

June 10, 2007

By Grace Alone, Through Faith Alone, In Christ Alone  
Romans 3:19-28 / Ephesians 2:1-10 / Job 35:1-16

Have you ever been taken to task for believing the Gospel? Or better yet, for being too confident in God's grace and your salvation? I have. I've even had people tell me they think it's nothing but arrogance to be confident that you're saved.

That's essentially what we find in today's passage. We find Job being taken to task because he was confident in God's Grace long before most people (including all his four friends, and here Elihu in specific) even thought in terms of Grace.

What seems to have Elihu all up in arms today is that he knows Job is a sinner, and not just a sinner, but in his eyes a callous, irreverent sinner who refuses to repent! And what irks him is that in spite of that fact, Job is so utterly confident that he will be "cleared" by God.

Elihu, of course, feels Job should be a bit more contrite in spirit — repenting and pleading for mercy. Yet instead Job has an unshakable confidence that he will be "cleared" — pardoned by God, declared "not guilty" — ("justified" before God to use the NT term) — even found, or better yet, "counted" flawlessly righteous (as the NASB implies). And all that, despite the fact that Job is a mere human being — and a FALLEN human being at that — a sinner!

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So what's Elihu's problem? He feels its just plain WRONG for a SINNER to be CONFIDENT OF THEIR SALVATION.

He would have real problems with Paul's statement in Ephesians 3:12, where he says, "In Him and through faith in Him (that is, Jesus) we may approach God with freedom and confidence." As believers we don't come into the presence of God cowering, we come into His presence with confidence and freed from the fear of being punished for our sins.

Elihu would also take exception to Hebrews 4:16 where we are told, that as believers, we can "approach the throne of grace with confidence." Or again in 10:19 that we can even "have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place."

Thus Mike Mason is right when he says, "By now the Gospel according to Job should be so clear to us that the accusations of his friends seem almost like a deliberate attack on the New Testament."

WHY do all Job's friends have such a hard time with the confidence spawned in the believer by the Gospel? Why do they have such a hard time with the concept of Grace? Because although they understand God's Justice and Sternness; His Righteousness and Hatred of Sin, they show little (if any) understanding at all of His Mercy, Tenderness and Fatherly Love.

Elihu has an exceptional grasp of God's EXACTING JUSTICE (34:11-12) / His ABSOLUTE SOVEREIGNTY over all creation (34:13-15) / His UNEQUALED MIGHT and INFINITE GRANDEUR (34:18-20) / His COMPLETE and COMPREHENSIVE KNOWLEDGE of everything that ever has, or ever will happen (34:21-30) / and His TRANSCENDENCE, IMMENSITY, OTHERNESS and IMMUTABILITY (35:5-13).

Like all Job's friends Elihu has an awesomely majestic view of God's Grandeur. But at the same time (just like the Muslim) there is a very noticeable absence of any understanding at all of God's Fatherly Tenderness, Compassion, Mercy, Grace and Love.

And because his view of God is lacking in THAT area, he struggles to grasp how Job can be so confident in a grace to which he seems so totally oblivious! In fact, to him all Job's talk about grace sounds like he's suggesting God is weak, permissive, and unjust — making grace (in his mind) incompatible with the nature of God.

Thus, when Job says, "I will be cleared by God," what Elihu hears is not a believing sinner expressing a Gospel confidence in the grace of a Holy and Just God, but a man suggesting God will turn a blind eye to sin — "clearing" or pardoning people whom he feels should instead be laying face down in the dirt, consumed with dread, and repenting in sackcloth and ashes.

That's NOT what Job was saying, but because his friends didn't understand the Gospel, or the concept of Grace, that IS what they heard him saying.

It's a problem every true Gospel preaching person, or every true Grace proclaiming person will run into on one occasion or another: The problem of having other religious people who misunderstand grace accuse them of saying "Go ahead and sin. God doesn't care! He will 'clear us,' accept us, or forgive us anyway."

