

HERE WE STAND: Part 3
ETERNAL LIFE IS A FREE GIFT

I want to begin by directing your attention to three well-known verses in the Bible. I'm sure each of these Scriptures will be familiar to many of you.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6.23)

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2.8-9)

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (Jesus, John 3.16)

Back in the 1940s, two young evangelists began to make waves in America. One was named Charles Templeton; the other was named Billy Graham. The two men were close friends, and traveled together and preached in the U.S. and Europe. Many thought Templeton was destined to be the one who would reach the world with the Gospel. Incredibly, Templeton abandoned his Christian faith and became an agnostic. Years later, in 1982, he said this of Billy Graham: “There is no feigning in him: he believes what he believes with an invincible innocence. He is the only mass evangelist I would trust” (*Anecdotal Memoir*). Templeton died in 2001 at the age of 86. A few years before he died, he wrote a truly sad book, entitled *Farewell to God*. Early in that book he recounts a conversation he had with Billy Graham years before. Templeton had been reading liberal theologians, and

begun to doubt the truth of the Bible. This is his account of their conversation (pp7-8):

All our differences came to a head in a discussion which, better than anything I know, explains Billy Graham and his phenomenal success as an evangelist.

In the course of our conversation I said, “But, Billy, it’s simply not possible any longer to believe, for instance, the biblical account of creation. The world was not created over a period of days a few thousand years ago; it has evolved over millions of years. It’s not a matter of speculation; it’s a demonstrable fact.”

“I don’t accept that,” Billy said. “And there are reputable scholars who don’t.”

“Who are these scholars?” I said. “Men in conservative Christian colleges[?]”

“Most of them, yes,” he said. “But that is not the point. I believe the Genesis account of creation because it’s in the Bible. I’ve discovered something in my ministry: When I take the Bible literally, when I proclaim it as the word of God, my preaching has power. When I stand on the platform and say, ‘God says,’ or ‘The Bible says,’ the Holy Spirit uses me. There are results. Wiser men than you or I have been arguing questions like this for centuries. I don’t have the time or the intellect to examine all sides of the theological dispute, so I’ve decided once for all to stop questioning and accept the Bible as God’s word.”

“But Billy,” I protested, “You cannot do that. You don’t dare stop thinking about the most important question in life. Do it and you begin to die. It’s intellectual suicide.”

“I don’t know about anybody else,” he said, “but I’ve decided that that’s the path for me.”

Charles Templeton lost his faith; Billy Graham held on to his. Templeton became an agnostic and wrote *Farewell to God*. Graham preached God’s love and grace, and led millions to Christ. But notice: It all came down to this: *Billy Graham believed the Bible was God’s Word and preached it. Charles Templeton lost faith in the truth of the Bible.*

This is the third week of our September series of messages I am calling “Here We Stand.” Our topic this morning follows on from the first two ‘non-negotiables’ we have taken our stand on in the last two weeks. Two weeks ago we took our stand on *the Bible as God’s Word*. Last week we took the next logical step: *We believe what the Bible says*. This morning we take the next step: Because the Bible is God’s Word, and we believe what it says, we take our stand on what the Bible says about how we are saved. Eternal Life is a Gift, received through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Billy Graham accepted the Bible as God’s Word, believed what it said, preached that gospel, and changed millions of lives for time and eternity. That life-changing message is reflected in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

In a world that rejects any objective truth, any absolute right or wrong, *the Bible declares bad news, and good news*. The bad news is that we are sinners on a one-way trip to physical death, followed by an eternity separated from God in hell.

Sin is an incurable disease; every person is condemned by it. *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Rom. 3.23). You can shake your fist at God, deny there is any such thing as sin, say there’s no hell, but one thing is unavoidably true: You are going to die. What then?

In response to this hopeless situation, God offers a solution: A Savior. In history, God revealed His plan: It began with a chosen nation, leading to a promised Messiah, the Son of God, who came to take the sins of the world on Himself. Although He never sinned, He gave His life in the place of all us condemned sinners. Jesus died on the cross almost 2000 years ago, then rose from the dead on the third day, proving His victory over sin and death. He offered forgiveness of sin and eternal life to all who believed in Him. *For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life* (John 3.16).

The gospel – God’s *good news* for the whole world – is encapsulated in ten words: *Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved* (Acts 16.31). Every person who ever lived, and every person alive today, is a sinner, separated from a holy God. God wants to restore that broken relationship with each of us. Not only that: He wants us to live with Him, in heaven, forever. *The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord* (Rom. 6.23). Eternal Life is a Gift: The Good news we have for the world is that God loves you so much that even if you are the worst sinner, you are never beyond the reach of God’s love. Jesus paid the penalty for all your sins, and if you believe in Him you’ll be a part of His forever family. It’s *absolutely free*.

