

The Great Leveller

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Date: 31 October 2010

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[0 : 00] Well, it would be helpful if you turn with me to Romans chapter 3, the end of it, and chapter 4 that we read earlier, page 941 in our church Bibles.

And Paul is concerned here to talk about faith, which is the great leveler of all Christians. Let me begin with a question this morning, a practical question, because although Paul's argument, he has seen, is very dense and theological, his purpose is supremely practical for the church.

What will cause us as a congregation to be distracted from our real mission as a church? It will cause us to be inward-looking and self-focused instead of outward-looking and gospel-focused, mission-focused.

Well, one major cause of that in all churches will be disunity. Nothing so saps the mission of the church than disunity and fracture within a Christian fellowship.

And what causes disunity? Well, nearly always, it is pride. Pride that leads to the interpersonal tensions and resentments that can so easily wreck a church from within, and therefore massively reduce its witness and its impact without.

[1 : 36] And that pride can rather paradoxically manifest itself in two almost opposite ways. Ways that seem to be different, but at root, in fact, are exactly the same.

The first way is rather obvious. It's the pride that seems and feels superior to other people because of perhaps what you perceive you have as your own spiritual pedigree or performance.

Whatever it is, whatever it is, something that you have, something that you've done, perhaps some particular gifts or abilities that are yours or some great knowledge or perhaps just a rather long and distinguished history within the church.

You're rather conscious of it. And so you quite resent it when some newcomer or perhaps somebody whose theological system is a bit suspect or whose moral self-control is a bit lacking in your view, when somebody like that seems to be given a bit too much attention in the church. Or perhaps they're given a role in the church that really ought to be reserved for people like you, for a real insider, not for relative outsiders or newcomers like them.

[2 : 50] Because, if truth be told, you've got quite a lot on your Christian CV and they don't seem to have very much at all. And so you harbour, rather, a justified resentment to you about Johnny come lately, Johnny new Christian, when he's given something like that to do.

That's the first form of pride. The second form of pride seems almost to be exactly the opposite. It's like a kind of reverse pride. It's the pride of nursing a feeling of inferiority because you lack the kind of pedigree that others in the church seem to have or the particular performance that others seem to exhibit.

Perhaps you haven't had a strong Christian background. Perhaps you aren't well versed in the Bible as some people are. Perhaps you can't understand all the intense theological discussion that some people might have.

Perhaps you don't have the tidy, domestic family background in life that some others in the church do have. And so you also harbour a bit of a festering resentment, a bit of a feeling of being an outsider, not quite belonging in this church.

And you get rather irked by some of those insider types who seem to be tutting a bit when perhaps you don't always know the sound answers to the theological questions. When perhaps you haven't read all the sound books that they've read or whatever it is.

[4 : 14] Or when they say something rather patronising that it seems to you and you're finding yourself whispering under your breath, well at least I'm not a pompous old like you are. Simmering resentments and rivalries and grudges, low assessments of others and high assessments of ourselves.

All these things are the fruit of pride or a sense of injured pride in our hearts. And the fact is that a church where these things are harbored won't ever be united in anything.

Far less in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Well what is the remedy that can bring unity to the church and in the task that demands that unity, our mission to the world as partners in the gospel? Well the answer and the only answer is a full and deep understanding of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ which alone saves us.

All of us. Whether we have a pedigree or whether we don't. Whatever our performance might be, all of us, says Paul in chapter 3 verse 24 of Romans, all of us, says Paul in chapter 3 of Romans, in his church.

[6 : 04] And what that must mean then for any church and for our church, just as for the church in Rome, is what Paul says in verse 27. All boasting, all pride in anything that we might have or be or know or do, all such pride is excluded.

Totally and utterly there is simply no place for that pride at all. And that's the first and foremost implication of the biblical doctrine of justification by grace alone, received by faith alone, says Paul. And that's why I'm going on and on about it in this letter, he says. Because grasping this truth and its implications is the only thing that will sort out problems in the church of Jesus Christ.

