



GRACE

Part 4 of Religion Saves

Pastor Mark Driscoll | January 27, 2008

You're listening to "Religion Saves and Nine Other Misconceptions," a sermon series in which Pastor Mark Driscoll answers nine controversial questions about Jesus and Christianity. The following is a presentation of Mars Hill Church in Seattle. For more audio and video content, please visit marshillchurch.org.

Well, good evening, Mars Hill. We are winding through a series called "Religion Saves and Nine Other Misconceptions." The deal was this, people posted 893 questions, 5,500 comments, 343,000 votes. Took the top nine questions and they are each now a sermon. So we did birth control, humor, and predestination. It's been a real grab bag. I don't know how you put those together.

Today we're gonna deal with God's grace, and then next week, how do you overcome sexual sin. The following week, faith and works, and therein we'll deal real strongly with the doctrine of regeneration. Dating – we got a special for you on that week. We're gonna give away a bubble suit – you'll see it online soon.

(Laughter)

It creates a zone of holiness. You'll love it. It's awesome. The emerging Church, and then the regular principle in worship. This week, we're gonna deal with the doctrine of grace, and I'll explain that in just a minute.

For those of you who would want to study that subject more, at marshillchurch.org, there is a blog by the executive elders, and I've got a blog that'll be going up this week, and it'll list links to articles, books you may want to read, just different resources to help you in your personal study, as well as the list of points I'll be covering this evening.

Pastor Jamie has a total year-end financial summary for you there as well. I'll go ahead and pray, and we'll get to work. Tonight's a very personal sermon for me. It's a personal question that is asked of me, and so you'll get to know a little bit more about me, and hopefully it's of help to you. So I appreciate having you guys join us.

Father, we begin by thanking you that you are a great God. That we don't have to make you be good, because you are good. We don't need to make you love, because you are loving. We don't need to make you desire to do good and to pursue us because that is simply the way that you are. And so, God, as we study tonight, we ask that this subject of grace would be made more clearly known and understood to us, that we might live in your grace and by your grace and through your grace, for your glory. And we know that it comes, grace does, through Jesus. So, we ask for grace in his good name, amen.

Here is the question that I was given to speak on, "Of all the things that you" – meaning me, so you can tell this can be a little personal – "what parts of Christianity do you still wrestle with? What is the hardest for you to believe?"

And my answer will be grace. So I'll dedicate this sermon to my lovely wife Grace. It's the thing that I struggle with most – not her, but the doctrine.

(Laughter)

And she is a constant reminder that I need to grow in my learning of this doctrine. And for those of you who don't know me, my name's Mark. Howdy, thanks for coming. And I'm 37 years of age, which means this year I'll turn 38 in October. So, my life is about a at the halfway point. The average man lives to about 75, 76. So, at any moment, the band's gonna take the stage, and we're gonna have halftime in my existence.

That's where I find myself, and I've lived up until this point roughly half my life. The first half as a non-Christian. The second half as a Christian. And had you asked me the question, "What do I struggle to believe in Christianity" before I met Jesus, I would have told you, "I really don't believe that I'm that bad. I don't think I'm perfect, but I don't think I'm really sinful like the Bible says I'm sinful." And that was what I struggled with most.

Part of that was I would overlook my sin, and I would sort of highlight what I considered my good qualities. And if I did have sin, I would conveniently find ways to blame other people, or excuse myself. And I didn't compare myself to Jesus, but rather to other people, cause if you compare yourself to Jesus, you'll get convicted and you'll see clearly.

So, in an effort to not do that, I compared myself to people. Went off to college and did study there. And as I was in a philosophy class, reading Augustine, I learned that pride is sin. I just thought it was self-esteem. I learned that living apart from God was sin. Living for myself instead of for

God was sin.

And I learned that sin included my will; I didn't desire what God wanted. My thoughts – I didn't think what God wanted me to think. My sin included my emotions; I didn't feel what God wanted me to feel. It included sins of omission; I didn't do some stuff I was supposed to. Sins of commission – I did some things I wasn't supposed to.

And as I came to understand fully that I really am a sinner. Not just in the things that I do, but in the nature that I possessed before I became a Christian. It really changed everything for me. And since that time, I no longer struggle to think that I am a sinner. I'm convinced that I am.

And what the Bible says is absolutely devastating. I'll read for you what the Bible says about sinners in general, and myself in particular. Apart from Jesus doing something for me, here's who I am.

I'm one who does evil continually – Genesis 6. Impure – Proverbs 20. Not righteous or good – Ecclesiastes 7. Full of evil and madness – Ecclesiastes 9. Wicked and estranged – Psalm 58. Gone my own way – Isaiah 53. Rebellious – Isaiah 65. Among those who have loved darkness – John 3. A slave to sin – John 8, Romans 6.

A child of the devil – John 8. Unrighteous, not understanding, not seeking God, and a stiff-necked resister of the Holy Spirit – Acts 7. Turned aside, worthless, not doing good, having a heart impenitent, or unrepentant heart – Romans 2. Without fear of God – Romans 3. Hostile to God – Romans 8. Spiritually foolish – I Corinthians 2.

Spiritually dead and among the children of wrath – Ephesians 2. Darkened; alienated; marked by ignorance, hardness of heart, callousness; which includes perversion, greed, and impurity of every sort, and living among the, quote, enemies of the cross of Christ – Philippians 3.

Dead – Colossians 2. Defiled and unbelieving – Titus 1. Under the power of the evil one – 1 John 5. And foolish, disobedient, and led astray, and among slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing my days in malice and envy, hated by others, and hating one another – Titus 3.

Apart from God doing anything, that's who I am. Now, that is devastating. And it's incredibly honest. The Bible is the most honest, truthful book that's ever been written. And one of the reasons I know that it's not just something that people made up is by sheer content.

There is no way in the world that were you to write a description of yourself, or were I to write a description of myself, that it would read anything like that. But that's God's ungarbled, unvarnished, absolutely brutally honest assessment of who I am, apart from Jesus.

Now, what doesn't surprise me today is that I'm a sinner. What does surprise me is how God responded to me and continues to respond to me, and that is with grace. This is what I struggle to believe. Not that I am sinful, but that God is continually only gracious toward me.

