“Cheap Grace” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 4 – June 21, 2026

I. **Romans 6:14-15** – [14]For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. [15]What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

II. **For a long time, I struggled to understand grace**.

a. That might sound strange coming from your pastor – but I just couldn’t understand that God would look with favor on me with no strings attached.
   i. I grew up in a church with an emphasis on good works… or doing good deeds that would keep you in good standing with God… which made it very hard for me to see grace as a free gift.
   ii. You’ve heard nothing in life is free, but a Lutheran pastor helped me believe that grace and forgiveness do not require my good works.

b. I just couldn’t believe that God would give me forgiveness, grace, life, and rescue me from sin in a purely loving, unconditional way… no paybacks expected or required.
   i. Some would have you believe that God’s love is transactional, but it is free and unconditional.

c. In fact, it was this transactional idea that made grace so hard to understand as a young person.
   i. You see, if I did bad things and sinned against God, I would go to confession… where I was told that I was forgiven, but I must also do things as penance.
      1. Usually the list consisted of saying many prayers, but sometimes it included other ways to make these sins right if people were harmed.
      2. In my young mind, I thought – Okay, if I do this bad thing, it requires a payment of this much… it was transactional.

d. Fast forward many years, and I had mostly walked away from the Lord, but in the back of my mind was, “One day, I’m going to ask forgiveness for all this bad I’ve done, and I will deal with the consequences then.”
   i. In other words, I had some *concept* that I lived under God’s grace, but I had cheapened grace to a transaction.
   ii. I live however I want, knowing that God will forgive me one day, and I will do lots of penance or whatever to pay Him back for my bad deeds.

e. You may think this is strange… or that you don’t understand how someone could believe this way… but let me tell you, among Lutherans it can be even worse.
   i. With my misunderstanding, I thought I would pay God back for my sinful lifestyle through penance… but many Lutherans simply sin with the idea that God will forgive them because He is merciful.

ii. I've known Lutherans living in direct opposition to God's will – excessive drinking and drugs, pre-marital intimacy, pornography, stealing, gossiping, and cheating – and do you know what they say about all that? "I believe in Jesus, so I'm forgiven."
    1. What?! "Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!" (v 15)
    2. God forgives, but that never gives us a license to sin.

III. **Today's reading in Romans is all about freedom by the grace of God**.

a. This section comes after Paul writes about Baptism and its power to bring us to a new life – connected to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
b. You see, everyone is conceived and born in sin, because it was passed along from the first people – Adam and Eve.
    i. That rebellion in the Garden of Eden was the first sin against God, and it was the beginning of our need for grace and forgiveness… because every person from that point on would pass it along like a sickness to the next generation.
    ii. The Old Adam that sins and rebels against God is drowned in the waters of Baptism… and a New Adam arises… forgiven and set free from the former life… a life without God and grace.
c. So, perhaps some people asked the questions, "Wait a minute Paul, are you saying that I can just sin against God all I want and He will just keep forgiving me? What's to keep me from sinning more and more with that kind of arrangement?"
    i. Paul answers this directly… are we to sin because we are under grace? Absolutely not!
    ii. When he writes "by no means!" the force of those words is, that's abhorrent… that's appalling… that is shameful!
    iii. Only the sinful human mind can get grace and forgiveness so mixed up as to think we have a get out of jail card or a license to sin… that's just cheap grace.
d. Cheap grace means that we abuse the gift and the giver – and it leads to destruction.
    i. We've all seen the children of wealthy people who are given everything on a silver platter… and they don't respect or care about any of it… they wreck brand new cars, spend the money on drugs and alcohol, flunk out of college, quit good jobs, and just sit around.
e. The sad part about sin is we become slaves to it… we are not living in the freedom we think we are.
    i. You see, a sinful life is supposed to be fun and free… as the world around us wants you to believe that doing whatever feels good is like heaven… but what does the Bible say? What does God say?
    ii. When I keep on sinning, I'm a slave to sin… a slave to unrighteousness and brokenness.

1. People think it's a better life when they don't have faith in Jesus because they can do whatever they want… but the truth is sin is not freedom… it is slavery of the worst kind that leads to an eternal death.

f. Yes, the wages of sin is death – it is the payment all deserve – it is transactional in a sense – because all are given what they earn.
   i. Yet, the grace of God undoes the power of transactions and cheap grace – because He flips the whole thing on its head.

IV. **Jesus was the payment for our sin and the source of our grace**.

a. I love that we have a Baptism today as an example of how God works, because that little baby had nothing to do with God calling Him into the family… it was a perfect example of God's unconditional love.
   i. God does the adopting – He chooses us, not the other way around… and God doesn't adopt us with expectations of paying Him back – because the price was far too high for that.

b. I'm not sure if you understand how much God hates sin…
   i. In fact, He hates sin so much that He was willing to do something unimaginable to take its power away… offer His own Son to pay its wage… death.
   ii. The radical nature of the cross is that God's own Son was sacrificed to pay for the sin of the world – which is why the Bible says to keep on sinning is shameful – Jesus willingly gave up His life so we would be free from the power of sin forever.

c. Now we are free to live in righteousness, not because we have to, it's because we get to…

d. There's a story about a young boy who spent years moving through the foster care system, getting too old for most families to consider adoption.
   i. Then, miraculously, a family with children of their own chose him and welcomed him as their son.
   ii. His new life began simply, as he shared a bunk bed with his brother and learned about family life…. However, he quickly discovered that this family got up early!
   iii. Long before sunrise, they headed down to the family-run bakery, where everyone helped bake bread, pastries, and cakes.
   iv. His brothers and sisters showed him what to do, and little by little he learned the work… and in time, he came to experience a deep sense of belonging and fulfillment…. because not only was he helping, but he was a part of the family.
   v. Now, it's not like the family brought him in for a 90-day supervision period to see if he was good enough for the job or chose to adopt a new family member to put them to work for free.
   vi. The work of the bakery did not give him a place in the family, but it was simply the place where his <u>new identity</u> was lived out.

e. We are adopted into the family with no strings attached, since Christ has paid a debt we could never repay.
f. Grace is free, but it was never cheap…
    i. It cost the Son of God His life… all so that we might belong to the Father and walk in <u>freedom</u> as His children. Amen