



# Acts 9: The Radical Inclusion of the Gospel (cont.)

Moving from darkness to light,  
from guilt to grace, and from  
persecutor to preacher.

Pastor Darren  
July 5, 2026

14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.

17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.

19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

1 Corinthians 15:14–19

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“The Gospel cannot be beaten into our ears enough or too much. Yes, though we learn it and understand it well, yet there is no one who takes hold of it perfectly or believes it with all his heart, so frail a thing is our flesh and disobedient to the Spirit.”

-Martin Luther

# The Foundation: The Empty Tomb



## Good Friday

The perfect justice of God required a penalty for sin. In perfect love, God took that penalty upon Himself on the cross.



## Easter Sunday

He is alive. Over 40 days, Jesus presented Himself with many convincing proofs. The scattered disciples became bold witnesses because there was no corpse to provide—only a resurrected Savior.

1 Corinthians 15:14 — And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.

1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared.

2 And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb,

3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

4 While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing;

5 and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living One among the dead?”

6 “He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee,

7 saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.”

8 And they remembered His words,

9 and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest.

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14 Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table;...

Mark 16:14

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3 To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

Acts 1:3

NASB95

Saul / Paul

# The Catalyst: The Damascus Road



1

## The Encounter

Suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him... (Acts 9:3)

2

## The Voice

"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? (Acts 9:4). The Messiah Saul thought he was protecting God from was the very One he was attacking.

3

## The Shock

Left blind for three days, Saul experiences profound remorse—sick over the sudden realization of his own sin.

3 As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; 4 and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

Acts 9:3–8

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5 And he said, “Who are You, Lord?”  
And He said, “I am Jesus whom you  
are persecuting, 6 but get up and  
enter the city, and it will be told you  
what you must do.”


Acts 9:3–8

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7 The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. 8 Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; [reminds me of Moses encountering the glory of the Lord and his face thereafter shining from the magnitude thereof] and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus.

Acts 9:3–8

NASB95



The Gospel  
Changes Lives!

# Prior to the encounter:

1 Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest,  
2 and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Acts 9:1–2

NASB95

# Following the encounter:

17 So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

18 And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized;

19 and he took food and was strengthened.

Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus,

20 and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”

Acts 9:17–20

NASB95

# The result:

21 All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, “Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?”

Acts 9:21

NASB95

# The result:

22 But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

Acts 9:22

NASB95

23 When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him,

Acts 9:23

NASB95

# SAUL OF TARSUS AND THE BARRIER OF SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

## THE PERSECUTOR

(Acts 9:1-2)

Breathing threats and murder.  
Motivated by a misguided,  
violent self-righteousness.

## THE FLASHPOINT

(Acts 9:3-9) - Damascus

Confronted by the resurrected,  
living Christ. Left blind, fasting for  
three days in the crushing  
realization that he was fighting the  
very Messiah he claimed to serve.

## THE PREACHER

(Acts 9:20)

The persecutor becomes the  
persecuted becomes the preacher.  
Filled with the Holy Spirit, he  
immediately begins proclaiming  
Jesus in the synagogues.

No Matter How Bad You've Been

13 even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; 14 and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 1:13–16

NASB95

15 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. 16 Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

