

# Sheer Grace (Romans 5:15)

by Ernest O'Neill

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*The sermon explains how the fall of mankind led to a gradual deterioration of mental and physical abilities, and how the lack of the Holy Spirit resulted in a world filled with neurotics, paranoid, and self-justifying individuals.*

**Duration:** 25:15

**Scripture:** Genesis 3:6, Genesis 11:4-6, Matthew 6:33, John 3:16, Romans 5:12-18

**Topics:** "Divine Grace", "Human Rebellion"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on Genesis 11:4-6, where humans decide to build a city and a tower to make a name for themselves. The speaker emphasizes that our mental capacities began to deteriorate gradually due to a lack of energy provided by God. However, at a certain moment, God turned away from humanity and looked to his son, Jesus, to bear the consequences of their sins and rebellion. This act of grace is the reason why we are alive today. The speaker also mentions that our bodies have the potential for incredible feats of endurance, but they don't always function properly due to a lack of something inside us.

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## Transcript

Would you take the number 72, okay, got 72, and alright, now multiply it by 4, okay, and divide that by 8, okay. So 72, multiply by 4, and divide by 8, okay. Alright, now will you multiply that by 2? No.

Did you get 72? No, okay. Now why, why? When you know how to divide, you know how to multiply. And you know that part of it is, well, I mean it's sort of corny, I'm asking you on Sunday morning to start doing mathematics, and you can't get the mind together fast enough to start doing it, but part of it is the old concentration, you know, I'm trying, yeah, well, multiply by 8, yeah, divide by 4, yeah.

And concentration so often prevents us really using the abilities that we have. What did you do last Tuesday? Or what did you do the Wednesday before? And yet you know that the capacity is there alright. If you stimulated the cortex of your brain with certain electrical charges, you could bring back things that you did when you were a child.

So, you know, the capacities really are there. You can do it, but somehow, because of a lack of something inside us, they don't work quite right, do they? You know, most of the Reader's Digest articles over the past 20 or 30 years are based on this fact that we use about a tenth of our potential. That really, we have all kinds of mental capacities that are capable of great feats of mathematical and logical calculation, but

somehow we're not using them all.

And you remember that last Sunday we shared that our minds aren't working the way they were meant to because of the lack of the planned energy that God had provided for them. And that's why our minds don't work the way they used to. And yet that deterioration was gradual.

Really, it was. I'll prove that to you if you look at Genesis 11 and 4 through 6. All our mental capacities began to deteriorate only gradually as they lacked the energy that God had made available to them. And Genesis 11 and verse 4, Then they said, Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they proposed to do will now be impossible for them.

Only to look at the Egyptian pyramids, you see, to realize that men's minds deteriorated only gradually as more and more men produced more and more children who lacked the perfect mind that their great forefather Adam had when the Holy Spirit was available to them. And it's only gradually that the minds deteriorated. As they were without the power of the Holy Spirit, so the mind of the race gradually declined.

You can see it, you know, if you examine the Inca civilizations. They obviously were capable of incredible things that we are only catching up with. We all have a feeling that the Chinese civilization and culture and education was even beyond ours, let alone beyond what they are today.

And so it was only gradually, you see, that the effects of the lack of the Holy Spirit on the minds of men and women began to be felt. But it was felt once, until we come to this point today, where we, because we've been so long without the power of the Holy Spirit running through fathers and mothers who had sons and daughters, our minds are really all just a fraction and a shadow of what they used to be when God's Spirit of life was available to them. It's the same with our bodies, you know.

The old body is weak again and again, isn't it? Again and again it's sluggish when we want it to work. Repeatedly we find that it's weary when we want it to do something. And yet we know fine well that there are times when our bodies are capable of incredible feats of endurance that we're just amazed at.

I think all of us are amazed at the pain that a woman can bear in childbirth. We're amazed at the unbearable pain that even our own bodies can face when they're really put to the test. We only have to look at some of the tortures that men have gone through in prison to see that the body is capable of much more than really we use it for.

And yet it is true, isn't it, that our bodies have shared in this gradual deterioration that we've all experienced through man-required refusing the gift of the Holy Spirit that God offered to him in the tree of life at the beginning of the world. And yet even that deterioration was gradual too. You can see that if you check up the normal top age for Americans with the top age mentioned here in Genesis 6 and verse 3. Genesis 6 and verse 3. Obviously, in other words, men didn't begin immediately to die at 70 years of age or 80.

