

Five Words of Gospel Hope

Breaking the Bonds of Legalism

By Don Green

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Truth Community Church

4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Well, I'm very grateful to God that he has brought you here this morning. Please turn in your Bibles to the fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians as we begin this morning. We have finished just last Sunday our long series on the Sermon on the Mount and we are now going to move into other matters in our church life as we continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ together, and we're going to move into a series of messages on the matter of legalism and breaking the bonds of legalism, and this is going to take us a few weeks to do and today is kind of a foundational message for that series that really sets the tone for everything else. What we say today, what we see from God's word today, is going to lay a foundation that we will come back to repeatedly for the next several weeks. It's going to undergird everything that we have to say and I think that by the time that we are finished with this, there is going to be a very significant impact from God's word on us individually and upon our congregation.

You know, legalism manifests itself in different ways. If you don't think rightly about it, you would not recognize the common thread that runs through it. Legalism is at the root of a man who is proud and boastful like the Pharisee in Luke 18 who prayed to God and said, "Father, I thank you that I'm not like the man beside me." Legalism is at the heart of the guilty and fearful prodigal son who fears coming back to his father and who says, "I'll come back and I'll just be a slave to you," not recognizing how the father would embrace him in the time to come. Legalism is at the heart of the sullen, the angry and the entitled second son of that father who said, "Look, I've done everything for you and yet you never gave me a fatted calf." These are distinct spiritual sins and bad dispositions and yet they do have a common root as we'll see in the weeks to come. The proud and boastful are manifesting a legalistic spirit. The sullen, the angry, the sense of entitlement comes from a legalistic spirit. Guilt and fear come from a legalistic spirit. Later on, we'll see that those who reject the law of God completely are also operating from a legalistic spirit, as counterintuitive as that may seem.

All of that is ahead for us in the days to come, but the answer, my friend, to all of those problems, to all of those spiritual diseases that manifest, understand that those are all just symptoms of something else. They are symptoms of a mindset that says God will deal with me on the principle of my merit, of my obedience, of my goodness, and he'll respond to me on that basis. All of it, all of it has that common root and I want to tell you that to dig out that root from that great weed requires a lot of work. It requires some deep

digging to dig that out, and yet what we will find is that the answer to it is found in the simplicity of the Gospel of Christ, and even more particularly, the character of the God who engendered the Gospel and saved us by grace through faith. This is really a wonderful thing for us to embark on here. I feel like we're lifting anchor and casting from shores into seas that are going to bring wonderful vistas into our mind and in our attention. Today is the foundation for everything that comes over the next several weeks. I've been working on this for months and so I'm kind of loaded up and ready to bear here, just so you know that. But what we're going to do, we're going to start at 1 Corinthians 15:1 through 4, and today we're going to see what it is that provides the hope that is found in this wonderful passage.

1 Corinthians 15, beginning in verse 1, the Apostle Paul says,

1 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

What does any true preacher do? What does any true church do? What do we endeavor to do at Truth Community Church? We preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and what is the Gospel of Jesus Christ? It is an announcement of good news about God based on an act in history by his Son Jesus Christ. The Gospel tells us that Jesus Christ is God Incarnate, that Jesus Christ lived a perfectly righteous life, and that he offered that life to God as a sacrifice for sinners to atone for their sins; to pay the debt that their sins had incurred; to pay the penalty that their guilt required from the hand of God. The Gospel tells us that Jesus Christ bore in his body the sins of everyone who would ever believe in him so that they could receive forgiveness of sin and his righteousness as a free gift from a loving and gracious God. That's what the Gospel tells us. God, after Christ made that sacrifice at Calvary, raised him on the third day. An emphatic, miraculous declaration that God had accepted the sacrifice that his Son voluntarily offered up for sinners just like you. The price of sin has been paid. The guilt has been borne. The wrath has been absorbed in Christ and now the call goes out to all men everywhere as a gracious appeal, a free offer from God, "Repent and believe in the Gospel and you can receive the gift of eternal life. All of your sins can be freely forgiven at the hands of a holy and just and righteous God. You can enter into the family of God freely and without cost."

