

ROMANS

BUT
NOW

...

GRACE



But Now...Grace

The Gospel That Turns Guilt Into Freedom

Introduction: When the Story Changes

Every human being carries a deeper problem than most are willing to admit.

It is not merely a lack of discipline, a lack of education, a lack of opportunity, or a lack of religious effort. The deepest problem of the human heart is separation from God. Humanity was created for union with Him, but sin fractured that union.

For many people, the natural response to this separation is performance. They try to become better. They try to do enough good. They compare themselves with people who seem worse and assume that their morality must be enough to make them acceptable before God.

But Scripture reveals a different reality.

The problem is not that people need minor improvement. The problem is that every person stands guilty before a holy God. No amount of comparison can erase sin. No amount of religious effort can remove guilt. No amount of moral achievement can create righteousness before God.

That is the weight of the bad news.

But the beauty of the gospel is found in two words that change everything: but now.

But now God has revealed a righteousness that does not come through human achievement.

But now grace has entered the story.

But now Jesus Christ has done what humanity could never do.

But now the guilty can be justified, the enslaved can be redeemed, the separated can be brought near, and the condemned can be made new.

This is the message of grace.

This is the power of the gospel.

Chapter 1: The World Stands Guilty Before God

The first step toward understanding grace is understanding guilt.

This is uncomfortable because modern culture often avoids the language of sin. People prefer softer words. They speak of mistakes, struggles, flaws, weaknesses, wounds, and imperfections. While all of those words may describe parts of the human condition, they do not fully explain the spiritual reality.

Sin is not merely bad behavior.

Sin is a break in relationship with God.

Sin is missing the mark of God's holiness. It means that humanity has failed to live in perfect alignment with the purpose, character, and will of God. Every thought, word, desire, and action that falls short of His glory reveals the same truth: something is deeply wrong within the human heart.

This guilt is not limited to openly corrupt people.

It is easy to look at the world and see evil. It is easy to identify violence, dishonesty, sexual immorality, greed, arrogance, and injustice. It is easy to look at society and say, "The world is broken."

But the deeper truth is that the brokenness is not only outside the church, outside the family, outside the home, or outside the individual. The brokenness reaches every human heart.

There is no one righteous by nature.

There is no one who can stand before God and claim moral perfection.

There is no one who has loved God completely, obeyed Him perfectly, and honored Him fully in every moment.

That means guilt is universal.

The religious person and the irreligious person both need grace. The person with public sin and the person with private sin both

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need mercy. The person who feels deeply ashamed and the person who feels morally superior both need salvation.

This is why comparison is so dangerous.

People often feel good about themselves because they compare their lives with someone worse. They say, “At least I am not like that person.” But God does not measure righteousness by comparing one sinner to another. He measures righteousness by His own holiness.

And before the holiness of God, every human being falls short.

The world stands guilty before God.

The church stands in need of grace before God.

Every heart needs rescue.

Until that truth is understood, grace will seem unnecessary. But once guilt is seen clearly, the gospel becomes breathtakingly beautiful.

Chapter 2: The Problem With Trying to Be Good Enough

One of the most common spiritual assumptions is that good people go to heaven.

This belief sounds reasonable to the human mind. If a person tries hard, treats others kindly, avoids major evil, and lives with some moral responsibility, then surely God should accept that person.

But this assumption collapses under the weight of God’s holiness.

The question is not whether someone is better than another person. The question is whether someone is righteous before God. The standard is not human comparison. The standard is divine perfection.

This is why trying to earn salvation through goodness is impossible.

Good works cannot erase sin.

Religious habits cannot remove guilt.

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Moral effort cannot produce perfect righteousness.

Even obedience to religious law cannot save the soul if the heart remains separated from God.

The law reveals the standard, but it does not give sinners the power to meet that standard perfectly. It exposes guilt. It shows what righteousness looks like. It reveals the seriousness of sin. But it cannot become a ladder that humanity climbs into heaven.

