

“The Source of Our Justification: God and His Grace (Sola Gratia)”– Romans 3:21-24

Brandon Holiski
Southern Oaks Baptist Church
October 4, 2020

[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take a Bible and meet me in Romans 3...

Last week we introduced the tension that seems to exist between what the Apostles Paul and James say regarding justification. Today we will begin to dig into the Pauline side of that conundrum. This will be the first of several sermons, Lord willing, on Paul’s view of justification. We cannot exhaust what Paul says on the matter in just a few sermons. Indeed, we will give most of our attention to what he says in Romans 3 and 4. But Paul is very consistent in his writings, so what we find in these verses is a good representation of his thought elsewhere. And then, once we have a good sense of Paul’s contribution, we will shift our attention to James and wrestle with that alleged tension.

Before we get into our passage for this morning, a couple reminders are in order. First, let’s remind ourselves of at least a working definition of “justification” as a starting point that we can test along the way.

“The doctrine of justification concerns God’s gracious judicial verdict in advance of the day of judgment, pronouncing guilty sinners, who turn in self-despairing trust to Jesus Christ, forgiven, acquitted of all charges and declared morally upright in God’s sight.”¹

In short, justification is about being declared or counted as though you were right in God’s sight. It’s the opposite verdict of standing condemned. John Stott had a memorable way of explaining it: It’s God’s “righteous way of ‘righteousing’ the unrighteous” in His sight.² But it’s not the same as sanctification. Sanctification is not a declaration, but a process. It’s the process of being made more holy or growing in righteousness. “It is the progressive conformity of the one who has been justified into the image of their Savior through the work of the Holy Spirit.”³ Justification is being counted righteous, whereas sanctification is being made righteous. Justification happens outside of you when you are declared righteous because of Christ. Sanctification happens inside of you as you are made righteous like Christ. Justification, therefore, is a one-time event, but sanctification is an ongoing process.

Next, by way of reminder, let me offer a word or two on context. We are, after all, jumping into Romans mid-stream here, so let me rehearse a little of what he has said thus far. The letter begins with the longest salutation by far in any of Paul’s writings and it focuses, not surprisingly, on the Gospel and its global relevance (Rom. 1:1-7). We then have a customary section of thanksgiving and prayer (1:8-15), which is then followed by what is generally regarded as the thesis statement of the letter in verses 16 and 17 of the opening chapter.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’” (Romans 1:16-17)

That’s the main case Paul is trying to build in this letter. He begins his case by painting a depressing picture of the fallen human condition. He starts with the Gentiles (i.e., non-Jews) and their idolatry, which has led not only to the worship of created things, but also to every kind of hatred imaginable, which has led to God’s just wrath (1:18-32).

However, even the Jews have problems. Yes, they had the Law of God, but that doesn't give them the right to sit in judgment over others (2:1-11). Indeed, Paul points out that some Gentiles, even without the Law, can, at least to some degree, do what the Law demand (2:12-16), meanwhile, some Jews who do possess the Law, break it regularly (2:17-27). Chapter 2 then comes to a close with Paul's discussion of how what is needed by all is a transformation of the heart wrought by the Spirit of God (2:28-29).

Chapter 3 begins with a brief section on God's faithfulness to the Jewish people despite their sinfulness (3:1-8). Paul then gets at the bad news, namely, both Jew and Gentile alike are sinful and in need of help that they will never find in the Law (3:9-20).⁴ *"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one"* (3:10-12). John Stott summarizes the section stretching from 1:18 to 3:20 as follows:

*"All human beings, of every race and rank, of every creed and culture, Jews and Gentiles, the immoral and the moralizing, the religious and the irreligious, are without any exception sinful, guilty, inexcusable and speechless before God. That was the terrible human predicament described in Romans 1:18–3:20. There was no ray of light, no flicker of hope, no prospect of rescue. 'But now', Paul suddenly breaks in, God himself has intervened."*⁵

And that *"But now"* brings us to our text this morning, which begins in verses 21 of chapter 3, where Paul begins to announce the best news ever: *"Through the death of Jesus Christ, God's righteousness is given apart from the law and is available to Jew and Gentile alike by faith (3:21-26)."*⁶ That's our text for the next few weeks. With those little words, *"But now"*, Paul is transitioning us from *"the black cloth of human sin to...the glittering diamond of the gospel."*⁷ Let's look at it. By now, I hope, you have the text in front of you. I'll begin reading at this major turning point, chapter 3, beginning in verse 21. Follow along as I do. This is God's Word...

