

## **No Law, No Sin; No Faith, No Forgiveness**

‘Legend has it that Jonathan Edwards, third president of Princeton and one of America’s great preachers, had a daughter with an uncontrollable temper. As often happens, this fault was not known to many people outside the family. A young man fell in love with this daughter and asked to marry her. “You can’t have her”, was Jonathan Edwards’ abrupt answer. “But I love her”, the young man replied. “You can’t have her”, repeated Edwards. “But she loves me”, replied the young man. Again Edwards said, “You can’t have her”. “Why?” asked the young man. “Because she is not worthy of you”. “But”, he asked, “she is a Christian, isn’t she?” “Yes, she is a Christian. But the grace of God can live with some people with whom no one else could ever live!”’

Truly God’s grace is far beyond just indefatigable. It covers a far more vast array of situations, circumstances and personality defects than just someone’s all-too-frequent episodes of flying off the handle. Speaking of which, isn’t there an awful lot of out-of-control anger erupting all across our country? People’s fuses the world over seem shorter than usual. The China virus has been wearing people thin, but this elevated anger stems from far more than just that. Spirits of lawlessness have been unleashed worldwide. The ability of people to extend “grace” to one another

seems to have practically disappeared; almost as if many people have up and forgotten what grace is, as if they've never known it.

All this shows to any who have eyes to see and ears to hear that humanity is in a very sad state. Plainly contrary to the bucket loads of false narratives peddled from media outlets to universities to politicians to even uniquely famous “religious” leaders, humanity is patently *not* evolving. In reality, we’re devolving, not progressing! We’re falling ever further away from God. Old news, but many have so long believed the world’s lies that people being bad is inconceivable. Too many of today’s affluent, pampered young people in the world’s wealthy cities are so self-focussed and self-absorbed that grace itself is a foreign and incomprehensible concept. Everything revolves around what they think and feel. Does anyone doubt that feelings are notoriously unreliable? Yet, anyone fool enough to contest trendy sentiments must be “cancelled” because, apparently, they are subhuman. So only some people are progressing, evolving to higher life, while the rest of us are holding them back, and therefore, need to be culled to improve the gene pool. There’s only one acceptable way to think. Any who won’t tow the current dogma are no longer equals.

But the Holy Bible, saved in hard copy so it can never be deleted from our consciousness, reveals a strikingly different condition. Since it’s God’s Word, it is real and true. Absolutely. Without peer. It can’t be disputed. It is so far above us that, in its light, our smartest genius’ reasoning is altogether puny, inconse-

quential, unworthy of consideration. God's Word is the final say, the ultimate authority. The buck stops there. Despite all attempts to weasel out of its rules, none can escape its truth. Romans 3:23 reads: "everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard". Not just "short", we're not even on the same planet. This "news" is not good at all. We're not only not evolving into higher life forms, we're already terminally diseased, thoroughly corrupted, speeding direct to hell, while slumbering in a hand basket. Every single one of us. Verse 10 quotes Psalm 14 in declaring the sobering truth: "No one is righteous—not even one"!

Martin Luther was painfully aware of this, literally from frequent self-flagellations. He knew that despite his penitential strivings to obey God's Law, he was always failing one way or other. He wore out priests with his near incessant trips to the confessional! But God's Words, as recorded here in Romans, suddenly jumped off the page and dived straight into Luther's heart. He realized that salvation is not dependent in the least on all his indefatigable efforts to live righteously. Verses 21-22 positively declare "God has shown us a way to be made right with Him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are". Here the Law is completed, fulfilled by the Gospel. For it is the Law that shows us that we are hopeless sinners, with no chance of ever gaining

God's favor obeying the Law because we're always breaking it. It's impossible to be good any more because, contaminated with Adam's sin, our human nature, inherited from him, is corrupt and has been devolving ever since. So the Law serves a vital purpose—it pushes our noses into the indisputable fact that we are gross sinners, and, without God's grace, will forever be. We see the ugliness of our manifold sins if we but open our eyes. Without the Law, we would not and could not see our utter depravity.

People of grace, who've realized their need of God's grace and, by faith, received it, know how sorry humans are, and so intuitively understand that grace must be extended to everyone. By offering grace to our fellow man, all lives benefit from increasing goodwill, mutual love and familial closeness. All of society then enjoys peace, tranquility and prosperity, the fruits of those who accept God's gift, His unmerited grace embodied in the self-sacrifice of Christ Jesus. "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" (John 3:16, NASB). This is God's inconceivable, continuous, free offer of grace, to any who will put their faith in Him. Our offenses against our Creator are unforgivable. Yet mankind gives offerings and sacrifices, even murdering our children, in futile attempts to get on the good side of the world's imposter gods. Every world religion tells us we have to earn forgiveness. In vain. One faith, one belief, stands in stark contrast—Christianity. For Christ showed us The Way, The Truth, and

The Life. We can't save ourselves. He offered the only perfect sacrifice settling all debts demanded by the Law. His Gospel is the only one in all the world that tells us to just put our faith in Him, and then we will be forgiven. Forgiven of everything. Without faith, we remain condemned in our sins. With faith, we are forgiven. HalleluJah! This is the message of the Reformation.

Believing in Him, at His Word, His grace is ours, and not just for forgiveness. Forgiveness is the first step, which opens the door to more sparkles of His grace. 'Three-year-old Mandy was born into the home of Marshall and Susan Shelley. Mandy was severely and profoundly disabled due to microcephaly. ¶ Marshall and Susan desperately prayed that Mandy would develop some skills. But, eventually, they had to accept that Mandy would never talk, nor walk, nor sit up, nor use her hands. She suffered frequent seizures. She stopped swallowing so they learned to administer medication and formula through a tube surgically implanted in her stomach. The parents never knew if she could see or hear. On the outside Mandy may not have appeared valuable. Yet, as they and other folk loved and cared for Mandy, something happened to them. ¶ When the Shelleys arrived at church several sets of arms would reach out to take her. People you would not expect—teenage boys, a woman recently widowed, men who didn't usually exhibit much interest in babies—would take turns in cuddling her. After church they would have to hunt for her as she had been passed from lap to lap. ¶ The Shelleys and those near

them had many questions: Why was such a child born? What is her future? There were no easy answers. But in loving and caring for Mandy people were set free. ¶ For example, after observing Mandy, one hospital employee said she decided “to get God in my life”, as she put it. ¶ In February 1992, Mandy contracted viral pneumonia. Her body did not have the strength to shake it off. One Thursday, Marshall and Susan sat in Mandy’s room, taking turns holding her. A procession of people came to visit. A hospital volunteer came to comfort the family. She poured out her story of divorce, remarriage, and a feeling of estrangement from God. But, she added, she now had a desire to renew her relationship with God. ¶ Another health-care professional, who was caring for Mandy, uncharacteristically broke into tears. She told of growing up in a boarding school, away from her missionary parents, and never being openly angry at them but never feeling close to them or to God. Now, after caring for Mandy, she longed to regain intimacy with her earthly and heavenly Father. Mandy died that evening at seven o’clock.’

The Reformation uncovered the heart of the Gospel, that it’s by faith that we are saved. A famous hymn expresses that comfort based on Matthew 6 and 10. Several days after my mother went to be with the Lord three weeks ago, I suddenly recalled her singing this hymn, and as her 88th birthday would have been this Wednesday, may you too be blessed as you hear this hymn.

***[“His Eye is on the Sparrow”]***

