ‘You must be circumcised and keep the law’ - to whom we gave no such commandment - it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”** Acts 15:22-29.

In that letter to the Gentile churches, do you see all 613 of the commandments listed?

No, you don't. No hint that they were to keep the Law.

Yes, you see some practical things for living. But they gave no such commandment to follow the Law!

And notice what happened when the Gentiles heard this!

We are told, **“So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement. Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words. And after they had stayed there for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles.”** Acts 15:30-33.

That is what grace does, it brings joy to our hearts, it lifts us up, while the Law, as I have said, condemns us!

Again, that is grace, not the Law.

The Law condemns us, but grace sets us free!

In fact, listen to what Jesus said in John 3:16-17, verses we are probably very familiar with, but pay attention to what He didn't say.

We are told, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”**

Do you see in any of these words that Jesus spoke regarding our salvation that it says, *“whoever believes in Him and keeps the Law shall not perish”?*

No, we don't. It is based on faith in Jesus and receiving that grace gift into our lives! He is the Savior, we are not! We need Him to set us free from the bondage of sin that we are in!

Also, in Hebrews 4:16 notice what Paul says in regard how we approach God. He wrote, **“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”**

I am so thankful that we approach God by His throne of Grace and not by the Law.

The Law will just condemn me, but grace sets me free! Praise God for His throne of grace!

Think about the children of Israel, as they gathered around Mount Sinai, and they were fearful, they did not want to talk with God.

Why was that?

Because the Law of God condemned them, and they knew that they could not talk to a holy and righteous God in their sinful condition! They even told Moses to talk with God!

But we can approach God, not in fear but in love as we approach His throne of grace and lay our requests at His feet.

Keep in mind what Paul wrote in II Corinthians 5:21, "**For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**"

This is the only reason we can approach God, not in our righteousness, which is like filthy rags. But we can approach God in the righteousness of Christ that has been given to us by faith in Him!

It truly is all about – ***GOD'S GRACE!***

Let me leave you with this to think about. This story puts things into perspective for us regarding this grace gift that God has given to us.

We are told,

To seek to earn, merit, or purchase salvation is to insult the Giver.

Imagine yourself invited to a banquet in the White House by the president of the United States. You are seated at a table that is filled with choice foods. Every effort is made to give you a most enjoyable evening.

At the end of a lovely visit, the president stands at the door to bid you good-bye.

What do you do?

As you leave do you press a dime into his hand and say, ***“Thank you very much for your kindness. I realize it has cost you a lot of money, and I want to help you pay for the meal.”***

Is that the proper response to his kindness?

On the contrary, it would be a very rude and insulting gesture.

So, it would be with God’s grace.

- William MacDonald, The Grace of God - Swindoll’s Book of Illustrations, p. 250