And I don't think I'm alone in this. I don't disbelieve in the grace of God, but I'm prone to forget it, or live as if it weren't true. As I was studying the Bible this week, I found roughly a dozen occasions where some pastor, writing to the church or people that he loved, says, "Now let me remind you of this."

And almost every time, he's reminding them of the grace of God. It seems to be something that people in general, myself in particular, who even believe in the grace of God, tend to forget or overlook and need continual reminder of the grace of God.

So, I'll start, regarding the grace of God, in I Peter 5:10, where it says that God is the God of all grace. So, all grace comes from God. I'll tell you that there are many words in the Bible that speak of God's grace. And God's grace in its various forms is spoken of about 400 times in the Old Testament, about 200 times in the New Testament, so that grace appears roughly 600 times as a mega theme of our Bible.

In many ways, it is the canvas upon which all that it means to be Christian is painted. It's the thread that weaves together all other doctrine and truth, and apart from grace, there really is no Christianity whatsoever. And that which distinguishes Christianity from every other religion is grace.

Every other religion says you need to be a good person, 'cause God loves good people. Christianity says, "You are not a good person, and God loves you. And by his grace, he will change you so that you can be good." And so, my definition of grace is this, I'll define it as this: Grace is God the Father, in love, doing good – doing good for ill-deserving sinners, through God the Son, by God the Spirit.

I'll read it again. Here's my definition of grace. Grace is God the Father, in love, doing good for ill-deserving sinners, through God the Son, by God the Spirit. So, grace is Trinitarian. It comes from God the Father, through God the Son, by God the Spirit. It is God's love in action.

The Bible says in I John that God is love, and that's true. God is by nature love. He's loving and he's good. And God loves – and God's love is demonstrated in his grace. So, for God, love is not just something that he feels. It's also something that he does. And when he acts upon his love, we call that grace.

Furthermore, the recipients of God's grace are ill-deserving sinners. And I choose that language very carefully. It's not just that I am undeserving of God's love. If I were a stranger to God, I would be undeserving. But by virtue of the fact that I'm a sinner, I'm an enemy of God. And as an enemy of God, I'm not just undeserving, I'm ill-deserving. I'm ill-deserving.

In the same way, some of you are new, and I've never met you, and you're a stranger. And if I did something very kind for you, that would be undeserving. But in addition, I have people in my life that are enemies, that have given whole amounts of time and energy and income to say and do evil and malice against me.

Were I to, for example, sell my home and all my possessions and give it all to them so that they could live in luxury and do more evil against me, that would be ill-deserved grace.

So, God doesn't just give undeserving grace; he gives ill-deserving grace to ill-deserving people. That makes his grace all the more gracious. And sometimes I struggle with grace, because it seems truly too good to be true. I don't know of anyone who's like God, that's that gracious.

And when the Bible says that God is holy, and that's the attribute of God that is mentioned on more occasions than any other attributes of God, holiness means that God is different. One of the ways that God is different is he is only good. He is purely loving. And he is gracious. His love compels him to action for people like me, who are ill-deserving of such kindness.

I'll tell you tonight about 15 kinds of grace. I know you're supposed to preach a three-point sermon. That's what they say in seminary, and they're wrong.

(Laughter)

So, you'll get a 15-point sermon tonight. And I'll tell you that grace exists in two forms. There is common grace that goes to all people, and there is saving grace, which goes to the elect, the predestined, the Christians. This distinction was made by Church fathers, such as Augustine.

And I'll tell you that common grace is one form of grace that everyone gets, and saving grace has 14 aspects for the Christian. And I'll explain to you those as well. I'll start with common grace. Here is my definition of common grace. Common grace goes to all people. It is God's love for all people. God loves all people. It is God's kindness to everyone, whether or not they ever love him and become a Christian.

And common grace is, by definition, anything and everything except for hell. Anything beyond hell is common grace. All right? When I sin, I should die and go to hell. Anything beyond that is common grace. Anything beyond that is grace of God. I'll give you some examples as well of common grace.

You'll notice that each one is good only for this life. When you die, common grace is of no help to you. But in this life, common grace is a great gift. I'll read from Psalm 104:14, where it says, "You, God, caused the grass to grow for livestock, and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth." Food is part of God's common grace across the earth.

Psalm 145:9 says, "The Lord is good." And that's true, he is good. "He's good to all, even his enemies, and his mercy is over all that he has made." Matthew 5:45, Jesus says, "God makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

Luke 6:35 says, "He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil." Again, ill-deserving people. Acts 14:17 says, "He did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful season, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." Every time you've eaten, you've experienced the common grace of God. Every time you've laughed, smirked, joked, or chuckled, you've experienced the common grace of God.

Acts 17:25 says, "He himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything." The fact that we live is God's grace. The fact that we breathe is God's grace. The fact that we love is God's grace. The fact that we have any measure of joy or provision, including food and housing and sustenance, is all of God's common grace. We don't deserve it, but it is his love showered upon all of us.

Now, the benefits of common grace are many. One, it restrains evil through the restraining power of the Holy Spirit, through the conscience that God put into our hearts, so we have some inclination of what is right and wrong. The threat of the punishment of government and law.

See, if it wasn't for God's common grace, this world would be hell. It would be total anarchy, chaos, and nothing but evil all the time. Furthermore, God's common grace, it allows nations to come into existence. It allows cities to be built. It allows cultures to rise up. It allows increased technology to be manifest.

It includes the arts, where creativity flourishes. It allows advancements in medical technology and science, so that people might live longer and healthier lives. It allows us to have a better, higher quality of life on the earth. And that is all God's common grace.

It even includes the ability for some people to have brilliant minds, even though their thinking may be used to argue against the existence of God, who has given them the grace to breathe, and think, and speak, and write against him. That's how gracious God is.

It also allows philosophy and religion to come to various degrees of an understanding of truth, even though they miss the central truth that Jesus is God. I want you to see that God is loving. God is good. God pours out his grace to ill-deserving sinners. That's every man, woman, and child who has, is, or will ever be alive on the earth. Because God is good.

Now, in addition to common grace, and I enjoyed common grace for the first 19 years of my life. I continue to enjoy it today. But when God made me a Christian at the age of 19, in addition to common grace, he gave me saving grace. Or to put it in the words of John 1:16, "Grace upon grace," which would be common grace, upon which is layered saving grace.

