

Not Enough Grace

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Date: 13 August 2023

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[0 : 0 0] Well, this morning I'd like us to turn back together to Romans chapter 5 and I'm going to read again verses 20 and 21. Now, the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

These verses and the passage that we read, these chapters 5, 6, 7 of Romans are speaking about two of the most important concepts in the Christian faith.

They're speaking about sin and grace. Sin refers to all the ways in which we have rebelled against God, all the ways that we've pushed God away, that we've failed to do the things that God asks of us, that we've done the things that God warns us against.

And it speaks of all the consequences of that rebellion, the fact that the world is broken, the fact that we are broken, the fact that what God intended for His creation has not come to pass.

Grace refers to the pouring out of love and kindness and favour and blessing as a free gift that we don't deserve, that can never be earned but which God lovingly gives to us.

[1 : 3 0] And at the heart of the Gospel, you've got this tension between sin and grace, these two things that are in conflict. And I want us to think about that a little bit more today.

As we do so, we need to start with a couple of preliminary points. The first thing I want to say as we begin is that it's important we recognize that sin can affect us in our daily lives in different ways.

And two of the ways in which sin can particularly affect us is that it can be the wind in our sails and it can be the storm in our face. In other words, sin assists us and it can drive us along a way of thinking, a way of speaking and a way of behaving that goes against God's word and that's unhelpful to ourselves and to others.

So sin can assist us. It can be the wind in our sails driving us on to do stuff that we shouldn't do. But at the same time, sin can attack us where it drives us down, it highlights our faults and our failings and our weaknesses, it depresses us, it discourages us and it hurts us and it's like a storm in our face.

And so I want us to have that in mind as we go through things today. Sin can affect us in these two different ways. It can be the wind in our sails, it can be the storm in our face.

[2 : 5 7] The second preliminary point that we want to highlight and that we want to remember throughout everything this morning is that in the Gospel, grace overcomes sin. That's what's been emphasised in these verses, that's what's been emphasised in these chapters.

That's the reality that runs right through the Gospel. Grace overcomes sin. Now, with all of that in mind, I want you to keep remembering that.

I now want us to think about a crucial point that affects every single one of us, whether we are committed believers, whether we're not quite yet believers, whether we're not really sure where we stand in terms of the Gospel.

It's a massive issue for all of us, it's a massive issue that affects our society, it affects our communities, our families, our churches and it affects our own hearts as well.

It's a big problem. It's a big problem of not enough grace. That's our title for today and that's what we're going to think about.

[4 : 0 1] I want us to think about this in relation to different areas of our lives. In particular, I'm going to highlight six different areas where sin affects us.

Three of them are examples of sin being the wind in our sails and three of them are examples of sin being the storm in our face. As we work through this, we're going to draw a wee diagram to help us. Start off with dividing it left and right. On the one side, you've got sin assisting us and on the other side, you've got sin attacking us.

Three on one side, three on the other, six areas altogether, each representing an aspect of our lives where we are affected by sin.

On the sin assisting us side, we are frequently too critical. We see people around us where they say or do things that we don't like, things that we don't agree with, things that we don't approve of and we respond by judging them.

[5 : 02] We're frequently too critical. Second one is when we're too casual, we see sin in our own lives and we're the opposite of critical.

We're not accepting of sin, whether it's gossip or greed or pride or envy or unforgiveness. We're quite casual about these things.

Sometimes when it comes to sin, we can almost see it as inevitable. We think, well, I'm a sinner. It's going to happen just the way it is. There's no need to get too worked up over it. Then thirdly, on the sin assisting side, we can frequently be too negative.

We see things that we don't like. We see challenges for us as a church, as individuals. We see the nation turning away from the gospel and we respond with doom and gloom.

And it's all just very negative. In each of these ways, sin blows its wind into our sails and it pushes us along nicely. On the other side of the diagram, you've got sin attacking us, where we're often left feeling too unworthy.

[6 : 09] Many of you feel like that. Many people in our congregation are in this segment. We look at ourselves. We feel as though we don't know enough. We feel as though we are not good enough. We feel as though we won't be able to keep going.

We're just blocked by feelings of being unworthy. Similar to that, we feel too weak. So that can clip us as Christians.

Maybe we want to serve. Maybe we want to get involved with things in church. Maybe we want to invite people to our homes, but we feel too weak and too nervous.