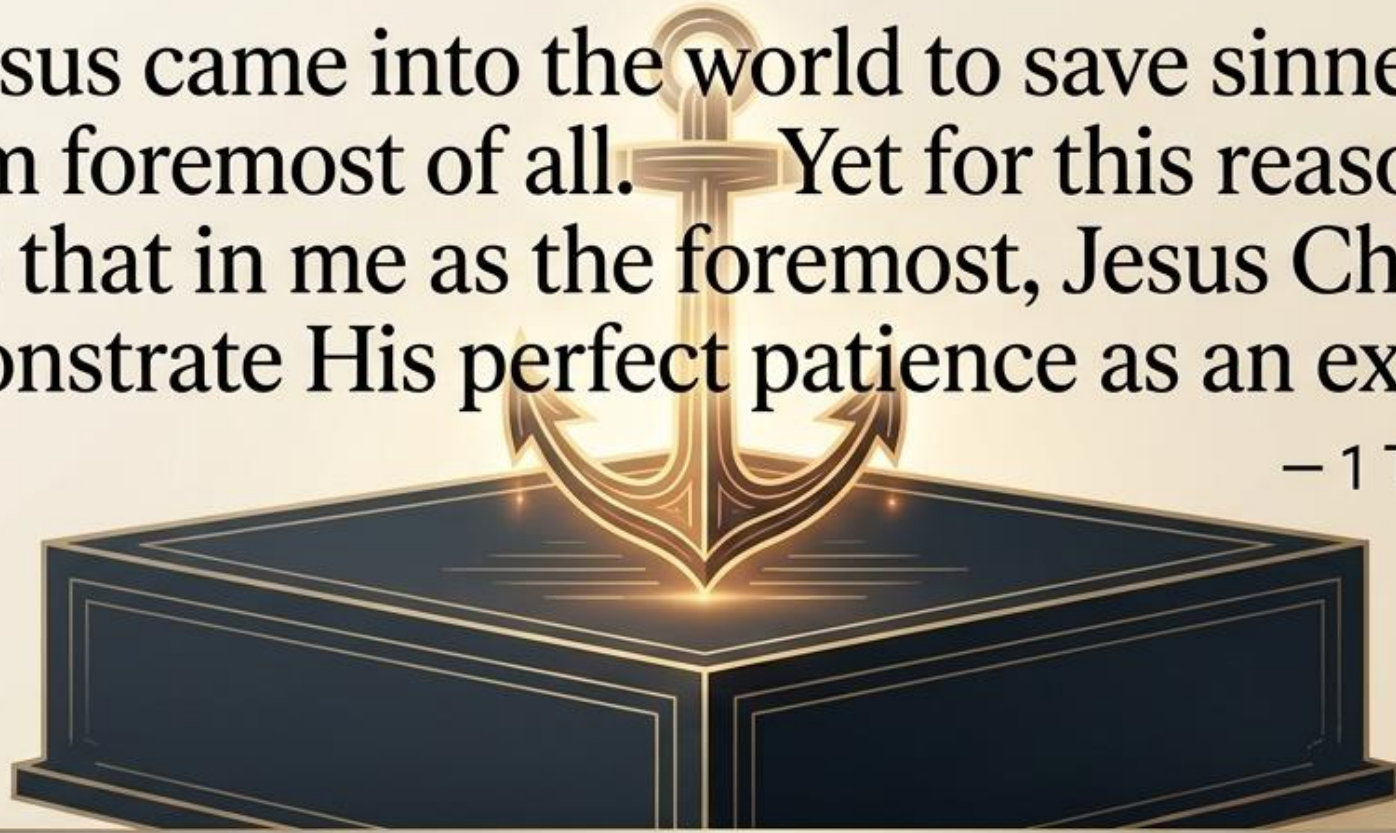
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# The Chief of Sinners Principle

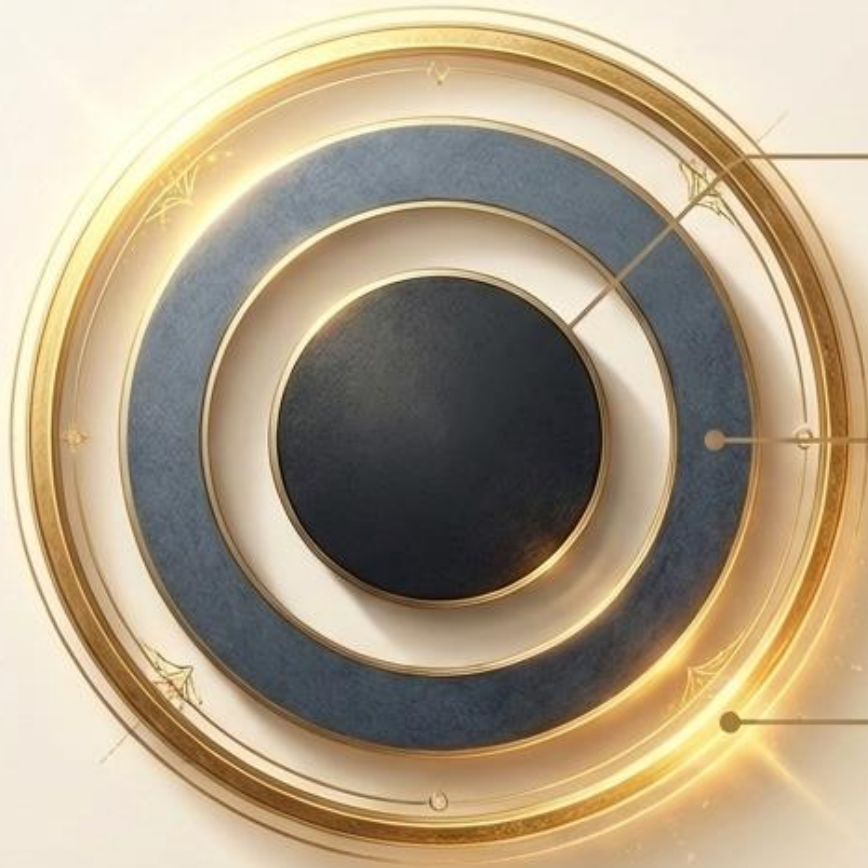
“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example...”

