

Revelation 3:3 — The Gospel According to Grace Explained

We are now in the second section of the Book of Revelation, which deals with “the things which are” (Revelation 1:19).

Revision—Overview

Revelation 1:19 NKJV

Write [Part 1] the things which you have seen, and [Part 2] the things which are, and [Part 3] the things which will take place after this.

Part 1 - “the things which you have seen”

Revelation 1 - Jesus reveals Himself to John

Part 2 - “the things which are”

Revelation 2-3 - Letters to the seven churches.

Part 3 - “After these things”

Revelation 4-5 - Rapture and Church in Heaven before the throne of God.

Revelation 6-18 - 7 Year tribulation period

Revelation 19 - Second Coming of Christ

Revelation 20 - 1,000 year rule and reign of Jesus Christ on earth then the Great White Throne Judgement.

Revelation 21-22 - New heavens and earth, eternity.

Chapters 2 and 3 contain personal messages from Jesus to each of the seven churches. So far we have studied the first four letters.

**Ephesus — The Loveless Church: Loyal but loveless
(A.D. 33 - A.D. 100)**

**Smyrna — The Persecuted Church: Persecuted but Pure
(A.D. 100 - A.D. 312)**

**Pergamos — The Compromising Church: Faithful but Flawed
(A.D. 313 - A.D. 600)**

**Thyatira — The Corrupt Church: Committed but Corrupt
(A.D. 601 - A.D. 1500 and to the rapture)**

**Sardis - The Dead Church - Dead and Dying
(A.D. 1500 to the rapture)**

**Philadelphia - The Faithful or missionary Church - Underdog yet Unstoppable
(A.D. 1800 to the rapture)**

**Laodicea - The Lukewarm Church - Crowded but Christless
(A.D. 1900 - the Rapture—The modern day seeker friendly church)**

The first letter was addressed to the church of Ephesus. Ephesus was the loveless church and represented the majority of the churches up to 100 A.D. Remember the remedy for leaving our first love — Remember, repent and do the first works (bible, prayer, fellowship and evangelism).

The second letter was addressed to the church of Smyrna, the persecuted church. The majority of churches during the years during the years 100a.d. to 312A.D. were being persecuted. Always remember that God uses trials to grow our faith and purify us, so submit to God and allow Him to cleanse you and change you into His image.

The third letter was addressed to the church of Pergamos — the compromising church. The church of Pergamos characterised the church from about 313a.d. to 600a.d. To fit in with the world, they became like the world.

The fourth letter was to the church of Thyatira — the corrupt church from A.D. 601 to A.D. 1500 and on. This represents the Catholic church.

The fifth church was to the church of Sardis - The dead church. This church represents the reformation, who received the Word of God — specifically the Gospel of Grace — but then didn't hold on to it and have now bought into liberal theology.

This week we will complete our study of the fifth church, the Church of Sardis, by looking at what they received, the Gospel of Grace. We will see how it had been corrupted and changed by the Catholic church into a false gospel of works.

Revelation 3:3 NKJV

Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent.

The church of Sardis, at the time and also prophetically, received the Gospel in all its glory. Satan tries so hard to pervert the gospel, to change it from what God has done for us, to what we can do for ourselves and/or what we can get to have a better life here and now. What happened to the church of Sardis, prophetically representing the reformation church, can so easily happen to us. We can forget. We can let go. We can neglect the precious truth of the Gospel, which is Jesus' Charge against this church. The challenge for us as Christians is to hold fast to what we have received and heard, to hold fast to the gospel and never forget.

I think that it's important that we look at some of the false teaching of the Catholic church and see how the Reformation brought us closer to the truth — especially concerning the gospel. For me personally, the gospel is the most beautiful story ever told, and I just can't get enough of it. Because of our sinful nature we actually tend to forget the gospel, and so start to rely on ourselves and not trust God completely for everything. So today, we will be studying the gospel. Some may ask, why study what we already know? Good Question. Paul gives us the answer in:

Philippians 3:1-3 NLT

Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. **I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith.**

² Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved. ³ For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. **We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort,**

In these verses we see the heart of the gospel:

v 3 **We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort...**

We will come back to this thought later.

