

“God’s Grace Is Enough, Part 1”

June 20, 2010

Dr. Ritch Boerckel

Scriptural Foundation: James 4:6-10, ESV

Warning Against Worldliness

⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? ⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

I love John Bunyan’s book entitled, Pilgrim’s Progress. It is an allegory of the Christian life which teaches the reader the temptations and pitfalls the Christian can expect to find in this world as we walk through this life in our struggle against sin. John Bunyan wrote the book from a prison cell in England somewhere between 1660 and 1675. Bunyan’s crime for which he was imprisoned nearly twelve years of his life was that of preaching the Gospel of Jesus without a license.

The main character in *Pilgrim’s Progress* is a young man named *Christian*. He flees from his hometown, The City of Destruction, and is set on a path toward the Celestial City by a man he meets by the name of “Evangelist”. One of my favorite parts of the story occurs early in the story when Christian comes to the house of a man named “Interpreter”. This Interpreter comes alongside to help Christian to know how he can stay on the path toward the Celestial City and how he can be successful in his journey. He first takes Christian by the hand and leads him “into a very large parlour, that was full of dust, because never swept; ... the Interpreter called for a man to sweep. Now, when he began to sweep, the dust began so abundantly to fly about that Christian was almost choked. Then said Interpreter to a young girl that stood by, ‘Bring some water and sprinkle the room;’ the which, when she had done, it was swept and cleansed with pleasure.

“Then said Christian ‘What does this mean?’ The Interpreter answered ‘This parlour is the heart of a man that was never sanctified by the sweet grace of the gospel. The dust is his original sin and inward corruptions that have defiled the whole man. He that began to sweep at first is the *Law*; but she that brought water and did sprinkle it, is the gospel. Now, whereas you saw that as soon as the first began to sweep, the dust did so fly about, that the room by him could not be cleaned, but that you were almost choked by it; this is to show you, that the Law, instead of cleansing the heart ... from sin, does revive, put strength into, and increase it in the soul, even as it does discover and forbid it, for it does not give Power to overcome it.

“Again, as you saw the young girl sprinkle the room with water, upon which it was cleansed with pleasure: this is to show you, that when the Gospel comes, it produces sweet and gracious influences to the heart, then, I say, even as you saw the young girl lay the dust by sprinkling the floor with water, so is sin vanquished and subdued, and the soul made clean through the faith of it, and consequently fit for the King of glory to inhabit.”¹

I love this part of the story because it reminds me the key to living a holy life in this fallen world is not God’s Law, but God’s Gospel. I am set free from the mastery of sin over my life, not by trying harder in my own strength to do what is right, but by the grace of God working in me through real, genuine, authentic faith in His Son, Jesus. Jesus always must be set before me, and the Gospel always must be embraced by me, through faith. Titus 2 says this,

¹ John 14:21-23; John 15:3; Acts 15:9; Romans 16:25, 26; Ephesians 5:26

¹¹ For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age...

The secret to living a godly and holy life in this present age is not the Law of God, but it is the Gospel of God. The cross of Jesus is not only the means God uses to forgive me of my sin, but it is also the means God uses to free me from my sins and to cleanse me of unrighteousness. As believers, as we struggle against sin and temptation in this present world, we ask the questions. “Is it possible for me to live a holy life?” “Can we be free from the anger and bitterness that chokes peace from our heart?” “Can we be free from the fire for sexual immorality that burns within our soul?” “Can we be free from the panicked pursuit of money that extinguishes our love for Jesus?” “Can we really be free from our sin?” The Gospel of Jesus shouts to us, “YES! YES, a thousand times YES!!” This is our birthright in Christ.

Satan would love for God’s people to believe that living a godly life in this corrupt world is impossible. What can we do? We are just weak people! Satan tempts the Christian to believe that sin is the only option for us and that we really have no other alternative. Satan wants us to believe we cannot help but walk down the path of disobedience to God’s Commandments and that we have no other choice. He whispers to us, “Haven’t you already tried to live according to God’s Law? All that it did was leave you feeling guilty, worthless and ashamed. What is the use?” But, the Gospel of Jesus tells us that God’s grace is enough to overcome any temptation, regardless of its strength and persistence. God’s grace is enough to overcome any sin habit which has rooted itself within our soul. The Gospel of Jesus tells us grace is enough.

We have been learning, in our study of James, that authentic faith changes the way we live and changes us from the inside out. In James 4, particularly, James is communicating that authentic faith rejects conformity to this world in its values, pleasures, mindset, priorities, passions, and ambitions. For, as Verse 4, says,

⁴ Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

That is strong language and it is used for a purpose; to shake us awake because this is no small thing. God calls us to make a choice. We must choose to live for God or we will choose to live for this world, but we cannot live for both! The true Christian says, “I choose to live for Jesus,” but what we need to be successful in our choice and in our commitment to live obedient lives is grace. That is what we need, we need God’s grace; grace that not only pardons us, but grace that purifies us of our sins and grace which binds us to God when we feel our lives straying from Him. Can we get enough grace to overcome and strengthen us against the temptations this world places in front of us? That is why Verse 6 is so very encouraging!