— 1 Timothy 1:15-16



Why did God choose the worst of the worst? To prove that His grace, love, and acceptance are more than enough to cleanse you from anything you have ever done.

# The Expanding Scope of Radical Inclusion



## The Samaritans

Overcoming deep-seated racial and historical divides.

## The Ethiopian Eunuch

Overcoming social marginalization, shame, and physical barriers.

## Saul (Paul)

Overcoming the moral extreme—saving the active enemy of the church.

What makes you above the saving reach of Jesus? Nothing.

# Step 1: Guilt (The Universal Condition)



For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

**The Concept:** True guilt is the appropriate, sometimes sickening sorrow over the realization of our sin.

**The Insight:** The deeper we go into our relationship with Christ, the more real our sin becomes to us. This shatters our walls of self-righteousness and pride, proving we desperately need a source of righteousness outside ourselves.

9 And he was three days without sight,  
and neither ate nor drank.

Acts 9:9

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19 and he took food and was  
strengthened.

Acts 9:19

NASB95

# Step 2: Grace (The Divine Response)

**Unmerited Favor + The Righteousness of Christ = Zero Condemnation**

## Key Verses

Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more. (Romans 5:20)

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)

## The Concept

We are no longer slaves to sin, but slaves to righteousness. Grace frees us so that we are no longer miserable over our failures, but made innocent before God.

20 The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,  
21 so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 5:20–21

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1 Therefore there is now no  
condemnation for those who are in  
Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:1

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## Step 3: Gratitude (The Resulting Life)

### False Gospel (The Trap)

I must obey so that  
I can be accepted.  
  
(Seeking to earn the  
favor of God)

### True Gospel (The Freedom)

I am completely  
accepted, therefore I obey.  
  
(Responding to what  
He has done)

**The Concept:** We do not stop sinning to earn salvation. We lay aside sinful behavior out of intense, joyful thankfulness for a salvation already granted.

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6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die.

8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

**Romans 5:6–9**

NASB95

15 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.

Romans 5:15

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20 The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,  
21 so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 5:20–21

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1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Romans 5:1

NASB95

22 But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:22–23

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1 Therefore there is now no  
condemnation for those who are in  
Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:1