And when it comes to saving grace, I mean that all of life as a Christian is lived by the grace of God. That's why the Apostle Paul is perhaps the man who speaks of it most frequently in the New Testament. He speaks of the grace of God roughly 100 times. And if you've had the privilege of reading his letters, every single one of his letters begins and ends with the exact same thing – the grace of God.

Because for the Apostle Paul, all of Christian life is truly, from beginning to end, the grace of God. Furthermore, that is even the whole storyline of the Bible. In the beginning, Genesis 1:1, we read, "In the beginning was God." So, the Bible begins by introducing us to the hero of history and Scripture and our life, and that's God.

And then the last line of the Bible, Revelation 22 – I'll quote it to make sure I get it right – Revelation 22:21 says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen."

In the beginning – God. Who is that God? His name is Jesus, and he's revealed himself in grace. The final word of Scripture is that God is a God of grace, and that grace comes through Jesus Christ. I want you to know that. That saving grace only comes through Jesus. There is no saving grace or salvation apart from Jesus. That's why in John 1:16 it says that Jesus came with grace upon grace. It goes on to say that the law came through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

In John 1:14 it says, "Jesus came full of grace." All right, the concept is that grace only comes – saving grace only comes through Jesus Christ. Now, that being said, Jesus' grace to me has come in 14 ways, and I want to share each of them with you. And in so doing, I'm hoping to help you, 'cause I love you, and I know that many of you are confused about grace.

And I think that the average Christian thinks of grace in 2 forms, not 14. You're saved by grace, and then you die and go to Heaven by grace. And in the middle, you try really hard, you do your best, you make God happy, you hope he doesn't change his mind, and you try not to tick him off.

(Laughter)

And that's generally how it's taught. One friend of mine, a wonderful woman, was actually taught, "You're saved by grace, but kept by works." That's what her pastor told her. Her pastor was wrong, meaning God saved you, but then you gotta – you gotta do your job, otherwise he'll revoke his love.

Now, God's grace goes from eternity past to eternity future. We'll look at it from predestination to glorification. And I'll start with electing grace, my first form of grace, of saving grace, is electing grace, and I'll read to you from II Timothy 1:8, 9. We'll cover lots of points in Scripture tonight.

It speaks of the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works. Right? Grace and works are antithetical. Works are about what we do – religion, morality, spirituality, so that God will love us. It's not about our works. It's about God's grace, and the works of Jesus. His sinless life, substitutionary death, and bodily resurrection.

It's not about what we do, it's about what Jesus does. It's not about what we do to make God love us. It's that in grace, Jesus Christ already has. And his works change us to enable us to live a life of good works. And so, the effects are works, but the cause is not us. The cause is the power of Jesus.

"Not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace" – there's our word – "which he gave us in Christ Jesus" – again, it's through Jesus – "before the ages began."

Now, what electing grace means is that in eternity past, before God made the world, or my mom, or me, God decided, "I'm gonna love Mark." The question is, "Why?" And the answer is, "Only God knows."

The Bible says that he loves us according to the purpose of his will for the praise of his glory. That's all we know. There's no reason that God would love me. I don't deserve love. God just chose in eternity past to love me. He chose to do me only good. He chose to give me only love. He chose to extend to me only grace. And he has my whole life.

My whole life, God has been nothing but good continually. And that understanding of love before time began, and God's providential sovereign, electing, predestinating grace, it transforms our whole view – my whole view of salvation. It's not that I love God, but that God loved me. It's not that I pursued God, but that God pursued me.

It's not that I called out to God, but God called out to me. It's not that I wanted to know God, it's that God wanted me to know him. It all begins with God initiating. With God pursuing. With God loving.

Now, the wonder of that is that this makes Christianity different from every religion. This is why I hate when people even say that Christianity's a religion. Religion is about us pursuing God, choosing God, loving God, knowing God. Christianity is about knowing, loving, pursuing, embracing ill-deserving people like me.

Christianity is so much better than religion, and Jesus is so much better than every other false portrait of God that every other false religion makes. And in eternity past, Jesus chose to give me electing grace, to choose to love me for no reason other than the fact that he is amazingly good.

And then he followed up on that when I was in college, which is preached grace. He sent people to me who knew him to tell me about him. 'Cause I had no idea who he was. It says of this in Colossians 1:5, 6, "You have heard before in the word of truth" – that's your Bible – "the Gospel" – that's the Good News about Jesus being a God of grace – "which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing as it does among you since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth."

I was in college, and God sent people to me to give me preached grace. To tell me about Jesus. To tell me Jesus is God. Jesus lived the life I have not lived. He died the death I should have died. He gives the gift I cannot earn. That he loves me. He's pursuing me. He'll be kind to me and merciful and compassionate. He's already poured out common grace, and he'd like to add to that saving grace.

And I came to understand Jesus. And what this does, this totally now transforms my understanding of evangelism. I don't need to manipulate people into making a decision for Jesus. I don't need to yell at you, bully you. I don't need to emotionally manipulate you. Because you know what? I'm not a salesman. I'm just a messenger.

My job is to tell you how wonderful Jesus is, and then for his grace to change your heart so that you could respond to him in love. So, God in eternity past elected to love me in grace. He sent people to preach to me the message of grace. And then he did the most amazing thing. He gave me regenerating grace.

Regenerating grace is to me one of the most astonishing, helpful insights that I've ever learned. It's something I've been meditating on all year – last year and into this year. And regenerating grace is something I'll explain in further detail when we deal with faith and works in a few weeks.

I'll read from Ezekiel, and I'll give you a brief summation of one of my favorite doctrines, regenerating grace. Ezekiel 36:26, God says this, "I will give you a new heart" – a new heart. Now by heart, it's not just speaking of the physical organ, but the center of who I am. The seat of my mind, will, emotions. The core, the essence of who I am – "I'll give you a new heart and I'll put a Spirit in you." That'll be the Holy Spirit.

