

For Gods Sake Let Grace be Grace

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the importance of letting grace be grace, highlighting the concept of God's sovereign grace in choosing and preserving a remnant. It delves into the significance of understanding grace, the implications of God's grace in our lives, and the call to exult in and worship the Lord of grace. The message urges believers to be humble, take risks for the poor and the perishing, and share the Gospel with confidence, while also extending an invitation to those who have not yet embraced Christ to respond to the free, unconditional grace offered to all.

Scripture: Romans 11:6, Romans 11:4, Romans 9:11, Galatians 2:10, Matthew 11:28, Ephesians 2:8, Lamentations 3:27, 1 Kings 19:18

Topics: "God's Sovereign Grace", "Humility and Evangelism"

Description

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Transcript

The title of the message is, For God's Sake, Let Grace Be Grace. Let Grace Be Grace comes from Romans 11, 6. You can see it there. But if it is by grace, that is, if the preservation of a remnant, a believing remnant, is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works.

Otherwise, grace would no longer be grace. So let grace be grace. Don't put anything in the place of grace.

And For God's Sake comes from verse 4. What is God's reply to Elijah? I have kept for myself, for myself, seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal. I kept them. And I kept them for myself, for my name, for my glory.

Had I not kept them and had there been no remnant, my name would have been disgraced. And I will not let my name be disgraced and therefore I kept them. I saw to it that there would be a remnant of seven thousand men who do not bow the knee to Baal.

So, here's the message for our church. Here's the message for the 21st century. Here's the message for the nations.

For God's sake, let grace be grace. Oh Father in Heaven, I pray earnestly now that as we begin this message, you would grant us to see and to understand and to savor the freedom of sovereign grace. I pray that we would feel our helplessness.

Grant that this people would feel helplessness. Oh God, grant, I pray, that we would feel how undone we are apart from grace. And grant, Lord, that we would be humble before you and before each other.

What a difference it would make in a church if we knew how helpless we are, how undeserving we are, and how gracious and patient and kind and free and unconditional you were in choosing us for yourself. God, I pray earnestly that you would grant us tonight to be broken, be humble, and then, oh Lord, please, would you grant that we would embrace all the riches that Jesus Christ has purchased for us. The riches of your grace, the fellowship of his suffering, the everlasting joy of his presence.

Please, Father, help me now to so unfold these words about grace, that there would be a fresh, deep, new, powerful, life-changing, transforming understanding and appreciation and love for grace. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

So, to understand grace, we need to get the flow of the thought here. So let's try to take the last two weeks and move into the new part tonight quickly. Verse 1, the main point of this text is, God has not rejected his people, Israel.

I ask then, has God rejected his people? By no means. So God is faithful, God's a promise keeper. Therefore, we who are trusting him today through Jesus Christ for the fulfillment of the promises of Romans 8, we can bank on it.

He's going to keep his word to us just like he kept his word to Israel. That's his first argument. Well, here's his first argument.

I am a Jew, verse 1, for I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham. So, if God has had mercy on me and I'm a Jew, then it's clear he hasn't forsaken Jewish people. I'm one of them.

Argument number 2 is in verse 2, namely the foreknowledge of God. He says, God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. You only, he says to Israel in Amos 3.2, you only have I known of all the peoples on the earth.

So I have known you, that is, I have chosen you. I've made you my wife, as it were. I've known you, made covenant with you.

I will live with you. We will not ever be divorced. And therefore, argument number 2, he is faithful to his people.

He will keep his covenant promises. And now comes argument number 3, that God will not reject his people and has not rejected his people. And it's the relationship between God's action in the days of Elijah and his action in the days of Paul.

And he draws a connection there in how God acted in those two days. Just as there was a remnant of faithful Israelites preserved in Elijah's day, so there is now a remnant of faithful Israel preserved in Paul's

day. That's the parallel he sees between Elijah's day and his own day.

But the argument is not simply a parallel. The argument that you can be sure that in every generation, leading to a final inclusive generation, there will be a remnant of Israel saved, believing in the Messiah, is not simply because of the parallel between these two generations. Let's see what Paul does more than draw the parallel.

Let me read it with you. Middle of verse 2. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars. I alone am left and they shake my life.

Verse 4. What is God's reply to him? I have kept for myself 7,000 men who have not bowed the knee to Baal. So too, at the present time, there is a remnant chosen by grace. What's the link? What's the nub of the argument between what God did in Elijah's day, in keeping a remnant, and what God is doing in Paul's day? And the nub is grace.

