



Romans 4:16a

Lent 2 | March 1, 2026

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That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace...

Lean on the Load-Bearing Grace

Not all walls are created equally. Inside your own houses that is true, not every wall was created equally. Some of the walls in your homes are there for support, others of those walls exist merely for looks. The former, the support walls are called load-bearing walls. They do just what the name implies, they bear loads. They keep the house upright. The latter are called non-load bearing walls, also sometimes called partition walls, because that is what *they* mainly do—they partition your houses into different rooms.

Now, if you are watching a house being built, you can easily tell the difference between the load-bearing walls and the non-load bearing walls. Load-bearing walls are constructed running perpendicular to the ceiling joists. In a multi-story home, they align with walls in the floors above or below. They are also aligned with beams in the basement, are tied into the foundation of the house.

The non-load bearing walls, well, they're pretty much just thrown up wherever you like, regardless of the direction of the ceiling joists or anything else. Also, they just *look* different than a load-bearing wall, because they do different things. And so, it's easy to see the difference between these two types of walls *if* you're watching a house being built.

But, let's say you're looking at a house that's already been *completely* finished. All of the walls look the same now. So, how can you tell which are the load-bearing walls and which are not? Well, there are a number of ways to figure that out, but the one *certain* way is to simply knock the wall out and see what happens next. If it's a partition wall, you have a mess, but that's it. If it's a load-bearing wall, well, now you're in some trouble. You might even be dead. (To be clear, I do not advise you to do this.)

In some ways, our lives are like buildings, and we build them out of various pieces—experiences, opinions, beliefs. And so, our lives, in that sense, are not very different from the life of the church at Rome in St. Paul's day.

He's writing this letter to a mixed group of house churches in Rome, perhaps *a majority* Gentile Christians, but there was a noteworthy number of Jewish believers in the church also. So, that church was a group of mixed experiences and opinions. And this letter to the Romans is about a lot of things. But at least one of those things that this letter *is most certainly* about is GRACE.

Now, in that full section of Romans which we read earlier, the only mention of grace is found in our sermon verse: ***“That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace.”*** The word “grace” doesn't appear anywhere else in the other twelve verses. But the *concept* of grace is to be found throughout. Paul speaks about righteousness *not* by works—unearned, *unable* to be earned, merely given. That's grace. Lawless deeds forgiven, sins covered, sins-not-counted—that's grace. When God gives something—not only for nothing—but as payment in the exact opposite direction of what should have been earned—that's grace. And this is what our text is about.

In Christ, God puts things right, He makes things right, He makes people right, He *will* make all things right, graciously. It means the initiative is His, the action is His, the glory is His. *All* of the glory is His. It's not partly by grace or mostly by grace. If grace is involved, then it is *all* by grace.

Now, grace has a number of corollaries, a number of things that go along with it. One of them is, for instance, the doctrine of election. That's what Romans chapters 9, 10, and 11 are all about. Election is that fact that God chose us, we did not choose God. We also *could not* choose God at all, and since someone had to do the choosing, God did it. That's grace. Another corollary of grace is faith. You see, God's grace in Jesus, His gracious deeds in Jesus, can only be received by faith, as Paul writes, ***“Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.”*** Faith is the *opposite* of working. Someone *else* works graciously, and then faith simply receives. That's grace.

And so, if it *is* all by grace, then it is *also* all by faith. It is all by relying. It is all by leaning for support and life and hope and present and future and everything. Faith *leans* on God's grace in Christ and leans *only* on God's grace in Christ.

So, the question for us is: how do you know if you are leaning on *Christ* or if you are leaning on something else? Well, if you're wondering, let's return to the picture I began with: need to figure out if it's a load-bearing wall or a non-load bearing wall, knock it down and see what happens. And if you want to figure out if what you've been leaning against is load-bearing or not, do the same.

Here's an example of what I mean. In some ways, this experiment is exactly what happened in the Roman church, and indeed, in *much* of the early Christian Church during the first century. Look at the Roman congregation, read the letter to the Romans, and you see a lot of problems that church was facing as a group of people coming together with different experiences and opinions—Jews and Gentiles. These were Jewish *Christians* in the church, they *did* believe in Jesus as their Savior, and they were *not* running around and saying, “It's mostly God, it's mostly Jesus, but I still have to do my part.” They would not have been saying that. They *would* have been saying, “It's all God, it's all Jesus, it's all grace.” But when walls started getting pushed over, it turned out, *maybe* their practice was a bit off.

