

Our Way of Life

Rev. Taek Kim

Scripture: Ephesians 2:1-10

¹You were dead through the trespasses and sins ²in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. ⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—⁹not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

We are taught to work hard, to be diligent, and make our best efforts in all our pursuits. I agree with that! We are taught to work for what we want or find ways, other means, or helpful people to help get the job done. Having good and strong work ethics is an excellent value.

As Christians, we are to make the most of our time for God, living, loving, and being beacons of God's love and salvation. Jesus tells us in many parables and other teachings of how we are to make the most the gifts, relationships, and time we have been granted.

We are also to actively fight our own desires and not fall into temptation. We are told to live for God, not for ourselves or for any other "master." In Scripture we are even told to "figuratively" beat our bodies to submission for the love of God, love of others, and, in many senses, love for ourselves. For if we do not love ourselves, as God created us, then we will have a hard time loving our neighbor as ourselves. We usually are very unhappy and sorry when we only focus on ourselves and follow our own desires without thought of God and others.

When it comes to finding forgiveness in the Bible, we are taught not to work for it. For the times we fail God and sin, when we commit sins against others, and when we find that trying to follow the Ten Commandments just brings us to more condemnation, we find the words, as read just a few moments ago, that we are to receive God's grace and mercy through faith and not by earning it. We are forgiven freely because someone else has paid the penalty for our sins. Even if we tried to pay for our sins, we would utterly fail. If we tried to work for salvation, we could never work enough to pay for our way.

When we consider the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, we see that forgiveness comes with a price that includes suffering and pain. Ask anyone who has ever forgiven someone for an awful act. People who have forgiven others can attest to the pain of forgiving when they would have rather paid back wrong for wrong, wished vengeful and hurtful acts, and more of feelings of wanting to make others pay for the pain inflicted upon them.

Instead of demanding payment from us, God paid for our penalty through placing his wrath upon Jesus Christ. However, God's plans, being immeasurably greater than anything we could create or fully comprehend ourselves, presented the perfect sacrifice through whom we are given the rewards of his resurrection from the dead. We benefit, not only after our days here are over, but we experience the blessings immediately and continually throughout our lives on earth. And this is not only for us, but for all.

Again, we do not work to attain salvation. Rather, because we are saved we are about the work and ministry of God. We are not accepted by what we do or by our obedience. We are accepted in Jesus Christ, and therefore we obey. This is our way of life, as we were created in Christ to do good works for the love of God and others.

Follow any child's life to adulthood when she has to earn love, and compare that of a child who is loved and accepted freely, and who obey from a response of love rather than trying to work for it.

In relationship, when one understands that s/he is loved unconditionally, it could lead to a response of love or of reckless living. There are risks to unconditional love.

One parable that quickly comes to mind when thinking of such grace and forgiveness is the parable of the prodigal son. Though the son returns to his father after demanding his inheritance before his father has died, wasting his inheritance on wild living, surviving by feeding pigs and eating the pig feed, and finding that maybe he could return to his father no longer as a son, but a servant, his father is found anxiously waiting and watching for his son to return. And when he does, there is grace that seems unfair and unwise. That parable tells us in part about the abundant and amazing grace of God.

Well, then are we are given such a beautiful picture of God's grace that may lead to abuse or cheapening of grace. Of course, there are sometimes the desires to cut corners, get the maximum output with the minimum input, and get away with things. And many times we do. However, God is more concerned about saving his creation. And the Bible addresses such ways of thinking or cheapening God's grace. In Romans chapters five and six it reads, "But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"

Still, the focus is God's grace and receiving it by faith, not by our own efforts or payment. And when we understand and find joy in God's unconditional love for us, we are then told that God has things planned for us to do. When we want to respond to such great love with our own love, we find that God has already given us opportunities to live and love as he desires.

By the grace of God, and with faith in Christ, Fanny Crosby lived an amazing life that will continue to touch many lives, through hymns sung in churches. Fanny Crosby was born on March 24, 1820.