"I'll remove your heart of stone" – see, a stone heart is what I had. It didn't love God, it didn't obey God. It didn't desire God. It didn't want to be holy. It didn't want to be like Jesus. And it didn't want anything to do with Jesus, not as God. A hard heart. A heart of stone – "and I'll give you a heart of flesh." This is a new heart. It's not a perfect heart, but it's a heart that does love God. That does want to do good. That does want to grow. That does desire Jesus.

It goes on to say, "And I'll put my Spirit" – the Holy Spirit, the same power that enabled the life of Jesus now dwells in me through regenerating grace – "and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

In the New Testament, the language used for the new heart of regenerating grace is being born again. That you're born physically. You need to be born again spiritually. You're born with a hard heart. You need to be born again with a new heart.

Now, what this does, this absolutely transforms my whole life. I can't overstate how wonderful this is. And I can't explain to you to what degree this absolutely undermines and devastates religion. I hate religion. Here's what religion essentially says, "God doesn't regenerate you and give you a new heart."

What that means is, you're deepest desires are really to do evil. And so, in an effort to avoid evil, you need to make a long list of rules. You need to be very disciplined to live by the rules, to keep you from sinning. That means that you're in constant conflict, and you don't really have any joy. And what motivates you to live a holy life is not love, but fear. You're afraid that God will punish you.

And Paul says in the New Testament that perfect love casts out fear, because fear has to deal with punishment. Regenerating grace means I don't obey God because I'm afraid of punishment. I know that Jesus died in my place on the cross for my sins, and my punishment has already been paid. Now, if I do sin, there will be consequences in this life, but not that kind of eternal punishment.

So, why would I want to follow God? Why would I want to obey God? Why would I want to love God? Why? The regenerating grace of the new heart includes new desires. I love this. My heart, as a Christian, has very different desires than my heart had as a non-Christian. As a non-Christian, I wanted to live for my glory, not God's. I wanted to do what I wanted to do. I didn't want to do what the Bible said.

I didn't want to go to Bible study. I didn't want to pray. I didn't want to love my enemies. I didn't want to forgive anyone. I can still remember being in college. I had a regenerated new heart. I was a brand new Christian. And one night, I got invited to a drunken frat party with naked women, and a Bible study. I had to choose, which one am I gonna go to?

And I remember sitting in my dorm room, thinking about it, and I remember then as I was walking to the Bible study, thinking to myself, "Something has really changed."

(Laughter)

Right? "I really want to go to the Bible study." Now, previous to a new heart, that would have not been my desire. Naked woman – Leviticus. Well, I don't even need to flip a coin. I know what I want to do.

(Laughter)

I meet Jesus, and all of a sudden, it's like I actually want to go to the Bible study – more than anything. Now, what this doesn't mean is that you and I won't have temptation, or what the Bible would refer to as conflicted desire. Paul speaks of conflicted desire very frankly in Romans.

He says, "I don't do what I want to do. Some times I do exactly what I don't want to do. I'm totally confused. What am I going to do?" He says, "So, I'm gonna follow the Holy Spirit, who gives me the desires of my heart."

As a Christian, you will have conflicted desires. But here's the truth. Your will and God's will, if you have the regenerating grace of a new heart, your will and God's will, they're not different. Because God's will and your will are the same, because your new heart has God's desires. Your new heart has God's love written on it, and your new heart has God's spirit working through it.

That means you need not feed your conflicted desires. You need to feed your deepest desires. If you're a Christian, your deepest desires will be for

holiness and Jesus and obedience and God and that which is good.

The result is that you could live a passionate life. See, religion doesn't have passion. In fact, in religion, passion is the problem. You can't do what you enjoy because that's wicked. Now, no, no, no. The regenerating grace of a new heart says, "You're deepest desires are God's desires, so be passionate for those desires. Replace an old affection with a new one, to use Jonathan Edwards' language, replace an old sinful desire with a new holy desire.

And your problem is not that you're passionate. The problem is you're not passionate enough. You'll be passionate for your deepest desires in your new heart. And if you follow your deepest desires of your new heart, you'll be doing God's will. God's will will be your will.

And here's the result: You'll be happy. I'm happy. I'm a happy guy. I really am. I have conflicted desires. There are days I don't feel like being qualified to be a pastor and obeying God and reading my Bible and loving my wife and doing my stuff. But my deepest desires – I read my Bible, I love my kids, be faithful to my wife, and be your pastor. Those are my deepest desires.

The more I feed them, the stronger they get. And the more I obey them, the happier I become because I'm doing what I'm made to do. And it feels right. How many of you know what this means; you've experienced regenerating grace and you have new desires? And the more you pursue them, the happier you become, and the holier you become, because your passion is leading you toward the things of God.

That's why I love regenerating grace. That's why I hate religion. Now, the regenerated heart, then, it demonstrates itself with converting grace, number four. And that is that you repent of sin, and you have faith in Jesus. That's what the new heart does.

Speaking of repenting of sin as a gift of God's grace, II Timothy 2:25 says, "May God grant them repentance." It's a gift that God grants, repentance. And speaking of faith as a gift, Acts 18:27 speaks of those who through grace had believed.

And all of this comes together in Ephesians 2:8, 9, where it says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith. This is a gift of God" – again, that's grace – "not of your own works" – not religion, morality, spirituality, holiness, rule keeping, list minding – "so that no one could boast, because it's a gift of God."

You say, "Well, what is the gift?" Well, the ability to repent of sin is a gift of God's grace. And the ability to trust in Jesus by faith is also a gift of grace. And what the new heart seeks to do by grace is turn from sin and turn to Jesus. Repentance and faith.

So, even the ability to trust God is a gift. It's nothing you've got to work up in yourself. It's something that you need to exercise as God gives it to you. This also transforms our boasting. Christianity is to be the most humble religion, and Christian ministers are supposed to be the most humble of people.

See, in other religions, there's an opportunity to boast, "I'm smart. I'm good. I picked God. I pursued God. I found God. I chose God. I want God." Christianity says, "No, none of that's true. God loves you, chose you, picked you, pursued you, loved you, gave you a new heart, gave you the faith to believe, gave you the gift of repentance, gave you his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It's all a gift of grace.

If you're gonna boast, boast in him, not yourself. Boast in what he's done, not what you've done. In Christianity, it leads to humility, because it's all of grace, from beginning to end, and it transforms our boasting. That is because of my next point, that God justifies us by justifying grace.