Look at Isaiah 55. Isaiah 55 comes to mind as we say these things. Isaiah 55 in verse 1 says,

1 Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost.

That summarizes the free nature of the Gospel invitation to sinners. "Come and find everything that you need in Christ. Come, you don't have to pay for it. Come and receive Christ by faith and in abundance beyond your wildest imagination will be yours because God will bring you into Christ, into union with Christ, and in Christ you will be made complete, in Christ you will receive a gift of righteousness, in Christ all of your sins will be forgiven."

That's the Gospel and what it tells us is this, beloved, the Gospel tells us this, the Gospel tells us that guilty sinners of all kinds, in all places, can be reconciled to God from whom they are presently separated. They can be brought out from under the cloud of God's wrath and into the sunshine of his enduring favor. They can receive eternal life as a gift by receiving Christ by faith. Not by anything that they do. Not by going through a series of rituals. Not by working and preparing themselves so that they can improve their righteousness to an adequate basis where God's grace can kick in. No, God's grace is operative at the level of sin the Scriptures say in Romans 4, he justifies the ungodly. He justifies the ungodly who come to Christ and put their faith in him. Free, immediate, irrevocable, eternal forgiveness of sin is offered in the Gospel to everyone who will believe. The freeness of the offer and the sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ are magnificent and it is in that hope that we rest, it is that hope that we seek to proclaim here over the course of time. What the Gospel tells us is that the justice of God is satisfied in the sacrifice of his Son; that the demands of God's justice, the call for penalty to be exerted upon sinners who have violated God's law, it has been satisfied. Justice has been fulfilled. There is no barrier to reconciliation with God because Jesus Christ paid it all when he died on the cross. So we want to see what the implications of that are today and in the weeks to come.

Beloved, here's the wonderful thing about this. The Gospel of Jesus Christ gives us hope and the Gospel of Jesus Christ does this: it puts on display the nature of God toward his children. What the Gospel of Christ does, if you picture a huge stage like we have with a black curtain blocking off the platform and somehow God is behind that black curtain, separate from sinners who have no access to him, what the Gospel does is it pulls that black curtain, splits it in two and opens up the Gospel and puts the nature of God on display when he works in our hearts and opens our eyes to the wonder of what salvation is and what biblical salvation is.

Here's the thing, beloved, when we're talking about legalism, as we'll explain in weeks to come, what we're really talking about, I want to tell you this, you may not think that you're a legalist, you may not think that you're infected with legalism, but at one degree or another there are strands of legalism in every one of us because we think wrongly about God, we haven't thought rightly about the nature of his character, and the answer to legalism is found not in abandoning the rule of God, it's not found in suddenly saying, "Well, I'm going to live any way that I want," as the antidote to legalism, the answer to legalism is found in understanding the nature, the character, the attributes of God that are put on display in the Gospel. That will answer every legalistic bone in every person's body, for those who will hear.

The Gospel gives us hope because it displays the nature of God toward sinners and for those of us who are Christians, who are rightly called children of God, who are in Christ, that is the most common way for the Bible to speak of believers. The Bible doesn't use the term Christian very often at all. What the Bible says repeatedly, that believers are those who are in Christ. They are in him. They are in Christ Jesus. We are united to him and when we are united to him, we are brought into living contact with the nature of God who is revealed in the Gospel. And when we think rightly about these things, first of all, when we see them, when we understand them, and when we start to think rightly about them, then we're opened up into an entirely different realm of what the nature of spiritual life is, brought into a realm of life and joy and peace and confidence and security that is the answer to the proud and boastful Pharisee; that is the answer to the guilty and fearful prodigal; that is the answer to the sullen second son who has a sense of entitlement about everything in life. The answer to all of it is in the wonderful Gospel of Jesus Christ. The answer to all of that is found in the displayed, the revealed character of God – watch this, watch this – the answer to all of that is found in the character of God that conceived, that planned, that appointed, that executed and applied salvation to our souls.