So, let's begin to study the Gospel as taught by the Scriptures.

First, we need to understand who God is and who man is otherwise the Gospel won't make much sense. The great issue here is that God is holy and God is just, and that man is not holy and man is not just. Man is unrighteous. Man is a sinner. We need to compare ourselves to Jesus and His perfect righteousness and holiness. This is the reason God gave us the law — it defines who God is; pure and perfect.

Romans 3:19-20 NLT

Obviously, the law applies to those to whom it was given, for its purpose is to keep people from having excuses, and to show that the entire world is guilty before God. ²⁰ For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are.

It's important that I understand that my problem with sin goes far beyond my actions; it goes to who I am as a person. I have a nature of sin, that is my essence. The human heart is predisposed right now to love everything else besides God; to love self more than God, to love wrong more than right. I am born with a heart that is totally opposed to God. I am naturally in rebellion against God.

Romans 8:7 NLT

For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will.

Psalms 51:5 NLT

For I was born a sinner—
yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.

Another way of expressing this is what Paul says in:

Ephesians 2:1 NKJV

And you He made alive, were dead in your trespasses and sins...

To be dead in sin means that we are physically alive, yet spiritually separated from God and morally unable to respond to God. Think about it. What can a dead man do? Romans 3:10-11 explicitly states who we are, what we understand about God, and what we can't do because we are dead in sin.

Romans 3:10-11 NKJV

There is **none righteous**, no, not one;
There is **none who understands**;
There is **none who seeks after God**.

The gospel not only addresses my behaviour or actions, but also addresses who I am, by promising to change me at the core of my being. This is why Jesus said in:

John 3:7 NKJV

Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

It's like God has to perform a resurrection, a spiritual resurrection to give us a new identity. Why? Because God's will for me is to be good like God is good, to be perfect. To never lie, steal, lust, covet or hate.

1 Thessalonians 4:3 NKJV

For this is the will of God, your sanctification...

This is naturally impossible for us in our sinful state, but God promises to gradually change us into His image, and to complete that process of transformation or sanctification by the time we go to be with Him. Always remember that for the Christian, God's commands are God's promises. What this means is that God has declared that it is His responsibility, His job, to empower us, equip us, strengthen us, grow us, and change us to become more like Himself.

Philippians 1:6 NLT

And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue **His** work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

It's all about what God does in me, through me and for me, and not about my effort. Why is this so important? Because if I don't understand that my sinful nature is completely dead, that it can't do anything good, that by myself I am incapable of obeying or pleasing God, then I will try to rely on my own strength. ***I will think that there is some chance, if I try hard enough, that I can do or achieve what God clearly says only He can do or achieve.*** Of Course, the reality is that I can't. As a result I will try but fail, and become despondent, miserable and hopeless. There are many Christians who either live defeated lives or turn from God completely because of the constant failure that results from trying to live the Christian life in their own strength. I was one of those who lived a defeated, frustrated life for many years, until someone finally explained the gospel more clearly to me. What a relief.

The reason so many people and churches don't want to tell people that they their human nature is completely sinful and depraved, and unable to help itself is because it seems offensive. And on the surface it is, because our pride and ego is bruised. But what a freedom comes when we realise that without Jesus we can do nothing, and then stop trying to do things that we were never able or asked to do.

John 15:5 NKJV

"I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

Until a person comes to understand that by and of themselves they can do nothing of eternal value, that they can do nothing good, they will be asking questions like, "I can't do enough to please God anyway, so why trust Him, why believe in Him? I'm still the same person. I'm still wicked and sinful."

Until a person comes to understand that by and of themselves they can do nothing of eternal value, that they can do nothing good, they will be swinging between the two possible results of legalism - pride and despair.

This is what the Gospel says about this: ***"no you aren't good enough, and you never will be, but Jesus was good for you."***

The gospel answers the question of, “how can sinful man be reconciled to a just God, whose justice demands that they be punished.” The answer is that Jesus came and lived a perfect life that we could never live, have never lived, and then died on the cross. We owed a debt to God because of our sin, and that debt was suffering eternal punishment. But on the cross, Jesus, God Himself, took our place, bore our sin and suffered the wrath of God that we deserved. On the third day He rose from the dead, then ascended up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. Now the Bible teaches that Jesus is the Way the Truth and the Life, that no man comes to the Father except through Him, and that there is one God and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

Now we come to the doctrine or teaching concerning “*justification*.” This is the defining doctrine of true Christianity, and was the main doctrine or teaching that the Reformation corrected.