This is where many people misunderstand religion.

They assume Christianity is mainly about becoming a better person so that God will finally approve of them. They believe the goal is to try harder, behave better, clean up their lives, and prove themselves worthy.

But the gospel does not begin with human worthiness.

The gospel begins with human helplessness and divine mercy.

A person cannot become acceptable to God by pretending the sickness is small. The sickness must be diagnosed truthfully. The heart must come to the place where it stops defending itself, stops comparing itself, and stops trying to earn what only grace can give.

Humanity does not need spiritual advice only.

Humanity needs redemption.

Humanity does not need minor correction only.

Humanity needs justification.

Humanity does not need a religious image only.

Humanity needs a Savior.

The gospel confronts pride before it comforts the soul. It removes the illusion that anyone can save himself. It silences boasting. It brings every person to the same place: guilty, helpless, and in need of grace.

Only then does the good news become truly good.

Chapter 3: But Now

The turning point of the gospel is not found in human effort.

It is found in God's intervention.

After the reality of sin has been made clear, after the guilt of humanity has been exposed, after every excuse has been removed, the story changes with the words: but now.

These words carry the weight of divine mercy.

Humanity was guilty, but now God has acted.

Humanity was separated, but now righteousness has been revealed.

Humanity could not reach God through the law, but now God has made a way through faith in Jesus Christ.

This is the great reversal of the gospel.

God does not ignore sin. He does not pretend evil does not matter. He does not lower His standard of holiness. He does not simply sweep guilt aside as if justice were irrelevant.

Instead, God provides a way for justice and mercy to meet.

The righteousness that humanity could not produce is revealed by God Himself. This righteousness is not earned through religious performance. It is not achieved through moral superiority. It is not reserved for one ethnic group, social class, or religious background.

It is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

This is why the gospel is not merely advice.

It is announcement.

It announces that God has done what sinners could not do for themselves.

It announces that righteousness is available apart from human works.

It announces that faith, not boasting, is the doorway into grace.

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The words “but now” mean the guilty are not left without hope.

They mean the sinner does not have to remain condemned.

They mean the person who has failed, wandered, hidden, performed, pretended, or rebelled can be made right with God.

Not because of personal achievement.

Not because of religious reputation.

Not because of moral comparison.

But because of Jesus Christ.

Grace changes the story.

Chapter 4: Understanding Sin

To understand salvation, sin must be understood clearly.

Sin is often reduced to a list of bad actions. But sin is deeper than behavior. It is the condition of the heart that has turned from God. It is the failure to live in union with Him.

The original idea behind sin carries the image of missing the mark.

Like an arrow that fails to hit the center of the target, sin means falling short of the purpose for which humanity was created. The target is not basic decency. The target is not being better than someone else. The target is perfect union with God.

And every person has missed that mark.

Sin damages relationship with God. It creates separation. It reveals that something is out of alignment between the Creator and the created.

This is why sin cannot be solved merely by self-improvement.

A person may improve habits and still remain separated from God.

A person may become more disciplined and still remain spiritually dead.

A person may appear successful, respectable, and moral, yet still lack righteousness before God.

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Sin requires more than reform.

It requires rescue.

The seriousness of sin is not measured only by the action itself, but by the One against whom it is committed. Sin is ultimately against God, and because God is holy, sin carries real guilt.

This is why the gospel must never be reduced to a motivational message.

Jesus did not come merely to inspire people.

He came to save sinners.

He came to restore what sin destroyed.

He came to make union with God possible again.

Without an honest view of sin, grace becomes sentimental. But with a biblical view of sin, grace becomes astonishing.

Chapter 5: Understanding Atonement

If sin creates guilt before God, atonement addresses that guilt.

Atonement means that sin must be dealt with. It means that reconciliation with God requires a payment, a covering, a sacrifice. God is loving, but He is also holy and just. He cannot simply ignore sin without denying His own character.

This is where many people misunderstand grace.

Grace does not mean God decided sin no longer matters.