Genesis 6 and verse 3. Then the Lord said, My spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh, but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years. And there were plain instances in those ancient times where

men lived way beyond that. So that obviously it was a gradual deterioration.

We didn't all end up in this present state of physical weakness and intellectual dwarf behavior. We didn't all end up in this position immediately. It was only gradually as more and more parents had more and more children who were used to living with fathers and mothers whose minds were not working correctly and efficiently.

So that began to be passed on down through the years. And you remember it all really started with what is called the fall. That's why so many of us differ from the evolutionists who say, Oh, you're getting so much better every day.

We can do so many things that we couldn't do before, but they don't realize that there was a golden age. That even the old classical authors, you know, Virgil and Caesar and Cicero, point to a golden age when things were once really far more beautiful and far more perfect than they are today. And we see really in Jesus' account and the account of the people in the Old Testament that that was so.

There was a time when it was beautiful. And really what we're experiencing is devolution, not evolution. What we're experiencing is a great decline, not a great growing or a great ascending.

But you know, we realize that all that started at the time called the fall. There was a fall of mankind. There was a time when we were much higher than we are today, mentally and emotionally and physically and spiritually.

And there was a time when we fell from all that. And that's the word that's used, dear ones. If you look at Romans 5 and 15, which is really the verse that we'd study today, Romans 5 and 15, that's the word that's used there.

It's page 981 in that black RSV Bible, 981. And Romans 5 and 15, that's the word that's used, you see, at the end of that first sentence in verse 15. But the free gift is not like the trespass.

Now, the word in Greek is paraptoma, and actually the right translation of it is the fall. It's the first trespass and therefore the original fall. And what Paul is saying is the free gift is not like the first fall.

And the first fall was just that, you know. Literally, paraptoma means a slip or a fall sideways. It's a false step, and it refers to the first slip sideways that man made.

And that's really what it was like, you know. It was just a slight deviation from what was God's perfect will for him. That's probably why you and I experience death so often without knowing how we came into it.

Because actually, it only requires a slight deviation from what is God's perfect will for us to begin to experience this death. Now remember, it did seem just a little fall. It just seemed a little slip.

If you look at it in Genesis 3 and 5, it must have seemed to Adam and Eve that all they were trying to do was achieve God's purpose in a slightly different way. And that was what the fall was all about, Genesis 3 and 5. You remember, Satan said, God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. And it was really just a little slip sideways.

It was just Adam and Eve saying, yeah, well, God made us to be like himself. And this, finding out what is good and what is evil on our own, this will make us like God. So it seems we'll achieve the purpose that God made for us originally, but we'll just be doing it by a slightly different method.

And brothers and sisters, that's what it is with us, you know. Why you experience further death in your mind or your emotions or your body is normally not because you've committed some terrible, devastating sin, but usually because you've just rejected a little God's Spirit for you at that moment. Usually that's where it all comes from, you see.

And really the big issue in Christianity is not good and evil. Do you see that? I mean, they were fulfilling good and evil. Old Adam was saying, well, we know the difference between good and evil.

That's all that's needed. That wasn't what God was concerned about. The issue was not good and evil.

The issue is, would you receive my Spirit's will for you at this moment in your life, whether other people call it good or call it evil. The issue is not good and evil, you see. In fact, they could have avoided good, but done it independent of God's Spirit.

And they'd still have been falling out of God's fellowship. So the issue is not good and evil. That's why so many ethical systems, you know, and so many ancient Eastern religions are really beside the point, because they're all concerned with being good and avoiding evil.

But that isn't the deal with God. The deal with God is, are you resisting my Holy Spirit inside you, or are you not? That's what concerns me. In other words, you could know the difference between good and evil perfectly.

You could always avoid evil and always hit good, but you could be doing it independent of God's Holy Spirit. And so that is what the fall is all about. And when you reject His Holy Spirit, then the whole personality begins to suffer the decline that we've talked about here.

And really, that's what the fall is all about, you know. It isn't a tremendous rebellion. It's just a slight deviation from what was God's perfect will for them.

He said, look, here's a tree of life. You can receive my Holy Spirit from it, and if you do that, my Holy Spirit will make you like myself. He'll make your mind work perfectly, your emotions work perfectly, your body work perfectly.