Justification by Grace Alone through Faith Alone in Christ Alone.

Where:

Grace means that it is a free gift—underserved, unmerited, unearned—it can’t be lost, because if it could lose it we would!

Faith is trusting or believing — this is how a person receives salvation, as opposed to working for it.

Justification is the act of being declared righteous or not guilty in the sight of God.

Ephesians 2:8-9 NKJV

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9 NLT

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

John 6:28-29 NKJV

Then they said to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?”

²⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”

The Catholic false gospel (the official Catholic church position)

Faith plus Works = Salvation

At the Council of Trent, the Catholics issued an anathema. They said that if anyone believes that a person is justified by faith alone, that they don’t have to do anything to earn God’s grace, then let him be anathema (explain - cut off from Christ or eternally damned).

The Catholic religion is often called the plus religion. The Catholic church teaches that a person is saved:

- **by faith plus works**
- **by grace plus merit**
- **by Christ plus other mediators**
- **according to scripture plus tradition**
- **and to the glory of God plus/and Mary and other saints.**

The Catholic plan of salvation is a salvation of works and sacraments.

In the Roman Catholic plan of salvation, baptism cleanses an infant from their original sin. This called the sacrament of regeneration as well as justification.

But this is just the start. Along the way they can commit small or venial sins which pull them down. They can also commit mortal or serious sins which knocks them completely off the plan of salvation.

Now, because the person has sinned, they must receive sacraments, they must confess their sins to a priest (the sacrament of penance). And then he must be justified by doing good works. Then the person must maintain their salvation by sacraments e.g. attending mass etc. And if, in the end, they have enough people praying for them, and if they do enough time in purgatory, they might, possibly, get to heaven.

So in summary, how a Catholic gets to heaven is based on what they do, not on what Christ has done. It is based on fear and not love.

But what does the bible teach?

Romans 8:1 NLT

So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.

What this means is that when a person repents of their sin, and in faith believes that when Jesus died in their place on the cross He paid the penalty for all their sins, past, present and future, the work of Salvation is completely done and paid for. God, from that point on, will always see the saved person as righteous or justified or perfect, without sin, no matter what or how many sins they commit. (As a reminder, this is in contrast to the Catholic teaching that baptism results in the removal of original sin, but not future sins.) The christian gospel of Grace teaches that Christ's death on the cross paid the penalty for all sins for all people.

So what this means is that when a christian sins, the penalty for that sin is already paid for, so when the person repents, they simply continue in their relationship with God. There is no having to do good works to earn God's forgiveness, to maintain our relationship with God.

As a result we have complete security as expressed by Jesus in:

John 10:28-30 NKJV

And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand. ³⁰ I and *My* Father are one."

It's because of this that the reformers came up with the five Sola's, with each sola intended to represent an important distinction between the teaching or doctrine of the reformers compared to teaching or doctrine taught by the Catholic church even today.

The five Solas of the reformation	Key Catholic teachings or gospel
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• By grace alone• Through faith alone• In Christ alone• According to Scripture alone• All to the Glory of God alone	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grace Plus Merit• Faith plus Works• Christ plus Other Mediators• Scripture plus tradition• Glory to God and Mary and other saints

“This is still the case because the Catholic Church regards itself as Christ on earth with divine authority to forgive sins and impart sanctifying grace”

Is this a new issue? No. It happened in the book of Acts. There was a council in Jerusalem that met to discuss this very issue.

Acts 15 NLT - selected verses

While Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch of Syria, some men from Judea arrived and began to teach the believers: **“Unless you are circumcised as required by the law of Moses, you cannot be saved.”** ² Paul and Barnabas disagreed with them, arguing vehemently. Finally, the church decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, accompanied by some local believers, to talk to the apostles and elders about this question. ³ The church sent the delegates to Jerusalem, ...