Grace means God Himself provided the sacrifice that justice required.

Throughout history, people have understood that guilt before the divine requires some form of appeasement. Many cultures created sacrifices and rituals in an attempt to satisfy the anger of their gods. But the gospel reveals something far greater and far more beautiful.

God did not demand that humanity climb its way up to Him through sacrifice.

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God provided the sacrifice Himself.

Jesus Christ became the atoning sacrifice for sin.

He was not merely a teacher.

He was not merely an example.

He was not merely a moral reformer.

He was the Lamb of God who took upon Himself the judgment sinners deserved.

At the cross, sin was not ignored. It was judged.

At the cross, justice was not abandoned. It was satisfied.

At the cross, mercy was not cheap. It was purchased at the highest cost.

The blood of Jesus is the answer to human guilt.

Through Him, the wrath deserved by sinners is passed over because the sacrifice has already been given. The cross shows both the seriousness of sin and the greatness of God's love.

Atonement means sinners do not have to carry their guilt forever.

Jesus carried it.

Chapter 6: Understanding Justification

Justification is a legal word.

It means to be declared right before God.

This is not the same as pretending sin never happened. It is not God ignoring the truth. It is not a sinner convincing God to look the other way.

Justification means that because of Jesus Christ, the believer is counted righteous before God.

The guilt is removed.

The record is changed.

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The sinner is declared righteous, not because of personal perfection, but because of faith in Christ.

A helpful way to understand justification is this: it is as if the believer had never sinned. Not because the sin was imaginary, but because Jesus fully dealt with it.

This is one of the most powerful truths in the Christian faith.

The believer does not stand before God covered in personal achievement.

The believer stands before God covered in Christ.

That means the foundation of salvation is not unstable. It does not rise and fall with emotional performance. It does not depend on having a perfect week, a perfect record, or a perfect religious routine.

The foundation is Jesus.

This destroys both pride and despair.

It destroys pride because no one can boast in personal righteousness.

It destroys despair because no failure is stronger than the grace of God in Christ.

Justification gives freedom.

The believer no longer has to live under the crushing weight of trying to prove worthiness to God. Good works still matter, but they are no longer an attempt to earn acceptance. They become the fruit of having already been accepted by grace.

The justified life is not performance for love.

It is obedience from love.

Chapter 7: Understanding Redemption

Redemption is the language of freedom.

It refers to being bought back from slavery.

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Sin does not merely make people guilty. It enslaves them. It binds the heart. It distorts desires. It promises freedom while producing bondage. People may believe they are in control, but sin becomes a master that demands more and gives less.

Redemption means a price has been paid to set the captive free.

In the gospel, that price was paid by Jesus Christ.

He gave His life to redeem sinners from the bondage of sin and death. Salvation is not only forgiveness from guilt. It is deliverance from slavery.

The redeemed person belongs to God.

This truth changes identity.

The believer is no longer defined by past sin, shame, failure, addiction, rebellion, religious pride, or spiritual confusion. The believer has been bought with a price and brought into a new life.

Redemption also changes direction.

Freedom in Christ is not freedom to return to the old master. It is freedom to live under the gracious lordship of God. The redeemed life is a life surrendered to Him, not because surrender earns salvation, but because salvation awakens surrender.

This is why faith is more than mental agreement.

Faith trusts Jesus enough to yield control.

Faith receives His work on the cross as sufficient.

Faith turns from self-reliance and rests in grace.

Redemption means the past no longer has the final word.

Christ does.

Chapter 8: Salvation Through Faith

The righteousness of God is received through faith in Jesus Christ.

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Faith is not merely believing that God exists. It is not merely agreeing with religious facts. It is trusting God enough to rest the full weight of life, guilt, hope, and eternity on Jesus.

Faith looks away from self and looks to Christ.

It stops asking, "Have enough good works been done?"

It begins trusting, "Jesus has done enough."

Faith does not boast because faith does not earn. Faith receives.

This is why salvation is free by grace.

