

Prove It!

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[0 : 00] Now over these last few Sunday mornings we've been looking at the theme of grace, God's goodness too, as in I think, I hope I've certainly found it to be a revolution in thinking, in my thinking and hopefully in some of yours also.

You've seen that the gospel is all about God. It doesn't matter how much we try, how much effort we put into pleasing God, how good we are, or any of these things we recognize and have come to recognize that we are redeemed and brought back to God because of His grace, because of what He has done for us. And as Christians today, however rubbish you might feel coming to church, He doesn't love you any less today because you feel far from Him and no matter what you do in your life, He will never love you less or more. It's not dependent on our abilities and on our talents, nor indeed will He ever be angry with you as a Christian in your life, times that He will be grieved but He will not pour out His anger in your life. We receive grace, we are recipients of grace. That's our Christianity, okay? That's where it is. We receive that gift. And not only do we receive grace, in other words not only does God accept us because of what Jesus has done, that Jesus has come and lived a life we couldn't live and died the death that we deserve, okay? We recognize

Jesus as the one who has lived that way and we receive His love and His grace when we come to Him in repentance and faith. But as Christians we live that way also and we ourselves begin to reflect that grace. It's not only that we receive the gift, we start as Christians living the gift, okay? And that's really what I want to talk about the next couple of weeks.

It's about living the gift of grace, living the grace life in many ways. Because what does grace or what does love look like? Well it's kind of intangible, isn't it? Love's a bit intangible. It's not that easy to describe. Even human love's not that easy to describe.

We kind of say, well, it's kind of just a feeling. It's that kind of fluttering heart that we have. It's that emotion that wells up within. It's difficult to use words, isn't it, to describe love for us. But we know that it needs to be more than just an intangible feeling. We know that love has a shape, okay? It looks at a certain way and if any of the young married couples here have done the marriage course with me, they'll know there's a chapter called the Love Languages which speaks about the kind of ways that love expresses itself in tangible ways. You know, you can say that you really love someone and you can keep saying that. You can also feel that love within you for someone and kind of have that emotional feeling. But you know that love ultimately needs to be recognized and shown and lived out in actions, in reactions, in the way that you sacrifice for someone, in the time that you will give them, in the resources that you will expend on them, in your attitudes to them in public and in private, in being forgiven and forgiving, all these things are visible demonstrations of a love that you have. You know, if you love someone, then there are visible demonstrations. I hope that's fairly self-explanatory for us this morning.

[3 : 57] You know, what about loving God? Because loving God is slightly different, isn't it? Because when we love God, it's not just with the kind of human love that we all naturally have for one another. It's a gift, it's a gift of grace. So it's a miraculous love that we have to God and it's essential for us to reflect that love in our lives. It's not any old love, can I say? Can I say it's not an undefinable love? Can I say it's not just a heart love?

In other words, I don't think it's quite enough for us to say, oh, do you hear me feel my heart beating? I really love God. Or sometimes I say, oh, I really feel great and close to God today. It's not as if we keep saying, I love God, I love God, I love God. All these things may be true and are significant. It may not be that we can just say, well, yeah, of course I love God is a throwaway comment. But we need to examine ourselves and our hearts to see whether the grace that we have is God's grace reflected in our lives.

How then does the Bible tell us that we can, as it were, test? Don't like the word, the use of that word really, but are we going to examine our lives to see that the grace or the love that we declare for God is His grace? Because it's got characteristics.

It looks certain way. It looks like something. And there's two of the texts that we've read there today. We've read from 1 John and also from John. We've read John 14, 15, where Jesus says, if you love me, you will obey what I command. In other words, obedience is a reflection of grace in our hearts, obedience to God. Or in 1 John, we have these words. This is how we know that we love the children of God by loving God and carrying out His commandments.