So here's what we're going to do today: what would prompt a holy God to offer forgiveness to sinners like you and me? Why would he do that when justice called for our punishment? Why would he be gracious? Why would there ever be forgiveness when we are guilty sinners before him? Well, today's message sets the context for what we're going to consider for the next few weeks to come, and here's what we're going to do today. I'm really excited about this. We're going to look at five words of Gospel hope. That's the title for today's message if you want to write that at the top of your notes, "Five Words of Gospel Hope." What these five words of Gospel hope are, are five attributes of God that are displayed in the Gospel. We are going to see what God is like by looking at some crucial, familiar, Gospel texts that tell us what was motivating God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ; what was at work in God, what animates God to save any sinner; what animated God to save you, my brother or my sister in Christ, young person in Christ. What we're going to see is with the veil pulled back, we are going to see the great character of God displayed in what we're about to see. Five words of Gospel hope, five attributes of God that Scripture plainly attributes as being his motivating factors in the Gospel.

So point 1. We'll state it this way. Point 1 is: the Gospel tells us that God is a God of love. God is a God of love. Turn in your Bibles to 1 John 4. Oh, this is so rich. This is so magnificent and it's magnificent because it shows us the multi-splendored magnificence of the glory of God. The Gospel tells us beyond any possible contradiction that God is a God of love. Remember what undergirds this. Remember the prevailing scriptural testimony about the nature of man, that man is dead in trespasses and sins; that man is dominated by the devil; that man is destined to suffer the wrath of God as the just punishment for his sins. There is no spark of life that any sinner can offer to God for God to respond to. Man is dead. There is no spiritual power that any sinner has to offer to God, to move toward God because he is dominated by the devil, Ephesians 1:1, 2, 3. There is nothing good that appeals to God in any sinner because Scripture describes us as unrighteous, every one of us; that there is no one who does good; that there is not even one; that the hearts of men are filled with insanity all the days of their life. Do you see

that if you are in Christ it was not because there was anything good about you that attracted God to you. This is fundamental for us to understand, and as we understand this, we start to unlock the key that looses us from the bonds of legalism. That's what we're going to see in the days to come.

Scripture tells us that God is a God of love, coming from the Greek term agape. 1 John 4:7 tells us this,

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

Now, as we've often said here, you should not think about God's love in sentimental terms. You should not think about it as some kind of an emotional reaction that he has as a doting grandfather might have on his grandchild, or something like that. There is a place for that kind of love but that is not how we should think about the love of God. The love of God means this: it means that he has sacrificially given of himself for the welfare of sinners. He sacrificially gives of himself to others, and you can see that as you continue on in this passage in 1 John 4. Look at verse 9 with me. It says,

9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

What is the love of God? What does the context tell you? God gave. God sent Christ. God graciously gave to those who deserved nothing from him. That's the love of God. And it goes on in verse 10 and says,

10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Do you see it here, beloved? Do you see the prompt of the love of God? It wasn't from you. It was not from you. What prompted the gift of salvation came from the prior preexistent love of God, and in that love motivated from that love, he sent Christ. And as we compare Scripture with Scripture, we see that Christ in perfect harmony with the Father's plan, with the Father's heart, Christ says, John 10:18, "I come and I voluntarily lay My life down. No one has taken it from Me. I give it freely and of My own accord." We see that reflected here in verse 10, look at it again with me. Your eyes must see these words on the page for yourself and see that if you are in Christ and you are secure, it is not from what you did, it is from what God did for you out of this sacrificial love that the Bible describes so often and so well. Look at it again with me, verse 10, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation," that which satisfies the wrath of God, "for our sins." Beloved, when we hear the Gospel, we are seeing the love of God on display. If you are a Christian here today and you are in Christ and you belong to him, understand that you have been on the receiving end of a great sacrificial love from the eternal God of the universe designed to secure the eternal well-being of your sinful soul. That's magnificent, isn't it? You look at that and say,

"That's an otherworldly kind of love." We're used to love that is conditional, you love me, I'll love you back. This is love that is unprompted by any object, anything in the object of the love and affection and kindness of God.

We have to understand that. It's so important, let's reinforce it from another passage of Scripture, Romans 5. This is all building and building and building here. Romans 5, beginning in verse 6. I'll give you a moment to get there.

6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

Do you see it there? Do you see the doctrine of total depravity on display right in that verse? That man has no ability to recommend himself to God, to move himself in God's place? He is helpless. He cannot help himself. You could not help yourself, spiritually speaking, and it was while we were in that helpless condition, at the right time, that Christ died for the ungodly.