"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." (Romans 3:21-26)

Now that is a paragraph that packs a punch. One commentator, Leon Morris, has suggested that this may be *"the most important single paragraph ever written."*⁸ He may be right. There's a lot packed into these verses, and we won't get to all of it today. But let's start from the top.

First of all, again, let's just acknowledge how beautiful those first two words are: *"But now"* (3:21). One of my favorite preacher from days gone by, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who preached 366 sermon through Romans over the course of twelve years (#goals), said of these words—*"But now"*—*"there are no more wonderful words in the whole of Scripture than these two words"*.⁹ That may seem like an exaggeration, but the case could be made.

"But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life." (Romans 6:21-22)

"For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. ⁶ But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code." (Romans 7:5-6)

“Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶ but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— ²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.” (Romans 16:25-27)

These are just some examples from Romans. There are several others we could relate from the rest of the Bible, if we had more time (e.g., Gal. 4:8-9; Eph. 2:11-13; 5:8; Col. 1:21-22; 3:7-8; Heb. 12:26; 1 Pet. 2:10, 25; et al). “By using this language as often as they do, New Testament authors suggest we derive great spiritual benefit from contemplating the contrast between our old life and the new.”¹⁰ Doug Moo, who chaired the committee that brought us the NIV translation, explains,

“One of the striking things in these verses is that they are objective in their orientation. That is, they do not say much about a difference in the way we may *feel*. They focus on the difference of who we *are* in God’s sight. A basic theme in Romans, coming to expression again and again in the letter, is the need for Christians to understand who they are. Paul will say much more on that subject in chapters 5-8. But he lays the foundation here [in 3:21ff] by reminding us of the great turning point in world history: the revelation of God’s righteousness in Christ, inaugurating a new age in which a restored relationship with the God of the universe is available to all.”¹¹

Amen! This is such good news. So let’s turn our attention more fully to the “but now” passage you have in front of you...

Look again at verse 20 and 21. The English disguises something, namely, that the word translated “*justified*” has the same root as the word translated “*righteousness*” in verses 21 and 22. Justification has to do with righteousness. When you see the word “justified” here you could render it “made righteous in God’s sight.”¹² With that in mind, look at verses 20 and 21 again. “*For by works of the law no human being will be justified [i.e., counted righteous] in [God’s] sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law...*”

This “*righteousness of God*” is the same “*righteousness of God*” that Paul mentioned in 1:17. The righteousness that he said in chapter 1 was revealed in the Gospel is the same righteousness that he will now show is caught up in the work of Christ.

He tells us that this righteousness is “*manifested apart from the law*” and yet, at the same time, “*the Law and the Prophets [i.e., the Old Testament Scriptures] bear witness to it.*” There is something of a tension here, but what is the point that he is making about this righteousness? Simply that people do not attain this righteousness by being perfectly compliant to God’s Law (an impossibility for sinners), and yet we do get a sense of this righteousness from the biblical writings, which point us ahead to Christ.

So how then do we come into this righteousness? He answers that in verse 22, saying it is “*through faith in Jesus Christ*”. We will come back to the nature of that faith in a later sermon. Suffice it to say for now that faith for Paul is a “posture of personal trust in Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the gospel message (see again Romans 1:16-17).”¹³

Verse 23 reminds us that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile when it comes to their guilt and need because, as Paul says, “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (3:23).¹⁴ We have a tendency to make distinctions based on a person’s preferred flavor of sin and the degree to which they indulge in it as a way of setting ourselves up as better than others. But Paul is saying that everyone is in the same boat when it comes to falling short and therefore everyone is in the same boat when it comes to their inability to make things right. You may look down on one sinner that you judge as standing “at the bottom of a mine” and think of yourself as

poised “on the crest of an Alp”, but these distinctions, even if it is real, leave you “as little able to touch the stars as they.”¹⁵ We all fall short.