Paul had it happen to him also. Paul proclaimed, more than anyone else, that we are saved by grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ alone, apart from the works of the law. That salvation is a gift given freely EVEN to the most ungodly or wicked sinners who would merely believe in Jesus.

He proclaimed that the love of Christ was grounded in the free grace of God and not in anything in or done by us — not because they had SOMEHOW DONE SOMETHING TO DESERVE IT, but despite the fact that they had DONE EVERYTHING NOT TO DESERVE IT!

But what did Paul's religious critics hear him saying? They heard him saying, "Let's sin all the more so that grace may abound!" (Rom. 6:1). Or as he tells us in Romans 3:8: "Why not say — as we are being slanderously reported as saying, and as some claim that we say — 'Let us do evil that good may result.'"

To such people, grace sounds as if it makes God lax on sin; makes the need to strive for godliness unnecessary, and gives sinners a license to go right on sinning!

That's what Elihu heard Job saying. *"Elihu,"* says Mason, *"now accuses Job of placing so much faith in God's grace that it has made him callous in regard to his own sin."* (He's attacking what he sees as a lax attitude in Job towards sin.) *"If there is any truth to this charge, it is only in the sense that the true believer is one who has given up all hope of ever being able to do anything about his sin. He can desire intensely to be free of sin, but in practice he knows that he cannot eradicate sin by his own efforts. All he can do is wait in faith until the time when, in Job's words, he will be decisively 'cleared by God.' For there is no other way to be cleared. We cannot do it ourselves."*

Which brings us to our **FIRST** point. The habitual struggle of the moralistic type person, or the religious type person to understand the Gospel-believing person or Grace-trusting person.

When the MORALISTIC or RELIGIOUS PERSON sins, they tend to go through a rigorous or elaborate process of penance and self-punishment. They feel they must go around remorseful and downcast; repenting or beating themselves up emotion-ally for their sins — giving up things they enjoy, or doing strenuous works they wouldn't otherwise do — hoping that by their efforts or self-punishments they will make up for, or atone for their sins and get themselves back into God's good graces.

It's NOT that they don't speak of God's grace or believe in God's favor, they just tend to believe you have to earn it or be worthy of it, and work to get it back when you lose it by sinning. Their view is you don't tend to appreciate things you don't work for!

But, When the GOSPEL-BELIEVING PERSON sins, he knows he doesn't need to go through an elaborate, lengthy, drawn-out process of penance and self-punishment, because he knows the punishment for his sin was already meted out on JESUS. He knows CHRIST already paid the penalty for all his sins — that He was punished for every single one of them in his place — and thus he knows he doesn't need to punish himself for them ALL OVER AGAIN!

That's why the person who believes the Gospel of God's grace in Christ, and trusts that His sacrifice was sufficient to purchase the full pardon of all their sins, does not need to walk around all sullen, and downcast; repenting and beating himself up emotionally for his sins — for he knows Christ already paid the full penalty for his sins, plus he is also convinced that nothing a sinner does can atone for his sins before a holy God.

Contrary to what the moralist or the religious person thinks, there should be a lightness; a freedom says Paul, a confidence in God's grace that permeates their being and shines out through their countenance.

The religious person, who thinks that it's necessary to wallow in guilt for a while will perceive this as irreverence, and even a lax attitude toward sin, but it's not! It's the natural result of trusting in the fully sufficient and wonderful grace of Jesus!

Then SECOND, since the believer knows (because he or she knows the Gospel!) that the sin which continues to dwell within him STAINS and POLLUTES everything he does, and makes even their most glorious sacrifices and good deeds, unclean and thus unacceptable to God as they are (soiled or filthy rags in the sight of God, as Isaiah puts it in chapter 64, verse 6), he also knows that all his efforts at trying to eradicate sin cannot possibly be what secures God's acceptance — only trust in the righteous merits of Jesus credited to the sinners stead by faith can do that for him.