Election by grace. Chosen by grace. Paul sees this word, or writes this word, because he saw it in verse 4, where God said, I have kept for myself 7,000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal.

If you read the Hebrew of that in 1 Kings 19, verse 18, it is literally, I caused to remain a people, 7,000 of them, for myself. And Paul hears that causal idea. God did that, and he draws out, so too, there is today a people chosen.

That's what he heard in that, I kept a people for myself, chosen by grace. And it was the sovereign choosing of them for himself which defines this idea of grace. Now be careful here that you don't make a mistake.

The point of God's work, what did he do there, is not simply keep alive a remnant. You might think that if you just read the words, he kept for himself a remnant, like he kept them alive. They became the remnant on their own, and he kept them alive.

You might think that that would be implied in the words, kept for myself. The problem with that is, it would not help Paul's argument at all, if that's what he were saying. Because the question that he's trying to answer here is not, are there believing Jews who've been kept from dying, who've been kept alive.

That's not the question. The question is, are Israelites believing in being saved, and inheriting the covenant promises, and it looks like it isn't happening, or it's not happening on the scale that it should, if God keeps his promises. Now that, he has to answer in a different way.

Verse four, I have kept for myself 7,000 men, does not mean I saw to it that they stayed alive. It means I saw to it that they were faithful. I saw to it that they believed.

Now that makes Paul's argument work. That's exactly the point that he draws out of Elijah's day for his own day. Just as God kept for himself a people believing, just as he saw to it that there would be 7,000 who believed in him, so too today there is a group chosen by grace.

In other words, the link between Elijah's day and Paul's day is not historical likelihood, but divine certitude. God did it there, and since he has power, and authority, and commitment, and rights, he will and he does do it here. Paul says, I myself am a Jew.

That's the connection that he makes. So also there is a remnant chosen by grace. The way God did the choosing was by grace.

That's what we need to think about. What does it mean that election or God's choosing of a remnant for himself is by grace? This is huge. Paul evidently thought the point of it would be missed at the end of verse 5. So knowing that it's relevant for history, it's relevant for your life, it's relevant for how you pray, how you witness, it's relevant for your marriage, it's relevant for your faithful obedience of missions and your sacrifices of love, he now says, so too at the present time there's a remnant chosen by grace, or there's an election, it's according to the election of grace.

And then he adds this, verse 6. If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works. Otherwise, grace would no longer be grace. In other words, Paul is really jealous, really jealous, that we not turn grace into something else with a wrong understanding of election and how God preserves a remnant for himself.

He really is jealous. That's why he adds that amazing verse 6. If it is by grace, that is, if keeping a remnant for myself by election is by grace, then it's not by works and otherwise grace wouldn't be grace and I don't want grace not to be grace, and so I'm telling you this, let grace be grace. And I wonder if you know what grace is.

Let's remove a misunderstanding here immediately. Notice something. He is not contrasting works and faith, which he does often, Romans 3.28, Romans 9.32. Faith is not mentioned in these verses.

He's not contrasting works and faith. He's not saying works are the sort of thing you do that earns God's favor, and faith is the sort of thing you do that receives God's favor freely. That's true and not here at all.

Very important. That's not the point. What does he contrast? He contrasts not works and faith, but works and grace, verse 6. If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works.

Otherwise, grace would no longer be grace. So the contrast is not between two kinds of human acting. It's between all human acting and divine human acting.

That's really important. Things people do and grace. That's the contrast here in this text.

And he says, if election, if choosing, if God's choosing of people is based on what they do, grace is no longer grace. If we provide the decisive act in causing our election, it is not an election of grace. It is a response to our decisive work.

Whatever the thing is, we provide. Think of it for a moment. What meaning could it have for election to be gracious if it depended on our decisive initiative? God contemplating in eternity, as it were, waiting in eternity, wondering, as it were, in eternity.

What will they do with the will that I have given them? Waiting, watching. What possible meaning would gracious election have if he waited and we decided and determined and constrained that act of election? It would be wholly dependent on us. How could that be called grace? God would be a responder.

We would determine his action. And grace would no longer. Let me try to confirm the trajectory that we're on here.

Let's go back to Romans 9, because what he's doing here is reasserting what he said in Romans 9, 11, and 12. So it would be good to confirm this with a more detailed statement of it, which we saw a couple of

years ago in Romans 9, 11. What God is doing, or what Paul is doing here in Romans 9, is describing God's free choice of Jacob over Esau before they were born.