And now we come to one of the basic and essential truths of our justification, and it relates to its source.¹⁶

The Source of Our Justification: God and His Grace

Look at verse 24. After claiming that “*all*” have sinned and fallen short, Paul adds that all “*are justified by his grace as a gift...*” So if asked about the source of the Christian’s justification—their right standing before God—it would be appropriate to answer that it is God and His grace. The saving initiative of our salvation—from beginning to end—belongs to God Himself. If we attribute that initiative to ourselves or anyone else, we have violated something essential in the Gospel. We have contradicted what Paul says here that we “*are justified by his grace as a gift*” (3:24).

What is grace? It’s getting something we don’t deserve, in this case, “God’s free and undeserved favour” that is ours when we are justified, counted as righteous in God’s sight. “Grace is God loving, God stooping, God coming to the rescue, God giving himself generously in and through Jesus Christ.”¹⁷ And God has offered this for underserving sinners “freely” or “*as a gift*” (*dōrean*). It wasn’t out of necessity. It wasn’t something earned. It wasn’t a reward for some achievement on our part. It was “*a gift*,” free and underserved.

And that little word in Greek helps to correct the mistaken notion of conceiving “faith” as a kind of work. It’s not. Our faith is not what saves us. “Faith is simply the attitude of coming to God with empty hands.”¹⁸ Faith doesn’t merit a thing. “This is crucial because,” as Timothy Keller explains,

“...if you come to think that your belief is the cause of your salvation, you will stop looking at Christ and start looking at your faith. When you see doubts, it will rattle you. When you don’t feel it as clearly or excitedly, it will worry you. What has happened? You’ve turned your faith into a ‘work’! Faith is only the instrument by which you receive your salvation, not the cause of your salvation. If you don’t see this, you will think you have something to boast about: *The reason I am saved is because I put my faith in Jesus*. This is a subtle misunderstanding which cuts away our assurance, and boosts our pride. And verse 27 says the gospel leaves no basis for boasting.”¹⁹

Now I hope to circle back to this idea in a couple weeks when we consider what this passage teaches us about the nature of saving faith, but our focus today is on the “*gift*” nature of God’s grace. We are “*justified by his grace as a gift*” (3:24). Faith relates to the means of our justification, but the ultimate cause is God’s grace.²⁰

Grace is an important concept in Paul’s writings. Moo explains,

“[Paul] uses the word to stress that all God does on our behalf is done freely and without compulsion. It is God’s very nature to be free from any outside ‘requirements’ about how he acts. Nothing we can do requires him to put us right with himself. We receive what he does as a pure gift.”²¹

But grace is not just something that’s important in Paul’s writings. It’s everywhere in the Bible. One author calls it “artery of the Bible”, running “through both testaments.”²² And you cannot understand the doctrine of justification unless you come to see that it is a justification by grace alone, or what the Reformers called “*sola gratia*.”

Sola Gratia

The grace of God is why any sinner can be justified. The grace of God is the only reason any of us can be counted righteous in God's sight today. As Paul Washer explains,

“God did not declare us right with Him *because of us*, but *in spite of us*. Neither inherent worth nor personal merit moved God to save us. It was grace and grace alone!”²³

He goes on to describe how the “doctrine of justification by grace through faith distinguishes Christianity from all the other religions of the world.”²⁴ Just imagine we ask people from different religions the question, “If you died at this very hour, where would you go, and what is the reason for your hope?” The Jew might say, “I would go to heaven. I love and obey the Torah, or the Law of God. I have walked in the way of the righteous. My works speak for me.” What might the Muslim say to the same question? “I will go to heaven. I love the Koran. I have followed the teachings of Allah's greatest prophet. I have made the holy pilgrimages, been faithful in prayer, and given alms to the poor. I am a righteous man.”