This is love for God to obey His commands. So there we have these two elements of grace evidenced, what it looks like. Isn't that utterly and completely contradictory to everything we've been saying thus far in this series on grace, that love looks like? What does it look like? It looks like obedience, obedience to the commands of God. Throw up your hands and say, oh, that's just ruined all. I just thought it was all about loving God, loving me for nothing. But here we have this great declaration of what this love looks like. It's a total bombshell, isn't it? That God says to love me, to live out grace in your life from your heart is to, oh, baby. And that's a great chance, I think, for all of us, total bombshell. Because we tend not to parallel love and law together. We think they're contrary.

[6 : 59] They don't go together. Law is not about love. It's about slavery. It's about duty. But it's not about love. But here God is absolutely dovetailing love and law together. And in reality, that's true, isn't it? People come up in front of a wedding service to declare their love for one another. They take vows to have parameters built around their love of faithfulness, of service, of sacrifice, that they will obey one another and that they will serve one another with love and law kind of coming together, parameter coming together. I've got a visible illustration of love and law in my little finger. You'll probably not see it because it's not a great big, I feel it's like a massive laceration. It feels like a major injury.

And I'll show you it later if you want to see it. To me, it's major, okay, a major injury. And that happened because of love and law. Do you know that? Because last week I was downstairs using wood and a saw with Ross, our youngest. And I was busy explaining to him because he was making a gun out of wood as they do. It would be nice if he made a bunch of roses, but you don't do these things. You make guns out of wood. And he made a gun and he was sawing up bits of wood. And I said, be very careful how you do that. Make sure you keep your hand far away. Use the different protective things that there are there. Be careful. Do it slowly. Concentrate. And I told him all that. And then he went upstairs and he kept nagging me to come back down and help him with a difficult bit. And there was people in. So I had to go down and quickly clamp the piece of wood and start sawing.

But I was doing it quickly and I was saying, I'm in a hurry. There's people in. And then all of a sudden, my finger almost comes off and Ross gets a visible demonstration of law and love. Because I love him a great deal. And so I make these laws about how to use a saw. And I say to him, do as I say, don't do as I do. And the blood reminds him that I love him and reminds me that I need to also recognize that when things are to get done right, we're to do them the proper way. But as you love somebody, you would teach them these things, wouldn't you? And that's significant. And so we recognize love and law do go together.

But the interesting thing, say you're to summarize the law of God, how would you summarize it? I guess you would all say the Ten Commandments. And that's absolutely right in many ways, the moral of God is summarized in that way and resummarized or deepened in the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament, where Jesus takes the external laws and internalizes them. So it's not just murder, it's hatred. It's not just adultery. It's lust in our hearts.

And it internalizes his laws. But these laws, what are they? They're a reflection of love. Are they not? How can they be summarized? Loving God and loving your neighbor. So they're actually relational. And love needs these boundaries, doesn't it? But can I do the vice versa? The boundaries need love. It's no good trying to obey the laws and the commands of God without the grace that we need in our heart to have the motive to do so. But the grace in our heart gives us the boundaries that we are to live by because they're good and because they're just brilliant for us in our lives to follow. So we need to be aware of the sort of thinking which says, well, I really, yeah, I really love God, but I can't really be bothered with His commands. And I love God, but I certainly can't be bothered with His people. Because we then ask ourselves, well, what love do we have? Is it the miracle of grace? Or is it our own kind of human idea of what it means to love God? Because grace has these two elements as the elements of living lovingly with God and following Him and living lovingly with one another and caring in that way. And I want to look at that briefly and loosely from the commandments, but very loosely. I'm not going to elucidate each of the commandments, but look briefly at living in grace with God and then look at also living in grace with one another. What does it look like? What does grace look like for us? In other words, in our day to day living, you're living your life as you follow Christ, as you claim Christ as your redeemer and Savior and say that you're saved by His grace. What does that grace, how should that grace be developing and growing in your life and in mine? Well, if we're living by grace with God, it means that we're going to God relentlessly with all our screw ups. That's what it means. It means we're going to God all the time because we so often make a mess of things. I've got a great quote from that book that I mentioned last week by Steve Brown. It says that we Presbyterians believe in a doctrine of radical and depraved sin, but if we find it in you, we'll kick you out. And that's often our attitude, isn't it? We kind of, we talk theologically about our depravity and our sinfulness, but we don't want to admit and recognize it among one another. But as Christians who live by grace, we're going to God with relentlessly, with a broken and contrite heart, aren't we?