⁴ When they arrived in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul were welcomed by the whole church, including the apostles and elders. They reported everything God had done through them. ⁵ But then some of the believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and insisted, **“The Gentile converts must be circumcised and required to follow the law of Moses.”**

⁶ So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue. ⁷ At the meeting, after a long discussion, Peter stood and addressed them as follows: “Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe. ⁸ God knows people’s hearts, and he confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. ⁹ He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith.

¹⁰ So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? ¹¹ We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus.”

¹² Everyone listened quietly as Barnabas and Paul told about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

¹³ When they had finished, James stood and said, “Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴ Peter has told you about the time God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for himself. ¹⁵ And this conversion of Gentiles is exactly what the prophets predicted. As it is written:

¹⁶ ‘Afterward I will return and restore the fallen house of David. I will rebuild its ruins and restore it,

¹⁷ so that the rest of humanity might seek the Lord,
including the Gentiles—
all those I have called to be mine.

The Lord has spoken—

¹⁸ he who made these things known so long ago.’

¹⁹ **“And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ...**

³⁰ The messengers went at once to Antioch, where they called a general meeting of the believers and delivered the letter. ³¹ **And there was great joy throughout the church that day as they read this encouraging message.**

What happened is that some false teachers went to the church in Antioch, and told the people that, in addition to believing in Jesus and what He did on the cross, they also needed to keep the law of Moses, the ceremonial laws — keeping the Sabbath and other feast days, observe dietary laws, be circumcised, etc. Paul also describes this in the book of Galatians.

“And there was great joy throughout the church that day as they read this encouraging message”—Legalism sucks the love and joy from our relationship with God and with each other.

What was their main objection to the false gospel of legalism?

Acts 15:10 NLT

¹⁰ **So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear?**

The Jewish believers recognised that they had never been able to keep the law, so it was pointless asking the gentile believers to keep the law. It would only drive them to pride or despair.

What doctrine or teaching did they refer to to support their position?

Acts 15:11 NLT

¹¹ **We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus.”**

In other words, Jesus didn't come just to make salvation possible for those who do their part, rather He came to accomplish it and give it freely to all people, to “whosoever will.”

But what about what the bible says about faith and works in:

James 2:26 NKJV

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

If we are saved by faith, then we don't need works right, or do we? How do we reconcile: “For by grace you have been saved through **faith**, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ **not of works**, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9), with “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:26).

Is James saying that we have to do works to be saved?

There are two understandings, one biblical and one not.

1. Any works based church:

Faith + Works (root or cause) = Salvation

2. What the bible teaches:

Faith = Salvation + works (fruit or effect)

In the first example (Faith + Works = Salvation), works is the cause or root of salvation. They believe that the person is saved because of their works, that salvation is the result of good works. This is a works based gospel (a false gospel)

In the second example (Faith = Salvation + works), the works come after salvation, and are the result of salvation. The works come after or follow Salvation because God changes us and gives us a new heart and new desires to please Him. This is the gospel according to grace (the true gospel).

So what does James mean when he says that "Faith without works is dead?"

You know a person is saved because of their fruit, but the fruit is not the reason they are saved.

This is especially apparent when we look at the next verse in Ephesians chapter 2.

Ephesians 2:10 NKJV

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

We are not saved by works, but we are created for good works.

The works happen after salvation. How does this happen?

The life that has been saved has received a new, regenerated heart with new desires and has the Holy Spirit living inside of them. Because of these things, they naturally start to do the things that please God. The more they love God, the more fruit of good works they will produce. **You know a person is saved because of their fruit, but the fruit is not the reason they are saved.** They are saved by God, by grace, through faith in Christ.

Did you know that the true christian is the only person who can say that they are going to heaven without being self-righteous. Why? In other religions, how do you get to heaven? You get to heaven by being good. By earning it. In contrast, with christianity, you're not reconciled to God by your own virtue or merit (good works), but you are reconciled to God through the virtue and merit (good works) of His son, Jesus.

euangelion; Greek word for gospel, means good news.

