

"God's Refrigerator"

I would say that most homes today are equipped with one of these, although not every household utilizes it to its full potential. While in numerous homes it may sit in the corner, it serves many purposes. Over the years, its role in our home has changed. The item in question is our refrigerator, also known as art gallery, photo album, and scrapbook.

When our children were much younger, through their experiences at the Rainbow Day-Care center, Kenbridge Elementary School, and Kenbridge Baptist Church, they drew, painted, scribbled and constructed other pieces of art. Coming home from preschool, elementary school, or church, they almost always had something in hand for display. We delighted in exhibiting any and all of their workmanship. It always gave us a sense of pride to see how their young minds constantly churned and how they placed on paper what they envisioned.

As they matured, the art gallery transitioned to a large photo album and scrapbook, where we have displayed pictures, report cards, and awards. When I viewed their good works, I forgot the times when they had to sit in "time out." My focus was on their accomplishments, and I filled with pride knowing that they were my children.

I have also made an analogy. I have never been to heaven: I don't know how it is furnished. But if there is a refrigerator in heaven, I am sure that it is covered with the handiwork of God's children. If God has a refrigerator, there are probably pictures held up with varied magnets, along with snapshots of people extending grace to each other, or expressing the love of Jesus in some way. That is the ultimate reason that Christ came for us, so that we could have an abundant life. And out of this abundant life, we want to give something back to God through our efforts or works. So in turn, if God has a refrigerator, I think that God places these handiworks on that refrigerator.

In our New Testament Lesson, Paul spoke of the past, the present, and future. Regarding the past, the apostle wrote that the Gentiles were dead in their trespasses and sins. In an earlier letter, Paul had written to the Romans, "The wages of sin are death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." We are not truly living as long as we have trespasses and sins. The word for "sins" is an archery term and actually means "a miss." The same term describes a man *shooting* his arrow at the target and then *missing* the target. Sin is the failure to hit the target; it is when we miss the mark.

Many of us think of sinners as murderers, thieves, rapists, and the like. While these kinds of people certainly *are* sinners, we tend to forget that because *we* miss the mark, we *too* are sinners.

To the men here today, are you as good a husband as you could be? How about your role as a father or grandfather? Are you doing everything right? And to the women, are you as good a wife as you could be? How about your role as a mother or grandmother? What kind of employee are you? Are your days filled with conscientious work when you are always doing your best? All of us are someone's children. What kind of children are we? Are we thankful for the efforts of our parents, and do/did we tell them? What kind of friend are you? It is easy to be friendly when nothing is at risk, when the boat is floating along with no problems. But it is different to be a friend when someone is sailing in troubled water. How about your daily walk with Jesus? Are you doing *all* you can for the One who gave His *all* for you? If we miss the mark, if we are not being what we ought to be and *could* be, then we are sinning.

Paul also uses the word "trespasses," which literally means "a slip or fall." This term actually means "losing one's way," "straying from the right road," "failing to grasp or slipping away from the truth." Are we in life where we ought to be right now? Have we reached the goal of efficiency and skill that our gifts have enabled us to achieve?

So the central idea of sin is failure: failure to hit the target, failure to hold to the road, failure to make life what it is capable of becoming; and that definition includes everyone of us. (William Barclay. Galatians and Ephesians. Philadelphia: Westminster Press. 1975. p. 95-97)

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As a result, we *deserve* God's wrath; we should *receive* God's judicial condemnation. But, the letter shifts its focus from the past in verses 1-3, to the present in verse four. Despite the fact that we are all dead in our trespasses and sins, that is *not* the end of the story. Thankfully, God is rich in mercy. The gloom and doom of trespasses and sins serve only as a backdrop to make the love, mercy, and grace of God shine more brightly. We do not deserve the love we receive from God, nor are we entitled to the grace and mercy. But instead, because of God's compassionate nature, these blessings are offered to even the most vile person.

Imagine that it's World War II, and in Norway, a respected member of the underground movement has just been murdered, assassinated by a bomb planted in his building. Worse yet, the bomb was planted by another Norwegian man, one who should have been sympathetic to the underground's work. And still worse, you are asked to visit the assassin before his execution. What would you do?

This is the situation in which Dr. Ejnar Lundby found himself when he was asked to visit Kristian Himler. Himler had betrayed his country and killed a man of great integrity and promise, and a man Lundby admired. What would he say when he met the murderer?

Lundby found Himler's cell and asked him, "Is there any way I can help you?" Himler answered with curses. Lundby prayed that God would remove his own emotions and replace them with compassion. He placed a Bible on a table beside Himler, and said, "You may not want to listen to my words. That's all right; I'm only human. But I've brought you the words of One who is divine and who can help you, because He cares for you in spite of all you've done." Himler ignored him.

