

OBSTACLES TO GRACE

PURPOSE AND SITUATION OF THE ROLLO

This rollo is the fourth talk of the second day. To this point in the Weekend, little emphasis has been given to the difficulty of living a life of faith based in grace. Now it is time for a reality check. In order to give the candidates a balanced presentation, it is necessary to paint realistically, the pitfalls and challenges of all who follow Jesus Christ as Lord.

The purpose of this rollo is to discuss the trials and temptations, the stresses and distresses to living a life in grace. It sets forth the underlying truth that the chief obstacle to a life in grace is human sinfulness. Sin creates an inability to recognize or to receive grace, hindering us from receiving the love and fullness of life that God wants for us.

This rollo is not meant to be a lecture on sin so much as a disclosure of God's power to forgive and to transform the sinner. The rollo need not be gloomy or pessimistic; rather, it should reflect the truth that in Christ, we become more than conquerors (Romans 8:37). It is important that the rollista give personal examples of the obstacles encountered in her/his personal experience, and of the victories that have been won by God's grace in daily life.

Time Objective: Should not exceed **30** minutes.

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OUTLINE

- I. INTRODUCTION**
 - A. Define sin**
 - B. Define obstacle**
 - C. Obstacles not from God**
- II. DISTORTED IDEAS**
 - A. About God**
 - B. About self**
- III. SPECIFIC OBSTACLES**
 - A. Satan/evil**
 - B. World**
 - C. Self/flesh**
- IV. HOW DO WE OVERCOME THE OBSTACLES?**
 - A. Full armor of God**
 - B. Die to self**
 - C. Obedience to God**
 - D. Crucified with Christ**
 - E. Put on Christ**
 - F. Fellowship with other believers**
- V. CONCLUSION**
 - A. Jesus overcame all obstacles.**
 - B. In Jesus we overcome our obstacles.**

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COMMENTARY ON THE OUTLINE

(This material is intended as a study aid for the Rollista. It is not intended to be the rollo.)

I. INTRODUCTION. A basic text for this rollo might be the words of Jesus in John 16:33 (NIV): *“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

A. Define sin. The daily walk with Christ is not an easy journey. Jesus called it “narrow” and “hard”, Matthew 7:14 (NRSV). It is filled with obstacles to a life in grace, caused primarily by human sin (Romans 3:23). It is important to define sin. Sin is “missing the mark.” Whenever, in thought, word or action we fail to do or be what God wants us to do or be, OR we do what God doesn’t want us to do or be, that is sin. The effect of sin is that it blocks and separates us from God and alienates us from others whom we offend. Through the Holy Spirit, we become aware of our sin and the depth of our sin in the light of God’s saving grace in Jesus Christ.

B. Define obstacle. Human sinfulness creates obstacles to our receiving grace. An obstacle might be defined as anything that hinders one from receiving God’s miracle of grace within us; whenever, wherever, however we resist God – there is an obstacle to a life in grace.

C. Obstacles not from God. In every human life there are experiences of personal difficulty, disappointment and suffering that are a natural part of life. These are not obstacles from God (Luke 13:1-5). The death of a loved one, particularly in a premature or catastrophic death, may cause one to blame God. The onset of personal illness or disease, the loss of a job opportunity, a business failure, a natural calamity, etc., can all become occasions for mistakenly affixing blame on God. God’s will for us is always good; God wants us to *“Have it to the full”*, John 10:10 (NIV).

II. DISTORTED IDEAS.

A. About God. Misconceptions about the true nature of God can become obstacles to receiving God’s grace. The often-prevalent notion that God, because of His unbounded love for us, has no expectations or demands of us is seen as false in the light of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) and Jesus’ summary of the divine law (Mark 12:28-31). Failure to honor these guidelines blocks grace. Conversely, many well-meaning people of faith imagine a fearsome, wrathful God of many demands and harsh judgment (Genesis 6:5-7). Ignoring the greater truth of John 3:16-17, their grace-starved lives experience spiritual paralysis. Still others envision God as an indifferent, far-off cosmic power too holy to become involved in mundane human affairs. Psalm 139 offers a corrective, as well as the personal touch of the Master.

