

Brownie Points- Grace and Works

by Francis Chan

Francis Chan's sermon explores the relationship between grace and works, emphasizing that true understanding of grace leads to genuine action and a secure relationship with God.

Duration: 33:24

Scripture: Romans 2:4

Topics: "Gods Grace", "Faith Works"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding God's grace and how it should lead to action in our lives. It addresses the misconception of earning God's love through works and highlights the need for genuine repentance and a desire to do good works out of love for God. The sermon uses real-life examples to illustrate the transformative power of God's grace and the eagerness it should instill in believers to serve Him wholeheartedly.

Transcript

I have some good news. Remember we were praying that the property owner would extend the contract for three more months and this week they agreed to that, so yeah, we're still in with the, we're still in with the Tierra Jata property and the last I heard from some attorneys and some people that are involved in the project, they're saying things are looking pretty good, okay, so we just have to really pray this one through. So again, just for those who weren't here last week, the issue is we're coming up on a deadline in March where we have to either buy this land or not according to the owners and because they've been very, very gracious through this project to kind of keep it in escrow for like two years and we're saying, gosh, the county still hasn't made up their mind but we think we're getting really close and showed them everything that we're doing and can you extend it just three more months and then by June we'll absolutely make a decision either to buy the property or not and they agreed to that and so everything's still going through with the county, everything's in line, going in process.

Truth is, is more probably than not, that's not even a phrase, probably we're going to buy this thing in June and we have to be prepared for that. The property's \$5 million but we're looking pretty good financially but if it is a go with the county, then I'll let you guys know and then we got to figure out what we're going to do come June and how we're going to take care of this thing so start saving up. Gosh, last weekend, last week, that whole study on being secure in your relationship with God, of all the passages in Galatians, I think that one hit me the most, impacted me the most and I hope it impacted your life, I hope it impacted

your relationship with God this week to where you feel secure and you're not your whole life striving and trying to earn God's graces and God's favor.

I mean, it doesn't even make any sense to earn God's grace when you think about it because grace by definition is something given to you that you did not earn and yet so many people spend their lives trying to grasp this good enough concept to be acceptable in God's sight when everything scripture teaches is that God loved us while we were sinners, when we were our worst. Everything when you read and you look at the life of Jesus, that's what he did. He went after the worst of the worst, the people who were down and out and in the pit of their sin, that's when he loved them and went after them and so why do we with insecurity strive after the love of God? But I realized something last Sunday in between services, I was talking to someone about the message and we were talking about our previous church experiences and some of the things that we went through in church and it dawned on me and I realized, you know what, consciously or subconsciously, some churches, quote unquote Christian churches, actually want you insecure.

They want you to be insecure in your relationship with God. They want you to be insecure in your assurance of salvation in heaven because if you're insecure, that guarantees that it'll curb your behavior. You'll live in this fear of I better not do that because I might go to hell.

I better not do that or I might go to hell. I better start serving, I better start giving so that I'll go to hell. See, by making you insecure and leaving you in this I don't know, I don't know if I'm really saved state, it guarantees that you'll at least do something out of fear of not going to heaven.

Yeah, you guys, that's not a Christian thing to do. That's what the cults do. They, you know, people go, well, how come people in cults are so much more committed? I go, they're not more committed.

They do these things because they have to. If they don't do them, they're going to go to hell. And so of course they're out doing these things because they're out earning their salvation.

If they don't do this, they're not going to become a god. So they better go and do this. They better follow these steps, there's these rules, they have to do this because they don't want to go to hell.

They, you know, they want to become gods or get their 70 virgins or whatever it may be that they're a rich nirvana, you know, whatever it is, they must do these things. They're enslaved by this system where they must do this, must do this, must do this. Otherwise, they're not going to get the desired result.

That's not what scripture teaches. That's not the way God wants us to live, to be in slavery and bondage to these rules in order to earn something. But really what the Bible teaches is that there's a God who loves you in spite of your actions.

You're not a slave who is only loved when you do what is right. You're a son of God who is loved. Even during those times you might rebel against God, he still loves you because you're his son.