He'll fill the world with my love and my life. That's all you have to do. And old Adam and Eve just turned aside a little and said, no, no, we'd rather know what is good and evil by ourselves.

We'd rather decide it for ourselves. We want to do it without your Spirit. Well, of course, it was His Spirit that made everything work, you know.

It was like gas to the automobile engine. It was electricity, like electricity to an electric razor. It was the thing that made the whole thing work.

And once you were without that, the whole thing fell into decline. Well, that's what the fall is about, you see. And really, Jones, I know we're facing it and fighting it in every class almost, at least in the natural sciences, aren't we? We're fighting it.

We're fighting this idea that we're evolving into something beautiful and that if you give us long enough, you know, Nietzsche and the rest of us will become the master race. Loved ones, it isn't so. We've been on the way down since this fall out of God's fellowship.

And really, you remember the death that resulted. The death was, well, it's outlined plainly really in Genesis, in Genesis 3 and 8. The first kind of death that took place there, and we've mentioned it before, Genesis 3 and 8, was really a death as far as God was concerned. Immediately, men rejected God's spirit.

They began to feel uncomfortable in his presence. Really uncomfortable, you know. And you get that in Genesis 3 and 8. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.

And up to then, you know, they'd always just gone forward to meet him and say how good the world was and how glad they were he'd put them in it. But when the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. And loved ones, every time you reject that little movement of God's spirit inside you, there comes some furtiveness and stealth into your life, you know.

There comes a sort of discomfort inside. And that's what happened with the old Adam and Eve in 9 and 10, you see. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, where are you? And he said, I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself.

And really, that's the first kind of result that came about in Adam and in the rest of us. We no longer felt at home in the universe. We no longer felt this was a friendly place.

We no longer felt that there was someone approving of what we were doing. We began to feel fearful and insecure. When thunder and lightning took place, which you remember was just part of the death that the universe itself experienced.

When that took place, we began to be fearful and unhappy and concerned. And we began to lack the security that would automatically have come to us if we'd really done what our Father asked us to do. And so really, there began to be a race of men and women who were neurotics, who were filled with fear of their own shadow, who were filled with terror of the darkness, who were filled with insecurity and uncertainty, who were filled with a need for somebody to approve them, because the great God of the universe did not approve them.

That was part of the death that came. And then you can see really what happened in Genesis 3 and 12. There's only one thing to do, you know, when you lack approval, or you lack justification, or you lack security.

You have to try to prove that everybody else is worse than you. And that's what old Adam did, Genesis 3 and 12. The man said, the woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree and I ate.

And so man stepped on that long slide into self-justification. And the only thing he could do, you know, when he knew that he was condemned by the maker of the universe was, okay, I have to prove that everybody else is worse than me. And from that moment on, men and women began to consume each other.

You know, we do it ourselves. Okay, they don't approve of me, but at least I'm not as bad as so-and-so. Then it becomes your responsibility to prove that so-and-so is worse than you.

And before you know it, you're involved in counting up each other's faults. And so that great self-justification method began in the world. And men and women began to tear each other down in order to build themselves up.

And really, brothers and sisters, the world began to be filled with just a great hatred, and a great rivalry, and a great competition. The same kind of thing that we get a little, you know, with the A's, B's, and C's, and D's. Just that kind of sense that it's us against the universe.

And that wasn't God's plan at all. And that was part of the death, you see, that resulted. And part of the chaos.

And the Father then looked down and saw us all, us poor paranoids, involved in tearing each other down and destroying each other in order to prove to ourselves that we weren't as bad as the rest. And he knew that letting us loose in the world would be like letting Lee Harvey Oswald loose in a crowded city, you know. He knew that to let a group of potential neurotics like ourselves loose in his universe would mean we would spread our smear and our dirt and our murder throughout the universe.

And do you see that's why God had to prevent us from living forever? That's really why he had to do it. His first job was to limit the amount of harm and pain and agony that we could cause in his universe. And that's why, you see, you get that action of his there in Genesis 3 and 22.

You remember Genesis 3, 22. Then the Lord God said, Behold, a man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil. And now lest he put forth his hand and take also up a tree of life and eat and live forever.

And so God had to limit the chaos that we could create. And that's why he took away, first of all, our eternal life. He had to bring us to a place where our physical life was limited.