The question here is, "How can I as a guilty sinner stand before a wholly righteous, just and good God, have him declare me righteous and let me into Heaven, when he says that I'm to be perfect, as he is perfect, and I am certainly not perfect, especially like that?"

And the answer is, "Through Jesus, I can be declared just in the sight of a wholly righteous, good and just God." This is what it says in Romans 3:23, 24, "For all have sinned" – I agree with that – "and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace" – I'm justified by God's grace, as a gift. This is nothing I've deserved through being a good person, moral person, spiritual person – "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Now, here's what I love about justifying grace. Jesus took all my sin, went to the cross and died, gave me all of his righteousness. He rose for my salvation. He lives to serve and help because he is still good to this day. And when I die and stand before God the Father, he will declare me justified and just in his sight because Jesus gave me his righteous and took away my sins. And that was a gift.

That is the greatest gift that has ever been given. Now, let me tell you why justifying grace is so important to understand. And if I'm honest, I would say this is one aspect of God's grace that I struggle with, and I need to keep reminding myself of, and I'm assuming that there are some of you here, as you look at these various ways that God's grace is given to you, there are certain ones you say, "I understand that."

There's others you're gonna say, "I really struggle to believe that and live in light of its truth." This one, for me, is one that I struggle to believe. I keep reminding myself of and living in light of its truth. Now, the opposite of justifying grace is something that a theologian, Sam Storms, calls a theology of merit and demerit.

Here's how it works, and it's wrong, it's evil, it's demonic. If I do good, God will love me more. And if I do bad, God will love me less. How many of you, honestly, you struggle with that?

And emotionally, here's how it plays itself out. You have a good day where you do good things, you feel really happy. You feel good, "God loves me." If a bad day, you disobey, you sin, you blow it, you're really despairing, maybe even depressed, "God loves me less."

And your joy is tethered to your performance, not Jesus, which means rather than joy, you have highs, where you feel like you're doing pretty good, but it's really pride, which is a sin. And you have depression or despair, when you're doing really bad, which is still pride, and a sin, because it's still

about me. It's not about him.

I struggle with that. I struggle with that. I struggle to believe this truth, "God cannot love me any more, and God will not love me any less, no matter what I do." No matter what I do.

Justifying grace says that God has already loved me so much that he gave me Jesus. God demonstrates his love for us in this, the Scriptures say, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." God can't love me any more than Jesus. He can't love me any more. There's nothing I can do to make him love me more than Jesus.

And there's nothing I can do that would cause God to love me any less, because God's love is based upon grace, not my performance. That's what justifying grace declares. How many of you, you struggle with this? You struggle with that right now, walking in here, feeling, "I've sinned. I've blown it. God doesn't love me as much as he would if I were a good child." That's a demonic lie.

Now, some will say, "But if you tell 'em that, then they're gonna sin so they get more grace," and I would say, "No, they won't. They'll know that God loves them so much, that they will love him. And as a result, they'll love what he loves, which is holiness. And they'll hate what he hates, which is sin.

"And the regenerating work of God will give them a new heart, and they'll start to live their new life, but not based upon performance and merits and demerits, but in pure, free love and grace and mercy. Not doing things of holiness because they have to, but doing things of holiness because they get to by God's grace."

Now, this is all connected to point six, which is that God gives me adopting grace. I love this one, 'cause I'm a daddy with five kids. I tell you that every week. That's how much I like 'em. I really like being a dad.

And imagery here is this, that we're all like just horrible kids. You know, we're kids with our finger up our nose, and our finger in the air. We're just those defiant, foul-mouthed, just cursing, stuff chucking, wildly disobedient, matted hair, just we're those horrible, delinquent, undisciplined children. And God doesn't adopt us into his family because he went to the orphanage or the foster care home and he was looking for the best dressed, best mannered, best spoken kid.

God picks the worst kids. The reason he picks them is not because they're gonna be easy, but because he's the only one who can change 'em. That's how good God is. The concept there is not the legal room, like justification; it's the living room, which is adoption.

And God's not seen in this understanding biblically as a lawyer, but as a Father. It says it this way in Ephesians 1:4-6, "In love he predestined us for adoption" – there's our word – "as sons" – which is a great honor – "through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace."

Now, what this does, this transforms our motive for holiness. See, when God adopts us by grace – now, imagine being that kid who never had a dad. Imagine being that kid who really needs a dad. Imagine being that kid who deep down really wants a dad. Imagine being that kid who is a horrible kid, nobody wants to even adopt or parent or invest in you because you're impossible.

And then, the best dad in the world shows up and says, "I'm gonna love you no matter what. I'm not gonna do a six-month foster-care plan with you, to where if it works out, I'll adopt you. I'm just gonna adopt you today. I'm gonna give you my last name. I'm gonna take you home. I'm gonna love you, feed you, clothe you, care for you, look after you, teach you, forgive you – and no matter what you do, nothing will ever change. My actions toward you are without any contingencies, without any requirements." That's God.

This transforms holiness. See, we're not kids who are trying to be presentable so that we'll get picked for adoption. We're the kids that are so well-loved, undeservedly, that we want to obey our dad, 'cause he's the best. We want to follow our dad, 'cause we trust him. We want to honor our dad, because he's been so kind.

And since he's already given us his last name, we want to live in such a way that we bring honor to his name. God adopts us into his family. That is the Church. He gives us the name of Christian. He chooses to do us good. And it's his kindness that leads us to repentance and that changes us into different kids.

I've experienced that. I totally get God as a Father. I'm so glad for adopting grace. And I'm so glad to be part of this church, the family of God. And that includes point seven, ministry grace. I Peter 4:10 says, "As each has received a gift" – grace – "use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's very grace." This transforms worship.

Did you know that every Christian gets at least one spiritual gift from God? This is a supernatural endowment to do ministry – encouragement, service, leadership, teaching, hospitality, helps – whatever it is. That means that you and I, we get to go to work with dad. That's what ministry is; it's going to work with dad. So, whether we're at work or home or school or dorm or grocery store or church – wherever we are, as we love and serve and care for and help people, we're taking the grace of God through the spiritual gifts that God has given us, and we're experiencing ministry grace, to where we get to love other people, 'cause God's loved us.

