

Sins Sour Witness of God's Sweet Grace

by Steve McVey



Imagine God covering you with the palm of His hand. Surrounded by His protective grace, you are safe. Outside the hollow of His hand is a spiritual battle, a frenzy of evil swirling, churning up filth and corruption like an angry tornado in the middle of a landfill - a violent storm that will not be stilled in the midst of a supply of garbage that will not be exhausted. But you are safe. After all, God covers you. You know what is going on around you in this wicked world, but it hasn't touched you.

Then, suddenly, in a moment for which you were not prepared, it seems that God lifts His hand. It is only for a moment. But in that brief moment, you are caught up in the evil that surrounds you like a child being snatched away by the updraft of a tornado's current. In that moment, you sin. It is a sin for which you will later be ashamed. But, for now, there is no shame. There is only the paradoxical experience of self-centered gratification filled simultaneously with intense pleasure and pallid emptiness.

Then, just as suddenly as the Hand seemed to lift, it covers you again. You come to your senses. You realize what you have done and are truly appalled. "How could I do that?" the recriminating voice of accusation screams within you. Filled with self-loathing and confusion, you begin to wonder if you really know yourself at all.

Satan couldn't lay a finger on Job until God first lifted His protective hand just long enough for him to get at him. Why does God do such a thing? Why will He allow us fail, when we have repeatedly asked Him to "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil?" Why will He at times say to Satan about us, "What he has is in your power" (Job 1:12)? In other words, why does God allow us to be overtaken by sin at times?

Perhaps one reason why God allows us to make sinful choices is to show us what we would be apart from His enduring grace in our lives. Have you sinned miserably? Are you filled with an awareness of your own failures? Take heart. God is still in control. Don't think you're that much worse off than those you know who haven't made the same kind of foolish choices as yourself.

Squeaky clean elder brothers who have never even read the brochure about the far country, let alone rented a house there, run inherent risks of their own. Don't misunderstand, no one would advocate prodigal choices for a number of reasons. Not the least of which is the fact that it suffocates the very thing it pretends to offer - life.

On the other hand, there is something to be said about the difference between the way grace is recognized and appreciated by prodigal sons and their pious brothers. Prodigals weep in their father's arms, overwhelmed by a forgiveness and acceptance which is given before even so much as an apology is offered. Their self-righteous brothers, however, are too busy tallying their own score card to even recognize that their brother "who was dead . . . has begun to live" (Luke 15:32).

It is in our moments of desperation and hopelessness caused by sin that we become motivated to look toward our Father. It is at those moments that God likes to show up and show off. Running toward us with outstretched arms and tear stained cheeks, He laughs out loud as He embraces us, still covered with the stench of dried pig manure. He kisses our cheek and cries out in glee with a voice that reverberates throughout the universe, "My child is home! My child is home!"

When a son of God has been in the far country and then comes home to that reception, something in him is forever changed. He can never quite be the same again. An internal adjustment takes place that somehow brings things into focus in a way never known until now. The awe of having been totally accepted, tenderly embraced and then completely restored lays hold on an ex-prodigal's soul with a grip that will forever refuse to be broken. There is a sense in which your sins are a testament of what you would be without God. It's an ugly sight, so look away from your sins and look to your Heavenly Father. Call upon Him and then trust Him to protect you from sin's pull. Cry out to Him when you feel the updraft of temptation in your life. He is sufficient for every temptation you will ever face.

March Sunday Preaching Series - *Extravagant Love*

The Story

**There Is Grace For The Unrighteous
There Is Grace For The Self-Righteous
Outrageous Grace**

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Did Jesus Come To Change God's Mind About Us or Our Minds About God?

Since Adam sinned in The Garden, man has had a distorted understanding of who our Father is, thinking Him to be a harsh Judge instead of a loving Father. But sin didn't change God. It changed man. Jesus came to set the record straight and help us get our minds right about the Father. He didn't come to change what God the Father thinks about us, but came to change what we think about Him.

Hebrews 1:3 says, "The Son is the *radiance* of God's *glory*. The word "radiance" is the Greek word *apaugasma* and literally means "out-ricing" as in the way the rays of the sun shine out from its surface. The word "glory" is the Greek word *doxa* and means "opinion." (For example, when we sing "The Doxology," we are singing a word (Logos) about our opinion (doxa) of God.)

So the Bible tells us that Jesus is the out-ricing of God's opinion. Opinion about what or whom? About us and what He thinks of us! Jesus came to be the exact expression of the Father's opinion of you. Everything we claim to know about God our Father needs to be Christological - centered in Christ Jesus and what He has revealed to us about the Father.

Don't let anything other than Jesus Himself be your source for understanding who the Father is. "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us *in His Son*, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world" (Hebrews 1:1-2).



Jesus came to show us the Father and what He has shown us perfectly and clearly is that our Father is Love. That's it. Nothing more. Nothing less. Every other doctrine or viewpoint we may develop must be grounded in that reality. Whether it's His justice or His mercy, His wrath or His patience, His strong sovereignty or His still small voice . . . you name it. It all must be understood in the light of the fact that He *is* Love or we will inadvertently stray away from a biblical theology into the smog of a human wisdom polluted by religion.

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