It's the only thing that will enable you to be the people that you are called to be. A missionary church. United by God's humbling grace.

And therefore real partners in gospel mission to the world. So do you see how practical and how down to earth Paul's focus is in writing all this theology?

[7 : 15] We know from chapter 1 of Romans and chapter 15 that his great passion is the ongoing and expanding work of mission to the world. And he wants the church in Rome to be partners with him, to be involved in it.

And he wants to enliven them in their own mission to the world. But the most practical thing that Paul can do to promote that mission is to make them understand fully the gospel of justification by grace through faith alone.

The most practical thing that Paul can do to make that church a missionary church is preach the gospel to them. Sometimes you get asked to go to speak at university Christian unions and so on. Nearly always what's asked for in the letter is we want a very practical talk about mission or whatever it is. Well Paul says here is a very practical talk about mission.

Understand the heart of the gospel and what God has really done for you in all its glory. And how he has done it in a way that humbles everyone and removes all possible grounds for pride.

[8 : 27] Grasp that. Really get that. Or you will never be a united church. You'll never be a missionary church.

So he says to the Jews, Do you Jewish insiders in the church and room think you're something special? Well just look at the cross of Jesus. Why did the Son of God then have to die for your sin, for your lack of God's glory, to put you right with him if you're special?

That's a very sobering and humbling message for a Jewish Christian believer, isn't it? To realize that to become a true Jew, changed in heart, circumcised in heart as well as in flesh, he could do absolutely nothing.

But God himself must shed his own blood to free him from the only thing that his precious Jewish law could do, which was condemn him as a sinner before God.

And through the law, says Paul, comes the knowledge of sin. But likewise for any Gentile, feeling rather inferior in Rome and rather resentful of these pompous Jews, Yes, only receiving the gift of God's grace through the death of the Jewish Messiah, had they too been brought near to God and had their sins forgiven.

[9 : 50] And so for both Jews and Gentiles, both insiders and outsiders in that church, Paul drives home the pastoral implications here. From verse 27 of chapter 3 right to the end of chapter 4.

The pastoral implications of the gospel of justification by faith. Now we get to look just at the first part of that today, where Paul focuses on this issue of pride, and how the biblical gospel is, and always has been, notice, the great leveler of human beings.

The biblical gospel of salvation, by God's sovereign grace alone, received by the empty hands of faith alone, absolutely levels everybody.

There can be no superiority ever, nothing superior in our status with God, regardless of our performance, or our pedigree, or whatever privileges we might have had.

That's his message. And there can never be, says Paul, because the biblical gospel always has been about faith from first to last.

[11:01] As it is written, remember chapter 1, verse 17, the law itself, the scriptures that you Jews prize so highly, says, the righteous will live by faith.

Now Paul is speaking here at the end of chapter 3 to everybody in the church at Rome, but he does especially still have the Jewish believers in his focus. Because they are the ones who are most tempted to religious pride on account of their pedigree, on account of the privileges that they've had.

They were Bible people and had been all their lives. Just as I think many of us in this congregation have been Bible people all their lives, brought up in the faith.

The Jews had the oracles of God, he said in chapter 3, verse 2, and they were proud of it. They had circumcision and the law and they boasted in it. Although Paul reminds them that they broke constantly the law that they so prided themselves in, but they had no excuse, says Paul.

In fact, they were the more culpable for failing to grasp what their own scriptures really taught about the way of salvation. It told them plainly that they were counted unrighteous because of their sins.

[12:17] And yet it also witnessed very clearly to them as chapter 3, verse 22 says, that the way of salvation and the only way of salvation was through the righteousness of God, through Jesus Christ, for all who believe.

But now, despite all their privilege, all their pedigree, it's plain, says Paul, that of all people they have nothing to boast about.

All your pride, says Paul, in verse 27, is excluded by your own law, by your own scriptures. Why? Because your own scriptures never taught anything about salvation by works of the law, but by faith.

