

Amazing Grace, II

Linda wasn't her real name but we'll call her that this morning. My wife, Sandy, and I lived in an apartment complex in Lanham while I attended Capital Seminary and Linda lived in the apartment upstairs.

Linda had had a rough life. She was very religious, but very confused. Her husband was an adulterer and even though they were separated he would come back into the home and demand physical relations.

Linda had begun to go to a Bible study group where she heard about salvation through Jesus Christ. She was sincere in her religion but very confused. You see, one of the cardinal doctrines of her Bible Study group was that salvation was something that could be lost.

They taught that we were all sinners and that Christ had died for our sins. They taught that forgiveness came through faith in Jesus Christ, but... no one could be sure of their standing with God because if we sinned again that relationship would be broken.

Believe me, I'm understating it when I say that Linda was despondent, dejected, depressed, and feeling hopeless.

We befriended Linda and had several chances to talk to her about God's Word. Somewhere along the way I gave her a book by Dick Seymour called "The Gift of God."

"The Gift of God" gives the Bible's plan of salvation in very straightforward terms.

She thanked us for the book and said she'd take a look at it. The next day there was a knock on our door and there was Linda. I wish I had a before and after photo to show you.

When she left the day before, Linda had despair etched on her face. She took the Bible's description of sin very seriously, so she realised that she sinned every day.

Now, she didn't want to sin. She tried not to sin. In a lot of ways she was living a whole lot more of a moral life than the average person, but she understood that God was holy and that in reality she offended that holy God in some way daily. So for Linda, every day was anguish and distress.

When I opened the door I almost didn't recognize the woman standing there. If a

person could glow, Linda was glowing. She was thrilled. She couldn't wait to tell us what had happened in her life.

Linda had read that book "The Gift of God." She had looked up the Bible verses for herself. She had become absolutely, unquestionably, convinced that Jesus Christ paid the complete price for her sin on the cross.

She was crying. She was laughing. She was ecstatic. Finally her search for peace was over. She said, "This is it. Now I know that I'm secure in God's love."

All of a sudden Linda began to look at life in a different way.

Now that her relationship with her Creator was sure she could begin to deal with her husband, and all of life, God's way. She was finally free.

Unfortunately that freedom was short lived. Later that week Linda went back to her Bible study group and told them what happened. I have to believe they could see the difference in this woman's face. She was someone who was excited. She had gone from night to day.

But this is what they told her. They said that the teaching that a person can be sure of God's forgiveness and eternal life was a lie. Their exact term was "a Baptist lie." They said that's just a licence to sin. They said that she could loose her salvation if she sinned again.

And as Linda came back to tell us all this, she was emotionally back to where she was before. Defeated, discouraged, and depressed. Unfortunately she wouldn't really talk with us after that. She was warned to stay away from us. Eventually we moved and I don't know what ever happened to Linda.

I do know this though: If a person really believes that God judges sin, really understands how pervasive sin is, and has no assurance of forgiveness, they will remain trapped in a prison of despair. And not only that God will never be shown to others through their life.

Today we're in "week two" of a three part series on God's amazing grace. Last week we looked at God's amazing grace in salvation. Today we're going to look at what the Bible says about God's amazing grace and the security it gives.

Go has a great goal for our life. It's to bring us into His family through faith in His Son, and then it's to teach us to live by His truth and share that truth with others.

Early on in my Christian experience I had the same questions Linda did. Once I was forgiven by God could I be condemned again? Once I was born into God's family could I become unborn and lose that new life He'd given me?

I really struggled to find answers to those questions. I studied Bible passages, I read books, and I asked a lot of questions to the people in the church I attended. I was amazed at how little most Christians really knew.

They said they were staking their eternal destiny on the promises of the Bible, but many of them couldn't answer my most basic questions.

I found that there were verses in the Bible that seemed to say a person couldn't "lose their salvation." I liked those verses. But there were some that seemed to imply that salvation was conditional. I might not have liked those verses as much but I still had to reckon with them.

Can we really be sure? Can we have confidence that we belong to the family of God, and rest in that confidence? Does the teaching of eternal security by God's grace lead to more sin, or more godliness?