Then you remember he had to withdraw his Holy Spirit. Because the Holy Spirit, you see, produces many incidental qualities of divinity that we do not normally think about. The Holy Spirit can obviously enable you to travel through space.

Now, obviously, the Holy Spirit enables us to do certain things at certain times. That is not appropriate at this present time, so he doesn't do that at the present time. When we go to be with God, obviously, we'll be able to travel through the space and through the universe at tremendous speed because of the Holy Spirit.

Now, do you see that with that kind of power available in the Holy Spirit, we could have wrought havoc until God secondly withdrew the Holy Spirit from us. And you read that, you remember, in Genesis 3 and 24. He drove out the man and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the chariot and a flaming sword which turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

And then, you remember, God subjected the whole world to frustration and futility so that we would know that the Holy Spirit was lacking in it. Verse 18, thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you and you shall eat the plants of the field. And that was the kind of death, brothers and sisters, that spread throughout the world.

And that's the kind of world that you and I have entered into. A world that is filled with people who are neurotic and paranoid. A world that is filled with people who are trying to prove that they're better than everybody else.

A world that is filled with people who lack the Holy Spirit and therefore who have minds that are impaired and emotions that are unbalanced and bodies that are physically weak. A world that has become a world that lives for itself, you know, that is antagonistic to its Creator and that is determined to live for self alone.

Now, that's the kind of world we have entered into, you see.

And that far, I think, we have got on previous Sundays. And you see, the Creator of the universe looked down and saw the Rhine turned black ink with the munition factories of the Ruhr. And looked down and saw California, one of his most beautiful creations, blotting out the sun with the greed of businessmen who wanted to succeed whatever it cost anybody else.

And he looked down at the rivers of Europe, blocked with garbage and sewage by people who didn't care who lived downstream from them, who didn't care about anybody but themselves. And he looked down into our universities, presumably, and he saw people who were supposed to be seeking truth. And he saw them scrambling over one another to try to make themselves superior.

And using truth to do that. And do you see that the Father's heart must have turned just over inside him? And really, what would you do when you look down like that? And do you see that his own word actually stood against him? His own word stood against him. Because he had warned man.

You remember in Genesis chapter 2 and verse 15, verse 17, he had warned man what would happen if he decided what was good and evil for himself instead of receiving his life. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die. And really when the Creator looked down on us, he saw not only the mess and the destruction that we had wrought, but he saw his own word standing against us.

And he saw that if he did not act at that moment against us, he would forever be called into question as far as his justice and his holiness is concerned. If he did not act at that moment there and then, then all of us would laugh. We would laugh into his face and say, you are no God of justice, you'll let us do whatever we want to do.

And he as the final moral arbiter and authority in the universe was committed to action of some kind. Now brothers and sisters, I do not understand it. But at that moment God turned.

And it is impossible to describe such a turning. But at that moment God turned from the mess we men and women had made and from us ourselves. He turned.

And I don't think eternity will ever be long enough for us to describe to each other what that turning involved. But at that moment he turned for some reason or other that we cannot understand. And he looked to his son and said, will you permit me to destroy their sins and requite their rebellion in you instead of them? And at that moment Jesus embraced the cross.

And that is sheer grace. There's really no reason for it at all. And that's why we're alive today, you know.

And it's impossible to explain it. It's just impossible. That's why Paul says the free gift is not at all like the first trespass.

The free gift is not like the first fall at all. Where the first fall spread death, the free gift in the life of that one man, Jesus Christ, has abounded for many of us. And brothers and sisters, that's why we're alive today, you know.

That's why you can even sit in the theater and have the opportunity to say yes or no to this God. Because of sheer grace. No reason at all but that he just loved us with all his heart, you know.

And I remember, you know, one man tried to say it. I cannot tell how silently he suffered. I cannot tell how silently he suffered when with his peace he graced this place of tears.

Or how his heart upon the cross was broken, the crown of pain to three and thirty years. But this I know, he heals the brokenhearted. He calms our fears.

He stays our lurking sin. And this Jesus, this same Jesus, this savior of this world, is here this morning and has the same attitude to you. And if you ask me why, I do not know.

Just sheer unmerited grace and favor. That instead of destroying us as we deserved, he destroyed his son in our place. And he's able and willing to accept us as his children and loved ones.

It's just miraculous, you know. Just need to thank him for it. Let's pray.

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