

# “Rise Up and Walk!”



Steve Brown

I recently talked to a pastor who has been preaching grace with all its power. A man in his church (a retired preacher) accused him of “exalting sin” in the pulpit. He emailed his sermon to me and asked me to read it. I did and I told him that the retired preacher was crazy. In fact, in the sermon, sin was preached in all its horror. The law was given without compromise. And the solution was exactly what the Bible says it is *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast”* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

As I read my friend’s sermon, it was clear that he was big on biblical holiness and sanctification. His message was not that everybody ought to try harder, but that they should love more and the only way to do that is to be loved deeply, unconditionally and fully by Jesus. A lot of those who are uptight about too much grace are saved, but they don’t hang around long enough to get loved.

When Jesus met the prostitute in Luke 7, he loved and forgave her and said, *“He who is forgiven little loves little.”* There’s a syllogism here. Premise: Sin is universal and destructive. Premise: People who are forgiven little love little. Conclusion: Angry and critical Christians are living in denial about their own sin.

My friend clearly taught that when we think we’re righteous, we have lowered the very high and devastating demand a holy God gave to us in his perfect law. At the same time, we have raised ourselves up with an insufferable and dishonest self-righteousness. John the Baptist said that Jesus must increase and he/we should decrease. When that’s reversed, it’s not the Christian faith— instead it’s a lie from a very hot place.

Another friend of mine, Zac Hicks, an incredible worship leader and composer, wrote a wonderful version of the Doxology. Here are the lyrics:

*Your perfect Law exposes me  
I feel my sin and desperate need  
My best good works are powerless  
To satisfy your righteousness.  
But there is One who lived for me  
His life, my only victory  
His death forever sealed in time  
That I am His and He is mine.  
Praise God from whom all blessings flow  
Praise him, all creatures here below  
Praise him, above ye heavenly hosts  
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.*

That’s it! That’s the gospel, and the reason for our worship and praise. We really do love because he first loved us, and in that love, God begins to make us more and more like Jesus until ultimately, we will be just like him (1 John 3:2).

All of that is true. We do get better—sometimes not much, but better. We can’t help it. The reason is that we’ve learned a principle I’ve preached a thousand times: ***The only people who get better are those who know that, if they never get better, Jesus will love them anyway.***

Now let me tell you something I’ve discovered: A healed cripple doesn’t have to be encouraged to walk. **Say what?** Think about it. In Acts 3, Peter and John were empowered by God to heal a crippled beggar. Peter said that they didn’t have any money but they had something better. “Look at us,” Peter said. “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!” Then the beggar responded, “Thanks but if it’s all the same I’ll just sit here.”

**Are you crazy?** Of course that’s not what the beggar said. Luke wrote, “And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God!”

If you’re blind and healed, you don’t have to be encouraged to see. If you’re deaf and healed you don’t have to be encouraged to hear. If you’re crippled and healed, you don’t have to be encouraged to walk. You may not walk very well. You may even stumble. You probably won’t be able to dance right away. But you don’t have to be encouraged to walk.

That’s what happened to us. We’re all, as it were, healed cripples. That’s what justification and imputation are all about. It’s by faith alone, grace alone and through Christ alone. We don’t need to hear sermons on the horror of being crippled or about how guilty we should feel for being crippled. We don’t need other cripples telling us that if we really loved Jesus we wouldn’t be crippled (hypocrisy). That’s all nonsense.

Jesus says, *“Rise up and walk! As you do, I’ll help until one day you will dance before the throne.”* □

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