And what the scriptures teach is that this kind of grace, this kind of love of God ought to result in action. So it's not a fear that drives you to do these things, but it's this understanding of being secure and loved by God and an understanding of his grace and his kindness that actually leads you to action. I love the passage in Romans chapter 2, verse 4, when it says, See, what is it that leads a person to turn away, to turn away from their sins and things that are rebellious against God? What causes a person to turn from that and turn toward God? The Bible says it's supposed to be the kindness of God.

That God, by loving you in spite of all that, that ought to change your life, that ought to affect you. You should say, wait, God loves me in the midst of all these things? In the midst of everything that I did, God still went after me? That while I was a sinner, he still loved me and went after me? And then once you believe that, you become a son of God, a child of God. And so even at those times when you rebel against God, it's saying that, wow, he still loves you.

He's still kind toward you. He's patient. I mean, think about how patient God has been in your life.

Think about all the things that he put up with with you. And he says, when you think about that, that's what should motivate you to turn from the way you're living, is the love of God, the security in God ought to change you. You know, I was praying this morning and just praying for you guys, and I was just going, Lord, let's pray that we get this.

I pray that we get exactly what the Bible says here, where we are so blown away by your kindness and how good you've been to us, that we willingly turn our lives around. That it's not me standing up and making you feel insecure that makes you change, or fear that makes you change, but that it's the kindness of God that leads you to repentance. I wanted to take this weekend, I'm taking kind of a deviation just this week from the book of Galatians, because I want to make sure we're on the same page.

We've talked about a lot of different things over the last few weeks, and the security in Jesus, but I titled the sermon today, Grace and Works, because I want to make sure we're still on the same page here, that just because we're secure in God, that doesn't mean that we don't do anything, okay? In fact, what the Bible says is that true grace will actually lead to action, because the moment Cornerstone becomes a church that doesn't do anything, that's the moment I leave, you know, and hopefully the moment you leave. If we're just about talk, the moment Cornerstone becomes a church that's known for how well they talk from up front, how well they talk, what a good show they put on, just forget about it. That's a waste of time.

We are supposed to be known by our actions, we're supposed to be known by what we do, and if anyone's been a part of the church for even a few months, you know that Cornerstone is all about doing something. See, understand, grace does not negate works, okay? And I've been saying it week after week, okay, it's not about works, it's not about works, it's not about works in the sense of earning our salvation, but I want to make sure you didn't take that in the wrong way and say, well then, we don't need to do anything, okay? Grace and works go together, but it's the grace that ought to motivate our works, not a fear and not a sense of earning. I heard a great quote this week, a guy named Dallas Willard writes in his book called The Great Omission.

It says this, grace is not void of effort, grace is absolutely void of earning. It's not that grace, because God's shown his grace on us, that that means we don't put any effort into our relationship with God, okay, understand that? But grace is absolutely void of any type of earning for yourself, but like I said earlier, if grace does not result in action, then it's not true grace. If you say you understand the grace of God and yet there's no result in your life, your life doesn't show it, then you don't understand the grace of God.

The Bible's very clear about that. I know it may seem confusing, I mean, it totally makes sense in my head, does that make sense to you? Okay, so there are actions involved, in fact, if there are no actions, then you didn't really understand grace. It's not a matter of working or not working, it's a matter of the attitude with which you work.

Grace is a sense in which I understand what God has done for me, therefore I can't help but serve him, versus earning and works, this whole idea of, I don't know if God's going to let me into heaven, I don't know if I'm good enough, and so maybe if I do these good works, I can earn it somehow. See, that is not grace, that is called religion, and that's not what we're a part of. We're a part about this relationship with God where I'm secure in his love and being so loved by him and understanding his kindness, what better thing is there to do with my life than to live for this God and serve this God? In Jude chapter three, I'm sorry, there's only one chapter, Jude verses three and four, it describes this false grace that I'm talking about.

It says, Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only sovereign and Lord.

See that last phrase, he says, you see, there's certain men, there's people who have kind of slipped into the church, and what these people are teaching, it says they are godless men, these people who have snuck in, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality. See, he explains, even way back then, even 2,000 years ago, there were people that would go into the church, and what they said, they go, hey, we're saved by the grace of God. God has forgiven us freely, so you know what, he's just going to keep on forgiving, so we can just sin, we can do the things that he hates, and you know what, we'll be forgiven.

