
Obstacles to Grace

Introduction:

This morning I want to preach to you a sermon entitled: **Obstacles to Grace.**

Next week the Lord Willing, I will take us back to complete the Sermon Series on **Back to the Basics.**

But this morning I want to challenge you about how we create barriers in our lives to Grace.

It is actually those cunning ways that we endeavor letting the priority of our own self supersede the priority of God-with-us.

Simply put, this is a sermon about SIN!

In our talk this afternoon, I want to explore with you the excuses and the evasions that we employ in our lives to inhibit the relationship of love that God offers to us.

The one thing we do not have to teach in the school of life is the art of making excuses.

I'm not sure when we first mastered this skill but it seems like it begins early in life.

Here's a Folk Song by Anna Russell that tells it like it is:

I went to my psychiatrist to be psychoanalyzed
To find out why I killed the cat and blacked my husband's eye.
He laid me on a downy couch to see what he could find,
And here's what he dredged up, from my subconscious mind.
When I was one, my mummy hid my dolly in a trunk
And so it follows, naturally, that I am always drunk.
When I was two, I saw my father kiss the maid one day,
And that is why I suffer from kleptomania.
At three I have a feeling of ambivalence towards my brothers

And so it follows naturally I poisoned all my lovers.
But I am happy now I have learned the lessons this has taught;
Everything I do that's wrong is someone else's fault!

And while that is tongue in cheek the point is well made. **We seem to have an excuse for everything.**

One of the most famous excuses of all is really a philosophy: **“the End justifies the Means.”**

When we don't care how we get to a certain end we will inevitably leave causalities along the way.

Instead of acting in faith, we sidestep God's plan and will and make our own way.

It can be said in a number of ways:

- Nobody was hurt
- Everything turned out O.K.
- Well, We made a profit
- We got elected didn't we?

And all of this puts up a barrier between God and ourselves.

Just making excuses for what we do and who we are!

I don't understand how anyone could be happy with themselves in this kind of existence.

It seems like to me this would be a miserable existence of guilt.

You see – we end up not being able to love ourselves and we certainly won't let God or others love us.

Often following Christ can be a real struggle.

Have you ever thought or said things like:

- “I am just not good enough.
- I just cannot seem to do what I want to do.

I have made resolutions,
I have turned over new leaves until there are no more leaves to
turn over.
I want to do what is right, but as hard as I try to do it, I find that I
cannot do it.
What is wrong with me?
I'm supposed to be a Christian.
I see what the Bible says, but I cannot seem to live up to it.
There must be other people who are living up to what God says.
Why can't I?"

Have you ever felt like that or said those things?

Maybe you came to this morning to this worship service feeling just like that!

I want to address these barriers that we have in our lives between us and God.

First we must understand

I. We Live in a World of Alienation.

A. We face obstacles to God's Grace in many different and enticing ways.

The Apostle Paul faced this Obstacle to God's Grace when he said, recorded in Romans 7:14 thru 20

"We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. 15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is SIN living in me. 18 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature, for I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 for what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is SIN in me that does it."

In this Scripture that I have just read to you is the Great Example of the Obstacles to Grace that Paul was facing in his spiritual life.

And if the Apostle Paul struggled with this, you can be assured that you and I are going to struggle with these obstacles.

Let me continue to read the rest of this passage for more is given how frustrated Paul was in this time of his spiritual walk with God.

It continues in verse 21:

“So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; 23 But I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of SIN at work within my members. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

We need to understand that SIN alienates us from God, Sin alienates us from others, and even ourselves.

When the Law said, **“Do not do it,”** Paul’s own sinful temptation and desires said, **“Do it!”**

And the problem was he obeyed his sinful desire and as a result, the commandment that said, **“Thou shall not covet”** produced in him all kinds of coveting

Now – believers listen to me – it wasn’t the commandment, instead it was his own sinful nature that produced it.

Now let me try to explain that:

- We rationalize immorality with **“but we really love one another, in spite of us being married to someone else.”** And what happens is people justify their being together against the Law of God thus becoming sinners. This becomes an Obstacle to God’s Grace.
- We rationalize our materialism with **“we just want our kids to have the best.”** We struggle to worship God with the tenth and yet don’t

struggle when it comes to buying stuff we want. This becomes an Obstacle to God's Grace.