⁶ But he gives more grace.

I do not know the specific temptations which are battling against your soul. I do not know how strong they are, but I assume they are very, very powerful, but here is the Word of God: He gives more grace. Regardless of this world’s pressure to conform you to itself, God gives more grace. God’s grace is always sufficient for our need.

In John 1 we are told that Jesus is the “Word”. Then, in Verse 14, we are told,

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Then John goes on to tell us,

¹⁶ And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

This is true if you are a child of God: from Jesus' fullness you have received grace upon grace. Have you ever stood on the ocean shore and let the waves lap at your feet? Before one wave recedes another wave comes right over the top of it; wave upon wave. That is the picture John is painting for us regarding God’s grace in Jesus; grace upon grace upon grace, an unending stream.

So why do we still sin? If grace abounds the sinners, and if grace is enough, why do we still sin? We have walked away from God's ocean of grace. We become self-sufficient and independent. That is our natural strength. If we are not consciously placing ourselves, and humbling ourselves, under the mighty hand of God daily, moment-by-moment, then our heart begins to stray. That is why we sin, because we remove ourselves from the place of God's grace. We have come to believe we can provide righteousness for ourselves and we can make ourselves into the men and women that we want to be, so we neglect our active, energetic pursuit of God and His grace. We stop yearning for God moment by moment. We cannot say, with David in Psalm 42,

¹As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul thirsts for you O God.

Moment by moment, with a great intensity, longing for God, and as a result we remove ourselves from the place of grace and we remove ourselves from the strength, we become weak and we become vulnerable and we sin. Verse 6 goes on to say,

⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

It is a horrible thing to be opposed by God. We are going to loose, so what are we to do? Look at verse 10,

¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Verses 6 and 10 are like book covers. They show the front of the book and they show the back of the book. The front of the book tells us we need grace. The back of the book says, "The way to get grace is to humble yourselves." God opposes the proud, but He gives grace to the humble. We need grace and that comes through humility, therefore the back cover says, "Humble yourselves." That is our action point and that is what we must do. That is our responsibility. One must act if one is to receive grace, and Verses 7 through 9 are the pages in between those two book covers: God opposes the proud, but He gives grace to the humble. We need grace which comes from humility. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God and He will lift you up and He will exalt you. That is His promise.

How do we humble ourselves? In rapid motion, there are these quick commands He gives to us, in Verses 7 through 9, and they reveal five specific actions through which we humble ourselves God so we can receive more grace. The first principle is the principle of submission. The second is that of resistance. The third is that of worship. The fourth is that of purification. The fifth is that of repentance.

The first grace principle is that of submission, as we see in Verse 7, and it is very simple,

⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God.

If God opposes the proud and He gives grace to the humble, therefore... Whenever you see a "therefore" you look to see what it is there for because it refers to something prior. "Therefore" if it is true God opposes the proud and He gives grace to the humble, then let us humble ourselves by submitting ourselves to God. The "submit" in the Bible is not a passive sitting at God's feet, waiting for Him to speak to us. Submitting to God is active in the Bible and it means actively means we arrange every part of our lives under the authority of God and under the desire of the Lord. It is an anticipation of God's desire and an active pursuit of His pleasure. Submission to God is the joyful quest of discovering what God wants in our lives and then committing ourselves to "get 'er done." Submission is an attitude which leads to action. To submit to God means we embrace a "no excuses" Christianity. Submission, rather than putting us in an inactive posture before God, makes us zealous for God's design in our lives. Christian submission produces a burning desire within us to please God, to do His will, and to advance His glory. We become willing to make any sacrifice, persevere through any trouble, deny ourselves temporal pleasures, and give our energies, even our lives, to honor our Lord Jesus. That is what it means to submit to God.