And he says this, verse 11 of chapter 9. Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works, but because of him who calls, she was told, the older will serve the younger. You see the parallels all over the place, don't you? Human works are mentioned, and they are contrasted with free grace in election. Nothing that they had done, either good or bad, before they were born, constrained God's choice of Jacob over Esau.

What does he contrast faith with? God's calling. God's divine work in calling. It is not of him who works, but of God who calls there in verse 11 and 12.

Grace is free, in other words. Grace in election is absolutely free, unconditional, uncoerced, uncaused by anything in us. Otherwise, grace would no longer be grace.

The spring of grace in God's electing initiative, it is God's electing initiative, not our response. So, bottom line in the argument, how can Paul be sure that in his day there will be a remnant who believe in the Messiah? And right on until Jesus comes, there will always be a remnant? And how can he be sure that this remnant might get its arms around the whole of Israel someday? Answer, sovereign, free, unconditional, electing grace. That's how he can be sure.

If God saves 7,000 people sovereignly and keeps them for himself, he can save 7 million people for himself any time he pleases. Without compromising their accountability and personhood. Main point, God has not rejected his people and no rejection of theirs can keep him from saving a remnant or saving a nation when he chooses to remove the hardness.

Six implications for your life. Number one, learn that you were saved by grace and be humbled. I was dead and you were dead in trespasses and sins.

We were blind. We were rebellious. And then, by grace alone, you were awakened.

And suddenly you saw sin as ugly and repulsive and hateful and undesirable. And you saw Christ as beautiful and attractive and satisfying and the only one who could meet your need. And you believed and were saved.

When you get to heaven and the Lord of Glory says, give me an accounting of why you are here and not your brother, your sister, your mother, your father. Tell me why you're here and not them. Tell me why you believed in me and they didn't.

You will not say, I guess I was more wise. I guess I was more spiritual. I guess I was smarter.

You won't say that. You will say with tears running down your face and with trembling in your voice, thank you. Wouldn't it be a beautiful church where everyone's pride was broken and we all knew that we deserved nothing but the worst criticism, the worst gossip, the worst accusation.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to be a part of a church where everybody was broken in half and felt utterly undeserving of anything good from God or anything good from people. Wives, husbands, children, colleagues, neighbors. So that there would be a real, deep, authentic, emotional sense in which everything bad that happened to us was expected and therefore not grumbled about.

And everything good that happened to us was received as an absolutely amazing grace for which we would sing and shout thanksgiving to a gracious God. Wouldn't such a fellowship be wonderful? We are such huffers and puffers about our rights and what we deserve everywhere with everybody, me included. I hate that about myself.

Don't you? I want to taste grace at a much more profound level emotionally than I have at age 57. And so I just ask you to pray for me. I want to wake up in the morning and go to bed at night and go to work and walk through the day feeling that every single breath I take, every single good news that crosses my path is stunningly undeserved and therefore causes me to spill over with a song of praise that every bad thing that happens to me is nothing like I deserve and therefore can be embraced with quietness.

Like it says in Lamentations, it was good for us that we bear the yoke of our youth. What a fellowship! What a glory divine! You want something to pray about for Bethlehem? Pray that. That's implication number one.

At least pray it for me if you don't need it. I desperately need it. Number two, since God's grace can take for Himself anyone He chooses, pray with boldness and confidence that God is able to save the hardest sinner you love.

I'll say it again. Since God is able to take for Himself a remnant of anybody He pleases because He is almighty and sovereign, pray with boldness and confidence for the hardest person you love. If you believe... Let's put it this way.

If God must wait and watch for hardened people to get soft, for the dead to rise, for the blind to see, for the deaf to hear, you may as well hang up the telephone of heaven because there's no point asking Him to do what He can't do, namely save sinners. But if God has a right, if God is God, if He can reach down into your son or your daughter or your husband or your wife or your mother or your father or your uncle or your neighbor or your colleague and by a sovereign work of quickening, freeing grace cause them to see Jesus as irresistibly desirable so that with all the freedom that they now have, they embrace Him, then ask Him to do it over and over until He does it. Sovereign grace is a mighty incentive to pray.

Third, since God can take for Himself who He wills, therefore, share the Gospel with everyone and trust that the power of God will triumph over all obstacles. Tell the good news of salvation to the person you think doesn't have a prayer in hell to be saved. Tell them the good news because you know that the Gospel is the power of God.

You know that by the Holy Spirit coming through your mouth, God can do wonders. He can raise the dead. He can say, Lazarus, come forth.

