

# **‘By grace, by Christ, by blood, by faith’**

Sermon preached by Peter Adam  
at the funeral of  
Dr Leon Morris  
at  
Holy Trinity Doncaster  
on  
Monday 31<sup>st</sup> July 2006

## **Romans 3:9-16**

We have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written:  
‘There is no one who is righteous, not even one; there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God. All have turned aside, together they have become worthless; there is no one who shows kindness, there is not even one.’  
‘Their throats are opened graves; they use their tongues to deceive.’  
‘The venom of vipers is under their lips.’  
‘Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.’  
‘Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery are in their paths, and the way of peace they have not known.’  
‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’

Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For ‘no human being will be justified in his sight’ by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is by Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a means of propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.

Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded.

By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

We meet to thank God for the life and ministry of Leon Morris.

As the servant of Jesus Christ he made a great contribution through his life, through his words and through his works. A shy man who never the less won the respect and affection of many; an outstanding intellect, a formidably perfect and detailed memory and yet, as I know so well, absolutely patient with the slowest student; Definite in many controversial ideas and principles and yet entirely respectful of those whom he differed. He looked like an ivory tower theologian, yet as we’ve heard, he spent five years in ministry in outback South Australia. He had an encyclopaedic knowledge of many

subjects. I remember one lunchtime a student asked an idle question about America and we had a 45-minute lecture on the American Constitution. I have just heard today that on one occasion somebody mentioned the breeding of animals at High Table. It was then discovered that Leon was an expert on pig breeding, and especially on artificial insemination in pigs. And he also had an extraordinary natural ability to play the stock market. A man of iron self discipline and yet entirely patient with those who failed. He was conservative in character and yet thoroughly radical in ideas, convictions and actions. He seemed old-fashioned, yet he was a pioneer in Biblical interpretation, in promoting excellence in theological education, and a pioneer in promoting and supporting the work and ministry in ordination of women. He was also a pioneer in making Ridley College the first residential college of Melbourne University to take both women and men. He was also a creative architect, as Ridley Chapel bears constant witness.

Leon was a man of big vision and yet a man of meticulous detailed research, with an infallible memory.

We would like to thank the parish of Doncaster for their care of Leon and Mildred, and for their hospitality today. We would also like to thank those who cared for Leon over years and months, especially the folk at Karana, his doctor, Dr Dunning, Brian Bayston and John and Helen Wedd. John Moroney tells me that he visited Leon on the day in which Leon died. Leon looked entirely at peace.

I want to draw your attention to Romans Chapter Three with its great themes of the gospel. This of course was the focus of Leon's academic research at Cambridge, which gained him his PhD, and which was the subject of his book The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross. We are told by Bishop John Taylor that when Leon returned to Tyndale House from his viva for his PhD, he recounted having been told by the examiners that while they did not agree with his ideas, they though he had expressed the mind of St Paul. I imagine that gave Paul some pleasure: it certainly gave Leon great amusement.

We turn to the great themes of the gospel in Romans chapter 3 verses 24 and 25. 'By grace, by Christ, by blood and by faith.'

We are saved, as Paul says, '**by grace**'. Since 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God they are now justified by his grace as a gift'.

The message of grace, of God's overwhelming grace in the Lord Jesus Christ to sinners is of course a matter of great comfort to us but also a matter for confrontation. We like God's grace when we feel weak: we may feel insulted by God's grace when we feel self-sufficient.

But Paul removes our self-sufficiency by his catena of quotations from the Psalms. There is  
'no one who is righteous not even one, no one who has understanding, no one who seeks God, all have turned aside together they have become worthless, there is no one who shows kindness, there is not even one'.

As we observe the world of theology at the beginning of this century, we see that those who forget their doctrine of sin will soon neglect the atonement. And those who neglect the work of Christ must inevitably neglect the person of Christ.

The message of grace as Paul applies it in Romans, is not just a message for the sinner, for ourselves, it is also defines the way in which the church functions as a church. Those who are strong should welcome those who are weak in faith. And Jews must welcome Gentiles. The message of grace is not just for the individual believer, but it constitutes the nature of the church of God. The church is saved by God's grace. Furthermore in Romans, the message of grace also prompts us to the work of gospel ministry around the world as we find Paul describing in Romans 15 and 16.

Leon was a man who rejoiced in the grace of God. Did that mean that he was a slacker? By no means, he worked very hard. But worked **from** grace, not **for** grace.

He was a man of iron self discipline. Strictly low church in his practice, and famous for refusing the Lucas Tooth scholarship because the money came from a brewery. Yet if he was a man of iron discipline for himself, he also accepted others as they came. There was God's grace, reflected in the life of Leon Morris.

Saved by God's grace as a gift, Leon rejoiced in receiving that gift for himself, and, of course, he wanted others to receive it as well. And that is why he was committed to the work of Evangelism, why he was committed to the gospel proclamation around the world.