7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Beloved, this is so essential. I would stand on the pulpit to emphasize the point if it were not such a breach of protocol, that you must understand and get this now. God showed his love to you in Christ because it was what he wanted to do. It was not because you deserved it, it was because God in his very nature, at the center of his being, is a loving, gracious God who gives of himself to sinners. That is why any of us are saved. It is rooted in the unconditional, the unprompted, the unmerited love of God. That's why Christ went to the cross. That's why God saved you. It's because it was of his design and desire to show goodness to you, to show favor to you even though you didn't deserve it. God is a God of love. His love was a choice that he made directed toward undeserving people who had no claim on him. Generally speaking and individually speaking, I had no claim on God. I had no claim on the great gift of salvation that I enjoy and will enjoy throughout all of eternity. There was nothing in me except the sin that I needed to be saved from. That's true of every man, woman and child.

So this humbles us but as we are humbled, our eyes are lifted up, our eyes are lifted up to the sky, lifted up to glory, and we see that great love has come down in Jesus Christ to save sinners like us. One theologian put it this way. We talk about God as a good God. He said and I quote, "The supreme expression of God's goodness is the amazing grace and inexpressible love that shows kindness by saving sinners who deserve only condemnation, and saving them, moreover, at the tremendous cost of Christ's death on Calvary." You are saved, if you are a Christian, you are saved because God is a loving God and you were saved at the cost of the infinitely worthy life and shed blood of Jesus Christ at Calvary, which he freely gave, which he gladly gave. He wanted to give it that he might carry out the purpose of God and bring you into salvation, to bring you into himself.

Beloved, just think with chronology in mind. We're talking about this 2,000 years later. Christ did this, Christ secured your salvation at the cross long before you were ever born. So it's obvious that we are the beneficiaries of something that we did not prompt in God. We are the beneficiaries of an eternal love that has been set upon his people. What's the key here as we move into this series? The key is this, Christian, speaking to you as a brother or sister in Christ: God's love prompted your salvation, not anything in you. This was an act of love, this was a sacrificial gift at great cost to Christ that was given to you. It came from God's love, not from your merit. Not from your deserving.

Well, let's look at a second word of hope, a second attribute of God that Scripture attributes our salvation to, and we can say this, secondly: he is a God of kindness. He is a God of kindness. He is the God of kindness. There is a gracious goodness to God and by the way, these attributes, they kind of overlap and reinforce each other. It's not that they are separate and distinct and have no overflow into one another, but Scripture uses different words to describe the character of God who provided such a great salvation to such unworthy sinners as us and I want you to see these things because these things are essential.

There is a gracious goodness to God. Look at Romans 2:4. The Apostle Paul, speaking to those who were judgmental trying to correct their thinking, says to them in verse 4, he says,

4 ...do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing [here it is, here's what I want to focus on this morning] not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

The kindness of God leads you to repentance. Kindness comes from the original word in the Greek, *chrestotes*. It's a word that means that God has shown generous favor to us. I love that word, that generous favor to us.

Do you realize, those of you that walk about with meager grudging thoughts about God, do you realize how much that thinking that God is miserly and difficult toward us, that he is difficult to please, that he is eager to quickly punish us for every smallest of transgressions that we might commit, do you realize how unworthy those thoughts are of him? Do you realize that we need to repent of that whole mindset. We need to think in a completely new way, if that's the way that we think about our God, because God, beloved, think about it, here you were a guilty sinner in hostility toward him, deserving eternal judgment, and on your own headed that way in a hurry, and what did God do when he saved you, my Christian brother, my Christian sister? What did he do when he saved you? He graciously, he generously rescued you from all of that. He graciously, kindly, abundantly pardoned you in Christ, and not only pardoned you, he imputed to you the very righteousness of Christ and gave you a perfect legal standing that answers the halls of his justice forever and ever, amen. Is that the product? Look, look, is that what someone who is miserly and unkind and difficult, is that what a difficult person? Is that what someone who is difficult to please does? Answer me. No. No, God has shown

generous favor to us. He has given us kindness that is useful. He has shown us kindness that is helpful. You know, they're just comes a point where basic language just can't bear the weight of the magnificence of the revelation of God, but at a fundamental basic level, my friends, what we can say about the nature of God is this: is that in salvation, he shows great kindness, and that great kindness helps those that he gives it to. It helps them by delivering them from eternal damnation. It helps them by bringing them into union with his great Son. It helps them by bringing them into a pathway that leads them securely and safely into the eternal bliss of heaven where we will one day ultimately experience the great beauty, the great splendor of the perfection of the new heavens and the new earth. That's what God has given to us in Christ when we were undeserving.

