



Standing Firm in God's Grace, Part 1

Introduction to the series:

I want to introduce you to a friend of mine, Reggie Religious. He's a good fellow, does his best, works his hardest to serve the Lord. He attends all the services. He teaches class from time to time. He checks in on the widows. He visits the sick. He calls the bereaved. He greets the guests. He has Bible studies in his home. He is doing all of this, but he is plagued with doubts and questions. Not about God, His existence, or His Word; rather, he is plagued with doubts and questions about himself. "What if there is a sin I forgot to confess? What if I'm missing it somewhere? What if I'm wrong about some doctrine? What if there is some work I'm supposed to be doing that I'm not? When do my sins separate me from God? When do I fall from God's grace?" Can you relate to Reggie? I can.

In fact, that last question plays on many of our minds. Do you know what **Galatians 5:4** says? Even if just hearing the reference doesn't spark your memory, I'm sure you've heard the verse over and over again. "You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace" (ESV). We've had classes on this verse; heard sermons on this verse. We want to make sure everyone knows this verse is in the Bible. We want to make sure everyone knows they can fall from grace. And, to be sure, the verse does say that. No matter how you cut it, no matter how you try to explain it away, this verse warns us that we can fall from the grace of God.

However, there is a better question. Do you know what **1 Peter 5:12** says? I'm guessing few of us are as familiar with this verse. "I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it" (ESV). What about **Romans 5:2**? Do you know what that says? "Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (ESV). What about **Acts 13:43**? "And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God" (ESV). Why don't we know these three verses as well as **Galatians 5:4**? Why do we spend more time worrying about falling from grace than we do learning about how to stand firm in and continue in grace? An unhealthy fixation on **Galatians 5:4** has left many of us in constant doubt about our relationship with God, our salvation, our destiny. No matter how much we serve and glorify God, we constantly fear that we haven't done enough, maybe we're still doing something wrong, maybe we've fallen from grace. Or perhaps we are in a worse state. Instead of standing in the shoes of Reggie Religious, we are living like Phillip Pharisee. We are convinced we have done enough, we don't get things wrong, we won't fall from grace because we are so good. Like the Pharisee in **Luke 18:9-14**, we are convinced we are the greatest, but we will receive a judgment day surprise as we are surpassed by tax collectors, prostitutes, druggies, and thugs because they have been justified and we haven't.

Have we become like mountain trail guides who spend more time talking about the dangers of falling, the outcomes of falling, the pain of falling, the gruesome nature of falling, than teaching people how to stay safely on the path where there is no danger of falling? The story is told of a mother who heard a thud and then her little boy break out in crying in the middle of the night. She rushed into the room to find her son lying on the floor, a bump rising on his forehead. He had fallen out of his bed. As she consoled him, rocking him in her arms, she asked, "What happened, buddy?" He responded, "I guess I stayed too close to where I got in." I wonder if an unhealthy fixation on falling from grace has developed in many of us an unhealthy fixation with staying too close to where we got in Christ. I'd like to change that focus. Yes, we need to heed the warning about falling from the mountaintop. But to actually heed that warning, what we really need to hear is how to keep our feet firmly planted on God's plateau. If we want to heed the warning against falling from grace in a healthy way, we need to spend more of our time learning how to stand firm and continue in God's grace.

What do you want? Do you want fear or confidence? ...doubt or assurance? ...anxiety or peace? ...despair or hope? ...misery or joy? We are talking about the entire nature of our Christianity and service to God. Where do you want it to be? If you chose confidence, assurance, peace, hope, and joy then you want to be with us over the next eight weeks as we look at eight keys for standing firm in God's grace, gaining confidence in Jesus, assurance in our salvation, hope in God.

Introduction to the sermon:

Why is it easier to sell parkas in Canada than in Mexico? Because folks in Canada recognize the need for a heavy coat and those in Mexico don't. Why does anybody buy anything? Because we become convinced we need it. We may need it for our health and survival. Or we may need it to look cool. Or we may need it to keep up with the neighbors. But for whatever reason, we are willing to spend money because we are convinced we need what we are buying. A good salesman knows his best customer is someone who needs what he is selling. If he can't find someone who needs it, then he must

figure out some way to convince folks they need it. Sadly, at least in my case, we don't really need many of the things we convince ourselves we do. Further, many of the things we really need go by the wayside because we don't realize our need. Why will a man who refused to exercise regularly and eat good foods suddenly start doing so after a diagnosis of diabetes or a heart attack? He doesn't suddenly need the exercise and good food more. He always needed them. The medical emergency simply makes him aware of the need.