But it can affect us also if we're not yet Christians or if we're not quite sure where we stand. And we think about the next step that we want to take in our lives. Whatever your next step is, you think, I can't do it.

I'm not strong enough. We're scared of taking that step. Scared that we're going to make mistakes. We're scared about what people will say. We're scared about change.

[7 : 09] We're scared of letting people down. We feel too weak. And then last of all, probably the most powerful one of all is when we're too hurt.

And sometimes things have happened to us that have left us badly, badly bruised. Something has been done to us, something has been said about us or said to us.

That might be in our family. It might be at work. It might even be in church. We've been hurt because all too often people are horrible.

And sometimes people say and do things that should never be said or done and that can leave us badly hurt. And it stops us in our tracks.

We can't get past that bruise. We can't forget. We can't move on. We can't heal. And often when we're hurt, we draw a line and we think that's it.

[8 : 11] I've drawn a line. I'm not going past it. We often think that by drawing that line, that we're exercising our authority. When the truth is, by drawing that line, we're just imprisoning ourselves in a mindset of hurt and frustration.

In all of these ones, on that side, sin attacks us. It comes as a storm in our face stopping us in our tracks. Now, looking at that diagram, a couple of things to say.

First of all is that we all fall into all of these categories. So it's not just that you are just one or two of these. I mean, that is probably the case that you are more prone to one or the other.

Maybe you can look at it and think just of, well, which one am I most prone to? And there probably is one or two that you're most prone to. But we also need to recognize that we actually all struggle with all of them.

And often they can feed into each other. So sometimes it's not that we're either critical or we feel unworthy. Often it's both. And sometimes our feelings of unworthiness can fuel our criticisms because we see others and we think they're better than us, we feel inferior and we respond by criticizing them.

[9 : 26] Sometimes our feeling of weakness can leave us thinking, well, I'm just going to give up and we just become, we just stop caring, we become casual about sin. Sometimes our bruises can

leave us cynical and we look at everything with negativity.

So we need to recognize, I think, that we're all affected by this. I'm affected by all of them myself. The second key thing, and this is the thing I want us to focus on, is the fact that although all of these are very different, they are all caused by the same thing.

They're all caused by the same thing. They're all caused by not enough grace.

And that's what I want us to think about today, because the point that Paul is driving home to us in Romans 5, and the point that we must recognize is the fact that at the heart of the Gospel is the fact that grace abounds more than sin.

You see that in verses 20 and 21, you see that in verse 15 as well. Paul is highlighting the abundance of grace available in the Gospel.

[10:45] And that's emphasizing to us that in all these issues that we face day to day and week to week, they're all caused by the same thing. They're all solved by the same thing.

They're solved by a flood of grace pouring into our lives. So I want to just go through them one by one and we'll see how far we get.

So number one, we're often too critical. This can happen in a thousand ways, can't it? You go to Tesco and you see someone parked badly and you think, what a complete idiot.

A colleague at work mucks up a task and you roll your eyes in frustration. A neighbor gets a nicer car and you're like, look how extravagant they are.

An older generation struggles with things changing. You think, oh, they're so backward. A younger generation wants everything to change and you think, oh, they're so reckless.

[11:43] A different church grows more than us and we think, oh, I'm not sure about them. A different denomination does things differently from us and we see them as rivals.

It's so easy. I'm sure you could think of dozens and dozens of other ways whereby we're critical. It affects us in our families, in our workplace, in our churches. We do it all the time.

And the reason we do it is because we don't have enough grace. We're not willing to accept things that inconvenience us.

We're not prepared to focus on the positives in people who are different from us. And when people make mistakes, we expect them to pay.

And all of that thinking is the opposite of grace. That critical mindset zooms right in on all the faults that you can see in others.

[12:44] And that dominates what you can see. I'm looking at my shirt. I've got an ink stain on it. Maybe you didn't notice it now, but now you can see it and that's all you can see when you look at my shirt. You just focus in on what's wrong.

And it's so easy for us to do that for the faults that we see in other people's lives, for that to just dominate the way that we think about them.

Grace refuses to do that. And we see that when we just think for a moment about how much God could criticize us, when we think about how much God could hold against us, when we think of every reason that we have given him to walk away from us.

But he doesn't do that. And the amazing reality of the gospel is that he actually does the opposite. And that's captured so powerfully in Romans 5, 7 to 8. He did say, scarcely will someone die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would dare to die.