Because that's God's grace. You guys, and the Bible says those are godless men who teach that, that are changing the grace of God, and they're turning it into a license for immorality. That means if you sit here today and you go, you know what, God loves me, so you know what, I can just go on in my sin, the Bible says you're godless, you don't get it.

You don't understand the grace of God if you think that just means that you can do whatever you want and God's going to keep forgiving you. That mentality, that mindset of, oh, you know what, I can do this, God will forgive me afterwards, oh, I can do this, God will forgive me afterwards, that type of mindset comes from a person who's godless, a person who doesn't understand the grace of God. You see, this whole idea of it being a license for immorality, the Bible makes it clear that there's no room for that in the church.

In fact, the Bible says if anyone in the church calls himself a brother, in 1 Corinthians 5, if you would actually call yourself a brother, a sister, or a Christian, and yet you continue in these actions, the Bible says you need to get that person out of your church. See, that's not a person who understands the grace of God. So, are you getting this? It's, you know, absolutely, you are secure in God, but if you're secure, there's going to be a result in your life.

It doesn't mean that we just run rampant in this room. And that was one of my fears, was that the more I talk about the grace of God, grace of God, grace of God, that some of you may misinterpret what I'm saying as though, wow, if we just live in the grace of God, this is going to become this room filled with immorality. And yet, that's not what the Bible says, and you've got to know if you get it, if you understand how good God is, if you understand his love, his forgiveness, his kindness, that'll lead you to repentance, that'll lead you to change your life.

His love will motivate you. On the contrary, you have Titus chapter 2, verse 11 and 12, it says this, For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to men. It teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age.

See that? The grace of God actually teaches us to say no to ungodliness. And I love, you see that word, teaches? It teaches us? It teaches us. That word teaches, there is the same root as that word, remember a couple weeks ago I described the idea of the tutor, you know, the slave that would kind of overlook the little kid as he was growing up, and he was kind of the master of the little kid, he was the one that disciplined him and everything else, same root word here, and back then we were talking about how the law was the one who disciplines us, and the law was that tutor.

Here he's saying the grace of God kind of takes over in a sense, and it teaches, the grace of God actually disciplines us, tutors us, and it helps us to say no to ungodliness. And it's interesting because when it says it, it teaches us to say no, the word is in a tense in the Greek where it's a once for all completed action. That means at your conversion, at the moment you understood the grace of God, there's a sense in which you definitively say, you make a decision right then, you know what, I'm done with my old life, that's it.

When you understand, when you really understand the grace of God, you make a decision at that moment, I'm done with my old self, I'm done with those things that I was doing, that ungodliness, it's over with, and it's a process of getting those things out, but you made a once and for all decision, and that's why once you make that decision, we say, you know what, come up here and get baptized, because getting baptized is that whole idea of, I'm done, I'm dying, I'm dying to my old self, and I'm going to rise again to a new life. See when you understand the grace of God, it leads you to say no to the things that God hates, and then the rest of your life is this working out of that. If you read on in Titus chapter 2, verse 13, bam, okay, Titus 2, there you go, While we wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

You see, the grace of God doesn't lead us to laziness, as some may assume it would. No, when you understand the grace of God, what it says is that, I love that last phrase, it makes you eager to do what is good. Don't you want to do what God wants you to do? Aren't you eager for that? Isn't there in you that goes, you know what, I don't want to just live my life and do what everyone else does.

I want to be used by God. Do you guys think that way? Do you in your mind just go, Lord, I don't want to live an ordinary life. I want to be totally used by you.

I want to live such a holy life that it blows people's minds. I want you to change me completely, where I live differently, and I want my life to count for something. I'm eager to do good works.

I talk to so many of you that get frustrated with life, because you go, I know there's more. I just feel like I'm just paying the bills, going to work, doing my deal, blah blah blah, and that's not what I was created for. There's more, there's something more, and there's something, see, and it's not this works thing, like I better do these things, or I might not go to heaven.