This week my wife and I will drive to Colorado Springs to present our second son, Daniel, to the United States Air Force Academy. What a day this Thursday will be for us and for Daniel. Daniel's world is going to change very quickly and very completely. He plans to surrender his right to run his own life. If the Lord wills, Daniel will get on a

bus this Thursday at the Academy with other cadets. He will yield over his nice thick head of hair to the shearers. He will give up his cell phone, his civilian clothes, his right to go to bed when he pleases, his favorite foods, his leisure time, and most everything else that he has enjoyed for the first eighteen years of his life. He will be issued new clothes. Every aspect of his life, from morning to night, will be governed by a whole new set of rules and regulations. People whom he does not now know will be yelling orders at him . . . orders he will submit to and obey. For Daniel, to submit to his superiors, requires at least three things. First, Daniel must recognize other people have a greater rank and position than he does. Second, Daniel must bend his will to the will of those who are in command over him. Finally, Daniel must act in obedience to the both the spirit and the letter of the orders which are given him, even if those orders are very unpleasant and seemingly illogical. Submission is not merely doing that which is directly stated, but also discovering that which is not specifically stated, but which is the desire and design of his superiors. Pray for Daniel when you think of him.

To submit means we place ourselves each day under God's rule. We surrender our right to run our own life. We can no longer think and do as we please. We recognize God has a greater rank and position than we do. He has the right to command us. We bend our will to His and we act in obedience to God's written orders, in both the letter and the spirit of His Word.

Unlike human authority, we can be thankful God's commandments are always wise, good, not nonsensical, and, unlike human authority, always absolute. We do not question His good judgment for He is the God Only Wise. Have you submitted yourself to God fully and completely to the Lord Jesus, or are there areas of your life which are self-governing? Wherever there is a lack of submission there is a lack of grace, strength, and power.

The second grace principle is resistance, as we read in Verse 7,

⁷ Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

When we submit ourselves to God, we are rejecting the authority of the Devil over our lives. We are transferring our allegiance from this world and the prince of this world to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and we can be certain that when we submit ourselves to God Satan will interfere and tempt us away from God, for Satan demands we align our lives to him. He will work to keep traitors and defectors from leaving his camp. Satan does not want us to enjoy God's peace, God's delight, God's righteousness, or God's reward. Satan hates it when Jesus is exalted and God is worshipped.

The Devil is a powerful adversary, but here is the promise: resist the Devil and he will flee from you. We need not fear Satan's wrath for "greater is He who is in you than he who is in this world".² God calls us to defend the spiritual ground we have gained in our pursuit of holy living through Jesus and to go on the offensive to claim new territory for Jesus.

In 2 Corinthians 2, Paul says,

¹¹ For we are not unaware of his schemes.

In order for us to resist the Devil we have to understand what the Bible has told us about the Devil's strategies he uses to rob us of the joy, and rob us of our fellowship with God and rob us of practical godliness. We should not be ignorant of Satan's schemes.

Let me identify four schemes of the devil in our lives for us to resist. In the first scheme, Satan plucks God's Word out of people's hearts so that God's Word will not produce spiritual life in us. In the parable of the soils, Jesus said some of the seed of the Bible fell on the hard path and birds come and ate it up.³ The seed represents the Word of God and Jesus explains, the birds are Satan and he comes along after the seed is sown upon a hard path, a hard heart, and he takes away the Word which was sown in them.

² 1 John 4:4

³ Mark 4:15

What does it mean to resist Satan? Resisting Satan means that when we hear the Word of God, whether it is taught to us in Sunday school or church, or whether we read it on our own in the morning, whenever we hear the Word of God we do not receive it with a hard, cold heart, but rather we receive it with a broken heart; ground which has been broken up and we embrace it, take it in, receive it, and implant it within our soul, intending it would have a fruitful effect upon us.

Resist the Devil! Do you want more grace? How do you resist the Devil? You do not let Satan pluck the Word of God from your heart after it has been sown into your life.

In the second scheme Satan leads us away from devotion to Jesus by tempting us with sin. Satan is called the “tempter” two times in the Bible.⁴ We resist Satan by not only fleeing from sin, but also by freeing from temptation. If we let the Satan tempt us then we are on Satan’s home turf. The time to resist the Devil is not after he has knocked on the door of our hearts and gotten a toe in the door. The time to resist him is when he begins to approach our property and say, “No, I am not going to allow myself even to enter into his sphere of temptation because I can handle temptation. I kind of like being around temptation.” No, the time to resist Satan is before he gets his foot in the door.

In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul warns all believers, especially the Corinthian church, of the huge concern he has,

³ But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

Someone recently asked me, “Do you think that Satan can plant thoughts into our minds? Do you think that is the way Satan works; that he actually puts thoughts we would not have if he were not active?” On the basis of this verse, I think that this is exactly what Satan. We resist the devil by taking every thought captive to the obedience of Jesus. We do not know the origin of those thoughts, so we take them captive by evaluating every thought which runs through our head on the basis of the gold standard of God’s Word.

In the third scheme Satan performs signs and wonders, as we read in 2 Thessalonians 2,

⁹ The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, ¹⁰ and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

That is what Jesus said about the last days, in Matthew 24,

²⁴ For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

We resist Satan by refusing to allow our faith to be rooted in miraculous experiences. Our faith is never rooted in our experiences. Our faith is rooted in the Word of God. I do not care what miracle happened to you or to someone else. What I care about is your faith being rooted in God’s Word, because here is one of the things I know Satan does: he produces miracles in order to deceive the elect.