The believer KNOWS (or should know) that even his most strenuous efforts are stained by the sin that indwells him, and thus none of them could possibly atone for even one small sin. And that causes the believer, unlike the religious moralist, to place all his confidence, not in anything he can do to atone for sin, but in what Christ did on the cross to atone for them all, thereby securing the forgiveness of each one.

The **RELIGIOUS PERSON** can never be sure of God's forgiveness or acceptance, even if he works hard for it, because he mistakenly thinks it depends on him, and his own efforts to atone for sin, thus making him terribly insecure and habitually unsure about his salvation.

But the **GOSPEL-BELIEVING PERSON** can be sure of God's forgiveness and acceptance, and confidently trust that he will be cleared by God (as Job puts it), because he knows that his justification doesn't depend on him, or his own efforts (strenuous as they may be), but on the fully sufficient merits and forever finished work of Jesus in His life of righteous obedience and death for sin.

Then **THIRD**, the religious moralist who hesitates to preach grace because they feel it makes people callous or lax in regard to sin, is actually the one who encourages the worst sin of all by doing so!

What do I mean? Listen carefully to what Mike Mason writes in this regard (as I often say, "Why say it yourself when someone else has said it better!"). He writes this:

*"If Job had refused to believe that God had already forgiven him for everything, and that He was continuing to forgive him on a moment-by-moment basis, then he would have ended up flirting with the most terrible sin of all, the sin of Judas Iscariot. Judas ultimate sin was not betrayal, but the refusal of forgiveness. For Judas realized what he had done; he knew he had "betrayed innocent blood" (Matt. 27:4); but his response to this searing self-knowledge was to go off and hang himself. In short, he punished himself for his own sin, and self-punishment is simply an elaborate method of self-justification—that is, of acting as one's own God. This is exactly what everyone does who persists in a remorseful, downcast, self-flagellating attitude before the clear revelation of the free grace of God."*

He's right. Judas is one of the only people in the entire Bible who is specifically said to have gone to hell or, *"the place where he belonged"* (Acts 1:25). And it wasn't because Judas stole from the monies people gave to support Jesus and the disciples in their ministry, for millions upon millions have been forgiven for stealing money. / Nor was it because he betrayed Jesus – serious as that sin was. Peter did something almost as bad in denying Jesus in His hour of greatest need and God forgave and restored him. / And no, it wasn't even because Judas committed suicide by hanging himself. He went to the place where he belonged, because he rejected the grace of God that could have been his in Christ.

He refused to believe that the death of Jesus was sufficient to purchase the forgiveness of ANY SIN, and proceeded to try and purchase the forgiveness of his sin with his own death, blood, or suicide.

Instead of trusting in the only sacrifice God accepts for sin — the death of His perfect, sinless Son on the cross, whose blood alone is able to secure our forgive-ness and wash away our sins — he went the route of seeking self-justification through self-punishment, and as a result was lost forever. That’s what the “unforgivable sin” really is — rejecting the grace offered to all in Jesus and trying to save yourself.

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You see, uncanny though it seems to many, those who refuse grace, and seek to atone for their sins through self punishment, though they look so earnest, and sincere, and remorseful (like Judas in hanging himself) are really committing the greatest of all sins — the sin of rejecting the grace God offers in the Gospel, and refusing to believe that the sacrifice of Jesus was sufficient to pay the full price for any and all sins.

Elihu, who thinks Job is being irreverent and encouraging sin by trusting too much in the grace of God, is actually being more irreverent and encouraging an even greater sin – the sin of thinking one can justify himself or earn his way back into God’s favor by being contrite, or repentant, or remorseful, or downcast or self-flagellating or self-punishing.

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Hear me well: According to the Bible self-justification is impossible, even if you offered the greatest sacrifice of all — the same one Judas did — the sacrifice of your own life in suicide. A sinful, unclean sacrifice cannot atone for or wash away even one sin. Only a perfect sacrifice — only a spotless lamb without blemish or any other imperfection — only the sacrifice of the sinless Son of God is able to purchase the pardon of and secure the forgiveness of, and wash away the guilt of sin.