Look at verse 27. Your law that you so love, your scriptures, your Old Testament faith, is not a law of works, it's a law of faith. To look at your Old Testament scriptures any other way, says Paul, is totally to misunderstand them.

It's to pervert them. Instead of leading you to salvation, it will lead you absolutely in the opposite direction, away from God's saving righteousness. That's a very, very important point.

[13:33] Make sure you grasp this. Plenty of Christians today misunderstand the Old Testament in just the way that the Jews that Paul is speaking to misunderstood it. There are two ways, says Paul, to approach the scriptures.

One is a right way and one is a wrong way. Paul never ever in this letter to the Romans denigrates the Jewish law, the Old Testament.

Quite the reverse. He tells us in chapter 7, the law is holy, it's righteous, it's good. Indeed it was given, he says, to lead the Jewish people to salvation, to righteousness.

But in chapter 10, as we'll come to it, in chapter 10, verse 32, it tells us, or chapter 9, verse 32, it tells us that for most of them, it did not lead them to that righteousness.

Why not? Because, says Paul, they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works.

[14:35] But it never was based on works. Paul is saying, it was always, as he says here in verse 27, a law of faith. Now that was a real challenge to the Christian Jew, to the Bible insider in the Church of Rome.

It was deeply humbling because what it means is, for most of his life, he has totally misunderstood his own Bible. And Paul's having to take him back, right to Sunday school, level 1, to show him all over again how to read his Old Testament properly.

And he must do that, verse 31, notice, to show that this gospel of grace alone from God, received by faith alone, isn't new, and doesn't contradict the Old Testament.

Do we overthrow the law by this faith? On the contrary. We establish the law, he says. We show that this is what the whole Old Testament story has been about right from the very beginning.

Now, it's a challenge to the Jew to stomach that. But of course, it's also a challenge to the Gentile, to the outsider in this church because he must realize that he can't disregard the Jewish Bible that he might think is irrelevant and unnecessary for him as a Gentile Christian.

[15:52] Salvation is by faith alone, apart from the law. Why do I need any of that Old Testament stuff? It's junked. No, says Paul. You also need the whole Bible. To understand the whole biblical gospel of Christ.

God's word about Abraham was not for Abraham's sake alone. He says that in chapter 4, verse 24, but for ours also. All of us, Jews and Gentiles.

So, all Christians, says Paul, need to understand the saving work of Jesus as it's taught in the whole Bible. And all the implications that that has for the church, whatever your background. Whether you think you know it very well, but you don't, like the Jews. That could be so for somebody who thinks they've known the Bible all their life. Or whether you don't know it very well at all, and you're tempted to think, well, it doesn't really matter, I don't really need to know it. No, says Paul. There's no such thing as just a New Testament Christian. There are only biblical Christians. Because the gospel is the same from Genesis to Romans to Revelation.

[17:03] The whole Old Testament, Paul says here, is a book about faith. It's a law of faith. And we don't overthrow it by this message about faith in Jesus Christ.

Absolutely the opposite. We establish it. We uphold the law, he says. And that's because, if you look at verse 28, he says, we hold, we reckon, that is, that the Old Testament teaches just what we teach.

First, verse 28, that justification is by faith apart from the works of the law. And secondly, in verses 29 and 30, that God justifies not only Jews by faith, but also Gentiles by the same faith.

That's what we hold, says Paul, that the Old Testament teaches all the way through. And notice how he goes to the very heart, of the Old Testament belief of the Jewish people to prove his point here.

God is one, he says, verse 30. That is, the very heart of the Jews' confession of faith, the heart of the Shema, the great prayer in Deuteronomy chapter 6. It's the heart of the law of Moses.

[18:14] The Lord, the Lord our God is one. The God of Israel was not just a tribal God of Israel. He's the God of the whole earth.

He's the only God. He's the God of all. He's the creator. Yes, Israel was God's special chosen people, but why? Not to domesticate God, not to possess God as though he belonged only to them, as though the rest of the world didn't matter a hoot to God.