How do we resist him? We say we are not going to put our faith in those experiences, no matter how powerful or amazing they may be. We must put our faith in the written Word of God.

In the fourth scheme Satan sends false teachers to teach his doctrines. In 1 Timothy 4, we read,

¹ Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons...

False teachers are going to come into the church and they will teach teachings of demons. We resist Satan by willingly testing every person’s teaching against the Golden Standard of the Scriptures. We trust no person, except the person who is teaching in accord with the Word of God.

⁴ Matthew 4:3, 1 Thessalonians 3:5

I know that some teachers become very dear to us because they have been used by God to help us understand God's Word and that is a delight and we thank God for those teachers. They have had a huge, positive effect upon us, but whether the teacher is John MacArthur or Beth Moore or Alistair Begg or Kay Arthur or any other pastor or teacher, we do not accept their teaching because they teach it. We are like the Bereans whom Paul commended as noble because after listening to Paul preach they searched the Scriptures to see if these things are true!⁵ How do we resist Satan? We resist Satan by testing every person's teaching against the Scriptures.

Grace Principle Number 3 is worship, as we read in Verse 8,

⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

The words "draw near" are the language of worship throughout the Bible. Exodus 19 tells us,

²² Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves...

This language is used throughout the Old Testament, particularly of the priests drawing near to make sacrifices upon the altar for the worship of God, but this drawing near was a priestly function. The people could not draw near to God in the Old Testament; the priests drew near to God on behalf of the people. They were the people's representatives. The general population was kept at a distance, but when Jesus Christ came into this world He changed all that. He made a way for the common person to draw near personally to the Living God. Listen to what Hebrews 10 says,

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith...

I love the fact this term "draw near" is used to describe worship, because it reveals worship is not formal or external, but is relational. Worship is not an event, but a friendship. Worship is about a real relationship with the living God. Worship is about personally meeting with Him, talking to Him, listening to Him, enjoying His company, getting to know Him, and living in His presence. I want to encourage you, are you drawing near to God? Worship is essential to life which receives more grace. No worship; no grace. More worship; more grace.

Our great calling on Sunday morning is to draw near to God together. If we accomplish the goal of drawing nearer to God together, then we have achieved God's purpose for us. What a joy for us to draw near to God! This is the very reason Jesus came into this world. 1 Peter 3 tells us,

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God...

If you are coming to church on Sunday to sing songs together or listen to music, you are missing the point. If you are coming to church on Sunday to hear a good sermon, you are missing the point. If you are coming to church on Sunday to talk with friends or to teach a Sunday school lesson or to serve God in some other way, you are missing the point. The point of worship, the point of coming together on Sunday, is to draw near to God!

After we leave, we do not evaluate the day upon the basis of how good the sermon was, or how good the music was, or whether we taught our Sunday school lesson well enough, we evaluate the day by answering the question, "Did I draw near to God through worship, because worship is not an event, it is a relationship and a friendship?"

The sound men asked me, "How many points are you going to get through today?" (Laughter) I said, "All of them!" I was wrong!

God gives more grace and this grace abounds to sinners, but that does not mean we lay passively in front of His feet and say, "Give me more grace!" If you want more grace, in order to live a holy life, what do we need to do? We need

⁵ Acts 17:11

to submit ourselves to God actively. We need to resist the Devil. We need to draw near to the Holy God who has made a way for us to draw nearer to Him in full assurance and in faith.

Is James talking to the person in the church who has a false faith and is not saved at all, or is James talking to the person in the church who is born again but who has drifted into sin? I believe he is talking to both. These two individuals, the person who has a false faith and is not saved and the person who may have a genuine faith but is drifted into sin, are very hard to differentiate. That is why James is writing this letter. The persons in those categories cannot know which category they are in, because the person who is living a life of disobedience, and I am not talking about sitting here in church, confessing it, repenting it, and turning from it, and moving on with God, but the person who is stuck in a life of disobedience, that person has no basis to be assured they are born again and they have real, living faith because the evidence God's tells us which happens is a changed heart.

Verse 10 tells us,

¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

That is the prescription God gives to both individuals, whether the person is saved or whether the person is not saved at all. This is a fantastic promise He makes, "Humble yourselves and I will lift you up!" The only way up is down; we humble ourselves before God and He will exalt us.

What do we need to live a holy life? We need more grace and God generously gives it to the humble, so let us humble ourselves before Him today. I love Isaiah 55,

⁶ "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; ⁷ let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

That is God's promise to you.