[12 : 42] That's the outworking of grace because we understand it. We understand what it means. It drives us to God. I can't believe that we've tasted grace if we are not driven onto our knees before God for conversation and hope and forgiveness and renewal and a fresh heart. We need that hope and we love that hope and we are driven to this graceful God because of our daily screw ups and find ourselves being forgiven and renewed. So we live grace with God. We worship Him. We worship Him because He's glorious. We've been touched by His grace, His sovereign majestic God, and He loves us so much and we know we've been created for Him. And so we worship Him. And why do we worship Him most of all? Because we have no need to go into His presence and impress Him. He knows exactly what we're like. There's no pretense when we're living by grace. We don't go to God and give Him a list of all our goodnesses and all how we've tried to be this and that. There's no pretense. The sovereign God of the universe loves us and so we worship Him without any need to try and impress Him. Don't try and impress God. Grace takes away that burden, that weight of trying to impress Him and be better than maybe the next people before Him. Grace, living by grace with God helps us to worship Him. It also helps us to prioritize Him as primary in our lives. He is worth lordship. He's worth that first place in our lives. And when we've seen Him and been touched by His grace, nothing compares to Him because of who He is. I'm not saying that human relationships don't count and aren't important. Of course they are, but they're human relationships and it's a different level of relationship with God because we recognize that human relationships are so precious but they're so frail and they don't last forever and we lose the people we love and sometimes are faced with huge tragedy and we know they can't redeem us and we know that they can't change our hearts. And so we prioritize God and we see that money and ambition and pleasure and education make desperately bad masters. They make terrible idols but they're great servants under God and under grace. But if we have such a small view of grace, then we, or should I say, if we have a small view of Christ, then we have a small view of grace. I don't know which way you put that. If you have a small view of grace, then it's because you've got a small Christ and because we keep making things much more important than Him. And so we keep going back to Him and asking for forgiveness for all the idols we make, for just butting Him out of our lives and not prioritizing Him and not making Him Lord, but just making Him a big player in our lives because we don't see grace, because He's really a God to be avoided and ignored rather than a God who is hugely generous and kind and forgiving to us. We live with grace with God and we recoil when the name of Christ is abused in our lives.

When people use the name of Jesus to justify their abusive power or their selfishness or their hatred or to justify division within the family of God and the church of God, we hate it when Jesus' name is hijacked by religion. We hate that. It makes us really angry. We hate when people use the name of Jesus as an excuse behind which they can sin and live any way they like. And we hate it because when we look in the mirror spiritually, we very often see in ourselves. We see how quickly we move towards legalism and move towards abusing Jesus and His name in our lives when we care less about Him. We love His day, the Lord's day, by grace because it's quality time. It's rest time. It's thoughtful time.

It's fellowship time. It's freedom not to be working and serving and yet so easily we make it a sentence and a burden and a guilt trip. So we keep going back in grace to see His provision and His gifts and His love towards us and that all He has given us and all that He provides for us is for our good. Live grace with God.

I can also say secondly and briefly that we live grace with others and I'm just outworking these texts that we read about if you love me, you will obey my commands and I'm taking that back to the fundamental moral laws of God in terms of our relationship with Him and in terms of our relationship with one another. In other words, I'm saying grace has characteristics. It's not enough for us to say, yeah, I love God but I'm just going to do it my way because the tangible reality of the Holy Spirit in our hearts means that we begin to reflect God in our hearts. We become Christ with all our uniqueness and all of your individuality. You still become Christlike. It doesn't mean that we are robotic.

It doesn't mean that we are all the same. Thank God that that's not the case. But it does mean that we have Christlike characteristics. So we live in grace with God and we also live in grace with others. And again, I want to refer back to that marriage course because there's a quote in there that those who've done it will know that I read every time.