So, my friends, I call upon you with me to step back and look at that from a global perspective. Look at the big picture of that and recognize something magnificent: a God who did something like that is a God who is infinitely kind. A God who has shown goodness to us, a God who has helped us. You know, he's so good and he's so kind, let's dial it back and come back into the earthly realm for a moment. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 5. God is so kind, he is so good, he is so helpful, he is so favorable that he causes every day his sun to shine on even wicked people. He is so kind that he allows his rain to fall on lands that despise his name. Just in an earthly sense, he's good to people who will never bow the knee to him. He shows them all kinds of temporal mercy and goodness. Scripture says it all comes from his hand and he generously bestows it upon them even though all he gets is rebellion and rejection in return. That's what he does with sinners. He's kind to them and look at what he's done to us in Christ. Look at all the kindness that he has shown to us, bringing us into this lovely, this magnificent, this wondrous, this perfect salvation. This is kindness beyond compare.

There is no kindness on earth that can begin to be compared to the gracious goodness that God has shown to you in Christ. The best of spouses are nothing like this. The best of children and grandchildren are nothing like this. All our earthly relationships will come to an end. God has shown us a kindness that is eternal, that will never end. He did it in love as a sacrificial gift at the cost of his own blood. He did it in kindness to show a favor to us that we did not deserve, a kindness that is useful, a kindness that helps us. What's the key for us today to have in mind? The key for us in this context is that it was God's kindness that prompted our salvation, not anything in us. His love prompted him in the Gospel of grace. His kindness prompted him in the Gospel of grace to lead us to repentance. It was his kindness. It was his goodness. It was his love. Do you get it?

We're not done yet. We're only 40% of the way there. We're only 2 of 5. Let's go to point 3 and see what Scripture says about the nature of God displayed and revealed in the Gospel. Point 3: we see that he is the God of mercy. The God of mercy, and for this turn over to Ephesians 2, if you would. Ephesians 2. When we say that God is a God of mercy, here's what we're saying, we're saying that while we were sinners, God had compassion on us. God acted to relieve our suffering. God acted to deliver us from our misery and whether we recognized it or not, we were in a miserable condition to be dead in sin, to be dominated by the devil, to be doomed to suffer the wrath of God. God, seeing us in that condition in time, had compassion on us. He acted to relieve our suffering in

magnificent ways that transcend our ability to understand and explain. We can explain them in part, we can explain them truly, we can't exhaust it. We'll spend eternity exploring the outer reaches of the depth of the love and the kindness and the mercy of God, beloved, so understand that what we're describing here doesn't exhaust it. The lips of the one who feebly expounds God's word to you this morning cannot possibly give due honor to the themes of which we see in the written page.

Look at Ephesians 2:4. Actually, let's go back and set the context. I've been alluding to this all along but let's reset the context here. This is us before Christ in verses 1 through 3. This is you before you were in Christ. Beloved, if you're here and you're not a Christian, this is you now. This is the present reality of your existence laid out for you in these next three verses. God's authoritative, inspired, inerrant word says this,

1 ... you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all [every one of us without exception] formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

There it is, beloved, dead in sin, dominated by the devil, doomed to suffer the wrath of God. That was us. That was you. That was me. That is you if you have rejected Christ to this moment. And what did God do? The word for "mercy" is the Greek word "eleos." Verse 4,