Historically, it referred to the good news a runner or messenger would bring to the city that victory had been achieved on the battle field. And everyone would cheer. It would transform the lives of all the people in the city because they hadn't lost the war, instead they had won the war. But they weren't the ones doing the fighting, they had nothing to do with the victory. They just celebrated the victory and enjoyed the benefits of the battlefield victory.

In the same way Jesus says, "I have accomplished salvation. I have defeated sin and death." Not, "come help Me save the world." Again, we simply rejoice in His victory. We didn't and don't do anything to help cause the victory.

An easy way to remember the difference between grace and law is this.

Gospel of Grace = Done	Law = Do
"what has Jesus done, now believe that."	"what would Jesus do, now go and do that,"

The gospel is not, "what would Jesus do, now go and do that," rather the Gospel is "what has Jesus done, now believe that."

This distinction between the law and the gospel is the most important thing to remember, but the most easily forgotten. It's so easy to fall into the trap that Paul describes so well in:

Galatians 2:23 NLT

How foolish can you be? After starting your new lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?

(Often people understand that they can't save themselves, but they think that they can change themselves — this is foolish thinking)

Gospel of Grace = Done	Law = Do
"what has Jesus done, now believe that."	"what would Jesus do, now go and do that,"
Relationship causes obedience	Obedience produces relationship

Relationship always comes before obedience. We do not have a relationship with God because we obey Him, rather, we obey Him because we have a relationship with Him.

Always remember (from Jn 14-15):

The more you read your bible, the more you know God
The more you know God, the more you love God
The more you love God, the more you will obey God
The more you obey God, the more you will abide with God
The more you abide with God, the more fruit you will bear (love)
The more fruit you bear, the more you glorify God in your life.

This is always the pattern in the bible. God always tells us what He has done for us, so we can respond to Him with a grateful heart. He always gives us a reason or a motivation to obey.

For example:

Exodus 20:2-3 NKJV

I *am* the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. **(Done)**

“You shall have no other gods before Me. **(Do)**”

Notice how God first demonstrates grace to the people of Israel by unconditionally saving or delivering them from the land of Egypt, where they were slaves to a cruel slave master. Only then does God give them the opportunity to do something in return — put Him first. There is no real requirement for them to put God first, after all, they were already free. God was giving them a choice, and opportunity to show gratitude. Of course, obedience always leads to the blessing of a more intimate relationship with God, but it doesn't change what God had already done for them, or continue to do for them. He still fed them, protected them, guided them and provided all their needs as He promised them, regardless of how they responded to Him. *It's like God is saying, “I have redeemed you, now here is the safe path to walk on.”*

It's critical that we understand that God didn't do this the opposite way around. He didn't say, put Me first, and if you do, I'll deliver you from the land of Egypt — this is law based thinking. Law based thinking makes God's blessings and grace conditional on our obedience. Law based thinking or logic goes like this: “if you do this for God, then God will do this for you.” This is wrong. This is the opposite of grace.

The pattern of grace first is consistent in the New Testament as well. In most of the Epistles or letters to the churches written by Paul, Peter and John, it starts by explaining what God has done for us, reminding us of many of His glorious, unconditional promises, and then describes what our response should be to God's great goodness and kindness shown to us. *The idea is that our motivation for obeying or responding is simply love from a thankful heart.*

God, you saved me when I didn't deserve it. You gave your life in place of mine while I still hated you. Wow. Thankyou God for all you have done. How can I show my thanks, my gratitude? This is the Gospel of Grace

Summary

When we understand all that God has done for us, His wonderful grace, then we will want to follow Him, willingly and joyfully obeying Him. This is the gospel of grace, and is based on the assumption that our human nature is completely corrupted and is unable to seek God or understand God. Therefore, we rely on God for everything, living in total dependence on Him.

If we think that we have to do things to earn God's favour, then living the Christian life becomes an obligation that we begin to despise. Our relationship with God soon dries up and becomes loveless. This is the false gospel of law and is based on the assumption our human nature still has some good in it, and, if we try hard enough, we can help God out by achieving things based on human effort.

Now come right back to our starting verse:

Philippians 3:1-3 NLT

Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. **I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith.**

² Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved. ³ For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. **We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort.**