You see, when it came to those *Gentile* Christians, there were some major differences in opinions and practice compared to the Jewish Christians. The Gentile Christians were not circumcised, they did not observe the kosher rules—the Jewish dietary laws. They were also sinners, but through faith in Christ, putting all of the load, all of the weight, all of the trust in Christ Jesus—that was sufficient. He was strong enough to bear their load, and He did it all for them. They were forgiven. They were saved.

But then, that left the question, what about all those particularly *Jewish* Mosaic laws that those Jewish Christians were still so fond of? What about circumcision? What about the foods? What about clean and unclean? Well, they realized that if faith in Christ was sufficient, if God's grace in Christ was sufficient, well, then that simply made *those* sorts of laws optional. So that wall got knocked down. And when that happened, *many* Jewish Christians realized they had been treating it as a load-bearing wall. They were leaning on it, even boasting in it, relying on those laws to bear their loads for them.

Now, today as well, we are tempted to treat various numbers of things in our lives as load-bearing when they're really not. One way to find out if you've been doing that is to look for the comparing that we do. "I thank you God, that, well, I'm not like that." "I'm not like her." "I'm not like him." "I certainly don't have it all together, but I'm not that way." This is one of the continual dangers in the Christian life, that I will compare myself, *if possible*, in ways that make it possible for me to come out on top. It could be a certain kind of success. It could be a certain kind of achievement. It could be a certain superior opinion. It could be a certain kind or number of relationships. It could be anything.

Now, you and I would never dream of saying out loud that "God only plays a *part* in my righteousness, but I've got to fill in the rest." We would never say that. We're not that blatant about it. But there are these sorts of walls that I will lean on, and I hope that it will bear my weight. The problem is: these are not load-bearing walls. They're the other kind, the partition kind. And the only thing they serve to do is *not* to bear my weight, but rather to partition. To separate us from each other—me from you.

And this means that the times when God comes in and knocks down those partition walls that we may have treated as load-bearing walls—those can be the times of His greatest mercy to us. Now, as we all know, that can hurt a great deal. But this is Lent, which can be a special time when God does this.

I might discover that I was leaning on that achievement, and now it's gone. I might discover that I was depending on that particular view of myself and my life, and now it's gone. I might discover that I needed that success, that approval, that reputation, that relationship, whatever it was—and then that went away, and it *felt* as though my building was crashing down. But the truth is, these were the partition walls, and they never kept the building upright. And so then, all that's left to me is grace.

And that's precisely why Paul says in our text, "***That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace...***" He goes on that this promise resting on grace is therefore "***guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.***" Abraham believed in God who gives life to the dead. Abraham believed in the God who calls into existence things that do not exist. Now that is grace, to give life to the dead and to call into being things that are not.

And God did that for Abraham; God gave life to the dead womb of Sarah, Abraham's wife, and with that life, God gave a promise. Not just a promise for Abraham, but for all. It was for all of God's children, and so the promise came to rest on one, on Jesus, who was for all. He was the Messiah of *Israel's* hope, the descendant of David, and yet He was also the light to lighten the *Gentiles*. So, Jesus bore the promise for all. He carried the hope all.

He loved all, and so everywhere He went, He pushed over the man-made walls. But He bore the promise, and so the load bore down upon His shoulders, all the load of men and women who did not want it all to be by grace. Jesus bore it all, and then He died. But God is the God who gives life to the dead. And just as Christ was delivered for our transgressions, He was also raised for our justification. (cf. Romans 4:25) Jesus was raised. He was raised to put things right.

And *because* God is the God who gives life to the dead, and because He calls into existence things that did not exist—now you are here, and I am here. We are here, together, as ungodly sinners that God has justified. He forgives our lawlessness, He covers our sins, He does not count our iniquity against us. And that's grace.

He raised His Son from the dead, and He has raised you from the dead. He has given you life, a new life, a baptismal life. And that's grace. You are alive. And *as* the God who gives life from the dead, one day, from the sleep of death God will call you. And He will raise you on that day to His side, on that day when all of the glory will be His.

And if this is all, indeed, grace—if this promise of grace is intended for you, then it is also intended for all. Because grace is not a partial thing or a mostly thing. If grace is involved, then it is *all* by grace, and it is *for all* by grace. And because it is for all, then the comparison thing that we do can stop, because there is no distinction. Not between Jew and Gentile, not between you and anyone else. We are all sinners. But we have Jesus, the Load-Bearer, who graciously takes away the sins of the world.

When those walls come down, then we can lean on Christ alone, who binds us together and makes us one people, Abraham's children, leaning alone on grace, on the God who gives life to the dead, and who makes us to be instruments of His grace to one another. May God help us to be so. Amen.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7) Amen.