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

What does mercy tell us about the God of our salvation? Mercy expresses the compassion of God. He showed kindness to you in your spiritual distress. He rescued you out of trouble and out of condemnation. Do you see it, beloved? What great mercy. There you are broken along the road to Jericho, broken bones, broken spirit, broken heart, chained in sin, chained in condemnation, chained in guilt, and what did God do? God, as it were, came along, speaking metaphorically, speaking figuratively here, God came along your road to Jericho and saw you there broken and unable to help yourself and he stopped, as it were, he reached down and by the magnificent miraculous healing power of his hands, acted upon you to rescue you, to redeem you, to deliver you from that condition. When you had no claim on him, when your lips were mute and unable to help, unable to call even, God stopped and out of the great mercy, the great compassion of his character, healed your every disease, healed your every broken bone, removed sin and guilt from you and brought you into Christ.

Beloved, what can we say to that except that was one great act of mercy? I love how the passage in Ephesians 2 isn't content just to say that God being merciful did this, watch the adjectives, beloved, watch the explosion of things from God's word. It's not that God being merciful did this, it was that God being rich in mercy, abounding, overflowing mercy did this, with great love with which he loved us. Listen. Listen and listen carefully: those adjectives are really really important for you to understand. They go to the heart of what we're trying to communicate here today. God did not do this reluctantly. God did not save to you, "Ah, do I want to do this? Oh, flip a coin. Okay, heads, I'll save them." It wasn't like that. God did this because he's merciful but more because he is rich in mercy, because he abounds in mercy. God did this because he loved you, yes, but understand he loved you with a great love. This is who God is. This is the God that is revealed in the Gospel. This is what Jesus Christ is like: great love, great kindness, rich mercy, and it was in that great mercy that God rescued you from your captivity to Satan and to your own sin. He abundantly did it. He gladly did it. It was the eternal plan before the beginning of time for this to happen. Christ was crucified before the foundation of the world, Acts 2 says.

So what's the key for us here today? The key for you is to recognize that it was God's mercy that prompted your salvation, not anything in you. God's love was unprompted. God's love was unprompted. God's mercy to us was unprompted by anything good in us. It came from within his own undivided essence. It came as an outflowing of his own attributes, his own eternal perfections, his own perfect excellency. The Gospel shows us what God is like and in the satisfaction of his justice in Christ, it shows him undeniably, irrefutably to be a God of great love, great kindness, great mercy. You cannot explain salvation on any other terms and be true to Scripture.

Fourthly, salvation shows him to be the God of grace. The God of grace, "grace" being from the Greek word "charis," meaning that God has shown undeserved favor to us. Look at Ephesians 2:5. Your Bible is open right there, "even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." Verse 7, notice the superlatives once more, "that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." So what comes next in the sequence of Paul's argument there, it's profoundly emphatic in the Greek text,

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves,

Do you see it, beloved? Not of yourselves. Not from anything in you. Not from anything that you did. You must banish that thought from your mind that God has been kind to you because somehow you deserved it. That's not true. That is the first and preeminent lie from the devil. It is,

8 by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

This was a gift. A gift undeserved. A gift unearned. A gift given because the Giver, who is God himself, a gift from the Giver who is Christ Jesus himself, a gift expressing his love, his kindness, his mercy, his grace. Beloved, do you see that? As Scripture describes salvation and what motivated it and what didn't, you didn't, God did, what you see exploding upon our minds and our understanding is a kaleidoscope of the greatest, richest hues of color of God's attributes that could ever be displayed. This is who God is. This is who God is to his people: a God of love, a God of kindness, a God of mercy, a God of grace. This is how he has dealt with us and he hasn't done it in restrained fashion. You've seen the words, you've seen the adjectives. This is in richness, in abundance, surpassing. This is how God has dealt with us.

Beloved, listen to me closely. Listen to me closely: the key to your spiritual growth is bound up in what we're talking about from God's word here today. The key to your comfort in sorrow is bound up in what we're talking about today. The key to your deliverance from guilt is bound up in what we're talking about today. The thing that humbles your pride and makes you an appropriate humble Christian is bound up in what we're talking about here today. The key that takes you away from being that angry sense of entitlement, "I haven't gotten what I deserve," is bound up in what we're talking about here today. Beloved, by grace God freely bestowed undeserved blessing on you in Christ. He accepted you in Christ even though you were unworthy, not because you were worthy. Let me say that again: God received you at the initial moment of your salvation not because you deserved it, not because you were worthy, not because you had somehow met a minimum level of requirement that prompted his hand. Banish the thought. Out on such blasphemy. That's not true. God came to you in Christ, God came to you in the Gospel despite your unworthiness. God came to you because he is a God of love, a God of grace, a God of mercy, a God of kindness. That's why God came to you. It was all from the great love and goodness of his own undivided character that anyone gets saved, that you got saved.