[13:54] But God shows his love for us that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. And that verse is telling us that God saw Pastor Sin.

He saw us as more than just our mistakes. He did not define us by our failures.

And that's what makes the gospel so amazing. And it's what makes a grace-shaped life so beautiful. And this is where we need to see that a critical mindset.

There's always two things that's true of a critical mindset. One is that we never know the bigger story. So the person who's parked badly in town, we just think they're idiots.

We don't know the whole story. Maybe they had to park badly because somebody else had parked badly beside them and they were just forced over by the other idiots, I shouldn't say that. But maybe they were in a rush, maybe they were just not that confident driving, maybe they were just having a bad day and they got it wrong.

[15:04] And that critical mindset refuses to see the bigger story or to think about it. And the other thing that's true of a critical mindset is that we can never see past the inconvenience caused to us.

We can never see past the fact that this is just annoying for us and that shapes everything. That we think. And it's both of these things that result in not enough grace because grace always thinks about the bigger story.

That's the amazing reality of what God has done for us that He thinks about our bigger story. And grace is always ready to be inconvenienced.

And nothing. Nothing is more of an inconvenience than for God the Son to come alongside us and to die on the cross instead of us.

Grace says it's worth it. So when we're tempted to be critical, think about grace. Secondly, we can often be too casual.

[16:10] Now here you might be thinking, well, hang on, isn't that more like, isn't the problem here more too much grace? And that's a mindset that's plagued the church over the years. It's a mindset that's known as antinomianism.

Nomianism is all to do with the law. Antinomianism. I can't spell and talk at the same time. It just means anti-law. And antinomianism is basically the mindset that says, I'm forgiven.

I can do what I like. Grace is abundant. I can do what I like. I'm going to heaven. I can do what I like. It doesn't matter. And that's a mindset that's plagued the church.

And you might think, well, that's caused by too much grace. But the truth is, it's actually caused by not enough grace. And it was the problem facing the Romans.

And you can see that in verses 1 to 7 that Neil read from chapter 6, the idea, you know, will we just continue in sin so that grace may abound? Will we just sin more and more so that God's grace can be seen more and more?

[17:11] It was a challenge facing them. It's a challenge facing the church today. And it's faced every generation in between. And it arises from a very poor, very inaccurate understanding of grace.

It's the idea that grace is just this kind of free ticket to do what you like and everything will be fine in the end. The idea that we can just sin because grace abounds.

And the reason that's a defective understanding of grace is because it's failing to recognize just how much God wants to give us. It's a failure to recognize how big and beautiful grace is because God doesn't just want to give you a free pass for life that's got no eternal consequences, as though it's just an invitation to a mindless party.

God wants to give you far more than that. God wants to give you newness of life. He wants to give you fullness of life.

He wants you to be everything that you are created to be. And we'll only understand that if we see that sin will ultimately always leave us empty.

[18:29] And you know that that's true. I know that that's true. There's so many times where I thought, I'm just going to do this. And you do it and then you regret it. And that's exactly what sin does.

Sooner or later, sin will always leave us empty. And if we're too casual about sin, if we're not bothered by it, we need more grace from God to see what sin really is, to see that sin is poison, that sin wants to destroy you.

It wants to destroy your families, destroy your career, destroy your relationship. It wants to wreck everything. But many of you probably aren't thinking, well, you know, I just want to keep sinning and do it.

I doubt that many people feel like that in here. But instead, you might be thinking, I can't help it. I wish I didn't sin, but I am a sinner. And it's often easy for us to think like that, to think, well, I'm a sinner.

I sin every day in thought word. Indeed, there's nothing that I can do about it. It's very understandable to think like that. It's very easy to think like that, and sometimes it can even come across as pious to think like that, to think, you know, that's quite a holy way to think.

[19:35] I'm a sinner. And I recognize that. But the truth is, that is another example of not enough grace. Because the problem with that mindset that thinks, you know, I'm a sinner, it's inevitable that I'm going to sin, is that that mindset thinks that we are still slaves to sin.

If we get up every day and think, well, I've got no chance of avoiding sin, that's just to give sin a place of control over us that it no longer has.

Because Paul makes it absolutely clear that we are no longer slaves to sin. We are no longer enslaved to sin.

By God's grace, by God's grace, as we follow Jesus. We really can put sin to death. We really can walk in newness of life.