Last week we saw that grace is the theme of the Bible. Not fairness, but grace. Fairness means getting what we deserve. the Bible says sinners deserve punishment. the Bible says, *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...*

That means that we all fall into the same category. There may be different types of sin. There may be different levels of sinfulness. There may be different quantities of sin, but in the end all of us are sinners.

in fact, look at this... **turn to Jas 2 pg 1073 Read vs 10**

What that means is this, if I break the law I'm a law breaker. I only have to rob one 7-11 to become a robber, and I only have to break one of God's laws to become a law breaker.

The Bible says when we break God's law we earn a wage. Rom 6:23 *the wages of sin is death...*

Now remember something, death is separation. When we die physically the soul is separated from the body. Death is separation.

But the Bible's talking about a death that's far worse than physical death. The wages of sin is spiritual death. That's separation from God for all eternity in hell.

God is just. He must follow through on His promises. He's the lawgiver and the judge rolled into one.

Break the law, suffer the punishment. All have sinned, the wages of sin is death.

If we got what was fair it would be death in hell for eternity. The wages of sin isn't penance, good works, baptism, or giving money. The wages of sin is death.

But as we also saw last week, God is a God of grace.

God placed the punishment for our sins on His sinless Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus died in our place. The holiness and justice of God has been satisfied, now God says: by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things...

God judicially condemns us because of sin and imperfections, and God judicially declares us righteous when we place our faith in Christ.

I. Grace means we're secure in Christ

Remember, grace can be defined as "mercy given when punishment is due." The letters g-r-a-c-e are a reminder that we're given God's Riches At Christ's Expense.

That means something very important; If we couldn't do anything to deserve God's forgiveness. If we could only receive it as a gift. If Jesus Christ is our sin bearer, then we're secure in our relationship with Him.

You know what finally answered Linda's struggle about her relationship with God? Her understanding of grace. You know what clouded that understanding again? Confusion about grace.

The solution to the question: Can a person lose their salvation once they've trusted Christ is to understand grace. If salvation's by grace you can't lose it.

If it's by anything else that we do then it can be lost.

Listen to some passages from the Bible:

Ac 15:11 *"But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."*

Eph 2:5 *even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)...*

Eph 2:8 *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God...*

2Ti 1:9 *who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began...*

See, God is, and always has been, a God of grace. It's an understanding of the grace of God that leads to security in Him.

I. Grace means we're secure in Christ

II. Grace means we have a proper view of Sin

In preparing for today's message I did an internet search for the words "eternal security." I got 2,000,000 hits, so you know this is a hot topic. Obviously I only checked out a small fraction of those sites but what I found was that the majority were arguing against eternal security and, the majority of those, used this argument:

They say that the Biblical Doctrine of eternal security leads to a low view of sin. in other words if I think that I can't lose my salvation then I won't take sin seriously. I want to challenge you with the thought that just the opposite is true.

Saying that we're saved by grace through faith doesn't mean that we think sin isn't serious.

The reason Jesus died on the cross is because sin is so serious it would send us to hell. The reason for the cross is: Eze 18:20 *"The soul who sins shall die. The wages of sin is death."*

Grace doesn't say God *overlooks* sin, it says God *forgives* sin on the basis of the complete payment Christ made on the cross.

Think this through... If salvation is by grace through faith and not of works, then God forgives undeserving sinners who come to Him. If we don't deserve salvation when we receive it and we don't deserve it in eternity because *it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast* just what is it that we're going to do to lose it?

The truth is, if I recognize the Biblical teaching on the seriousness of sin, I couldn't possibly believe my relationship with God could depend in any way on me. If I did, and I believed I was still forgiven, it would show how little I really understood about sin.

Look at a couple of scriptures with me:

Matthew 22 pg 872 Read 35-36

Here's a lawyer, meaning a religious scholar trained in interpreting God's OT law, asking Jesus which of all the 613 commandments in the Mosaic law was the greatest. Now remember this isn't man's law we're talking about here. This is God's holy law.