The best we can ever do, no matter how hard we try or what we offer, says Isaiah, is give to pile filthy rags upon more filthy rags — and God does not accept filthy rags as atonement for sin! Not even if one of those “filthy rags” is to punish ourselves for our sin by taking our life in suicide.

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Which brings me to my **LAST** point. Job’s confidence, which so irked Elihu, and appeared to him to be arrogance or irreverence, was actually an expression of Gospel trust and humility. It was actually Job’s way of saying he knew he was a sinner, and that as sinner, nothing he did could atone for his sin!

Job could have punished himself from sunrise to sunset / cut himself till his blood soaked the ground / called himself all sorts of terrible names / taken a whip and literally flagellated himself until his back was lacerated / or done the Judas thing and killed himself — it still wouldn't have atoned for even one single sin.

When Paul says in Eph. 2:8-9, *"It is by grace that you are saved,"* he means it is by *GRACE* that you are saved, *"through faith..."*, not because of your faith! Faith isn't the instrumental cause of our salvation, it's the gracious means by which we are joined to the risen and glorified Jesus whose life of obedience and death for sin secured our salvation!

After all, says Paul, even the faith that joins you in spiritual union to the Christ who saves you is itself a gift! "For by grace you were saved, through faith — and that not of yourselves it is the free gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast."

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 You see, God will not allow us to think anything we did, or can do, is what saves us! Because if we thought that, we would have all the reason in the world to boast! But when we understand ***IT'S ALL GIFT*** — not only salvation, but the faith by which we come to partake of that salvation, then it removes all grounds for boasting.

After all, how can one boast for having received a gift they didn't deserve? A gift God merely lavished on them by an act of His grace when they were dead in trespasses and sins?!

That's what Paul says in the preceding verses: "When you were dead in your trespasses and sins, God made you alive in Christ..." Who did it? Who made you spiritually alive? Who raised you from the dead spiritually so that you could even believe in the first place? Was it you? ***NOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*** When you were **DEAD** in your trespasses and sins **GOD** made you alive!

That's why Paul can go on and immediately say in the rest of that same verse — *"it is by GRACE you have been saved."* ***"When you were dead in your trespasses and sins GOD made you alive in Christ—it is by GRACE you have been saved."*** (Eph. 2:5)

*"We are justified freely by His grace,"* says Paul in Romans 3:24, *"through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."*

And again, *“When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and I want you to stress these things.”* (Titus 3:4-8)

As Paul commands, I “stress these things” so that there is NO ONE here who doesn't see it. I say it again: Salvation comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, or it doesn't come at all, for God accepts no other atonement for sin than the sacrifice of His only begotten Son.

*Trust in Him and you'll be saved; trust in anything else — anything in you, or anything you can do (even taking your own life as a way of punishing yourself for your sin) and you will simply join Judas in hell.*

Sorry if that sounds harsh and unloving, but it's true. And because it's true, it would be even more unloving for me **NOT** to tell you, and DO ALL I CAN to steer you away from the mistake that HE, and millions upon millions of others like him, have made — the mistake of thinking he could atone for his sin by something he did.

For as Acts 4:12 tells us: *“There is salvation in NO ONE ELSE, for there is no other name under heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved.”* Only by trusting in Jesus, and Him alone, can one be saved.

So, if you haven't yet done that — if you came here today **TRUSTING IN THE THINGS YOU DO**, or **TRUSTING IN THE THINGS YOU DO PLUS JESUS TO CLEAR YOU** (or SAVE YOU), then I plead with you to **repent**.

Remove every bit of saving trust from ***anything other than Jesus***, and place **ALL** your hope for salvation (every last shred of it) in **HIM ALONE**.

HIS **LIFE** whereby he supplied the righteous obedience to the law that you could not supply, and HIS **DEATH** whereby He paid the penalty for every one of the sins of all who would ever trust in Him.