- We rationalize our hatred by saying **“someone needs to stand up to that person.”**
- We rationalize our lies with **“I was just trying to protect them.”** And we trample over the commandment that says, **“Thou shalt not lie.”**
- We excuse our absence in Worship with **“Sunday is our family day.”** And we disregard the command of God to worship.
- We excuse our pride by calling it **“positive self-esteem.”**
- We feed our minds with immorality and godlessness and excuse it with **“It's not hurting anyone but me.”** And friend, to be honest, this immorality and godlessness is sending you straight towards hell.
- We tear down other people and say, **“I was just having fun, and I really didn't mean it.”** But, yes we did, we meant it.

Do you see and understand how these kinds of reasoning's can become **Obstacles to God's Grace?**

Little by little, by our own intention or by our inattention, we alienate ourselves from God by doing what we know we shouldn't be doing or how we should be acting.

Let me share with you what we mean by Obstacles to Grace:

1) The first obstacle to Grace is Ignorance.

Sometimes we can alienate ourselves from God and others unknowingly

Our lack of understanding defeats us.

Talking about Ignorance – let me share with you a story that will help us relate to this obstacle:

LETTING GO OF SIN

Men who trap animals in Africa for zoos in America say that one of the hardest animals to catch is the ring-tailed monkey.

For the Zulus of that continent, however, it's simple.

They've been catching this agile little animal with ease for years.

The method the Zulus use is based on knowledge of the animal.

Their trap is nothing more than a melon growing on a vine.

The seeds of this melon are a favorite of the monkey.

Knowing this, the Zulus simply cut a hole in the melon, just large enough for the monkey to insert his hand to reach the seeds inside.

The monkey will stick his hand in, grab as many seeds as he can, then start to withdraw it.

This he cannot do. His fist is now larger than the hole.

The monkey will pull and tug, screech and fight the melon for hours
But he can't get free of the trap unless he gives up the seeds, which he refuses to do.

Meanwhile, the Zulus sneak up and nab him.

Spiritual Application:

Don't we see this is what happens when we in our ignorance are tempted by the enemy of our lives and we get a fistful of sin and refuse to let loose and he sneaks up behind us and we ARE caught?

2) Secondly, the Greek word of SIN literally means for us “Miss the Mark.”

We illustrated that this morning with the guys shooting their paintball guns at the target.

Story:

I've been hunting for nearly 50 years.

I hunt deer with a bow, shotgun and black power rifles.

I count myself a pretty good marksman with all my arms.

This experience helped me when I was in the army going through Basic training at Ft. Jackson, S.C. in 1969. I recall having to go to the rifle range where we were trained to shoot the M-16 rifle.

We had to shoot targets 100 yards, 200 yards, 300 yards, and up to 500 yards away.

I qualified to be an marksman shooter because of my experience in shooting.

Spiritual Application:

Friends - God has a target for us to shoot for.

God's command/His target is to connect with Him so that we can live our potential with Him the way He designed it to be.

If we don't see this happening in our spiritual relationship with God, then what is happening is we're **Missing the Mark.**

Whenever I would miss the target they would let me and my training sergeant know. And then I could adjust from missing to hitting the mark.

It always upset me whenever I missed my target because I prided myself in being a good shooter.

You see when we see the reality of our SIN we can despair, we can ring our hands, and we can feel guilty, **OR we can turn to God for mercy and Grace.**

I remember whenever I would miss my drill instructor would encourage me that I could do it.

Maybe you are here today thinking as I am talking that you have made a mess of your life or you have some things in your life that disqualifies you to be a genuine Christian believer. In a sense you are saying, "I've missed the

mark!” I really want to hit the Mark that God has set for me, but I need help!

Maybe you know that you look good on the outside to others but you know there is SIN on the inside and God certainly knows that SIN is there in your life.

If you feel that way, then let me say, **“Good!”**, because if you and I admit our SIN you will be able to see the wonder of God’s Grace in His offer to forgive us.

Jesus came to give His life for our SIN.

And our salvation does not depend on our ability to EARN Grace, instead it is tied to whether or not we RECEIVE Grace.

It’s not a question as to whether we continue to Sin.