But what might the Christian say? He might say, “I would go to heaven” and then quickly add, with a strange mixture of joy and contrition, “In sin my mother conceived me, and in sin was I brought forth. I have broken all the laws of God, and I deserve the greatest condemnation.” Can both statements really go together? I mean the world understands the answer of the Jew and the Muslim. Their answers are based on personal merit and virtue. But the answer of the Christian seems strange because he seems to be confessing that he is destitute of such things. And he is, in himself. But he can say, “My hope for entrance into the presence of God is founded upon the virtue of another, Jesus Christ, my Lord.” Is that not the personal testimony of every single Christian?²⁵ It's what Augustus Toplady captured in the hymn, “Rock of Ages,” that I mentioned a couple weeks ago:

Not the labors of my hands
Can fulfill Thy law's demands.
Could my zeal no respite know;
Could my tears forever flow,
These for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring;
Simply to the cross I cling.
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die.

That's the posture of the person who sees their need for God's grace. And that is the posture of every Christian through faith.

“Those who boast of a right standing before God based upon personal virtue or merit do not understand who God is or who they are. The smallest glimpse of the righteousness of God or the moral depravity of man is enough to crush any hope of a salvation earned...How then can we who have sinned beyond our ability to calculate present ourselves before Him with any hope of right standing? Each one of us has sinned enough to cast a thousand worlds into destruction. If we are to be saved, it is by Him. If a reason is to be found for our salvation, it must come from Him. If something is to be done, it must be accomplished by the gracious work of a saving God.”²⁶

Amen! And Hallelujah because something has been accomplished through Christ our Lord!

One of my favorite pictures of grace outside of the Bible comes from a literary classic called, *Les Misérables*, by Victor Hugo. He tells the story of Jean Valjean, who at the start of the tale had just finished serving 19 years in prison (5 years for stealing bread for his starving sister and her family and 14 additional years for numerous escape attempts). Those years have made him a very jaded man as you can imagine. When he is released from prison, he seeks shelter, but no innkeeper will have him because his passport indicates he is a former convict. The only one who gives him refuge is bishop Myriel.

At night Valjean steals some of the bishop's valuables and takes flight. The police catch him with the goods and they bring him back to the bishop's house and throw him down at the bishop's feet. They then explain that they found Valjean with the stolen goods (this is a really tense scene). But to everyone's surprise Myriel conveys to the police that they are mistaken about Valjean's theft. Then he looks at Valjean and says, "I am glad to see you. Well, but how is this? I gave you the candlesticks too, which are of silver like the rest, and for which you can certainly get two hundred francs. Why did you not carry them away with your forks and spoons?"²⁷ What a picture of grace. Valjean deserved to be prosecuted, but the bishop chose not to bring judgment upon him. What makes this grace so shocking is that the bishop didn't just let Valjean off the hook, he incurred the cost of his crime (by giving him the valuables he stole) and blessed him beyond what he even sought (by giving him even more valuables). He received the opposite of what he deserved. What a shocking picture of grace.

But biblical grace is not just shocking. It's also threatening. Victor Hugo writes this wonderful line about Valjean after this encounter, which you have likely only seen if you have read the book because I don't think it's in any of the movies or live performances. The author says of Valjean, "He could not have told whether he was touched or humiliated."²⁸ If you are a Christian, meaning you have consciously experienced the grace of God, you can relate to that sentiment. When you realize your guilt and the goodness God has lavished on you in Christ, you have these moments where you don't know if you should be crying in joy or sorrow. You feel both. You feel touched and humiliated, just like Valjean did when he experienced grace from bishop Myriel.

Later in the same chapter Valjean's thoughts are further narrated:

"In opposition to this celestial tenderness, he summoned up pride, the fortress of evil in man. *He dimly felt that this priest's pardon was the hardest assault, the most formidable attack he had ever sustained*; that his hardness of heart would be complete, if it resisted this kindness; that if he yielded he would have to renounce the hatred with which the acts of other men had for so many years filled his soul, and in which he found satisfaction; that, this time, he must conquer or be conquered, and that the struggle, a gigantic and decisive struggle, had begun between his own wrongs and the goodness of this man."²⁹