If we want a spirituality marked by confidence, assurance, peace, hope, and joy, we must stand firm in God's grace. The very first key to standing in God's grace is recognizing we need it. Sadly, too few people realize they need God's grace. Perhaps they don't realize it because they don't realize their own sinfulness or the awfulness of their sins. These don't stand firm in God's grace, they simply sit in their sins. Perhaps they don't realize it because they think somehow they have made up for their sins by their religion. These don't stand firm in God's grace, they crumble under the weight of their own works. If you want to stand firm in God's grace, you have to start by recognizing your need.

Discussion:

- I. You need God's grace because of sin.
 - A. Our story begins in **Genesis**. We know what **Genesis** means. It means "beginning." The name is taken from the first phrase in the Bible. "In the beginning..." It is appropriate because **Genesis** does tell of many beginnings. It tells of the beginning of the world, mankind, the family, God's promises, God's nation, God's plan. It tells us about the beginning of our victory in Christ. But it also tells us of another beginning. It tells us of the beginning of sin.
 - B. Can you imagine what it must have been like to live in the Garden of Eden? Think of the beauty, the leisure, the peace, the joy, the happiness. Adam and Eve had a direct relationship with God. They walked with Him in the garden. Work was easy. Relationships were happy. Even the law was pretty limited. Tend the garden. Be fruitful and multiply. Don't eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. There was no hurt. There was no pain. There was no sickness, sadness, or sin. There was no loneliness. The world was good. Life was good. In fact, in **Genesis 1**, God looked at His creation and saw that it was good seven times (**Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31**).
 - C. Why don't we live in that world? What changed all of that? Sin. In **Genesis 3:1-6**, the serpent heightened the temptation that was in the world. He convinced Eve that God's way didn't work. He convinced her that God's law held her back from the greatest blessings. He pointed her to the forbidden tree and convinced her to take a bite. She turned to her husband and convinced him. Because of that moment, everything changed. Sin entered our world and death through sin (**Romans 5:12**).
 - D. But **Genesis** doesn't stop there. It goes on to show the consequences of sin. **Genesis 3:16** demonstrates the pain in childbearing because of sin. I don't think this is limited to the physical pain of the actual birth, but also includes the emotional pain that goes along with raising children in a world of sin, a world in which they are sure to sin. The verse also shows the hardship in marriage. Where peace had been was now strife. **Genesis 3:17-19** demonstrates the struggle with work that comes because of sin. **Genesis 4** shows the consequences of sin and demonstrates some of that pain of bringing up children. Sin destroys relationships like that of siblings. Cain and Abel could have had a healthy childhood and a healthy relationship but sin had marred the world. Sin spread to Cain and it ended in the first murder, not among strangers but among brothers. Because of sin the world was once destroyed by flood in **Genesis 6-8**. Even in the new world, sin reared its ugly head. Because of Noah's drunkenness and Ham's carelessness in **Genesis 9:20-27**, relationships were harmed that didn't just impact individuals but nations. Sin caused Sarah and Hagar to be at odds (**Genesis 16**), which then caused problems that continue to plague our world as those who claim to be of Ishmael, Hagar's son, fly planes into buildings and fight religious battles against all that is right. Sin divided Jacob and Esau (**Genesis 27**). Sin caused competition between Jacob's wives (**Genesis 29-30**). Sin caused the destruction of the relationship between Jacob's children (**Genesis 37**). What would ever cause brothers to sell a brother into slavery and then lie to their father about it? Sin.
 - E. Sin has been passed from father to son and mother to daughter since the beginning (not by birth, but by example). All have sinned (**Romans 3:23**). You have sinned. **Romans 3:10-18** describes each of us. This passage isn't saying we are sinners when we have been this bad. It says we are this bad because we have sinned.
 - F. **Genesis** wants us to understand the nature of sin. Over and over again what caused every problem mankind faced throughout that book? Sin. Do you think it is different today? What are we to grasp from this? Sin is what causes our problems. The struggles we have in our relationships are caused by sin. The problems we face on the job are caused by sin. Satan continues to make us think that God's law is holding us back and keeping real blessings from us, but sin does nothing but cause pain and problems. Certainly there is some pleasure; otherwise there would be no temptation. There is a momentary reward. But is it worth it? How sweet and juicy was the fruit that Adam and Eve ate? Was it worth what we see in the world today? How sweet were the sins you have committed? But were they worth the pain, the broken relationships, the wounded friends, the estranged family, the loneliness and isolation? Would you overcome that? Would you be set free from that? Then do something about sin. But that is the big problem. Sin has already done two things to us that we can't change.