We get to help other people, 'cause God's helped us. We get to serve other people, 'cause God's served us. And we do it out of pure grace. And when people ask, "Why do you do this?" You say, "Well, this is what God is like. He's done this for me, and so I treat you this way. Isn't he a great Father? Would you like to know him?"

The result is that our life, then, is one of sanctifying grace, my eighth point. One of the things that I really lament is that I think for years of my life I really didn't understand sanctifying grace. I believed I was saved by grace, but I didn't believe that I would continue to grow to be more and more like Jesus by grace.

I was a guy who tended to be – I'm a good list maker and rule keeper. I don't know if any of you are like that. Probably not this late. Those people were here earlier today.

(Laughter)

It's now 7:20, you're all like, "No, I just got up." Okay, you understand grace and you abuse it. Good. Nice to have you.

(Laughter)

Anyways, I'm a guy who's very self-disciplined. Very – I mean, you tell me to do something, and I will do it. Period. I'm just very good at making a list and doing it. Very self-disciplined. And I would have told you at some point in my Christian life until the last few years, that sanctification, becoming more like Jesus, is not so much by grace, but good, old-fashioned discipline and hard work.

And I'm not against discipline or hard work. But God cares about the motive, why we do what we do, not just what we do. I'll read it to you. Sanctifying grace in Romans 6:14, "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law, but under grace." Law is living by rules, a long list of rules, saying, "God, just tell me what my job description is, and I'll do my job."

And I'll tell ya, I'm really good at that. I am really good at that. I can remember as a non-Christian a pastor told me, "Read your Bible." I did, in two weeks. I remember another pastor told me, "You need to read every day." So, I read a book every day for almost ten years. You give me a to-do list, I can do it, no matter what. No matter what.

What God says, though, is we're not under law. We're under grace. Some say, "So, we don't read our Bible and pray and love God and serve others?" Sure we do, but we do it by a totally different power for a totally different reason, because we're under grace, not under law.

And that is this – first, is it that we love God, or that God first loved us? Well, it's that God first loved us. That's what I John says. It's not that we first loved God, but that he first loved us and gave us Jesus. Now, God loves us first. And Jesus says three times in John 14, "If you love me, you will" – what? "Obey me."

Jesus loves me. He asks me if I love him to obey him. That means that I will do the things that I'm supposed to do, like read my Bible, repent of my sin, pray, give money to Mars Hill Church, serve you, be faithful to my wife and kids, do the things that I'm supposed to do. But I will not do them so that God will love me. I will do them because God already does love me.

I will not do them because that is my duty. I will do them because that is my delight. I will do them because God's heart has changed me, so that I want to do the good. And I'm under grace. Sanctified by grace. Understanding the grace of God to me, so that I can live to be more like Jesus by the grace that he gives me.

And this would include my ninth point, empowering grace. Paul speaks of this, and to me, this is – this is a source of great hope. I don't know about you, I've got more to do than I can do. And the question is, "How am I gonna do it?" The answer is, "Empowering grace."

Paul speaks of this in I Corinthians 15:10, "But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them." Now, some people who are lazy, they'll use the word grace to mean, "I don't do anything that I'm supposed to do, but God's gracious, and I trust him." No, you're wicked.

God's grace doesn't just make up the difference. God's grace also empowers you to work very hard, and to do a very good job. Lazy Christians can't blame it on grace. 'Cause empowering grace, enabling grace, allows them to work hard. He says, "I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that was with me."

And in Hebrews 10:29, he speaks of the spirit of grace. Now, here is what is transformed by empowering grace – my work. My work is transformed by grace. I can work hard, and I can get a lot done, by the grace of God, which gives me the ability to do what I cannot do. And that is by the power of the Holy Spirit, the same power that empowered the ministry of Jesus, dwells in me by God's grace, and empowers me to live the life that God calls me to live.

And I'll be honest with you, again, I've got more work to do than I can ever do. But what I find is, that I actually can get a lot of work done by God's grace. This week I researched and wrote, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, 150 pages for a book. Now, most people in three days don't read a 150-page book.

I had some pastors ask me recently, they said, "Okay, what do you have to do this year?" I said, "Well, I gotta preach 40, 42 times, 5 times a Sunday, a new content every week. I've got to write six or seven books, 'cause that's what I'm publishing now. I'll publish probably 300 before I die. I've gotta preach in Dallas. I've gotta preach in New York. I've gotta preach in Chicago. I gotta preach in North Carolina. I gotta preach in –" where am I going?

"I'm going to Australia. I gotta preach in London. I gotta preach in Ohio. I gotta go back to Chicago. I've got a wife. I've got five kids. I gotta church that's growing. We got a hundred churches in our network." They said, "How do you do that?" And I said, "I don't know. I don't know. But it all gets

done, that's what I could tell ya."

I couldn't chart and graph it for ya. For those of you who are neatniks, I couldn't tell ya. And if I wrote a book on it, it would be I Corinthians 15:10. That would be my whole book. It'd be a very short book. But it would be the only one that didn't lie. And it would say, "I worked really hard, and I got more done than I can do, by the grace of God." That's it.

The grace of God allows me to do things that I can't do. I can't. I feel like the little boy who came to Jesus and looked around and saw maybe 10,000 or more people, and handed him a sack lunch and said, "Well, here you go. I hope this helps."

(Laughter)

And then Jesus fed like 10, 15, 20,000 people. And I'm sure after that, everybody came up to the kid and said, "Would you like to write a book on how to be productive?"

(Laughter)

And the little boy said, "It'd be a short book. It would say, 'I gave Jesus my lunch –

(Laughter)

""And then he multiplies."" That's what he does. I can't explain that, but I appreciate it, because its empowering grace, and it allows me to do things that I can't do. This includes God's provisional grace.

He speaks of this in James 1:17. "Every good gift and perfect gift is from above. It comes from God the Father." This transforms my and our whole understanding of possessions. The air I breathe is a gift. The life I have is a gift. The health I enjoy is a gift. The home I live in is a gift. The bed I sleep on is a gift. The car I drive in is a gift. The wife that I have is a gift. The children that I have are a gift. The clothes I wear are a gift. I mean, everything I have is a gift.