Known as an American hymn writer and poetess, Fanny Crosby wrote over 9,000 hymns during her life. Her works include "Blessed Assurance," "To God Be the Glory," "Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior," "Safe in the Arms of Jesus," and "Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross."

She entered the NY Institute in at the age of fifteen and afterward taught English and history (1847-58). As a pupil and as a teacher, Fanny spent 35 years at the school. Her first book of poems was published in 1844 was called "The Blind Girl and Other Poems."

In 1858, she published a book called "A Wreath of Columbia's Flowers". It is collection of stories and poems filled with the same emotional tone she gave her hymns. Her last book, "Memories of Eighty Years," was published in 1906.

Although blinded by an illness at the age of 6 weeks, she never became bitter. One time a preacher sympathetically remarked, "I think it is a great pity that the Master did not give you sight when He showered so many other gifts upon you." She replied quickly, "Do you know that if at birth I had been able to make one petition, it would have been that I should be born blind?" "Why?" asked the surprised clergyman. "Because when I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior!"

After leaving the school, she dedicated her life to serving the poorest and the neediest. Supporting herself by her writing, she quickly gained fame for her hymns. It is said that publishers had so much of her work, that they took to using them under pseudonyms. Her usual fee was a mere \$2 which frequently went to her work with the poor. Her mission work is legendary, as is her devotion to serving others above herself.

One of Miss Crosby's hymns was so personal that for years she kept it to herself. Kenneth Osbeck, author of several books on hymnology, says its revelation to the public came about this way: "One day at the Bible conference in Northfield, Massachusetts, Miss Crosby was asked by D.L. Moody to give a personal testimony. At first she hesitated, then quietly rose and said, 'There is one hymn I have written which has never been published. I call it my soul's poem. Sometimes when I am troubled, I repeat it to myself, for it brings comfort to my heart.' She then recited while many wept:

Someday the silver cord will break, and I no more as now shall sing;
but oh, the joy when I shall wake within the palace of the King!
And I shall see Him face to face, and tell the story--saved by grace!

At the age of 95 Fanny Crosby passed on and on her grave in Bridgeport, Conn., there is a simple little headstone with the name "Aunt Fanny," and these words:

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine.
(from <http://www.nyise.org/fanny/bios.html>)

Fanny's life was one that found the riches of love and forgiveness that was given to her, and to all, freely through the costly price paid that could only be paid through Christ. She placed her faith in the one who not only wanted her to freely receive, but also freely give, as God had already planned for her to do.

Are we still trying to work to attain God's love and forgiveness? Or are we us starting to comprehend more fully and accept what Jesus Christ has done for us and the world? And are we, with our entire lives, sharing the joy and freedom we experience by such loving grace, living for God because we are first loved by him, and not because we have to earn his love? We all fall into those categories in some degree. And I pray that we all, in time, can say with our lives that we believe in the last one.

If you believe that God saves us by his grace through faith in Christ, not by our efforts or by our obedience, then our lives will reflect that same grace and faith in every relationship we have, whether old or new.

God has planned for us many good works for us to do, and in doing them sharing the same grace of God to those who need to hear the good news of God's grace and purpose for their lives. By receiving God's grace, we begin new adventures in Christ. This is our way of life in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Praises and prayer requests for this week:

PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

Pastor Taek's mom has responded well to her cancer treatments with very good results. They will be doing treatments only every 3 months. Prayers she gets better and hopefully go into remission.

PRAYER REQUESTS

1. Grace Anson was admitted to Fountain View for long term care.
2. Elaine Gasidlo's grandson, Brayden who had a fall accident and fractured his arm. After needing sedation for a procedure to reset his broken bone and put in a splint, he is now recovering. Prayers for a full and complete recovery.
3. Please keep Ethel Heiss in prayer as she has been in pain with kidney stones, and as doctors see next week Wednesday with a CT scan what the next steps are if needed.
4. Tim and Kim Bodenmiller's daughter, Avery, as she due soon with her next baby, and though there has been some concerns with too much amniotic fluid, we pray that her delivery later this month will be safe for mom and baby.