I better accomplish what I need to do, or I won't get there, or God will be angry at me. It's not even about that. It's about this longing.

It's about a desire, just like you want to be holy, you're also eager for good works. Man, I don't know about you, but I want my life to count for something. I want to, you know, on my deathbed, you know, if I have one, if it's, you know, not a freak accident, but I'm just in the hospital, I'm thinking about it, you know, hey, I want to, I want to be able to look back at my life and go, man, what a ride.

I'm ready, God. I feel like I did something with my life. I really believe that somehow I was able to communicate while I was on the earth that you're a great God, and now I'm going to see you any moment.

That's the way I want to end my life. Guys, I was talking to a friend of mine this week, and we were in the offices talking, and it was so powerful what she was saying that I said, you know what, do you mind if I grab the video crew, and I want the whole church to hear what you are saying right now, and her name is Heather Mercer. You may remember her back from 9-11, but we ended up videotaping our conversation just so that you guys could get a piece of this because I felt like it's exactly what I was talking about, about someone that was eager to do what God wanted her to do and wants her to do today.

So, if you just watch the screens right now. So, Heather, you were telling me about like how when you were in college, you prayed certain prayers, and you had no idea how God was going to answer that. Tell me about that.

Yeah, when I was in college, showed up at Baylor University in 1995, that was really where God got a hold of my life in a really significant way through a local church community there, and I would hear stories of how God was moving around the world in ways that we read about in scripture, and it was a time in my life where God was really getting a hold of my heart just in my relationship with Him. I was falling in love with Him. I was experiencing His love for the first time in a real significant way, and I would read the New Testament, and I think, I want my life to look like this.

You know, I want to, if this is really going on around the world, I want to be a part of it, and hear stories of how God was healing the sick, and masses being saved, and churches being started in a day, and I just thought that sounds like the most exciting thing I could ever be a part of, and so I just started to pray and say, God, you know, I don't know what I have to give you, but if there's something that you can do with my life, then please, I want to go to the places that nobody else wants, and as a college student, and I think we all go through this in life, I had this sense of, generally of insecurity, like is there anything that God can do with me, because I don't have a lot to offer. I don't have some great talent or skill, but the desire was there to be a part of seeing history change through the gospel. How did they, how did they capture you? I mean, I forget the story, but I mean, that initial moment when, what were you doing? What happened when they came after you? Yeah, when we were taken, we'd been basically investing in a few Afghan families, mostly widows and orphans that lived in Kabul, people that were involved in some of the projects that we were doing with food distribution, things like that, and this one family had really shown an interest in the gospel, and if you can imagine living in a time that looked very much like the time of Jesus, and experiencing a regime that had taken everything away, and these people were desperate in the true sense of the word, so to hear about a God of love who could give them hope in the midst of what they were going through, gave them, they were very responsive.

So we were sharing with this Afghan family, and on the day we were arrested, we had gone and shown the Jesus film to them, and what we didn't know was that the Taliban had actually targeted them and infiltrated the family with a Taliban spy, and when we went to show the Jesus film, the Taliban left and got the religious police and they came back and arrested us. Wow, and you were detained how long? It was

three and a half months. Three and a half months.

So when you come back, I mean, I just remember like it was yesterday, I mean just the news, everything else, I mean you became, I mean really like a national hero to a lot of people, and you end up sharing your story, and you share it for a couple years, and then what did God start doing in your life? Yeah, I mean both Dane and I really felt like, you know, there was a season to share the story, but we came to a point where we realized we don't want to keep sharing the same story, and you know God's always, He's a living testimony. He invites us into the miracles of what He's doing in His kingdom day by day, and so you know I just said, God I want to be involved in the next miracle. I mean this, He didn't save me for this to be the end of the story, and so I just started praying and saying, God where's the next place, and thought He might send me back to Afghanistan, and I hope at some point I get to go back there, but when the war in Iraq started, He opened up that door to go back into Iraq, and to serve Him among the Kurds, so.