Paul said in Romans 6:1-2 “*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so the Grace may increase? 2 By no means! We died to sin: how can we live in it any longer?*”

3) Ultimately, sin is choosing our own will. We want to be the center of our universe, and God wants us to let Him give us His Will and He be the center of our universe.

How in the world did the Old Testament Lot end up in such a mess?

One word—Choices!

—Something each of us have in common. Every single day... every single moment we make choices.

—What to eat. What to wear. What to say. What to do. How to act.

—You’ve made a thousand choices before you arrived here to worship this morning!

A choice to argue with your wife.

A choice to yell at the kids.

A choice to spend some time with the Lord in prayer.
A choice to eat breakfast and what to eat.
A choice to come to church to worship.
A choice where you sit this morning.
A choice to listen or not to listen to God's Word.
A choice to have a right attitude or a wrong attitude.

Choices!

The choices you make today are the ones you're going to have to live with tomorrow and for the rest of your life.

God want us to choose Him and His way, not ours!

So, it can become a tug of war between God and our own will.

II. We Cannot Deny that we Experience Sin.

1) Sin is experienced in corruption of business, at home, in government, and even at church when people become ego-centered and grab for power and control, and position for themselves.

Let me read to you a couple passages from the book of I John.

In I John 1:5-10 "This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is Light; in Him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we live and do not live by the truth. 7 but if we walk in the light, as He is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, purifies us from all sin. 8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him out to be liar and His word has no place in our lives."

In I John 2:15-16 it reads this way, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boastings of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world."

Let me give you some examples of sin:

Sometimes we may really think we are doing good. We may even be desiring to do good ... but the methods we use can be wrong.

Jim Cymbala is the Pastor of the Great Brooklyn Tabernacle in New York City. His wife is the Director and songwriter for the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir.

In his book **FRESH FAITH**, Pastor Cymbala writes,

“Many times at the end of our services, I meet people at the altar who are so ashamed that they often will not even look me in the eye. Their shoulders are slumped; their gaze is on the carpet. I sense no faith in them to ask Christ for mercy.

Praise and worship seem impossible.

They are living under the heavy burden of their own failure, with no hopes that their life can be retrieved. They now feel too unworthy to expect any blessings from a holy and righteous God.

I am not talking about people with the stereotypical inner-city problems of drugs, prostitution, or whatever. These are average-looking people who have simply given in to a besetting sin so often that they are convinced they will never rise above it.

Often, as the congregation is worshipping in the background with a song such as **“Grace, Grace, God’s Grace – Grace that will pardon and cleanse within,”**

I notice that the person before me isn’t singing along.

It is because the person isn’t sure that the song could really be true for him or her.

Sometimes I will gently try to lift the person’s chin or perhaps the hands in upward openness to God.” (pg. 129)

You see – the incredible message of the Gospel of God’s forgiveness can cleanse and renew the foulest heart!

God's promise of redemption is staggering ... and yet amazingly it is true!
Its Amazing Grace the choir sang about this morning.

Friends, we need this Amazing Grace this morning to be applied to our spiritual lives.

You see – now understand this, when we give in to the temptation that becomes SIN in our lives we need a Savior who can put us back in the right relationship with God.

2) When we sin willfully against God, the Word of God teaches us that we are separated from God.

Yes, SIN alienates us from God. And Jesus is the only One who can put us back in the right position, when we confess and repent of our sins.

That's when His precious blood is applied to our sins.

SIN in the original Greek language means **“To Miss the Mark.”**

Everyone of us has been there haven't we!

Let me share with you this humorous little story:

A young woman asked for an appointment with her pastor to talk with him about a besetting sin about which she was worried.

When she saw him, she said, "Pastor, I have become aware of a sin in my life which I cannot control.

Every time I am at church I begin to look around at the other women, and I realize that I am the prettiest one in the whole congregation.

None of the others can compare with my beauty.

What can I do about this sin?"

The pastor replied, "Mary, that's not a sin, why that's just a mistake!"

We certainly understand what the pastor was saying was probably the truth, but still I have to agree with Mary, this was a besetting sin in her life.