Beloved, hear me and hear me closely: God accepted you in Christ though you were unworthy. Grace is not earned. By definition, it is undeserved favor and what this tells us about God when we remember that millions through the ages have been on the receiving end of this, that there will be myriads of myriads of believers surrounding the throne praising the great name of Christ throughout all generations and throughout all of eternity, what this tells us is that God gladly gives that undeserved favor and that if you are in Christ, you have received something of incalculable infinite worth that you didn't deserve.

Let me ask you a question when this is plainly before us in our minds through what we've seen in God's word so far, wouldn't it be the most repulsive of thoughts, when you realize the great vast measures of goodness and help and blessing that have been given to you, wouldn't it be the most ungrateful, the most filthy kind of response to say, "Yeah, I earned that. He needed to give that to me. That was mine from the start. Did you see how I gave the bill to the homeless guy on the street? Do you see how many times I've been in church? Did you see me say in my prayers? Did you see me counting the rosary?" Please. When we view ourselves rightly, we realize that at our best, we still fall short, and our

best is, you know, filthy rags, and you step back from that and say, "No," and we hang our heads in a holy humility and say, "No, it wasn't about me. It could never have been about me." This was about a great God of grace, love, mercy, kindness, generously, richly bestowing on me things that will benefit me throughout all of eternity in which I absolutely did not deserve. The key: God's grace prompted salvation, not anything in us.

Fifthly and finally here today. What does the Gospels tell us? The Gospel tells us that he is a God of patience. He's a God of patience. Beloved, I don't know if you ever step back and think on these things and reflect on them in the way that we're about to describe, but whether you were saved as a young person or whether you were saved as older, later in life, the truth of the matter is that before you were saved, God endured a lot of your sin against him.

2 Peter 3. I'll just read it for the sake of time. 2 Peter 3:8 says,

8 ... do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. 9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

He was patient toward you. God deferred the judgment that this wicked world deserves in part so that he could gather in you, and he defers his judgment now so that others would still have time to come. The word for "patience" here is the Greek word "makrothymeo." I like just the way that sounds. Makrothymeo, there's just a manliness about that. This idea of patience has – listen to me – has the idea of being forbearing. It means that God was willing to wait. He showed self-restraint in the face of provocation. God – watch it, listen; oh, this is all so important – God does not hastily retaliate against sinners. He does not promptly punish them, if he did we'd all be vaporized long before now. We are all here breathing, living today, saved or unsaved, we are all here because God has shown forbearance. He has been patient with us in our iniquity, in our transgressions, in our guilt. He was patient. This is undeniable. God restrained the judgment that you deserved so that you could be shown this kind of rich grace, mercy, love, kindness. And the key: God's patience is what allows for salvation, not anything in us.

Now, beloved, do you see how these five words give us hope, God's love, his grace, his patience, his mercy, his kindness? Listen to me carefully. We need to pull this together and have it start to shape the whole way that we think about God and the world around us and our own multiplied seemingly infinite and unending shortcomings. God is a God of love toward sinners, of kindness, of mercy, of grace, of patience. Beloved, let this deep balm enter deeply into your souls. God did not grudgingly save you. He did not reluctantly save you. It pleased him to do so and it pleased him because he's a God of love and kindness and mercy and grace and patience. It pleased him to put those attributes on display in your life and let you be the eternal beneficiary of who he is. It pleased him. He gladly richly did it. God never accepted you because you were worthy. God never accepted you because you were somehow obedient enough. That was never

the case. It was never the premise. It was never the cornerstone. It was never the foundation of why you came to Christ in the first place. Forget it. Don't go back there if you've ever thought that thought. Just leave it behind. Let it be part of your growth in repentance and in the grace and knowledge of Christ that you leave that thought behind, never to revisit it again.