'By grace as a gift.' But where is this grace to be found? Well, Paul's answer is clear It is **'by grace', 'by Christ'**.

We are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption, that is **'by Christ Jesus'**.

The Lord Jesus was indeed the Lord from heaven, the focus of the Bible story, the revelation of God, the Messiah in whom all the promises of God found their fulfilment, the word made flesh, the incarnate Son of God.

If it is generally, true, as Paul quotes the Psalmist,

'there is no one who is righteous, not one, not one who is understanding, none who shows kindness, not even one',

there was in fact one, as Paul goes on to show. And that one who was righteous, the one who showed kindness, was of course the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

The righteous died for the unrighteous; The Lamb of God bore away the sin of the world; the good Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep. Jesus came to serve, that is, to give his life as a ransom for many. As Paul explained, Christ was the saviour not of the Jew only but of Jews and Gentiles alike, the universal saviour.

It takes some nerve to assert that simple truth today.

And as Paul points out Jesus achieved that 'by redemption.' That is, through the redemption that is by Christ Jesus. As Leon told us so frequently and so powerfully redemption means deliverance.

Redemption was given at the cost of Jesus' life and redemption was the means by which God rescued a sick and sinful humanity.

It is only those who trust in Christ as their saviour, who see God's grace focused in Jesus Christ, in the person and work of Christ, who can of course have assurance of salvation.

For we know that our salvation comes not from our constancy, our faithfulness, or our feelings, but from the work of Christ on the cross. It was an objective atonement, a substitutionary atonement, that gives us assurance of our status and relationship with God.

We are saved **'by grace'** as a gift, **'by Christ,'** through redemption, that he won for us.

We are saved **'by grace,' 'by Christ.'**

How are we saved **'by Christ?'** well Paul's answer is clear, **'by blood.'**

Others, as Paul has just pointed out, are 'swift to shed blood,' the blood of others. Jesus was swift to shed his own blood for others.

The cross is crucial.

Blood means death

Blood means life laid down in death.

Blood means a life offered to God in death.

And this blood of Christ, as Paul points out, is a means of propitiation.

The wrath of God has been revealed in Romans Chapter one, and the unrighteousness of humanity in Romans two and three. God's solution, God's gift is this means of propitiation, the means by which God propitiated his own wrath and justice.

Without that interpretation of Romans chapter three, the wrath of God revealed by God is unresolved.

Yes, in the cross God rescues us from God. We find the self-substitution of God. God himself becomes our saviour.

**'By grace,' 'by Christ,' 'by blood.'**

There are many Christians around the world who will rejoice that God saved us by his grace

But as Paul points out so clearly in Romans chapter three, that grace is personified in Jesus Christ. We are saved **'by grace'** and **'by Christ.'**

And what is the work of Christ that saves us? Not his teaching, not his miracles, not his example: but his death as a sacrifice, as a means of propitiation. We are justified, saved, delivered, rescued **'by grace,' 'by Christ,' 'by blood.'**

And, as Paul adds in the last section of chapter three, **'by faith.'**

It is, as Leon points out in his commentary, the first time in Romans in which faith is expressed in terms of faith in Jesus Christ. In verse 21 we read,  
'the righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.'

So faith is not just a general confidence in God or a general hope in God. It is clear faith in Jesus Christ. For God's grace is personified in Jesus Christ, and it is the work of Christ on the cross which achieves our forgiveness and our eternal life.

This focus on **'by faith'** is of course one reason why Leon was determined that the message of the Bible would be clear to everyone. It was why he was so committed to the translation and circulation of the Scriptures, to training of ministers of the word, both here in Australia and around the world, and why he was so committed to the task of evangelism, of bringing men and women and children of every nation, of any religion or none to know God in Christ.

As Paul explains, this is a gospel for Jews and for Gentiles. What courage it takes to say that today, that Jesus is the only saviour for the Jews, and the only saviour for the nations.

There are many reasons why we should thank God for Leon Morris.

Some of us will focus on his work of Biblical scholarship, his work of Bible translation. Others may focus on his work of evangelism, his commitment to the proclamation of the gospel, his life serving the proclamation of that gospel. We rejoice too in his great commitment to aid and development work through the Tear Fund. We rejoice too at his promotion of the leadership and ordination of women, so it is a great delight of course to have ordained women deacons and priests with us today. We might too celebrate Leon's commitment to world evangelisation and to the work of God around the world. Leon was an Australian but he certainly had a worldwide vision of the progress of the gospel, and he was committed too to the work of theological education around the world.

What was the gospel that drove Leon, that entranced him, that inspired him?  
What was the gospel, the message which he preached in season and out of season?

It was God's salvation; our justification: **'by grace,' 'by Christ,' 'by blood,'** to be received **'by faith.'**

It is this gospel which enabled Paul to say,  
'I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers,  
nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height,  
nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,  
will be able to separate us from  
the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

Praise God!