Now that's a battle every day, and it's never something that we're going to do perfectly, but it is what we should strive for. And the more that happens, the more we put sin to death and follow Jesus, the more living with us and working with us and being part of a church with us is going to be a joy because we are becoming more and more the people that God wants us to be.

[21 : 01] When you are tempted to be casual, think about grace. Thirdly, we're often too negative. It's very easy to be negative.

I think we're especially good at this. In Scotland, it's a national trait, I think, whether it's the weather or the state of the government or the state of the economy, the NHS, schools, ferries, media, these are all sources of frustration.

And the Gospel doesn't call us to pretend that these things aren't a problem. In fact, the opposite is true. The Gospel calls us to always stand up against injustice, poverty, inequality.

But at the same time, that does not mean that we should be miserable or grumpy or negative.

And this is definitely true in regard to the work of the Gospel. We face many, many challenges as a church today. We've got a massive, massive task on our hands, reaching the community around us, reaching the next generation with the good news of Jesus.

[22 : 10] It's so easy for us to see so many challenges ahead of us. It's so easy to think of ways in which the past was better. There was more people here. It was easier to get people to church and there were more people following Jesus.

And there's so much that needs to be done in order to reach the next generation. But if we think about all of that and respond with negativity, then there's not enough grace in our mindsets.

And that's because first and foremost, the Gospel, the good news of God's grace through His Son Jesus Christ is just utterly brilliant news.

It is such good news. Paul highlights that in verses 1 to 2, chapter 5, when he speaks about the fact that through faith in Jesus, we have peace, we have access to Him, we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

So many extraordinary privileges given to us by God through Jesus. And too much negativity is a failure to recognize the magnitude of everything that God has done for us.

[23 : 26] And that's easily done. It's so, so easily done. But we need to constantly remind ourselves of just how much God has done for us through Jesus. We need to recognize how much God has done, but negativity is probably even more so a failure to recognize how much God can still do.

And that's what's so important for us to recognize. We look at our congregation and we say, will our church grow? Not enough grace says no.

Will new people come? Not enough grace says no. Will people come to faith? Not enough grace says no.

Will one day there be a united congregation in Carlyway? Not enough grace says no. Will the next generation grow up to be buzzing for the gospel?

Not enough grace says no. Grace says yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

[24 : 30] Grace says that all of these things are possible and grace proves that all these things are possible because God has done it a thousand times over in the history of His church up until this point.

It's so, so easy to be negative, but when you're tempted to be negative, please think about grace. Number four, I'm going to skip ahead actually.

You can feel crippled by the fact that we feel too unworthy. And that can happen to us in so, so many different ways. And for all of us, that can stop us in our next step in following Jesus, whether that's our first step or whether we're looking to serve Him more in the weeks and months ahead.

But it's yet another example of not enough grace. And that's because behind that word unworthiness, behind that idea is the mindset that things that we have to earn our worth before God.

And it's so easy to think like that, that we have to earn our worth before God. But that's never, ever how the gospel works.

[25 : 45] Paul makes it so clear in this chapter that the gospel is a free gift given to us in his love. And we can so often feel that our failings, our inadequacies, they're disqualifying us from coming to Jesus, they're disqualifying us from serving Jesus, they're disqualifying us from being loved by Jesus.

And so we look at ourselves and we feel like our failures are too powerful. But it's so, so important that we recognize that God's, that in the battle between our sin and God's grace, grace is always bigger, it's always stronger, it's always more powerful.

So important that you remember that Jesus is more stubborn than you. And in terms of saving you, you will give up long, long, long before he will ever give up.

And that's the reality that lies at the heart of grace. In fact, grace presumes our unworthiness. It presumes the fact that we're not good enough.

It presumes the fact that we need God to do everything for us. I want to ask you a few questions.

What would you say to me if you said, if I said to you, I'm only going to go to a restaurant for dinner when I'm full.

[27 : 03] I'm only going to go to school once I've learned everything. I'm only going to go to the doctor if I'm feeling completely well. I'm only going to the garage if my car is working perfectly.

If I said that all to you, you would say, the Leukeloch, are you wise? And so when you say to me, I can't follow Jesus, I can't profess faith, I can't come to the Lord's table because I'm not worthy enough.

I don't know enough. I'm not good enough. You're just missing the point completely.