This morning we proclaim that Here We Stand: Eternal Life is a Gift: The Gospel is Jesus Christ plus nothing; it is by God's grace alone; and it is through faith in Jesus Christ alone. WE PROCLAIM THE GRACE OF GOD.

That's a great message. More importantly, it's a *biblical* message. It's revealed throughout the OT, and stated *clearly* and *simply* so often in the NT you'd think we could never get it wrong. But listen: Today, this message of hope for a hopeless world is garbled and confused by the church.

This isn't a new problem: The first churches the Apostle Paul planted on his first missionary journey were less than a year old when false teachers infiltrated them and twisted the gospel message. You can read about it in Acts 15 and the book of Galatians. They taught that *believing in Jesus was just the first step; to be really saved, you needed to avoid sin and follow their rules.*

This shouldn't come as a surprise. If there is one truth in the Bible Satan wants to confuse, it's the gospel. Why? Because every time a person believes in Jesus as Savior, Satan loses that person forever. That person has passed from death into life (John 5.24). Does Satan try to bring misery and destroy our lives on earth? Yes – but his ultimate goal is to imprison you eternally in hell – the hell that was created for him and his demons (Matt. 25.41). Every time a person believes in Jesus, his plan is defeated. He hates that.

Romans 5 condenses this message in bite-sized statements of truth: Verse 12 tells the truth of our hopeless condition:

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned...

Sin is like an infectious disease. We all know what this is like today. COVID-19 started with one infection, and look how it has spread! Sin is just like that. Like a contagious virus, sin infected the human race, but instead of just killing some, it brought death to every person. We all sin, and we all die. Nothing we do could overcome our sin. Nothing could avert our death. We were slaves of sin, living every day of our lives in fear of death (Heb. 2.15), facing eternal judgment. That's the *bad news*. The *good news* is spelled out in verses 15-19:

But there is a great difference between Adam's sin and God's gracious gift. For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ. And the result of God's gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man's sin. For Adam's sin led to condemnation, but God's free gift leads to our being made right with God, even though we are guilty of many sins. For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ. Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone. Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners. But

because one other person obeyed God, many will be made righteous. (NLT)

There is one word you should underscore in that passage: It occurs five times, and highlights the most vital and precious truth in the Bible for every human being. It is the word *gift*. We all know what a gift is: It is something you receive *free*. The text even emphasizes this – referring to salvation as a *free gift*. And as if that’s not enough, four times this *gift* is called *gracious*, a result of God’s *wonderful grace*. What is *grace*? It is *undeserved favor*. None of us deserves the gift of forgiveness of sin and eternal life, and nothing we ever do could make us deserve it. So God gives is *absolutely freely*.

Despite this transparent teaching of Scripture, false teachers throughout church history *and still today* will try to convince you that your good works will ultimately determine whether or not you will be welcomed into heaven when you die. God must have known this would be a major problem, because in dozens of Scriptures, He unambiguously declares that it is explicitly *not* something that has anything to do with our good works:

When people work, their wages are not a gift, but something they have earned. But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners. (Romans 4.4-5, NLT)

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2.8-9)

...he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. (Titus 3.5-6, NLT)

Why are ‘killjoys’ in the church so insistent on undermining the free offer of forgiveness of sin and eternal life? Why do they want to inject a list of do’s and don’ts we must follow if we are going to get to heaven?

There may be many reasons. It goes against everything we are taught in life: Study hard, train, eat your Wheaties, and you will succeed. The idea of someone getting a free pass to heaven without showing they deserve it seems un-American!

Others point to Scriptures that enjoin us to live godly lives. They fail to distinguish between God’s free gift of eternal life for those who believe, and His offer of eternal rewards for those who live godly lives. One pastor said that eternal life is free, and will cost you everything. Huh?

We’ve all seen those offers online or on TV of a ‘free gift’ that costs \$9.95! Some theologians paint God’s offer of salvation that way: *Believe in Jesus and you are saved, but if you don’t live a good enough life, you won’t get into heaven.*

Chuck Swindoll captured it best when he wrote, “Mankind is incurably addicted to doing something for his salvation.”

Listen: *Is it fair?* No. It wasn’t fair for Jesus to die; He *never* sinned. It isn’t fair for us to get eternal life; we *have* sinned. But that’s the only way we could ever be saved, and because

God so loved the world, He gave His only Son, and whoever believes in Him will not perish, but has everlasting life!

What love! What grace! What a gift! What a promise! The Apostle Paul captures this amazing reversal of fortunes, and God's stunning act of mercy, in 2 Corinthians 5.21 (NLT):

For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

Where do you stand with God this morning? If you haven't believed in Jesus as your Savior, received forgiveness of your sin and become a member of God's forever family, let this be the day you trust in Him. God is listening to your heart. *Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.*

If you know the Lord this morning, take your stand boldly on this truth: Eternal life is a free gift. Believe it. Receive it. Tell it.