Absolutely the reverse. God chose Israel and God gave Israel his law through Moses in order that Israel would be a light to all the nations in order that through Israel God's salvation, his promise to Abraham to bring saving grace to the whole world so that that would be fulfilled.

And the God who is impartial in judgment will also be impartial in salvation, says Paul. He'll save Jews and Gentiles by the same faith, verse 30.

That's what the whole Old Testament bears witness, to faith. That's what the gospel of Christ fulfills and establishes. Salvation is and only ever has been by faith and only by faith and by faith for all.

[19:39] Now notice, by the way, that when Paul speaks about faith all through these verses and there are some 30 references to faith all through this chapter, what he means is through Jesus Christ.

So look at verse 32 of chapter 3. Begins the whole section. Righteousness comes through Jesus Christ to all who believe, to all who have faith.

Then look at chapter 5, verse 1, that rounds off this whole section. Therefore, says Paul, since we are justified, since we are made righteous by faith through our Lord Jesus Christ.

See, by faith from first to last means by Christ from first to last and by Christ alone. That's what the whole Old Testament is about, he says.

That's his claim. In chapter 4, verses 1 to 12, he's simply expanding these two statements of verse 28 and verse 29 and 30.

[20:41] Again, going right to the very heart of the Old Testament witness, going to Father Abraham himself. Let's just grasp in the two points that Paul is making.

First of all, in verses 1 to 8 of chapter 4, he takes up the issue of verse 28, the claim that the Old Testament teaches justifying faith apart from works of the law.

Here's his point. The whole Bible, says Paul, teaches that salvation is not by religious performance for any, but it's only by faith for all.

That is, that God's saving righteousness comes not even in the tiniest part, as a wage that we can expect or deserve, but as a gift that we receive totally undeservedly by sheer grace.

That's what he's saying in these verses. So, look at verse 1. Take Abraham, says Paul. We want to go right back to the beginning of God's story and right to the top, to the great one who is the father of us all according to the flesh, the Jewish patriarch, the friend of God himself.

[21 : 53] What do we find then? The Bible tells us, doesn't it, that Abraham obeyed God, that he kept his laws, he kept his statutes, he kept his commands. Surely then Abraham must have something to boast about.

Surely he must be counted right with God, and a friend with God, at least to some degree, because of what he was and did. Absolutely not, says Paul at the end of verse 2.

Really, he should begin a new sentence there. But not before God, he says. However it might seem to you, God says, Abraham has got nothing whatsoever to boast about.

How so? Well, verse 3, what does God say? What does the scripture say? It says, Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.

It's better to read all the way through here, not as righteousness, but for righteousness. That's a more literal translation. I'll come back to that. But it's a direct quote there from Genesis chapter 15 and verse 6.

[23 : 05] Abraham does not deserve to be counted righteous by God as a worker, deserves his wages, verse 4. No, verse 5, he did not work, as if to contribute anything at all to his salvation.

What did he do? He trusted God, get this, look carefully, verse 5, he trusted the God who justifies the ungodly. And that's why Abraham was counted righteous.

Abraham was not a deserving case according to God, according to the scriptures. Abraham was an ungodly man. He was a wicked man. That's the truth about Abraham. Now, we looked, didn't we, at Abraham's story in Genesis some time ago, and there's plenty of evidence even there, isn't there, after Abraham became God's friend of his sins and failures before God.

But remember what he was before. He was a pagan. He was a moon worshipper. He came from the heart of paganism, from Ur of the Chaldees. He was an ungodly man.

He contributed nothing to his salvation except to throw himself on the promise of God and trust him who justifies wicked pagan, ungodly people.

[24 : 27] His salvation came, says Paul, and says the Old Testament as God's free, undeserved gift of grace. And Abraham merely put out empty hands with faith and received that gift of God's grace.

He was justified by faith alone, not by works. Now, don't misunderstand, you could misunderstand this. It wasn't faith within Abraham that God somehow counted as righteousness.

