

Mod 3: Grace v. Sin: Is Grace a Double Cure?

Read: Matt. 6:12, Matt. 18:23-35, Jeremiah 17:9, Eph. 2:1, 5; Col. 2:13, Rom. 3:24, Rom. 3:26, Rom. 4:7, Rom. 4:8, Rom. 5:9, Romans 8:1, Ezekiel 36:26, Titus 3:5, John 3:3, 5, Eph. 2:5-6; Col. 2:12-13, 2 Cor. 5:17, Ezek. 36:27; Acts 2:38; Titus 3:5; John 3:5, Rom. 8:13; Eph. 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:23, Phil. 2:12-13, Heb. 12:23.1 Jn 3:4, Rom 6:23, Rev 21:8, James 2:10, Romans 3:19, Mt 6:12, Luke 13:4, Mt 18:23–35

The English word “grace” can be used in three ways. What are they?

During the previous two classes we talked about two of the ways.

1. First, it can refer to the **cause** of salvation: it represents the aspect of God’s nature that causes him to love sinners and seek their salvation even though they do not deserve it.
2. Second, “grace” can refer to the **way** of salvation: we are saved by the grace system (via the grace gate), as contrasted with the impotent law system (via the law gate).
3. Third it refers to the **content** of salvation, which we receive as a gift in the moment when we make the transition from lost to saved. In this sense grace is like a package we receive at conversion. What’s in this package? “Be of sin the double cure: save me from its guilt and power.” (Rock of Ages). This double cure is the content of grace.
4. If grace is a double cure, then sin must inflict upon us a “double curse.”

SIN IS A DOUBLE CURSE

Sin is a Double Curse: Rom 6:23, 1 Jn 3:4, Rev 21:8). James 2:10, Luke 13:4, Mt 18:23–35

We have two different problems caused by sin (a kind of double curse). What is the “double curse” that sin has brought upon us? In many ways it is similar to the two worst, most disastrous things that can happen to a person living in this fallen physical world, summed up as **debt** and **death**. The kind of debt I am thinking about is not just one’s credit card bill or house mortgage. I am referring to catastrophic debt, caused by an unusual calamity such as negligence in a serious accident, or an especially grave and drawn-out illness. Owing such a debt can be a horrendous burden, weighing down the soul to the point of despair.

The other worst human disaster is, of course, death. This is the physical death that has come upon the world as the result of sin, invading the life of every human being in one form or another. Such death is a crisis not just because of the event itself, which is unwelcome enough; but even more so because of the many painful and heart-wrenching circumstances that lead up to it. Every disease in a sense is a “little death,” or a prelude to death. Deaths that are caused by other human beings, either accidentally or deliberately, are especially devastating.

Debt and death that are of this world are disastrous enough, but the two corresponding spiritual problems caused by sin for every human being are infinitely worse.¹

Sin makes us guilty. This stems from the fact that “*sin is lawlessness*” (**1 Jn 3:4**). Sin is an attitude of opposition to law or rebellion against the law. Every sin breaks some law of God, some rule in one’s law code. The lawbreaker becomes *guilty*, i.e., he now stands in a wrong relationship with the law.

Law includes two components: commands and penalties. To be guilty means not only to exist as a lawbreaker, but also to be subject to the penalty prescribed by the law. Under God’s law the wages or penalty of sin is death (**Rom 6:23**), eternal death in the lake of fire and brimstone (**Rev 21:8**). **James 2:10** says, “*For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.*”

Here is where the concept of *debt* enters the picture. To be in debt means to owe somebody something. Jesus teaches us to pray for God to “*forgive us our debts*” (**Mt 6:12**), not our “trespasses.” **Luke 13:4** describes those who are guilty of sin and deserving of punishment as “debtors” Such words are used throughout the parable of the unmerciful servant (**Mt 18:23–35**), which uses the image of a debtor’s prison to convey the idea that sin puts us into debt to God. What do we owe him? The debt of eternal punishment in hell.

This state of guilt is the sinner’s *most serious problem*; it is the more weighty aspect of the double curse. If one dies in a state of guilt, he is lost for eternity, period. Everyone under the law system is still under this curse of guilt. Apart from grace we as creatures can either pay our Creator the debt of perfect obedience that we owe him, or we can pay him the debt of punishment in hell for failing to obey perfectly.