The Sin of Pride! And sin comes in all forms

III. There are many ways to Sin

- 1) There are situations where the devil tempts us in enticing situations and we are lured into SINNING.**
- 2) There is Sin of Disobedience to what we know God wants us to do. We just bulk and refuse to listen to God.**
- 3) There is Laziness when it comes to getting out of our comfort zone and ministering to those in need. We know we could be doing something for God and we're just plain lazy We don't want anything to mess up our own selfish desires.**
- 4) We plead ignorance and say, "We didn't know it was a sin!" Yes, you did my friend, because the Holy Spirit was there and checked you and you went ahead and did it anyway.**
- 5) We tell ourselves, "I'm too young to commit myself to going to heaven. I've got to have fun and if I make this commitment I'll have to give it up." Let me respond that and say, I've more fun being a Christian than I ever did when I was a non-Christian. Can you testify to that?**
- 6) We convince ourselves that we don't have the TIME to go to church, we don't have the time to pray and serve and do ministry.**

IV. We Can Overcome Sin.

- 1) First we must realize that God is a God who loves us and wants to forgive us of our sins.**

Jesus Christ, the Son of God died for us and became our substitute so we could experience forgiveness of our sins and put us in a right relationship with God.

“For God so loved the World that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”
John 3:16

Jesus tells us that we are to repent of our sins and be baptized.

Often following Christ can be a real struggle when it comes to the area of Sin.

This is the human condition for all believers.

Some people labor under the misimpression that whenever people come to know Christ their problems are over, that sin is no longer a problem.

Nothing is farther from the truth.

The fact is that we all struggle with Sin.

What we really are struggling with is our old sinful nature.

Especially now that we have come to Christ do we struggle, because we understand the commandments of God and the requirements of His Word. And we have the Holy Spirit convicting us of our SIN

You see for all those years we have been thoroughly committed to the practice of sin.

And it becomes a very real struggle that all Christians face.

Placing our own lives in beside His Word and making the comparison of what we are as opposed to what we ought to be, we see the disparity of the two and want to do something about it.

So, we roll our sleeves up and try to change.

And we find it hard work that we can't accomplish, we just simply cannot do it on our own!

Let me try to relate this to you:

If you have experienced the effects of the aging process on the human body, you will better understand this passage of Scripture.

I don't know what sport you like the best. Perhaps its golf, tennis, basketball or softball.

In any case the older you and I get, and if you try to play as you get older, often the things your brain commands you to do are not always the things you do.

As you take a swing at that ball on the grass and you know where it is suppose to go and where it goes is not always where you want it to go.

If you understand this, you will understand what Paul is talking about here.

He is saying, ***“I went into this thing with a desire to obey God’s Law. I even attempted to obey it. I gave it my best shot. And it didn’t come out that way. I tried to do a good thing and I ended up sinning. How is that?”***

There is a struggle with our sinful nature.

Verse 20 says, ***“Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.”***

Conclusions:

In Romans 7:24-25, Paul said, ***“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death/SIN? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.”***

The Living Bible says, ***“Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, He has set me free (from sin).”***

Jesus Christ is the Deliver to the SINFUL Obstacles we face in our spiritual walk with God.

Only Christ Jesus can set us free!

Only Christ living in us through His Holy Spirit can give us the power to overcome the sinful nature that is within each of us.

As we surrender our lives to Him, we find His power to be real, and His word to be true.

We can learn several important lessons from these Obstacles to Grace.

- 1) We can learn that we cannot struggle victoriously in our own strength and it's futile for us to try.
- 2) We can learn that we are not very different from any other Christian believer when we struggle with sin.
- 3) Everybody struggles. Everyone has Obstacles they have to face.
- 4) Your struggles might be different from mine, but we all struggle.

The action we have to take is to follow Jesus when He said recorded in Luke 9:23-26:

23Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 24For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. 25What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? 26If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."

Denial of self is the step we need to take to overcome sin that has its root in our lives.

We can't do it alone; we must have God's help.

The Grace life is possible if we accept the life of Jesus as our model and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to lead us in our relationship with God.

Friend, you are a container of God.

The living Lord lives in you.

And the life which we contain is the life which sets us free only through the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit.

As we surrender our spiritual lives to Him, we will find His power to be real, and His word to be true.

In closing I want to read Paul's victory that can be our victory from Romans 8:1-2

“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”

Do you want to be set free from that SIN in your life?

