

**The Grace That Saves Us Produces Obedience in Us, But It Is Grace That Saves Us, Not Our Obedience**

"I remember several years ago when Connie and I bought our first gas barbecue grill," the Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander said as he began his sermon Sunday. "Of course it came in a box, and needed assembled. Now I am what you would call 'hand and tool challenged,' and so my wife was very concerned about my putting this thing together out in the back yard, especially given the fact that in this situation I could blow myself and the neighborhood up!

"As I opened that large box and removed the parts," he continued, "I began to worry because I didn't see what I needed to see. I saw bolts and screws and handles and pipes, but I didn't see *it!* Finally, I spotted it, taped to the bottom of the box underneath everything else: the instruction manual! I was saved. I opened it up and went to work, knowing that if I followed those instructions precisely, I could barbecue chicken for dinner that night instead of myself! Now I didn't say to myself, 'This instruction manual is oppressive! This manual is trying to rob me of the joy of backyard barbecuing! This manual is restricting me from achieving my full grilling potential!'

"No, I said, 'Thank the Lord, I know . . . what to do so that I can enjoy a great barbecue.'

"That's what the Old Testament Law of God was all about . . . Verse 22 is very compelling here: 'Be careful to obey all the commands I give you; show love to the Lord your God by walking in his ways and clinging to him.'

"It's important to note that this exhortation to obey God's law comes only *after* God has first come to the people, delivered them from slavery in Egypt, and entered into a covenant relationship with them at Mt. Sinai. The Israelites were to obey, yes, but their obedience was a way of showing love for the Lord who had redeemed them. Their obedience was not an effort to earn salvation; it was the response of a love relationship.

"What happens, over time, is that people . . . stop obeying God because they *love* him, and they begin obeying God's commands as a way to earn God's approval. They begin to think that obeying God's law or Jesus' teachings is the *means* of our salvation, rather than the *fruit* of our salvation. . . . Without this love relationship . . . we are (p.2→)

"The Seven Acts of Mercy" by Caravaggio (1571-1610), Church of Pio Monte della Misericordia, Naples. © Web Gallery of Art. The seven acts of mercy represented here are the following. On the right appear the (1) burial of the dead, (2) visiting prisoners and (3) feeding the hungry. (4) Dressing the naked appears in the foreground, symbolized by St. Martin and the beggar. Next to this scene, the host and St. James of Compostela allude to the (5) offering of hospitality to pilgrims. (6) Relieving the thirsty is represented by Samson drinking from the ox jaw. The youth on the ground behind the beggar of St. Martin may also represent the merciful gesture of (7) caring for the sick. The Madonna and child and two angels are shown above. In the readings Sunday, Hosea and Jesus will tell us that God wants us to be merciful.



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Sundays, 10:00 a.m.: Word & Table service

Sundays, 11:30 a.m.: Refreshments, conversation

Sundays, 11:45 a.m.: Moderated post-service discussion

Thursdays, 7:00 p.m.: Evening Prayers

**For the poor:** Meat; fresh produce; canned fruits and vegetables; dairy products; peanut butter; cooking oil; pancake mix; syrup; spices; diapers; baby wipes; bathroom tissue; for personal care: soap, shampoo, conditioner, razors, shaving cream; new underwear (adults and children); cleaning supplies; bleach.

**Readings, 6/8:** Hosea 6:1-6; Ps. 50:7-15; Rom. 4:13-18; Mt. 9:9-13 **6/15:** Ex. 19:2-8; Ps. 100; Rom. 5:6-11; Mt. 9:35—10:8.

**Prayer Emphases:** Paraguay; Presbyterian Reformed Church; Fillmore Wesleyan Church, Fillmore, NY, and the Rev. Ben Last; Upper Room Ministries, Nashville, TN; parishioners on Montana Avenue.

**(Sermon, cont'd.)** susceptible to two dangers: First, we can deceive ourselves into confusing religious activity with doing the will of God. . . . (Second is that we can confuse *hearing* Jesus' words with *doing* them. . . . Jesus simply tells the people that life itself will judge them in this regard. Life itself will happen to you. You will be faced with . . . things that will shake your life to the foundations. . . . and those who build their lives on the words and will of God will find that when the storms are past, they are still standing." The grace that saves us produces obedience in us, as we obey in loving response to God's love, while being guided in freedom toward our true purpose in life.