- II. You need God's grace because sin has destroyed and dominated you.
- A. Paul explains the problem in **Romans 7:7-13**. God provided good laws. He has shown the way. His way works. His way does not withhold blessing, but provides blessing. But, somehow, sin uses God's good law against us. It seized opportunity even from the simplest commandments of the law. "Don't covet," the law says. But sin uses that very decree to produce coveting within us. What has sin done? Sin has destroyed us. As **Romans 7:9, 11, 13** says, sin brought death into our lives. This is not talking about physical death, but spiritual. After all, Paul was still physically alive. When we choose to sin, we destroy our fellowship with God and our spirit dies. **Ephesians 2:1-2** drives this home saying, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked..." (ESV).
 - B. Because of sin we have died and there is not one thing we can do about it. We cannot bring ourselves back to life. We cannot erase the stain of sin. We cannot wash away the filth. Notice the cry of one who recognized what his sin had done to him in **Psalms 38:3-4**. That is us. That is all of us, whether we recognize it or not. Our sins are a heavy burden. They are too heavy for us. They have separated us from God and have destroyed us.
 - C. But sin was not satisfied with merely destroying us. It was not satisfied with killing us and then dancing on our spiritual graves. Sin didn't simply get us to fall and then move on to his next victim. Sin wanted control. It wanted to dominate us. Paul continued in **Romans 7:14-24**. Paul claimed he did not understand what he was doing. He did not do what he wanted. He did things he did not want to do. Why? Paul said it was because he was no longer the one doing it, but sin was doing it in him. Almost as if Paul knew we would struggle with accepting what he said, he said it twice in **Romans 7:17** and **Romans 7:20**. "It is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me" (ESV). That is, at some point the sin was no longer a matter of what he wanted and chose to do. Rather, the sin took over and performed in him what he was trying not to do. Paul said, "I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out" (**Romans 7:18**, ESV). And this is not the only place Paul makes this point. In **Ephesians 2:3**, after saying our sins had killed us, he wrote that we "were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (ESV). Please understand, the word "nature" in this verse does not mean how we were born. Rather, it refers to a nature established by a long habit of repeated practice. He isn't saying we were born children of wrath, however, at some point our habit of walking in sin, living in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind made us into children of wrath. Sin became second-nature to us.
 - D. But pay careful attention to Paul's point in **Romans 7:14-24**. Paul was trying to put an end to this. Paul had seen the devastating effects of sin. He had seen where his sins led and he wanted to stop. He knew that God's way was good and he wanted to pursue that. He was like the person Jesus mentioned in **Matthew 5:6** who hungered and thirsted for righteousness. He tried and tried and tried. He worked and worked and worked. But what happened? He always went back to sin. If this was just someone we knew today, we would dismiss them and say, "You just don't want it badly enough." But this isn't just anyone. This is the apostle Paul writing by inspiration. He said he wanted to do right, but couldn't because sin had dominated. He ends with the despairing cry, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (**Romans 7:24**, ESV). If Paul, the Pharisee of Pharisees, according to the law blameless, couldn't overcome sin by his own trying, who are we to think we will? Oh, don't get me wrong, I'm sure Paul cleaned up a lot. I'm sure he could say he was doing better than he used to before he got in good with the Pharisees. But for all his cleaning up, he couldn't get out from under the curse of sin.
 - E. Think about where this leaves us. Sin is the root of every problem in the world. It is the root of all our problems. Worst of all, it is leading us on a path straight to hell. And we can't do a thing about it. We can't get rid of the sins we've already committed and we can't stop ourselves from sinning. Are we destined to live and die sinners, separated from God, spiritually dead, heading for hell? By ourselves, Yes. But that is why God gives His grace. That is why God gave His Son. How does Paul answer his own despairing cry in **Romans 7:25**? "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (ESV).
- III. You need God's grace to be set free from sin.
- A. **Ephesians 2:4-9** shows how we can be saved from sin. We can be saved by God's grace. Without grace, we cannot possibly be saved. But there is more to this salvation than what we commonly think. For years, I have equated salvation with forgiveness. But I have been wrong. No doubt, salvation is not possible without forgiveness. Salvation, however, is not simply forgiveness. The word translated "save" means to save from danger, especially the danger of perishing. When speaking in physical terms, it means to make whole, heal, and save from the danger of dying. When speaking in spiritual terms, I think we need to see it in much the same way. Being saved is not just about having our past sins forgiven. Being saved is about being made whole, being mended, being fixed. When we submitted ourselves to sin and became its slaves, we became sick and broken. Mending us and healing us means more than forgiving sins we've already committed, it means getting us to the point of overcoming our sins.
 - B. Remember what Jesus said in **John 8:32**. "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (ESV). The purpose for truth is not simply for us to be right; it is to free us from sin. It is not only to forgive us of our sins, but set us free from the bondage of sin. **Proverbs 20:9** says, "Who can say, 'I have made my heart pure; I am clean