The NT makes it very clear that the sickness of our sinful nature is so serious that it is actually a state of spiritual death. **Ephesians 2:1, 5** talks about our pre-Christian life as the time when we were “dead” in our sins, trespasses, and transgressions (see **Col 2:13**).

The biggest problem with this part of the double curse is that our sinful nature makes it very difficult to resist temptation and to obey the commandments of our law code. Paul shows how serious this condition is: “*The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God*” (**Rom 8:7–8**). Sinners can still respond to the gospel, but obeying God’s law commandments is a real challenge.

Two Distinct Problems

The two parts of the double curse are two distinct problems requiring two distinct and different kinds of solutions. One is an objective legal problem requiring a legal solution; the other is a problem with our own inner personal condition and requires a healing of our very nature.

To illustrate this distinction I like to picture a rather immature man losing his temper at home, storming out of the house in a snit, jumping into his car parked in the driveway, and zooming out onto the road without stopping and checking for traffic. He is immediately broadsided by a truck, creating two problems. Shortly two sirens are heard as emergency vehicles approach. One is a police car, because the careless driver has broken the law by driving recklessly and causing an accident. Thus the man has to deal with the law by going to court and

¹ Cottrell, J. (2009). *What the Bible Says about Grace: Set Free!* (p. 68). Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company.

paying a penalty. The other siren is from an ambulance, which is necessary because the accident also broke the man's leg. So the man also has to go to the hospital and have his leg set and put into a cast, and he has to hobble around on crutches for weeks. This is a totally different kind of problem compared with the traffic citation and court appearance.

By analogy, the sinner's double curse includes two distinct kinds of trouble. He is like a man walking around deep in debt beyond his wildest imagination, with a body filled with cancer. He owes God the debt of eternal punishment, and his soul is dead in trespasses and sins.

Many Christians are confused about the question of assurance. This is caused in large part by a failure to understand what it means to be saved by grace, and in particular, to be saved by the grace *system* rather than the law system (as we saw in the previous chapter). It is also fair to say that this misunderstanding of grace includes a widespread lack of understanding of the double cure. Confusion about the double cure is a serious barrier to assurance of salvation.

Those who think of salvation as a kind of "single cure" (rather than a double cure) tend to zero in on salvation as forgiveness of sins (equivalent to justification but seldom referred to as such). In other words, to be saved is to be forgiven; forgiveness is what one receives at conversion. Now here comes the serious wrong turn: Whether or not one *remains* forgiven is seen as depending on the "good works" of the Christian life; it depends on whether one is "good enough" to be saved. The answer to the question "How *forgiven* are you?" is merged with the answer to the question "How *good* are you?" One's goodness is the measure of his forgiveness. If I think I am only fifty percent good, then I will think I am only fifty percent forgiven—which, of course, is not enough for salvation! Thus, at best, one is in a constant state of "Maybe; I hope so; I'm not really sure." I believe a right understanding of the double cure can erase this doubt about assurance. I am including here a chart that depicts the double cure, and will attempt to explain it.

5. The whole purpose of God's grace is to counteract this double curse with a DOUBLE CURE! "Amazing grace" solves both aspects of the curse of sin.

GRACE IS A DOUBLE CURE

When God gives us the gift package of grace at the moment of salvation, that package always includes two main items, each designed to cure one of the aspects of the double curse. These two parts of the double cure do not come separately; we do not receive one without the other (as Paul emphasizes in *Romans 6*). Together, they constitute the content of grace; they save us from sin's "guilt and power."

THE GRACE OF JUSTIFICATION

Since guilt with its resultant penalty is the sinner's most serious problem, it is no accident that the primary aspect of grace is the one that deals with this problem. This is the gift of *justification*, which occupies most of Paul's attention in *Romans 1–5*. At the heart of his argument in these chapters Paul declares that we are "*justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus*" (*Rom 3:24*). His basic thesis is that "*a man is justified by*

faith apart from works of law” (**Rom 3:28**, CSB). Other NT terms that are equivalent to justification are forgiveness (or remission) of sins, and pardon or acquittal.

Since guilt itself is a legal problem, justification likewise is a legal concept. It is equivalent to a person standing before a judge in a court of law, and hearing the judge make this declaration: “No penalty for you!” When God justifies us (bestows upon us the gift of justification), He is acting in His role as Judge, wearing His Judge’s robe. He is declaring that the legal penalty for our sins has been taken away. Our debt of eternal punishment has been canceled. When we die under grace, we die debt-free! “*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*” (**Rom 8:1**). “No condemnation” means no penalty, no damnation, no hell! There is *no hell* for those who are in Christ Jesus!