That's why I don't like that translation. As though God said, well, well done, you aren't righteous, Abraham, but you are faithful, so that's okay. No. Faith is simply the empty hands of trust that are held out to receive a righteousness that God gives as a sheer gift.

That's clear from verse 6. David speaks of the blessedness of the one, notice, to whom God counts righteousness apart from works.

Faith isn't the righteousness, faith receives the righteousness from outside, from God. It's the gift of God's grace. What is that righteousness?

[25 : 45] Well, Paul has already spoken about that in chapter 3 verses 21 to 26. Look at verse 22 again. It's the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, which is for all who believe.

Or verse 24, it's the righteousness that comes, says Paul, by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. In other words, it's none other than the righteousness of Christ that comes to us in Christ.

I'm emphasizing that because as some of you know, there are many who want to deny that today. But again, if you look ahead to chapter 5, we'll come to this later, verse 18, it's abundantly clear.

Paul says, one act of righteousness by Christ leads to justification, leads to righteousness and life for all men. By one man's obedience, Christ's obedience, his act of righteousness, many, he says, will be made righteous.

And that is the righteousness that God counts to those who trust in him, to trust him to justify the ungodly.

[27 : 05] Christ's righteousness is counted to Abraham as a gift, not at all as something he deserved or even contributed to in any way. And so it was for all of the faithful in the Old Testament is verses 6 to 8, make very plain.

Here the authority is none other than David, the great king. And yet he too, the Bible tells us, was an ungodly man and he knew it. In the psalm he's speaking about everybody, but it's clearly autobiographical, isn't it?

David confesses he's a lawless person, he's a sinner, and yet he knows the blessedness of having his sins covered. How? Because, as verse 6 says, the Lord has not counted his sin against him, but has counted him righteous, apart from works, apart from anything that he has done, despite his sinful heart.

And that's the great exchange, friends, that we saw at the very heart of the gospel. In verses 24 and 25 of chapter 3, the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, his blood for ours, our sins counted to him, and his righteousness, now says Paul, for our unrighteousness, his obedience counted to us. But Paul's point here is to say that is what the whole Old Testament scriptures witness to. The Jewish scriptures, the law, they're all about the blessing that's received by faith of the person whose sin is not counted against him, but is counted righteous through trust in the promise of God.

[28 : 57] And our gospel simply establishes that, says Paul. It shows how God can be the just judge and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. So the whole Bible, he says, teaches salvation is not at all by religious performance for any, but it's only by faith for all.

Well, all right, Paul, we'll admit that. It does seem to make sense then of how God could forgive sin and accept sinners. It was all about faith. It was all about trust in God's promise to deal with sin through the Messiah.

But surely, somebody says, surely what the Jewish law promised, it promised to us Israelites. You said that yourself a minute ago in chapter 3 verse 19.

What the law says, it says to those under the law. And that's us. Abraham's descendants after the flesh. So surely if these pagans, these Gentiles, who have come to faith, are to come fully into this blessedness, that you're talking about here, surely, well, they too need to come into the family of Abraham.

Surely they too need to become Christian Jews like us. No, no, no, says Paul in verses 9 to 12.

Now he takes up the question of chapter 3 verse 29, is God the God of Jews only?

[30 : 27] To ram whom his second point, which is this. No, your whole Bible teaches salvation is not by religious pedigree for just some, but it's for all those of faith and faith alone.

God's saving righteousness, in other words, is not just for insiders, but for outsiders too, in just the same way for everybody. So verse 9, is this blessing, this being pronounced, blessed and forgiven and right in God's sight, is it only for the circumcised, for the Jews, or also for the uncircumcised, the outsiders?

Again, says Paul, the answer is in your own Bible. When did God pronounce Abraham righteous? Verse 10. Oh, well, we all know that.