[19:08] And it's a helpful one because it speaks about the cost of grace in our lives with other people to love it all. And I'm taking this as reflect. It could reflect just ordinary human love but I'm also taking it to reflect grace to love it all. It's a quote from C.S.

Lewis to love it all from the four loves. Sorry, I eventually get around to it to love it all is to be vulnerable to love anything in your heart will certainly be run and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries. Avoid all entanglements. Lock it up in a safe in the casket or coffin of your own selfishness.

But in that casket, safe and dark and motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken. It will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. And that's what happens, isn't it? When we don't allow the grace of God to work itself out, not just in our love for God, but in our love and in the cost of that love for one another, we grow to that place where we love God's structures. For family, for example, we recognize family, see the building block of society and in the church, we value and respect those who are older than us, both our parents in the faith and their parents naturally. We love them. We move beyond our peers. We don't just take that common thinking that says that nobody matters apart from my friends. We respect them and we respect the structure and the place that God has given and by grace, we submit to that by grace. We recognize the reality of rage in our own hearts, anger that lives deep within us, that his commands speak about. And these commands not to murder in the second table of the law are in relationship, obviously, to one another, but they go back to anger. They go back not to a problem with your neighbor, but to a problem in your own heart and in my own heart. And grace enables us to see how easy we find it to hate one another. Easy. You go to any football match any week of the year or any sports event where there's sides and you see how quickly competitive there's not in the field, primarily in the stands, turns to abject and outright hatred. How quickly that's the case for so many people. It's easy for us to see how quickly our anger spills into the relationships we have, into our families, into our marriages, into our church and we use that anger to justify selfishness and grace. It exposes that, my friend. It exposes the anger that's in your heart and in mine. It exposes that it's unacceptable to God and unacceptable to grace. It reacts against grace. It's contradictory to grace and we need to work out that anger by coming to God for forgiveness and by renewing and being restored by Him.

You think you have no reason to pray? You can't think of what to pray about? You think you've got things sorted in your life? Well, someone pours hot tea in your lap and you'll see that there's things to deal with. You'll see there's anger to deal with and you'll recognise how quickly anger wells up, how quickly anger wells up within the family of God. You know, more than anywhere else, more even than the Easter road, it's easier to be angry in the house of God. Why? Because we always think our anger is justified because we're on God's side or God's on our side and we're holier than others and we know better than others. So it's easy for us to be angry and yet grace takes that perspective from other people and takes it and internalises it so we look and see our own needs sensitive to the reality of rage. I don't believe anyone is irrelevant for anyone, certainly me. But also by grace as we're living with others, we're alerted to the power of lust in our lives. We see through God's grace and through his lens how lust cheapens other people and ourselves, how it encourages and motivates self-indulgence, that it destroys trust and love and faithfulness. Grace, my friend, sees lust as a tinderbox. It recognises that it's not other people's problems. Grace is able to recognise and know that and it changes the way that we look and the way that we act and the way that we think towards others, not just with regard to family structures or with regard to our anger or with regard to our lust. It changes how we are. There's this constant flux and the less we understand grace, the more that we are hanging on to a religion, the less that we will see the significance of Christ and of his work in our lives. But we don't regard ourselves as needing transformation. When grace is cheap, when the cross is a long way away, then we will always find grace an alien and strange concept. Grace as we live with others also values truth. Values truth greatly because we've seen truth in Christ Jesus and so we stay close by grace to him who is the author of truth and the revealer of truth. Do you know how easy it is for us to believe the lie from the very beginning in Genesis chapter 3, Humanity has found it very easy to believe the lie. Very easy to disbelieve God. Very easy to go in a way that suits themselves and believe the lie of Satan. How easy it for us to move away from that kind of theoretical, theological kind of concept. How easy it is for you and I to believe gossip. The worst about people. Thinking the worst. Lying to get out of a bad situation. Cheating in the same way. We want grace to cover all these failures in ourselves but we're also very quick to point them up and to expose them and to pass them on in others. Let's be the people who take gossip, who receive gossip and who just quench gossip with us. Let's not be the people that pass it on. Let's not be the ones who love the juicy tidbits that we hear about people. To be honest we didn't really like anyway and we think it would be good to take them down a peg or two. But let us be purveyors of truth. Let us protect one another and validate and value truth and forgive