To us this wonderful gift of justification is a free gift of grace, but it is not free to God. We will remember that God must be true to both sides of His nature; He cannot simply set aside the demands of His holiness, which require that sin be punished. The only way God is able to deliver us from the obligation to pay our debt of eternal punishment is for Jesus Christ to pay it for us. When Jesus died on the cross, He “*canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross*” (**Col 2:14**). Every sin is like a moral IOU that we write out to God. When He died on Calvary, Jesus took every one of these dreadful IOUs and wrote “Paid in full” on it. As the song says, “Sing, O sing of my Redeemer; with His blood He purchased me! On the cross He sealed my pardon—paid the debt, and made me free!”

The result of justification is free admission through the grace gate into heaven. Jesus has paid your 1,000 points admission fee, and delivered into your hands that free ticket to heaven that says, “*Admit [your name] into heaven, absolutely free.*” What greater gift could there possibly be?

THE GRACE OF REGENERATION AND SANCTIFICATION

The other salvation gift that we find in our grace package is designed to cure the spiritual sickness afflicting our souls and restore us to spiritual wholeness. In supplying this gift God switches roles and robes. He sheds the garments of a judge, and dons the attire of a physician. God as the Great Physician gives us everything we need to cure the disease of sin that has invaded our natures. Unlike the first part of the double curse, which was an objective legal problem, this second problem is a blight upon our very being; therefore the cure for it must also bring about a change in our soul’s condition.

This second part of the double cure actually occurs in two steps or stages. There is first of all an initial step, a one-time event wherein God touches the soul and causes an immediate change in our hearts. This is usually called the act of *regeneration*. This is followed by a continuing process of growth and change, usually referred to as *sanctification*. The former is the precondition for the latter. The two are related as cause and effect. Paul speaks of both in **Ephesians 2:10**. “*We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.*” This is a statement about regeneration, referring to it as an act of new creation (see **2 Cor 5:17**). “*Created in Christ Jesus for good works*” states the purpose of that event, i.e., to enable us to do “good works.” “Doing good works” is another way of saying “becoming sanctified or holy.”

Ezekiel 36:26 prophesies the regeneration event, picturing it as God performing open-heart surgery on the sinner: “*Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.*” This is a

literal heart transplant, not of the physical but of the spiritual heart. The language of regeneration appears in **Titus 3:5**, which says that God saved us “*by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.*” Here regeneration and renewing are synonyms. This is equivalent to what **John 3:3** calls the new birth or being “*born again.*” Paul refers to it several times as a true resurrection from the dead: “*Even when we were dead in our transgressions, [he] made us alive together with Christ ... and raised us up with Him*” (**Eph 2:5–6**; see **Col 2:12–13**).

The divine power that accomplishes this mighty deed comes from the gift of the Holy Spirit, who at conversion is infused into our very being sort of like a healing medicine is injected into the bloodstream of someone who is deathly ill. Our “*regeneration and renewing*” are “*by the Holy Spirit,*” says **Titus 3:5**. In that moment when our souls are literally immersed in the Holy Spirit, and when we drink the Spirit into our inward nature (**1 Cor 12:13**)—this is the moment when the healing begins. See the prophecy in **Ezekiel 36:27**.