I know this struggle. You know this struggle if you are a Christian. In the face of God's incredible grace to you, you are not merely shocked by it, you are threatened. Why? Because you know you deserved the opposite of His favor. You know you could never repay His favor. By accepting it, you lose your sovereignty. You lose control. And that is scary. You are not your own anymore because you could never repay the grace that He has shown you and so you owe your life now to this gracious God. In fact, that is what Myriel says to Valjean, "You have promised me to become an honest man. I buy your soul. I take it away from the spirit of perversity; I give it to the good God."³⁰ As one writer explains, "The grace of God when it comes in will either turn you into a harder person than ever or break your heart into eternal softness."³¹

Later in the book we see that contrast all the more starkly. Throughout the book there is a police officer named Javert, who self-righteously pursues Valjean. He has a strong sense of justice and has spent his life thinking in terms of rewards and punishments, but knowing nothing of grace. One day, Javert falls into the hands of Valjean, but remember that Valjean by this time is a changed man. Grace has had its way with Valjean, so instead of killing his enemy, he lets him go. It's another picture of shocking grace. The recipient of grace is now extending grace. But just like it was previously to Valjean, grace proves very troublesome to the officer. He realizes that to receive it means that he would have to radically change his worldview. But instead of embracing the change, he casts himself in the river and dies.

Friends, that's the paradox of grace. It's amazing to some, but it's repugnant to far more. It's why the people ask Jesus what every religious person asks, "What do we need to *do*?" And when Jesus answers (as Christianity does later), "*Nothing*. Just believe me. Receive me," they grumble because grace is threatening. If someone gives you eternal life, you are forever in their debt and are no longer your own. So there are many people who say, "No thank you." And that's the tragedy of lostness. People turn down the only One in whom we can find everlasting life.

But I hope and pray that will not be your story. The offer of salvation that God gives to us is the most amazing act of His grace. And there is nothing that you have ever done that is more powerful than the grace of God in Christ. Nothing. Seriously, nothing. Absolutely nothing. Christ died for your sins and you can be brought into a right relationship with God through the risen Christ today, if you would turn from your sin and self-reliance and trust instead in Jesus to save. You can pray to Him now. Confess your sin and need. Ask Him to save you on the basis of His work—His perfect life, His death in your place, His resurrection—and He will save you today. And if you need to talk about that, let's talk after the service.

For the rest of us, if you have experienced that salvation, that second chance, that restoration, that grace, God didn't show you such favor so you could live life without regard to him. You were saved for a reason. Paul has said, "*It is by grace that you have been saved through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works so that no one can boast. But you are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for you to do*" (Ephesians 2:8-10). So God didn't save you as an end in itself. God's grace didn't just save you. It is propelling your growth in Christ. Listen to Paul's words to Titus...

"For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good." (Titus 2:11-14; NIV)

We are saved by God's grace. And God's grace becomes our tutor. And we never graduate from His grace. And that's a good thing, amen?

So where are we heading next? Before we get back to James and what He says on justification, I want to spend a few more weeks here in Romans.

Sermon 1: Romans 3:21-24—The Source of Our Justification: God and His Grace (*Sola Gratia*)

Sermon 2: Romans 3:24-26—The Grounds of Our Justification: Christ and His Cross (*Solus Christus*)

Sermon 3: Romans 3:26—The Means of Our Justification: Faith and Not Works (*Sola Fide*)

Sermon 4: Romans 3:27-31—The Glory for Our Justification: God's and Not Ours (*Soli Deo Gloria*)

Sermon 5: Romans 4:1-5—The Example of Our Justification: Abraham and His Faith (*Sola Scriptura*)

This will take us to and through Reformation Sunday on the church calendar, so I thought it might be cool to rehearse these "five solas," which arise naturally out of our text. Then we will circle back to James 2 and consider the fruit of our justification and how good works relate to all of this. That's the plan. It probably will change.

Let's pray...

¹ This definition comes from Philip Eveson and is unpack in greater detail at: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-doctrine-of-justification/>.

² John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans* (BST; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 109.

³ Erik Raymond, "What Is the Difference between Justification and Sanctification?", accessed online at: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/erik-raymond/what-is-the-difference-between-justification-and-sanctification/>.

⁴ For sinners, therefore, "in justification there is no contribution, preparatory, accessory, or subsidiary, that is given by the works of the law." John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 109.

⁵ Stott, 108.