Here's Jesus' answer: **Read vs 37-40**

Love God with all you've got and love others with as much passion and consistency as you love yourself.

Now I won't ask for a show of hands but think about this. Is there anyone sitting in this room, this morning, who can say, "I perfectly obey those two commands 24/7/365? Does anyone here have the brashness to make a claim like that?

This isn't about excusing sin. This is about being honest and real with the word of God. Every one of us break the two greatest commandments every day of our lives.

How about another one: Romans 7 pg 1004 Read vs 7

Here the Apostle Paul, a dedicated Jewish opponent of Christianity who became a believer, explains how God's law convinced him of his sin.

As a Jew Paul was a strict legalist. He was great at keeping the externals. He didn't steal, kill, commit adultery, or worship other gods. He would have said an evil desire

isn't sin. you can have wrong desires but as long as you don't act on them they're not sin.

Then the commandment, "thou shalt not covet" really sunk in. Coveting is an inward action that has nothing to do with the will.

He says in effect, "I really had no true understanding of my own personal sin until God's law enlightened me. And the commandment that really opened my eyes was the one on coveting."

I met a man once who told me with a straight face that he hadn't sinned in 20 years. I believe that man was a moral guy, just like Paul was before he trusted Christ. It's just that he had a very shallow view of sin.

Sin is internal as well as external. Is anybody in this room going to say that they don't sin in thought?

One more: Jas 4 pg 1074 Read vs 17

Ask most people what they mean by "sin" and they'll name an action. God's commandments are always thought of as negative "thou shalt nots." But, here's the clincher. Not only is a wrong action sin, but the Bible says the lack of a right action is sin too.

God says, ...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...

The Bible commands: be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

Or how about this these: Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

How many of us can say we never fail here?

Grace doesn't excuse sin. Grace sees sin for what it really is. Eternal security doesn't divide sin into mortal and venial. It doesn't say, "Well, nobody's perfect so obviously our little mistakes aren't really sins."

Grace says all sin is deadly. There are no small and large sins when it comes to our eternal relationship with God. God's standard isn't goodness, it's perfection.

I. Grace means we're secure in Christ

II. Grace means we have a proper view of Sin

III. Grace means we're set free to serve our God

Linda couldn't serve God because she was trapped by her own insecurities. If you believe your relationship with God is determined by how good you are, how do you ever know when you're good enough?

In fact, if you're honest with the Bible, and see sin for what it really is, you know how unrighteous you really are. It's a paradox, but in a sense the closer you get to God the more you see how sinful you are.

It's like walking down a long dark hall toward a light at the end. At first you might think you look pretty good. Then as you get into the dim light you notice your shoe is untied, or your shirt tail's hanging out.

You fix those things and keep walking. Now you're nearer to the light and you notice you have cat hair all over you.

The closer you get to the light the more imperfections are revealed.

See how any honest person who thought that they could loose their salvation through disobedience, or lack of obedience, would feel totally undone. That was Linda.

She couldn't serve God because she was crippled with fear, doubt, and guilt.

God wants us to be free to serve Him. **Look at Gal 3 pg 1034**

The Galatians were Christians living in Asia Minor in the 1st century. They were originally Gentiles who came to faith in Christ and began to grow in that faith. Shortly after they trusted Christ a group came along called Judaizers who confused these new Christians.

The Judaizers were guys who tried to wed Judaism with Christianity. They said, to these believers that Christ wasn't enough. They needed faith in Christ but, they also had to keep the Mosaic law which Christ fulfilled.

In other words they tried to mix works and grace. **Read vs 1-3**

The Message paraphrases verse 3 this way: *Are you going to continue this craziness? For only crazy people would think they could complete by their own efforts what was begun by God. If you weren't smart enough or strong enough to begin it, how do you suppose you could perfect it?*

God is the beginning and end of our salvation.

Now flip over to Gal 5 Read vs 1

To believe that my works are part of my eternal relationship with a holy God leads to bondage. The NIV says: *Christ has set us free to live a free life.*

All of us were slaves in some way. In Galatians our former state is portrayed as slavery, Jesus Christ as the liberator, salvation as an act of emancipation, and the Christian life as a life of freedom.