from my sin?” (ESV). Obviously, none of us can. But God can do that. He does that by His grace. The psalmist says so in **Psalm 51:10-12**. God’s grace creates a clean heart in us and renews our spirit. But more than that, it upholds us with a willing spirit. In **Psalm 119:146**, the Psalmist recognized that apart from God’s saving grace, he would not observe God’s testimonies. In this text, he doesn’t say he should be saved because he keeps the testimonies, but he needs to be saved in order to keep them.

- C. Even **Philippians 2:12-13**, the passage that most demonstrates our need to work out our salvation, demonstrates the only reason we should work is because God is working in us to will and to work. If not for God’s grace, our working would do us absolutely no good. However, we can have confidence and assurance that our work is worthwhile because God is working in us through His grace.
- D. I hope you are grasping the great import of what all this is saying. Sadly, most of us think grace is just for covering up sins, therefore we fear teaching about it. We automatically fear that anyone who starts talking about grace too much must be telling folks sin doesn’t matter. Grace is not permission to sin; grace is God’s power to overcome sin. But here is the key. You have to be the person Jesus spoke of in **Matthew 5:6**. You have to hunger and thirst for righteousness. You need to be like Paul in **Romans 7:15**, wanting to do right, hating wrong. Talking about grace is not dangerous for that person. She is not looking for permission to sin. She is looking for the power to do right. She is looking for the power to be holy. She is longing to be righteous. Hearing about God’s grace doesn’t cause her to get lackadaisical and let sin take over again. Hearing about God’s grace gives her the motivation to keep on serving God. She knows God will forgive her where she has fallen short in the past and is working in her to help her overcome today and in the future.
- E. At this point, some of us ask, “If I’m saved by grace, why do I have to do anything?” If we really mean that question, it only demonstrates we aren’t actually being saved by grace. The person who is really being saved by grace wouldn’t think to ask that question because he isn’t trying to figure out what he has to do to be saved. He wants to be saved so he’ll have the power to do God’s will as he has been wanting to do.
- F. This is a growth process. Salvation isn’t a momentary change and now we never sin again. Don’t walk away from this lesson thinking that it means if you sin again you weren’t really saved. **Philippians 3:12** demonstrates this. Paul had not attained perfection, but he was pressing on. God’s grace was growing him.
- G. So the question right now is do you want to be righteous? Do you want to be holy? Do you want to do right? Do you want to stop doing wrong? Do you want to be free from sin? Do you want to be immersed in God’s will? If so, you need grace. If you just want permission to sin, grace won’t help you. But if you want the power to overcome sin, you need grace. Recognizing this is the first key to standing firm in God’s grace.

Conclusion:

Please understand that this is one lesson in a series. I know there are many things regarding standing firm in God’s grace that I didn’t talk about today. Before you come to me to say, “What about _____?” please wait to hear what else we will learn over the next eight weeks.

I only have one thing I really want you to do based on this lesson. I want you to examine your destiny and decide what you want. Do you want God’s way or your own? According to **Proverbs 14:12; 16:25**, our way leads to death. But God’s way leads to life (**Romans 6:23**). As you make this decision, please consider the promise of God found in **Galatians 5:22-23**. Satan wants you to believe that God’s way will hold you back from real blessing. He wants you to believe that God’s way is stifling you and oppressing you. But God’s way will bear fruit in your life. As you surrender your life to God and let His grace empower you to observe His testimonies, you will find that He is doing for you what you couldn’t do for yourself. As much as you tried to gain peace, self-control, love, and joy for yourself, you can’t do it. But God’s promise is that through His way you can have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. All of these can be yours, but only by walking God’s way. If you want that, then you need God’s grace.