failings in others because grace recognizes how much we have been forgiven. Isn't that true? Isn't that just the balance of it all? Is that we look at people differently because we see how much we've been forgiven ourselves. It's the muscle of grace. It's a muscle that grows and develops the more that we interact with the Savior ourselves in all honesty. Going back to that desire to worship Him because before Him there's no pretense. Each of us has pretense today. We all put on a show and that might be one of the aspects that I deal with on Wednesday about Facebook. The kind of image we give, the image we like to give to other people. God knows and we come before Him because we value that and because He still redeems us despite how ugly we are inside and He still loves us. And also we embrace lastly and very briefly within that whole concept of loving one another. We embrace contentment. Embrace contentment. That's a really difficult truth to preach in a materialistic age. Particularly a materialistic age that has suffered a credit crunch. But He's given us everything in its right perspective. Even out of Christ, even without Christ, even before we gave a hoot about Christ, He'd given us family and life and friendship and gifts and talents and energies. Yet in Christ we find so much more and that we embrace through repentance and faith His adoption, His inheritance and His goodness and His love. Now we're going to spend our lives discontented spiritually or discontented, maybe we wouldn't say spiritually but discontented with life and not thinking it's connected to spirituality. Envious of other people. Envious of other people's wives or husbands of their jobs or their talents or their times. Jealous about how God has blessed them and hasn't blessed me. Grumbling about where we find ourselves in life and the unfairness of how God has dealt with us.

[28 : 57] But grace resists that temptation. It doesn't make things easy. It doesn't mean that life isn't difficult and a struggle for us. But it resists the temptation to wallow in that and it moves beyond it to see what we have inherited and what we have in grace and spiritually and reminds us of the unsearchable riches of Christ that have been poured out on us eternally and recognizes His right and His sovereignty to do with us as He sees. That it's recognizing grace, loving grace and luxuriating in that reality. So may it be and I don't for a moment preach this from a position of knowing and understanding our lives and our experiences but I preach it from the reality of knowing that I must fall in my knees before Christ every day to remain in grace. Not that grace can be taken from me. Not that it can be lost but that so I remain in that beautiful place of grace and don't revert to legalism or to license or to gracelessness. And He simply asks that we live facing Him, looking to Him, not needing all the answers but aware that He is the sovereign God who loves us and who redeems us. And I hope next week God willing that we'll look at the subject of holiness within the same kind of rubric as we have today. Let's pray our heads in prayer.

Heavenly Father we come before you today and we recognize that grace is so unbelievable, it's just amazing and recognizing that so often we've lived our lives being religious but graceless. Lord ask for your forgiveness for that. Graceless preachers, graceless elders, graceless congregations. We know how easily we fall into that trap. Lord we ask for the simplicity of life that begins to recognize that Christ has done, has finished, has completed the work for us, that we are covered in His righteousness. We are endowed by His Spirit and His Spirit enables us to live by grace. It's counter cultural. It's crazy by this world's reckoning. Surely Lord that in us is one of the marks that we are touched by grace.

It's when we love you and when we make you Lord. We ask that you would challenge us in our hearts and souls and that we would be able to consider more and more the reality of your gift and the implication of your gift in our lives. Please forgive us for finding it easy to love you because it's kind of intangible and no one can challenge that. And we can save what we like in many ways and still say we love you. But remind us that that love has characteristics both in terms of loving you but also in terms of loving one another. Forgive us for finding it so easy and we know, say know my own heart how easy it is for people not to love me or meet not to love others. That we know Lord is where grace begins. It's great work and we pray that we would recognize that work in our lives. Continue with us then we pray as we conclude by singing to you and praise and bless our fellowship and friendship together throughout this great day that you give us Lord's day, a day of focus and separation to you. We ask in Jesus' precious name, Amen.