Lundby was invited to a conference in Switzerland the next day, but he felt unmistakably drawn to visit the prison again. Once there, he found a changed man. Himler was freshly-scrubbed, friendly, and grateful. He had been reading the Bible, and he wanted to commit his life to Christ. In fact, Himler was no longer afraid of his execution, and he wanted to atone for the murder.

Lundby left the prison thrilled, but was shocked by the strong conviction that suddenly overcame him, that Kristian Himler had just lied to him. Lundby returned to the cell and confronted Himler, who was astonished, because he had just read a Biblical passage against lying. In the face of these two confrontations, Himler confessed that he had not been the one to plant the bomb. He had driven the car. The man responsible for the bombing had a family, so Kristian had taken the blame. Lundby threw all his efforts into exonerating Kristian Himler, and three days before his execution, his death penalty was removed. Due to Lundby's efforts, Himler was eventually released. (Steven R. Mosley. *Glimpses of God*. Sisters, Oregon: Questar Publishers, Inc. 1990. p. 259-261)

In spite of our evil side, the side that God doesn't like, our negative attitudes and deeds, God has extended this powerful gift of grace to us to make us alive, to give us a reason to live. Now we can truly live life abundantly *because* of God's grace. Jesus was raised from the dead signifying a new life; our baptisms symbolize our new life in Christ.

Earlier, I stated that this passage deals with the past, present, and the future. The past was when we were dead in our trespasses and sins; the present is the fact that God is merciful; and the future is stated in verse seven, "In the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Our futures will happen simply because of the grace of God. God has provided a better way for us; we have opportunity to see daily the riches of God's grace. God is kind to us in many ways. The greatest act of kindness shown to us was the gift of Jesus, God's Son; without that ultimate expression of kindness, we would not know God. And along with the gift of God's Son, we have been offered grace, mercy, and love of immeasurable proportions.

How can we be saved? The writer of Ephesians gives us an equation for salvation in verse eight. God's grace plus our faith equals salvation. $A+B=C$. Salvation is as simple as that. It is a gift available to all who believe.

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To gain salvation, we need not *do* anything, except believe. It doesn't matter how many senior adults we help to cross the street, or how many smiles we give at the post office or the grocery store, or how prompt and efficient we are at work, or how long we have attended church, or what offices we have held in the church or community. None of those have any bearing on our salvation. Becoming a Christian requires an acceptance of the gift of God's grace. That's all. Nothing else. Period. We cannot acquire salvation by ourselves any more than we can raise our height by one inch on our own. Many will seek to work themselves into heaven, or think they have to jump through some holy hoops to enter the Kingdom of God. All we have to *do* is to accept God's grace and believe.

On the other hand, if the love of God comes into our heart, if we seek to live the Christian life, then our conduct will *reflect* this love and grace of a Christian. Our works will be in *response* of Christ's great love for us. Jesus said, "By their fruits you shall know them," meaning that what we *do* reflects what is on the inside. The majority of our behavior is governed by our values.

And God takes pride in the jewels of the creation. We are God's workmanship; our new lives have been created in Christ Jesus for good works. Initially, humanity was created to have fellowship with God. In this new created order under the new covenant, since the sacrifice of Jesus, we now live under grace. And once we accept this grace, we *will* provide good works. Christ died so that we might live, and I truly think that we can make God proud of us. So proud, that if God had a refrigerator, snapshots and pictures of our works would be hanging there for all of heaven to see. We were created for good works, pictures to be displayed on the refrigerator to bring God glory, yet these works do not *save* us. What we **do** does not bring us salvation.

Ally and Samuel are not my children because of what has been displayed on our refrigerator. I am proud of them regardless; they will *always* be my children. When we would hang their artwork with a refrigerator magnet, we *communicated* something to them, and they hopefully received the same message, which is that they found favor in our eyes.

Our works on God's refrigerator do the same. When our works reflect the love, mercy, and grace of Jesus, we are finding favor in God's eyes. And then God is the proud parent who thinks that it was all worth it. All the grieving that we have put God through because we were so stubborn and bull-headed that we thought we could do it ourselves, all the blatant disobediences, all the times we missed the mark or did not meet our potential, all these things are covered by the grace of God, and God smiles, because we truly *are* God's workmanship.

How long has it been since God placed one of your pictures on the refrigerator? Are you meeting your potential as a family member or friend? How are you measuring up to the standard that Christ set before us? Are you following his example? When was the last time you realized that you could make God smile, that what you do every day truly *does* matter to God? Remember, we sin when we miss the mark. Today would be a great day to recommit yourself to Christ.

Maybe you have never accepted this free gift. Becoming a Christian is easy, really. God has provided a way for us to accept this free gift of grace, this unconditional love. All we have to do is to have faith . . . all we have to do is believe in Jesus. And when we place our faith and trust in Jesus, then God grants to us salvation. If you have never asked Jesus to live within you and made a commitment in turn to live for Him, then today is the perfect time to do so. Your commitment or re-commitment today would be another picture on God's refrigerator. Won't you come?