⁶ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 321. This is a tremendous resource to have with you when you are reading through the Bible. It will help you track with the argument of the biblical authors and help ensure you are grasping what you are reading in your Bible. There are some more recent editions available than the one I drew on.

⁷ Timothy Keller, *Romans 1-7 For You* (The Good Book Company, 2014), 79.

⁸ Lean Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 173.

⁹ Douglas J. Moo, *Romans* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 133. Moo also list the biblical examples that follow.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Robert W. Yarborough, "Romans" in *Romans-Galatians* (ESVEC; Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 73.

¹³ *Ibid.* He continues: "Some have proposed that Paul speaks here of Jesus' faithfulness. It is true that Jesus was faithful. But in commending faith Paul characteristically has in mind the sort of personal commitment that Christ called forth from him starting with his Damascus road experience onward (Acts 9:1-20)."

¹⁴ "God's *doxa* ('glory') could mean his approval or praise, which all have forfeited, but probably refers to his image or glory in which all were made but which all fail to live up to." Stott, 109.

¹⁵ John Stott credits Handley Moule for this wording. See *Ibid.*

¹⁶ The wording for this heading was drawn from *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁸ Keller, *Romans 1-7 For You*, 81.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Yarborough, 73.

²¹ Moo, 128.

²² Preston Sprinkle, *Charis: God's Scandalous Grace for Us* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2014), 32.

²³ Paul Washer, *The Gospel's Power and Message* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Press, 2012), 153.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 153.

²⁵ *Ibid.*.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 154.

²⁷ That's my favorite scene in the story. But for a long time it troubled me because, even though the act of the bishop was touching and generous, he still lied, right? But then I heard one preacher use the scene as an illustration in a way that made me reconsider this point and demonstrated that the scene is an even better example of biblical grace than I (and every other preacher I had previously heard) realized. He said it wasn't a lie. "Because the bishop, when he took this ex-convict in, he knew what this man was capable of. He knew what was in the man's heart, and when he took the guy in he put everything at risk, so in a sense he gave it all away. Real grace is shocking. The bishop, by bringing the man in, opened himself, made himself vulnerable, made himself weak, and allowed himself to be plundered. The fact is it wasn't a lie. By even the act of taking in the ex-convict, the bishop had actually been saying, 'I know what you're capable of, and it's all right. I'm going to serve you even if you do that.' He had given it all away" (Timothy Keller in a sermon called "Basics," which was preached to Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City on October 3, 1993). In fact, Victor Hugo (the author) puts a line in the bishop's mouth that has stuck with me since I read it. "Do not ask the name of the person who seeks a bed for the night. He who is reluctant to give his name is the one who most needs shelter" (Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, Volume 1, Book 1, Chapter 6 [1862]). You see, the Bishop knew what Valjean might do and he welcomed Him in just the same. So when Valjean is brought before him, and he gives him even more valuable goods, he is showing an *amazing* grace. It's counterintuitive. It's shocking. Myriel didn't just give Valjean favor that he didn't merit; he gave him favor when Valjean was owed the opposite (e.g., judgment, litigation, punishment, retaliation). In that way, the scene reminds me of biblical grace. The kind of grace God has shown a wretch like me (and that is no hyperbole).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Volume 1, Book 2, Chapter 13. The whole paragraph is relatable for Christians. "Jean Valjean left the town as though he were fleeing from it. He set out at a very hasty pace through the fields, taking whatever roads and paths presented themselves to him, without perceiving that he was incessantly retracing his steps. He wandered thus the whole morning, without having eaten anything and without feeling hungry. He was the prey of a throng of novel sensations. He was conscious of a sort of rage; he did not know against whom it was directed. He could not have told whether he was touched or humiliated. There came over him at moments a strange emotion which he resisted and to which he opposed the hardness acquired during the last twenty years of his life. This state of mind fatigued him. He perceived with dismay that the sort of frightful calm which the injustice of his misfortune had conferred upon him was giving way within him. He asked himself what would replace this. At times he would have actually preferred to be in prison with the gendarmes, and that things should not have happened in this way; it would have agitated him less."

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Timothy Keller in a sermon called "Basics," which was preached to Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City on October 2, 1993.