That is so cool. I love that part about your story of just, I don't want to spend the rest of my life talking about this one thing that God did, as huge as it was, I mean most people would look at that and say, okay that's my legacy, I've lived my life, I've done what I need to do for the kingdom, and for you to go, no, there's like a rush in being at the center of what God's doing in the world, even if it's painful, even if it's difficult, and you just want to stay in that, like you don't want to get comfortable, you don't want to just you know, sell your books, and sign them. You know that was actually my biggest fear, was that that would be the end of it, and you taste what God's doing, and you taste who He is, and nothing else is better.

Is it hard being back in the U.S. in a somewhat comfortable setting? It can be, you know, it's, I feel the subtlety of how the comfort of this age really can creep in, so you know, it can be a temptation, so I find that the gospel is a lot simpler overseas a lot of times, but I have a real passion to see people get a vision for what God's doing around the world, and engage in it in a really meaningful, life-changing, world-changing way, and so as long as God has me in the States, that's the trumpet I'm going to blow, and see how many people I can take with me. Wow, now you know when we were talking earlier, I was thinking, I wish you had come last night, and had you speak to the whole church, but if you had an opportunity to talk to the people at Cornerstone, and just like, what word of encouragement would you want to say? I mean, if there's one thing you could say to all these people living here, we're in Southern California, it's a great place to live, and everything else, but what would be the one message God's put on your heart to share with maybe the college students, or really for anyone? That's a great question, and I might, maybe I can say two things, and the first thing would be the reality that when we learn God is with us, then there's no place that we can't go, and there's nothing that we can't do. In captivity, I think that was the lesson he really drove home to me, is his promise is true, well, I'm with you always, even until the end of the age, I will be with you, I will never leave you, I'll never forsake you, and when that reality became a part of the very core of my being, then whatever the question is, it's easy to say yes, and there's so much freedom when we really, really, really know that God is with us, then there's nothing to be afraid of, so that would be the first thing, and then I think the second thing would be that God, I would say the second thing is that God is really challenging, from what I'm seeing the American church to rise up out of the status quo, and really apprehend the life of a New Testament disciple, and it's costly, you know, and I think we were sometimes afraid of that, but once we've lost everything, and we realize we have nothing left to lose, we find out in the end, we've gotten it all back, because everything we want is found in Jesus anyway, and I would, you know, just really plead and call out to the American church to apprehend what it's like to lose your life, because there's so much freedom to be found in that.

Isn't that cool? My favorite part of the interview was when she says, yeah, that was my biggest fear, was that that's all God would have for my life, and that would be the end of it. She goes, because it was so good. She said, I wouldn't trade that experience.

I mean, imagine being held captive by the Taliban as a single gal for three and a half months. Every day, she just thought, this is it. I'm dead.

They're gonna kill me today, and she was just praying, going, God, I thought I would minister to him my whole life, but she talked about how as great as that was, and she would not trade it for anything. In fact, she refers to that experience as the grace of God. Think about that.

She says, that's the grace of God, because God has shown me his grace in allowing me to experience that, and she said, in those days in that cell by myself, I felt the presence of God. I was close to him like never before, and my biggest fear now is that I won't get that back, and my biggest fear is I'm gonna spend the rest of my life just traveling around and having this comfortable lifestyle, so I need to go back. God has more that he wants to do.

I don't want just that to be my legacy. I'm thinking just that, you know, and her partner, the partner in ministry, Dana Curry, she's in Morocco now, you know, in northern Africa, just again ministering to Muslim people, because it's just this rush. It's this idea of what that verse was saying.

I didn't think I could explain it any better than that, of when you understand the grace of God, you're eager to do good works. See, some of you in this room, you've experienced the presence of God when you were put in situations that were terrifying, possibly. When you're in situations where you didn't know what was coming next, but in that time you were so close to God, and while there's a sense in which you don't want to go back and have to relive some of those difficult times, there's also the side of, man, but I was so close to God that I wouldn't trade it for anything, and I actually long for that intimacy with God.

See, when you watch this video, I guess the question that comes to my mind is, do you watch that and think to yourself, well, that's her. God's not going to do anything great in my life at this point. See, my fear was that some people would watch that video and go, well, that's her, and she's a hero, good for her, but me, I'm a mom.

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