Come on, Lazarus. Wake up. And the very command, the very pleading creates the life.

Oh, I encourage you. I encourage all of us. Witness to unbelievers with tremendous confidence that God saves the hardened sinner.

Fourth, since God's grace keeps us from falling, preserves us for Himself, since He chose and since He called and since He justified, He will keep us. Therefore, draw this inference. Kept by the power of God, believer, kept by the power of God, take risks for the poor and the perishing.

Who can separate you from the love of Christ? In tribulation, distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No. Therefore, take risks. The doctrine of sovereign grace is meant to unleash very loving people on the world who don't care about their own lives anymore.

God keeps them. You can't kill me unless my time is done. Like Henry Martin said, I'm immortal until my work is done.

Therefore, throw yourself into the hardest place for Christ's sake. I've been reading and praying with Noelle and Talitha through the November Global Prayer Digest. It's all about unreached peoples in China.

And they are so terribly, totally unreached. I can't pronounce most of them. And I read them, I just want to say, Lord, send laborers.

Send them from Bethlehem. Don't let us just dream about, well, we're safe. We're kept.

We're called. We're chosen. We're justified.

Make money and live comfortably. What's that? That's not Christianity. That's American dream, perverting theology.

Let grace be grace in what it does to our lifestyles, in what it does to our passion for the lost and the poor. I just wrote a vision today. I won't tell you too much about it because I don't even know if it's going to fly, but it's called Mission 210 from Galatians 2.10. Anybody know what Galatians 2.10 is? It's Paul saying to Peter and James and John in Jerusalem, gave them the right hand of the fellowship and they reminded us to do what we were eager to do, namely to remember the poor.

I want us to have fresh ideas. We're all so wealthy. We're all so comfortable.

We're all so secure. Sovereign grace is to unleash very dangerous, risk-taking, loving, lay-down-your-life people for the sake of the poor and the perishing around the world. Implication number five.

O Christians, let us exult in grace. Let us worship the Lord of grace. Let us love the Lord of grace.

Let us be happy in the Lord of grace. Let grace be your joy and His glory. Wake up in the morning and say, saved by grace, and say thank you.

Go to work and say, saved by grace, and say thank you. Come home in the evening and say, saved by grace, and say thank you. Do a good deed and say, saved by grace, and say thank you, Jesus.

Exult in the God of grace. Let your heart overflow in praise and thanks. If you're not a praising person, you don't know grace like you ought to know grace.

Oh, that God would come and give us a taste deep down in this emotional junk of our lives that keeps us what we were made by our parents and by our backgrounds, keeps us ungracious, grumbling, murmuring, doubting, negative people. Oh, that it would be shattered by sovereign grace. I am loved for absolutely no reason in me.

Which leads us to one last amazing implication, and it does not apply to everybody in this room, but just a few, namely those who came here not yet believing in Christ and therefore not yet enjoying His salvation. What does the doctrine of sovereign, free, unconditional grace say to you? It says this. Listen very, very

carefully.

It says, don't say, I may not be chosen. Rather say, since God's choosing is wholly and totally dependent on unconditional free grace, there's absolutely no reason to think I'm excluded. I'm going to say that again.

That is massively important for everybody. Massively important for any unbeliever here who's trying to play games with God or is fearfully trembling at the prospect of free grace manifest in an election that happened before the foundation of the world. The word of that grace to you tonight is, don't say, I may not be chosen.

Rather say, since all God's choosing is by grace alone, there is absolutely no reason that can be given that I should be excluded. Therefore, I will not be excluded. I will embrace the Savior.

I will hear Him coming out of Pastor John's mouth saying, come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart. And you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Oh, Father, please, beyond all my poor, poor ability to speak of grace, would you do grace now? Would you do grace? Oh, get a remnant. Let it be a fullness here. We would pray for the Jewish people, Lord.

We long that the natural branches would be grafted in again. We long for there to be a movement of the Holy Spirit among the synagogues of the world bringing Jewish people to join with us unnatural branches that have been grafted in to the Abrahamic covenant through the Messiah Jesus. Oh, Lord God, save millions.

But Lord, my more immediate concern here in Bethlehem is I want us to be a people who savors grace, lives by grace with our families, lives by grace at work, lives by grace in the neighborhood. Lord, I pray that these applications that I have tried to press upon our consciences would be worked by you. I commend this church to you, Lord, for your healing, your blessing, your humbling, your joy, your boldness, your risk-taking, your love.

I commend us to you through Christ who loved us and gave himself to us. Amen.

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