If salvation could be earned, it would not be grace. If righteousness could be achieved through works, then the cross would not be necessary. If human goodness were enough, then Jesus would not have needed to die as an atoning sacrifice.

But salvation cannot be earned.

It must be received.

Faith receives what grace provides.

This also means salvation is available to all who believe. The gospel is not limited by background, ethnicity, religious history, moral failure, social status, or personal weakness. The same way of salvation is offered to the religious and the irreligious, the Jew and the Gentile, the moral person and the openly broken sinner.

All have sinned.

All need grace.

All who believe are justified through Jesus Christ.

This is the simplicity and power of the gospel.

Not works.

Not religious pride.

Not moral comparison.

Not self-salvation.

Faith in Christ.

Chapter 9: No Room for Boasting

Grace leaves no room for boasting.

If salvation comes through faith and not works, then no one can stand before God and claim credit. No one can say, “God accepted me because I was better.” No one can say, “I earned my place.” No one can say, “My morality saved me.”

The gospel humbles everyone.

It brings the religious person down from pride.

It lifts the ashamed person up from despair.

It places every believer on the same ground: grace.

This is deeply offensive to human pride because people want to contribute something to their salvation. They want to believe their good behavior, religious history, sacrifices, or discipline made them more deserving than others.

But grace does not work that way.

Grace is not a wage.

Grace is a gift.

This does not mean obedience is unimportant. It means obedience is not the root of salvation. It is the fruit of salvation.

The believer does not obey to become loved.

The believer obeys because he has been loved.

The believer does not serve to earn forgiveness.

The believer serves because forgiveness has already been given.

The believer does not pursue holiness to purchase acceptance.

The believer pursues holiness because acceptance has already been secured in Christ.

This changes the motivation of the Christian life.

Fear is replaced by gratitude.

Performance is replaced by faith.

Boasting is replaced by worship.

The life of obedience becomes a response to mercy, not an attempt to manipulate God.

Chapter 10: From Condemnation to Freedom

The gospel does not minimize guilt.

It removes it through Jesus.

This is why the message of grace is not shallow encouragement. It is not a vague statement that everything will be fine. It is the announcement that the deepest problem of the human soul has been answered at the cross.

The sinner who trusts in Christ is no longer condemned.

The guilty are justified.

The enslaved are redeemed.

The separated are reconciled.

The ashamed are covered by grace.

The spiritually dead are given new life.

This freedom is not based on feelings. Feelings change. Performance changes. Circumstances change. But the finished work of Christ does not change.

The Christian life begins and continues by faith.

Even after salvation, believers can fall back into a performance mindset. They may begin by trusting grace but later start living as if God's love depends on their ability to act perfectly. They may become more focused on outward behavior than inward communion with God.

But the gospel calls believers back to daily faith.

Not faith in personal discipline.

Not faith in spiritual appearance.

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Not faith in religious routine.

Faith in Christ.

The same grace that saves also sustains.

The same mercy that justifies also transforms.

The same Savior who redeems also leads His people into freedom.

The Christian life is not an endless attempt to earn God's love.

It is a daily walk in the love already given through Jesus.

Conclusion: The Question That Matters Most

The most important question is not whether someone considers himself a good person.

The most important question is: What is being trusted before God?

If the answer is morality, religious effort, personal goodness, or comparison with others, the foundation is not strong enough. No one can stand righteous before God on the basis of human achievement.

But if the answer is Jesus Christ, then there is hope.

He is the atoning sacrifice for sin.

He is the source of justification.

He is the Redeemer who paid the price for freedom.

He is the righteousness given to all who believe.

The gospel begins with the honest truth that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But it does not end there.

It moves into the glorious announcement of grace:

But now God has made a way.

But now righteousness is available through faith.

But now sinners can be justified freely by grace.

But now the condemned can be saved.

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But now the broken can be restored.

But now the guilty can stand forgiven before God.

The story changes because Jesus changes everything.

And the only fitting response is faith.

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