Christ receives sinners because of his grace and mercy. His character does not change and do you know what that means with these five attributes, these five words of Gospel hope and the fact that his character does not change? Do you know what that means for you today as a Christian? It means this: it means that God does not grudgingly keep you, God does not grudgingly love you now. The God who was patient with you before you came to Christ in all of your dishonesty, in all of your lust, in all of your anger, and he patiently endured that so that you could come to Christ, he graciously, patiently keeps you now.

Romans 8. I'll just read it for the sake of time. Romans 8:31. This is Paul's point. He says,

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?

And listen to what he says. Oh, listen carefully, beloved. I'm almost done. It's been a long time, I know. I know but I don't really care. I'm just getting started. Verse 32. Listen,

32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

If God dealt with you so graciously while you were a sinner, now that Christ has delivered himself, now that you have been brought into Christ, do you think that somehow his attitude toward you has changed, his disposition is different and now he is no longer loving but he is hasty to punish and quick to chastise, grudgingly bearing with you? "Oh, she fell again. Oh, I am fed up with that child of mine!" Is that how he treated you when you were in sin? No. Did his character change when you became a Christian? No. He deals with us in a consistent manner consistent with his immutable attributes and his attributes revealed in the Gospel are those five words of hope. The implications of this, my friends, for Christian living, for your sanctification, are utterly incalculable. There is no way that we can exhaust it but we'll spend a few weeks going forward to try to work out some of the implications of it.

Listen to me now, listen to me now and we'll work all of this out more in the days to come. Many Christians, probably many of you if not most of you, live with guilt that comes from their struggles with sin and failure, and prior teaching in other places has laid upon you a legalistic notion that you have to work yourself back into God's favor. You try harder. You start making up rules, "I'm going to do this, this and this." And in that, you project your own sense of guilt and legalism. You project it on God as if that's how God is thinking. It's not. They try to get back into God's good graces by trying harder but the more they try, the more their rules condemn them even further. The rules, beloved,

will never show you mercy. The rules will never show you love and kindness and grace and undeserved blessing and benefit. God will. Christ showed us mercy in salvation and he shows us mercy as Christians not because we deserve it but because – here's the point – but because that's who he is. He is gracious and humble in heart and he invites all who labor and are heavy laden to come to him and he will give them rest. That's who he is.

Beloved, before you were a Christian, your performance did not prompt his love and now as a Christian, your performance does not keep his love. It is a matter of eternal outworking of his eternal attributes that he was pleased to show to you. Your rest as a Christian is not found in being sorry enough. Your rest is not found in asking forgiveness hard enough. Your rest as a Christian is not found in striving harder to keep the commandments. Your hope, your rest is found in the cross of Christ. Your rest, your hope is found in that eternal display of the love, kindness, mercy, grace and patience of God. As he was to you 2,000 years ago, as he was to you at your conversion, so he is now in your very imperfect sanctification, your very imperfect Christian growth.

I invite you, beloved, by faith to look outside of yourself to Christ. Day by day and with each passing moment, look to this Christ and look to the one who has displayed his marvelous attributes in your salvation. Go back and read these passages again and again. You won't find exceptions, you won't find qualifications on the outpouring of the divine mercy upon those that he has brought in Christ. As you do that, you'll find strength to meet your sins and trials here. And let me say to those of you that are not in Christ, you have not sinned your way out of being able to receive this grace. All of the confusion and guilt of your sin, all of the chaos of your mind, God cuts through all of it like a mighty gilded sword cutting through a knot that cannot be untied. He cuts through all of that with the glory of Christ and says, "Come to me and I will give you rest." If you're not a Christian, I invite you to this God. He will receive you when you put your faith in Christ.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Our Father, we thank you for the wonderful display of your wonderful character as it is found in Christ. We honor you, we praise you, we thank you, we pray that you would help us develop a mind that is geared not toward legalism but is geared toward an understanding of who you are and what you have done for us in our Lord Jesus Christ. Bless each one as they go, Father. Let the roots that have been dried up and shriveled in self-effort and guilt find the waters of grace that would refresh and bring forth fruit. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.

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