When you're struggling with feelings of unworthiness, think about grace. Time is blasting on. Let's be very quick.

Sometimes we feel too weak. So often we're overwhelmed by that. And yet there's such a crucial thing that Paul says in verse 6.

[28 : 08] In this verse he speaks about the human condition, the fact that we are ungodly. He speaks about the atonement that the fact that Christ died for the ungodly. He speaks about redemptive history, the fact that all of this was done at the right time, culminating God's great plan of salvation.

And all that massive, incredible theology happened while we were still weak. It all happened while we were still weak.

The whole gospel, the whole of redemption presumes our weakness. In other words, God never ever expects us to be strong on our own. That's why he says, my grace is sufficient for you.

My power is made perfect in weakness. If you're crippled by feelings of weakness, please think about grace.

Last one. Sometimes sin attacks us by highlighting the fact that we've been hurt.

[29 : 10] This is probably the most powerful one of all. For all of us we can be stopped in our strax by the fact that we've been hurt. And spiritual injuries are just the same as physical injuries.

If you're running and you pull a muscle, it stops you in your tracks. Spiritually exactly the same happens. When your heart gets bruised, it stops you in your tracks. And we see this all the time.

I know people who won't even try church because they've been hurt. People who've stopped coming to church because they've been hurt.

People who don't want to follow Jesus because they've been hurt by a follower of Jesus. People who are Christians but who are reluctant to let anybody get close to them because they've been hurt.

And people who are Christians but who most of the time are sad all because they've been hurt. And these bruises are very, very real and they're very, very painful.

[30 : 15] But the reason that these bruises stay as bruises is because of not enough grace. And the key point that we have to recognize is that grace heals spiritual bruises.

And that works in two ways. First of all, in order to heal, when we've been hurt, in order for us to heal, we need to receive God's grace and you.

We need to receive His comfort, His encouragement, His love. And that can come through reading the Bible ourselves. That can come through listening to sermons. That can also come through God's family, our brothers and sisters in church.

At the same time though, in order to heal, we don't just need to receive God's grace. We also need to show God's grace.

In other words, we need to be ready to forgive. Now, it's so important to say that that doesn't mean glossing over hurts. It doesn't mean pretending that things didn't happen that have happened. Grace never, ever means pretending that wrongs aren't wrongs.

[31 : 19] In fact, grace is grounded on the fact that wrongs are wrongs. It's the whole idea of grace is that it's something that's not deserved and not earned. But showing grace to the person who hurt you doesn't mean pretending that they didn't hurt you.

It means that you're not going to allow that bruise to imprison you. It means that you're not going to just view that person through the lens of your pain.

It means recognizing that ultimately there's a bigger story for them and for you and only God can sort it all out. It means recognizing that we can actually move on.

We can leave things with God. Relationships can be restored. Things can be healed. And the crucial thing to remember is this.

If you have been hurt, not enough grace, in other words, refusing to show grace, that does not get them back.

[32 : 20] It keeps you injured. When grace doesn't heal them, it heals you.

And so when your bruises are sore, think about grace. All of this is showing us that it's so, so easy for our mindset to be shaped by an attitude of not enough grace.

And it's so easy for our lives to be spoiled by a mindset of not enough grace. Whatever stage we're at in our journey of faith, sin can feel so strong and so powerful, whether it's the wind in our sails or whether it's the storm in our face.

And the amazing reality that these chapters highlight and that the Gospel teaches us is that grace abounds more than sin.

And grace replaces that storm in our face with sunshine because grace meets us at every point of need.

[33 : 30] And grace blows us in a far better direction. It makes us an amazing blessing to others. As followers of Jesus, we never ever wanted to be the case that our lives are characterised by not enough grace.

But that leaves us all with a final question. How do I find grace? Well, the key thing you need to recognise is that grace is not rare.

It's not scarce. It's not hidden. And Paul emphasises to us that it is abounding.

And so how do you measure the availability of grace? How do you measure how much grace is available for you and for me going into this new week?

Well, to do that, you need to count up how much sin you can see. Count up how much sin you can see in the world around you.

[34 : 37] Count up how much sin you can see in the things that you experience. Count up how much sin you can see in your own heart.

And as you do that, you're going to count a lot. That's the starting point for measuring grace, because however much sin you can count, the amount of grace available is more.

Because we're sooner bound, grace abounds all the more. Amen.