All of the books that I enjoy, and I do enjoy them, they're all gifts. As Christians, we say that everything belongs to God, and that everything we have is a gift of his grace. And this is provisional grace. And this transforms our appreciation of our possessions. It should lay an axe to the root of covetousness, "Hey, why do they have that? I don't have that?" I don't deserve anything. They don't deserve anything. Wasn't it nice of God to give me this? And isn't it nice of God to give them that?

It should devastate in us any desire to steal. If I need something, I need to ask God. He gives me what I need. I don't need to steal from somebody. And this provisional grace includes my 11th point, which is financial grace.

Do you know that money is God's grace? It is. It says this in II Corinthians 8:1, "We want you to know, brothers, about the grace" – and contextually there, it's money, grace is money – "of God that has been given among the church in Macedonia."

A few verses later, in II Corinthians 8:7, to the most faithful tithing church in the New Testament, he says, "But as you excel in everything – in faith, and speech, and love in all earnestness, and in love for you, see that you excel in this grace also." And the grace there is giving to the Church.

The point is this, when we see that all of our money ultimately belongs to God, and that he's entrusted some to our care as stewards, and that our money is a gift of God's grace, it allows us to spend wisely, to give generously. It allows us to give to the church, so that other people would meet Jesus. I think this is one of the great weaknesses and immaturities in Mars Hill Church.

Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, that's where your heart is." And we're a church that has these roller coaster financial times, "Okay, guys, it's really bad." "Okay, okay, we'll give. Okay, it's fine now? Good, we're done." Like, there's none of this financial consistency here. I mean, the whole staff is on Dramamine. Mars Hill's one big financial roller coaster. That's what we are.

And the result is that I think there really needs to be an increased maturity in the understanding of financial grace. See, if my money is a gift – and some of you say, "My money's not a gift, I earned it! I worked hard." And I would ask questions like, "Well, who made the earth?" "God." "Who made you?" "God." "Who put you on the earth?" "God." "Who gives you life and breathe?" "God." "Who gives you skills, talents, abilities?" "God." "Who gave you the job?" "God." "Who gave you the ability to do the job?" "God." "Whose money is it?" Probably not yours.

(Laughter)

Right? And when you understand that your money is grace, you don't ask questions like, "Why do I need to give my money to God?" You ask questions like, "How much of God's money do I get to keep?" You get to be gracious. That means you could also give to people – people that are hurting, people that are struggling, people that need financial assistance. You can give to them.

They'll ask you, "Why do you give me money?" You say, "It's grace. See it? It looks like money, but it's really grace. And it's God's grace. And he loves you. And he cares about you. And he's worried about you. And he wants to take care of you. And he sent me here to show you that he's a God of grace." The money is a way that we show grace.

I'll give you another one, number 12, miraculous grace. Our God is a God who does miracles, supernatural things. He heals. He changes hearts. He does the impossible. And he does it by grace. It says this in Acts 6:8, "And Stephen, full of grace and power was doing great wonders and signs among

the people.”

Now, this transforms our whole view of the supernatural. What you don't need to see a miracle is a guru. We don't need a guru. We have Jesus, we don't need a guru. Furthermore, we don't need to make God do the miraculous, like through praying, or faith, or manipulation.

God is a good God, and we can pray, and we know that God answers prayers – sometimes yes, sometimes no, sometimes later – but we can pray in faith, knowing that God is a God of the supernatural. That God is a God of the divine. That God is a God of the miraculous. And I see this. I see this in my own heart. I see this in my own life. I've seen people healed. I've seen people liberated from demonic oppression.

I've seen the power of God show up in amazing ways. I've seen God completely change someone's heart, regenerate them right before my eyes, and pass from spiritual death to life. Sometimes God does this in answer to prayer. Sometimes God does this just because he's that good, and no one asked him.

And as Christians, we believe that even miracles, signs, and wonders and spiritual power is the result of God's grace – not any manipulation or guru.

Number 13, persevering grace. If I'm totally honest, this is the one I struggle with the most. The question was what do I struggle with the most. I told you grace in general. This grace in particular. Persevering grace, and that is this, that if you really are a Christian, you'll be a Christian for the rest of your life. You won't fall away from Jesus.

You may wander and stray, you may sin, but if you really are a Christian, you'll be miserable and you'll come back. How many of you have experienced that? You used to sin; it was really fun. You became a Christian. You went out and did it again, and it was misery. It's because that's not the deepest desire of your regenerated heart, and the Holy Spirit convicts you. And God doesn't empower you to sin. And it's just totally miserable.

On this issue of persevering grace, it says in Philippians 1:6, 7, Paul says this to the church he loves as I love you, “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you” – that's predestinating, electing, regenerating, justifying grace. He does all this work in me, will bring it to completion. He's not gonna give up. That God didn't predestine me and then have the Gospel preached to me and then regenerate me and give me the gift of repentance and faith and justify me in his sight, and then quit. I mean, God doesn't start something he doesn't intend on finishing.

“ – will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace.” The true Christian is saved by grace and kept by grace, and will persevere through all of life by the grace of God, which enables them to remain in relationship with Jesus.

Now, I'll tell you why I struggle with this. I don't struggle with it, first, in regards to my past. When I look at my past, I say, “You know what? God has been exceedingly gracious to me. He's loved me, provided for me. He showed up continually. He's been amazing.” I don't struggle seeing God's grace in my past.

In my present, like today, I do wrestle a little bit. Like, “Am I gonna make it through? Am I gonna be okay? Am I gonna walk faithfully as a Christian today, but not so much?” Where I struggle is in regards to preserving grace being there in the future – tomorrow. Okay? I wonder sometimes, “God, are you gonna be there? Are you gonna show up? Or one day, you just gonna walk away and I'm on my own?”

“And I've said it my whole life, in such a way, that I acknowledge that I completely need you. And what am I gonna do if you don't show up?” Is this just me, or has anyone else been here? Okay. Now, what I do in the middle is this, I freak out.

(Laughter)

Not so much so that I need somebody to come and get me, but really, really close to that at some points. Because being a leader and a visionary, I see my future. And here's what I see. I see my wife needs me. Someday we're gonna grow sick and old, and we gotta take care of each other. I see my five kids need me, and as they get older, they're gonna go through their teen years and get married and have kids, and we're gonna be grandparents. And boy, how am I gonna do that? How am I gonna do that well and love them all and do what I need to do, as God would have me to do it?