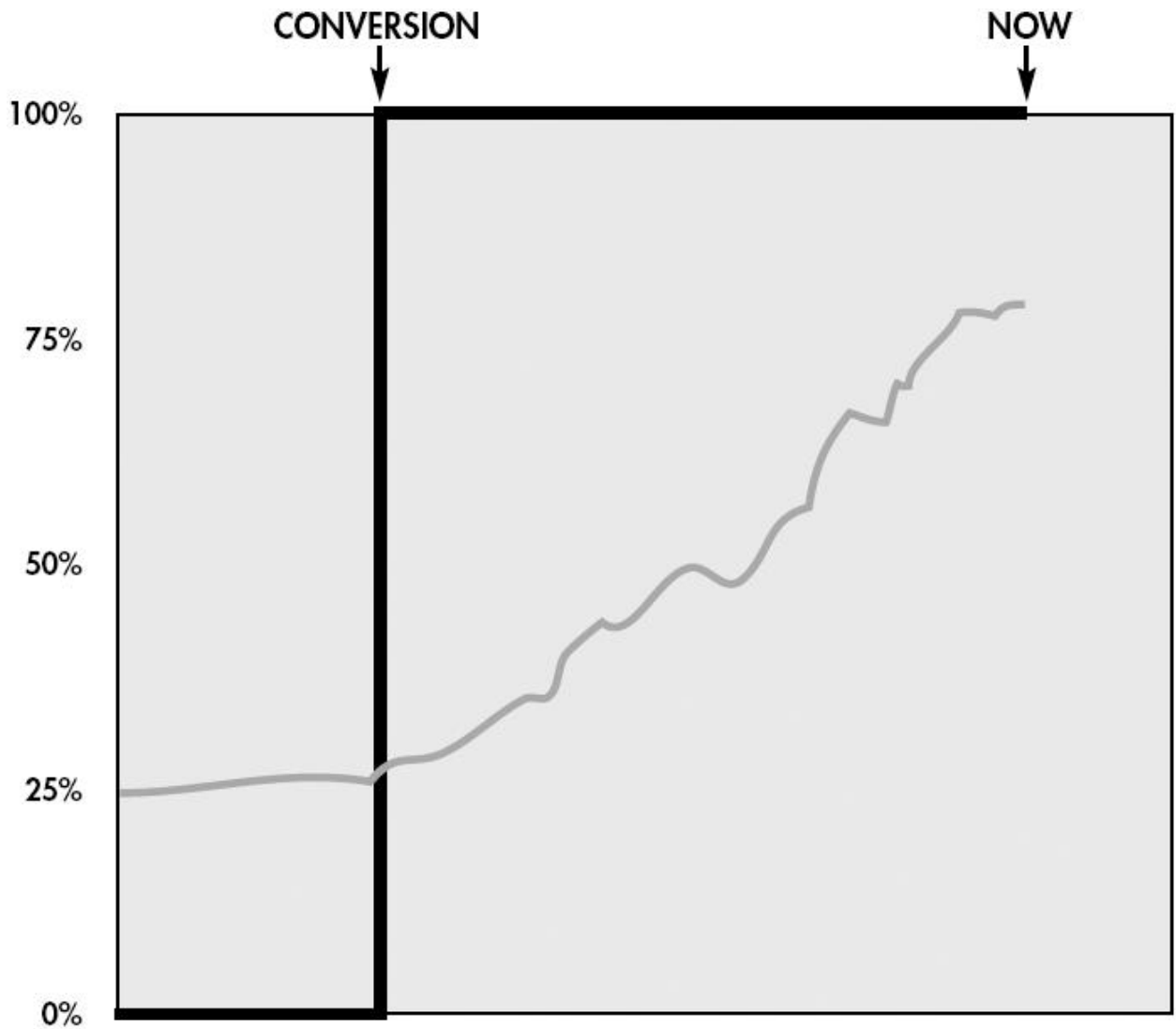
It reminds me of a familiar scene in old-time western movies. Sometimes, when the hero has an accident, or takes a bullet or arrow, he gets an infection and develops a deadly fever. The doctor is called to the house, and he periodically goes into the bedroom to see if any change has occurred. The first few times he comes out of the bedroom, sadly shaking his head. Then finally, after one last visit, he exits the bedroom with a big smile on his face, saying, “The fever broke!” He is telling us that the hero has turned the corner and is beginning to get well.

When God’s gift of regeneration is bestowed upon the sinner, we can joyfully shout, “The fever broke! The fever of sin has begun to wane!”

But as with the western hero, and as with a heart-transplant patient, the healing of our sin-diseased natures is not immediately complete. It does not happen all at once but is an ongoing process called sanctification. This process is the result of the Holy Spirit’s continuing to indwell our very bodies (**Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 6:19**), for the purpose of helping us to make a full recovery. In this recovery stage we are empowered by the indwelling Spirit, but we must use our own spiritual muscles and exercise our way back to health (**Php 2:12–13**). As our live-in physician the Spirit supplies us with the “tonic” that builds up our spiritual systems, but He also gives us instructions that we must follow in order for the cure to progress.²

² Cottrell, J. (2009). *What the Bible Says about Grace: Set Free!* (pp. 72–75). Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company.

THE DOUBLE CURE



#1-SOLID BLACK = PERCENT FORGIVEN

#2-GRAY = PERCENT HOLY