NASB95

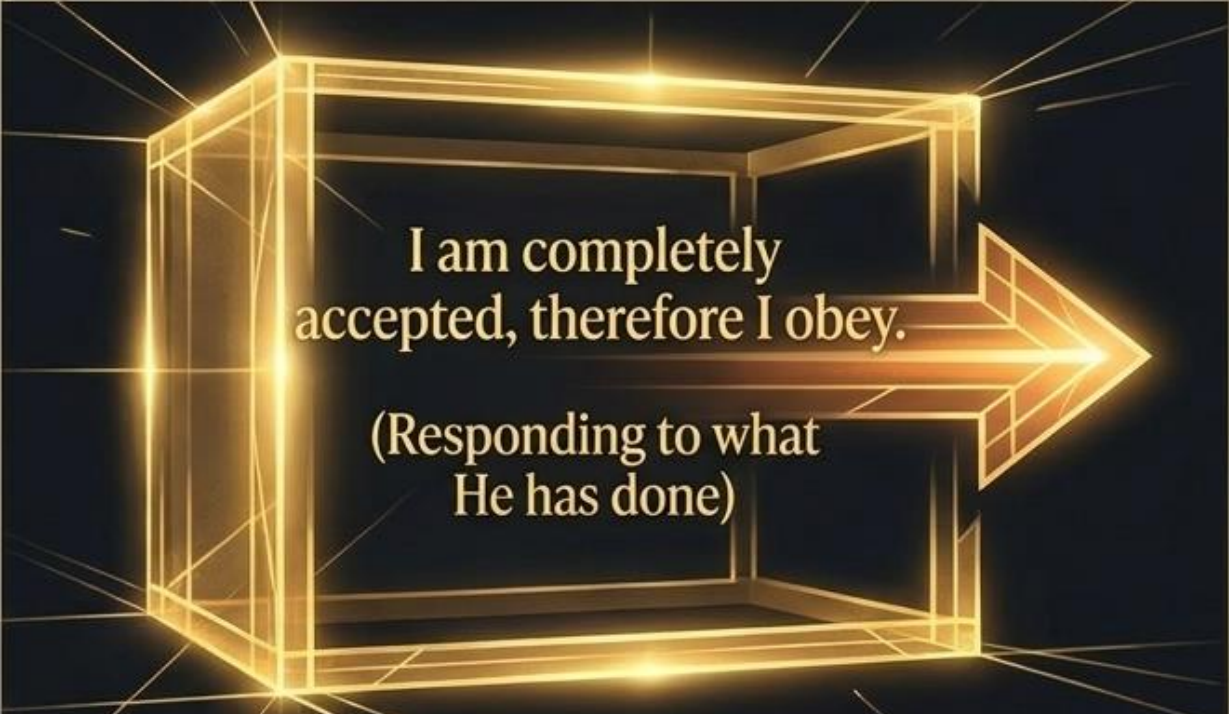
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**The Concept:** We do not stop sinning to earn salvation. We lay aside sinful behavior out of intense, joyful thankfulness for a salvation already granted.