And my parents and Grace's parents, they're gonna get old. They're gonna get sick. One of them's gonna die first. We're gonna have to look after the other. It's just my family. I look at my job and I say, “You know, I think in 18 months, Mars Hill might be 10,000 people. There's only 40 churches in America that are that big.

I want as many people as possible to know Jesus and experience his grace. How are we gonna care for all those people? How are we gonna look after all those people, have enough community groups and counselors and pastors and shepherds? And furthermore, I've got to teach every week. What am I gonna say every week for 40 or 50 more years that I haven't already said?

(Laughter)

You know? How do I talk for an hour? That's a lot of content, and I can't even start repeating myself, 'cause it's all on the Internet, and someone'll pull it up and then I'm ruined. That's a lot of pressure.

And then I start thinking about, what about Acts 29? We got a hundred churches. I want to see a thousand churches planted. I want 'em to be 250 people as an average. That's a quarter million people. How are we gonna help that many people?

Then I start thinking about my writing ministry. I need to write six, seven books a year, which means if I live another 40 or 50 years, I'll publish 300

plus books. How am I gonna write 300 books?

Then I start thinking about travel. I gotta go to all these states and all these countries, and I gotta preach all these sermons, and they're totally different sermons than the one you've heard, and I gotta make new ones, 'cause they've also listened to all the stuff that's on the Internet. So now it's more content.

And how are we gonna get pastors to do all of this? And where are we gonna meet? And how are we gonna pay the bills? And you guys suck at tithing.

(Laughter)

How are we gonna do this? I mean, seriously. In the middle of it all, I've got all the critics, which take time, and the media, which have demands. And people who are attacking on every front, even attacking our servers and digital hacking. And I look at it all, and I'm like freaked out a little bit.

What if I get sick? What if I get tired? What if I need a day off? How is this all gonna happen? And here's what I've decided. It's totally impossible. It's totally impossible. Totally impossible. Absolutely impossible. Can't happen – but by the persevering grace of God.

And I'll show you a story. And some of you are looking at your life right now, saying, "I can't do it. Whatever I'm dealing with – health, kids, family, marriage, life, finances, school, work – I can't do it. Right? I just – tomorrow, I don't think I'm gonna make it. I think I'm done."

Here's how it works. I'll give you a story from the Old Testament. God had some terrible kids like me. They were called the Israelites. They walked around in a circle for 40 years, complaining.

(Laughter)

That's what they did. And God was good to them every day. And every day, he showed up with manna (food), and he literally fed them every day. Now, some people worried, "Hey, you showed up yesterday. You showed up today. But I'm not sure you're gonna give me food tomorrow," so they would hoard it and collect it.

Some people live like that. It's a backup plan. They're like, "God, I trust ya, and just in case you don't do your job, I have Plan B, and I'll be fine." That's sin. Having a plan is not sin, but having a plan that assumes that God is not going to do what God can do is a sin.

And what happened to the manna that they collected, just in case God didn't show up? It spoiled and God took it away. And what God was showing is, "You do not get the grace that you need until you need it. And until then, you've gotta trust me with the faith that I've given you as another act of my grace."

That means that what I have to do, I cannot do. And that means that I will not be able to do it until the moment that I need to do it. And that God will be there, as he was there yesterday and is here today, and he will give me the exact kind of grace, in the exact measure, at the exact time that I need, and I'll be okay. I'll be okay.

Now, that's what I struggle with is believing that that is true. And if I don't believe that, it ruins my sleep and my health. It causes me anxiety and stress. And it takes my joy, and it ruins everything. But God's persevering grace is what I need to keep, by faith through the grace of God, believing. And one day, it's gonna all be over.

My last point is at the end, there's glorifying grace. That God's grace is from predestination in eternity past, to glorification in eternity future, and it's all God's grace, every step of the way in the middle.

Paul says it this way in Romans 8:30-32, "Those he predestined" – that's predestinating grace – "he also called" – that's preached grace. "Those he called, he justified" – that's justifying grace. "Those he justified, he glorified" – that's eternal glorifying grace. "What shall we say to these things? If God is for us" – and you know what? He is. He is. He's a God of grace – "who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, Jesus, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"

I want you to know that there is coming a day that I will die. And I will experience glorifying grace. I'll be freed from the presence and power of sin forever. I will receive a resurrection glorified body. It'll be free of sickness and sin and death and the fall and the curse. That all sin will be gone. All the effects of sin will be gone. All that will be left is the grace of Jesus.

And what awaits me in that day is unprecedented grace upon grace. I will see – I will see Jesus. I am actually going to meet Jesus. I long for that more than anything. That's the deepest desire of my new heart. I will see Jesus. I will be with Jesus. I will learn from Jesus. I will meet Jesus. And I will see the full effects of his glorifying grace.

I will see lame people run to Jesus. I will see blind people open their eyes for the first time and see Jesus. I will see deaf people for the first time hear – and they'll hear the voice of Jesus.

I will see people who have been abused their whole life be safe and never harmed again. I will see people who have died rise to resurrected life. And I will see people who have shed many tears experience the hand of Jesus wipe every tear from their eyes. And together we'll be forever with Jesus by absolutely pure efficacious, sovereign, unprecedented, unending, irreversible, unimaginable, worship-inspiring, heart-transforming, life-changing, earth-recreating, saving grace.

And I invite you all to join me in that. I do love you. And if you don't know Jesus, I would ask that you would give him your sin. That you receive his grace. That you would become a Christian today. And that you would not only benefit from common grace in this life, but saving grace in this life and the life to come.

I would love to in the end not only see Jesus, but see you there with me, with the rest of us. I'll pray for us.

Lord Jesus, I thank you that you are a God of grace who gives grace upon grace, who came to the earth filled with grace. Lord Jesus, I thank you for common and saving grace. I ask that your Holy Spirit would regenerate the hearts of those who listen, that they may have the faith to believe and the grace to repent.

And until we see you, Lord Jesus, it is my prayer, until then, that the words of II Peter 3:18 would be true, "May we grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. To him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity! Amen."