We learned that in first year in Sunday school in Genesis chapter 15 verse 6. Everybody knows that, Paul. Well, when then was Abraham circumcised? Oh, we know that too, Genesis chapter 17. We all know that. Some 14 years later. Why the gap then? Well, says Paul in verse 11, for a very good reason.

[31 : 46] God's purpose, he says, in that delay, was to make quite clear that Abraham is the father, the great patriarch, the forefather of not circumcised Jews, but rather, he says, the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be credited to them.

So, uncircumcised, pagan, Gentile believers, says Paul, are every bit as righteous before God as great father Abraham.

As are, verse 12, circumcised Jews, but only if, notice, they are not merely circumcised, but also walk in the footsteps of literally the uncircumcised faith our father Abraham had.

You see the shock in that. The purpose of God in giving the ordinance of circumcision in the first place, that mark that was so characteristic of Jewish identity, that the purpose was so that Gentiles, uncircumcised pagans, would be embraced by God's great salvation, a salvation that was for the whole world.

Circumcision, says Paul, was a missionary ordinance from God. It was given to the Jews, but it was given for the salvation of the pagan Gentiles of the world.

[33 : 23] God. Isn't that staggering? The very thing that the Jews thought utterly separated them from the Gentile dogs was the very thing that God said is to tell you that you have a mission to the world.

It's very striking, by the way, in that regard, when you go back and read Genesis 17 and 18, that after Abraham is circumcised, in Genesis chapter 17, the very first thing that we see Abraham doing is what?

On his knees, interceding with God to save the pagan idolatrous cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Circumcision was a missionary ordinance.

And so, as one writer puts it rather well, far from being necessary for Gentile believers to discover Abraham as their physical father, that is for them to get circumcised, it's necessary for Jewish people to discover Abraham to be their uncircumcised father.

That is to share his faith. Isn't that striking? That Abraham is not the father of any Jews at all unless they believe as Abraham did.

[34 : 35] Believe in the promise of God's righteousness through Christ alone as a gift of his grace, quite apart from works of the law. And not for that matter, by the way, is Abraham the father of any Muslim.

As they would claim. Unless they also share Abraham's faith. Unless they also, like Abraham, saw Christ's day and rejoice. Jesus is very plain, isn't he, in John chapter 8.

Unless you believe in Jesus, no matter who you are, your father is not Abraham, said Jesus, but the devil. Very stark. So there's only one Abrahamic faith.

People talk today about the three great Abrahamic religions. But there's only one, says Paul. If you are Christ, says Paul in Galatians 3, and only if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

The promise fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's rather wonderful that we have in our own congregation here, in our own church family, people who are from Jewish background and Muslim background, as well as pagan Scottish backgrounds.

[35 : 44] You see, it's not about insider status. It's faith. It's not ever mere family that counts in the household of God.

And all the privileges of insider status that some people have had, whether it's for the Jews, an upbringing in the words and the ways of God, in the old covenant faith, and the mark of circumcision, or whether it's the privilege many of us have had in this church, or at least an upbringing, or at least many, many years of belonging to the Christian church, and having the privileges of Scripture, and knowing the ways of God, all these privileges, says Paul, are given by God for the sake, not of the insider, but for the outsider.

But through what God has entrusted to us, righteousness may also be counted to them as well. And that many outsiders will also become insiders, true members of God's household, through faith in Christ alone, just like the rest of us.

One true family of faith, with no sense of superiority one over another, to do with our performance, or pedigree, or privileges, but together, humbled, leveled by the astonishing grace of God who justifies the ungodly, which is every one of us.

God's grace. And you see why Paul wants us to be a united missionary church, we must be a church that love and that live the gospel of grace alone, through faith alone, for everyone, everyone without exception.

[37 : 30] Let me end just by three simple conclusions to help us see that. first, only this gospel of God's leveling grace will unite the church. Only when we really understand that God justifies the ungodly by faith alone will we have great contentment instead of the resentments that rise so easily from pride and conceit in our hearts.

Pride always divides and destroys, but grace is the great leveler and is the great healer in any church. When we understand grace, we won't boast, will we, inwardly to ourselves about our own spiritual knowledge.