Jesus Christ, through His amazing grace, sets us free from false religion, inadequate religion, guilt, fear, the power of sin, an accusing conscience, the wrath of God, and the tyranny of Satan. Christ has delivered us from all these things.

What happened with our friend Linda was she didn't stand fast.

Here's the tough thing for a lot of people to understand, if we lapse back into the idea that we have to win our acceptance before God by our obedience we wear the yoke of bondage.

Grace means we're set free to serve our God! Not to sin, but to serve God.

Read vs 4

If you think you can lose your forgiveness and your position in God's family by not doing everything that God requires, you've fallen from grace.

To say that my works make me acceptable to God is to say that Christ didn't do it all at the cross. And if Christ didn't do it all at the cross, how could *I* ever possibly do enough?

The guilt of known failures, the accusing conscience, the fear of failures I may not even be aware of, all these things burden me down.

Freedom is being accepted by God on the basis of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Freedom is not having to agonize over where I am positionally with the Lord.

And because I'm now free, and not wrapped up in self-focus, I can use my liberty to serve God and others.

Stand firm in the grace of God. Stand firm in your security in Christ. Stand firm in the liberty that was bought and paid for by the cross.

It's only by knowing that we're set free to serve in God's grace, that we can be free to serve God in the power of His spirit.

In his book *The Gospel Under Siege*, Zane Hodges begins with this imaginary, but all too real scenario:

Last night Jim accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. This morning he is bubbling with a joy he has never experienced before.

On his way to work he meets his friend Bill. Bill has always claimed to be a Christian. He also reads a lot of books on theology. But Jim has never been too interested in theology, until now.

"Bill," Jim begins, "guess what! I got saved last night. I trusted Christ as my Savior. Now I know I am going to heaven!"

"Hmmm," Bill replies, "maybe you should tone it down a little. After all, you don't really know that you're going to heaven." "What do you mean?" Jim enquires. "The Bible says, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved,' and that's what I did." Bill gives Jim a wise and knowing look. It is the kind of look all perceptive theologians know how to give the ignorant and the unlearned.

"But did you really believe? Maybe you just believed with your head and not with your heart." "What do you mean? Jim's feeling a little depressed now. "I mean," Bill continues sagely, "you can't know yet whether you have real saving faith."

"How will I know?"

"By your works. You'll have to wait and see if you live a real Christian life." Jim is dejected. "You mean that if I sin, I'm not a Christian after all? "No, I don't mean that," Bill assures him. "All Christians fail once in a while."

"But how much do they fail? I mean, how bad does it have to get before I find out I'm not saved? "Well, it can't get too bad for too long." "But how bad? For how long?" Jim feels desperate. "I can't tell you exactly. But a true Christian doesn't practice sin. If you find that you're practicing sin, that will show that you didn't have real saving faith to begin with."

"What if I do pretty good for a while and then mess up? "Then, maybe you weren't saved to start with." "Maybe? What do you mean by that? "I mean," Bill's tone is solemn, "you'll probably have to wait until the end of your life before you can be sure you're a true Christian. You have to persevere in good works, or your faith wasn't real." "Do you think I can be sure before I die?" "Maybe. Listen, Jim, I've got to get to work. We'll can talk about this later."

Bill rushes off. Jim is disheartened. All the joy he had experienced since last night has suddenly evaporated. Now he's filled with questions and doubts.

Jim has become a casualty in the siege of the Gospel!

EPILOGUE

When Jim got home from work that night, he got out his Bible and began to read the Gospel of John.

Pretty soon he had read verses like' John 1:12; *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:* and 5:24; *he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life...*

As he read his assurance and joy began to return. "I sure don't know where Bill is coming from," he said to himself, "but I know what these verses are saying. I know I have believed. I know I have everlasting life"

With the return of his joy came a renewed desire to please God, not to prove he was saved, but out of gratitude for God's grace.

What Jim needs now is a church that preaches a clear Gospel and that expounds God's truth faithfully.

For 25 years we've sought to be that kind of church. A church in which we strive for holiness, but we rest in God's grace.

Are you resting there today?