24 Wretched man that I am! Who will  
set me free from the body of this  
death?

Romans 7:24–25

NASB95

25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

Romans 7:24–25

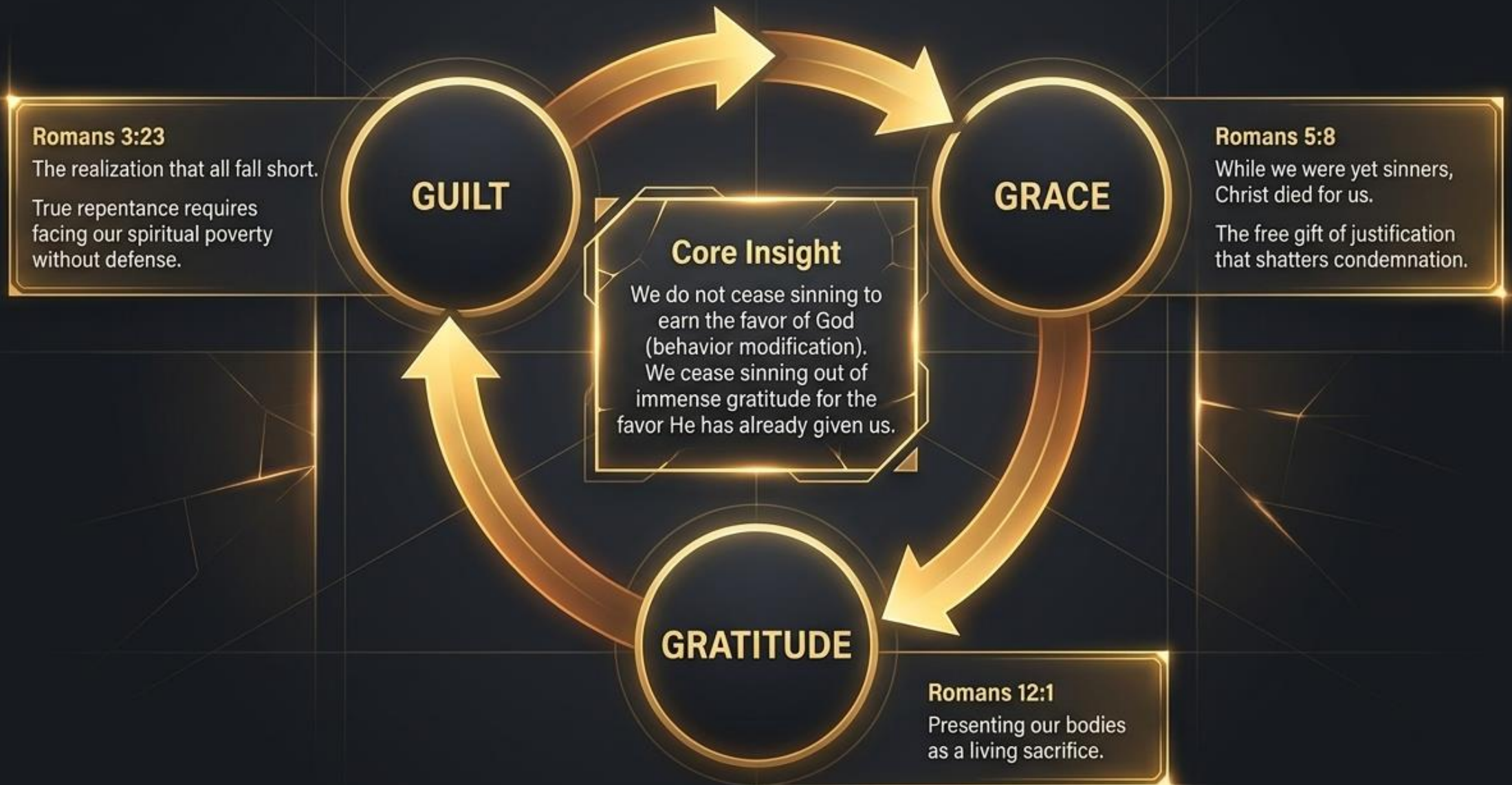
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1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

Romans 12:1

NASB95

# The Engine of Transformation: The 3 Gs Framework



# The Anatomy of Repentance: Guilt vs. Shame



21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

2 Corinthians 5:21

NASB95

One day as I was passing in the field, and that too with some dashes on my conscience, fearing lest all was still not right, suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul, Your righteousness is in heaven. And I thought as well that I saw, with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God's right hand. There, I say, is my righteousness, so that wherever I was or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, He lacks my righteousness, for that was just before Him. I also saw that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor my bad frame that made my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, the same yesterday and today and forever. Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed...Now I went home rejoicing for the grace and love of God...Here I lived for some time, very sweetly at peace with God through Christ. Oh, I thought, Christ! Christ! There was nothing but Christ before my eyes.

-John Bunyan (Pilgrim's Progress)

“That’s what gospel doctrine is for - to show weak and unworthy people like us a picture of Christ in his grace and glory.”

- Ray Ortlund

# A Gospel Still Changing Lives Today

The exact metrics of transformation seen in Acts 9 are still happening right now.



“Think carefully who this Son of God is, how glorious he is, how mighty he is. What is heaven and earth in comparison with him?...The law did not love me or give itself for me. Indeed it accuses me, terrifies me, and drives me to despair. But now I have someone who has set me free from the terrors of the law, sin, and death, and has brought me to freedom, the righteousness of God, and eternal life. He is the Son of God, to whom be praise and glory forever...Read these words, “he loved me and gave himself for me,” with great emphasis. With a firm faith you may engrave this “me” on your heart and apply it to yourself, not doubting that you are among those to whom this “me” belongs.”

-Martin Luther

# The Invitation of Grace



If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord,  
and believe in your heart that God raised Him from  
the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

For whoever will call on the name of the Lord  
will be saved. (Romans 10:13)

As Martin Luther wrote: *Read these words, 'he loved me and gave himself for me,' with great emphasis. With a firm faith you may engrave this 'me' on your heart.*