We won't resent it when somebody with less history than I do in this church overtakes me, perhaps in a leadership position or a position of recognition or something. Now we will see that all our privileges, perhaps our stalwart membership in the congregation for years, all of these things are precisely that purpose in God's hands, that others who had none of these things might come in and grow and bear fruit among us, perhaps in much more public ways than will ever be so for our own life, in our part.

And grace will never resent that. Grace will always rejoice in that. When we understand grace, we won't ever boast in our own particular service in the church so that our particular thing that we enjoy and we are part of and we do, that if that's removed, we get terribly defensive about it.

And we feel protective of it. We get very hurt and we feel devalued. Perhaps if somebody else who's particularly gifted in an area is asked to take on something that once we did. Or perhaps if ill health or just age robs us of the active involvement in something that once we had.

[39 : 33] So, so easy, isn't it, to build our whole identity, our feeling of acceptance on our ministry on something that we do so that we get all of our self-esteem from it. Our sense of worth all comes from doing that one thing so that if we lose it we're so desperately resentful.

Isn't that true? Or perhaps we don't have it in the first place but we desperately crave some role or some position that somebody else does have. If only I got asked to speak at such and such a thing or be part of this or be as good as him.

I'm just as good as him. It's easy, isn't it, to harbor resentments like that. How often do you say to yourself, surely I deserve better treatment than that?

I do. But grace kills resentments in our hearts and kills resentments in the church. grace says, nothing in my hand I bring.

Simply to your cross I cling. Grace just marvels that we're here at all, that we're blessed, that we know the covering of our sin, that we're counted righteous in Christ.

[40 : 46] That's why only grace can unite the church. Secondly, only this gospel of grace inspires the church, brings confidence instead of reticence to our evangelism.

Because only this gospel tells us that it is possible for the ignorant, for the pagan, for the total outsider to be justified and made right with God. Abraham was that and yet God's sovereign grace claimed him.

Not because of his performance or his knowledge or anything else, but simply because he responded to the call of God. And so we can have great confidence.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, Paul says in Romans 10. The gospel is the saving power for everyone who believes. And God will and does and loves to call the ungodly, the wicked, the pagan outsider and make them his friends for eternity.

Jesus says, the dead will hear my voice and will live. And that means we can have confidence, friends, to proclaim that gospel.

[42 : 00] In fact, we're commanded in Romans to do exactly that. How can they believe in him whom they have not heard and how are they to hear without someone proclaiming the good news to them? It's because God saves sovereignly the ungodly and the undeserving and the unlikely outsiders by sheer grace.

It's because he does it like that that we can have the confidence to preach the gospel. Even to the people who we think are the most unlikely folk in the face of the earth ever to respond to that message.

It's only the gospel of God's saving, electing grace alone that can inspire us to have any confidence at all in our evangelism. Finally, it's only the gospel of God's level in grace that can encourage us inside the church and give comfort and despair.

Comfort, sorry, in the face of despair, even for those of us who've been inside us for a long time. Because this gospel tells us just what it told David, that when we have tripped and stumbled and fallen into sin, even great sin, that there can be restoration.

not by privilege because somehow God overlooks the sins of his people just because they're inside the church. No, but because for those who do humbly trust his grace and look to the cross of Jesus, there is cleansing, there is forgiveness for every lawless deed, every transgression.

[43 : 37] There is covering and accounting of righteousness, not our own, through the blood that has been shed. And I know that as a flawed and feeble Christian, I can tell you how much that grace means to me.

So friends, only an ever deepening understanding of this gospel will make us, or any church, a united, contented congregation who love the grace of God.

We're quick to show that grace to one another within the church when we sin because we know that we're all flawed and all feeble and all raised up only by that grace, but equally eager to share that grace with those outside because only this gospel is the power of salvation for all who believe.

Well, may God grant us a deep, deep understanding of his humbling grace. favorf and pour