- B. About self.** Sometimes grace is blocked by distorted ideas we have about ourselves. The buoyant flush of grace can lead one to a false sense of self-sufficiency. As with Peter (John 13:36-38), human pride sets in, and we think we can manage by ourselves. Here the obstacle is simply that, in our determination to do things our own way, we fail to seek God's will or ask for God's help. On the other hand, one sin of religious people is trying to be good for God. If we keep the law and the commandments, God will reward (bless) us. This also is pride. It says God has an obligation to us. The cross of Jesus says our efforts to justify ourselves are at cross-purposes to God's plan of grace. Shame ("I am unworthy of grace") can be another distorted idea about oneself that hinders grace. Worthiness is not a precondition necessary to receive grace; for, as Paul reminds us in Romans 3:23 (NIV), "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*"

III. SPECIFIC OBSTACLES.

- A. Satan/evil.** The "Adversary" is ever at work to convince us of his non-existence, and to set up obstacles to God's grace. Satan appears eighteen times in the Old Testament and thirty-four times in the New Testament. The rollista might deal with the questions "What is he like?" and "What are his methods?" 1 John 3:8 cautions us to recognize the evil and stand against it, as Jesus did.
- B. World.** The world is full of temptations that draw us away from the will of God, sometimes with eternal consequences. Paul warned us in Romans 6:23 (NIV), "*The wages of sin is death.*" Jesus' own ministry began with his wrestling with temptation (Matthew 4:1-11). The rollista might deal with the questions "How does the world influence us?" and "How do worldly concerns get in the way of grace?" Witness to personal struggles with worldly temptations is appropriate here. 1 John 2:15-17 offers strong truth on this issue.
- C. Self/flesh.** In addition to pride, we all wrestle with human selfishness. To be born and to grow is to struggle to be independent and autonomous. We put ourselves, our ideals and priorities, our pleasures and aspirations at the center of our daily lives. Jesus reminded us that those who seek their own lives will lose them (Mark 8:35). In addition, grace reveals to us places in our lives where we need to make changes, harmful habits and modes of behavior that prevent God from helping us become what He wants us to be. *It may be appropriate for the rollista to share briefly a personal struggle at this point.*

IV. HOW DO WE OVERCOME THESE OBSTACLES?

- A. Full armor of God.** Ephesians 6:10-18 provides the equipment for our battle to overcome these obstacles.
- B. Die to self.** In Mark 8:34-35, Jesus calls us to die to self and begin to live for him and the Gospel.
- C. Obedience to God.** Jesus' own life of perfect obedience to the will of the Father models for us the way to overcome our obstacles to a life in grace. (John 14:21)

- D. Crucified with Christ.** In Galatians 2:19-20, Paul declares that we are united with Jesus in his death in order that we might live in Him. (Romans 6:4-8)
- E. Put on Christ.** In Romans 13:14 (NIV), Paul admonishes us to “*Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*”
- F. Fellowship with other believers.** We need to surround ourselves with brothers and sisters in the faith to help us with our struggles. (James 5:16)

V. CONCLUSION

- A. Jesus overcame all obstacles.** He fed the hungry, He healed the sick and infirm, He delivered the possessed. The final obstacle was Calvary’s Cross, overcome on Easter morn. Returning to the initial theme text in John 16:33, Jesus tells it like it is: life brings trouble; be hopeful; he has overcome all the obstacles to a life in grace.
- B. In Jesus we overcome our obstacles.** None of the obstacles we encounter in life need be permanent unless we choose to let them be. In Jesus Christ we can overcome all the obstacles to a life in grace. We can do all things through Christ (Philippians 3:14); God’s power works within us beyond our expectation (Ephesians 3:20); we become more than conquerors (Romans 8:37). Don’t let the grace be wasted; today is the day to be saved (2 Corinthians 6:1-2)!

Note to the rollista: *There is far more subject matter in this “Commentary . . .” than is required to meet the time objective of the rollo. While it is necessary to speak very briefly on each item listed in the outline, be careful to select for expansion, only those items for which you have something significant to contribute - - usually through personal experience. Remember, the more important part of the Weekend will occur during table discussions than what participants will learn or remember from hearing the rollo. The rollo is meant more to spark ideas for the table discussions than it is meant to be instructive.*

Time Objective: Not to exceed **30** minutes

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BIBLE REFERENCES

(These Bible references are included here to help the rollista understand some of the biblical background of the rollo. The list is neither complete nor is it intended to become part of the rollo. Read the references and listen for the Word of God.)

Gen.	3	Human disobedience brings alienation from God and mortality
Exodus	20	The Ten Commandments
Deut.	9	Israel makes the golden calf
1 Samuel	13	Saul's disobedience
Psalms	36:1-4	Transgression speaks to the wicked
Jonah	4	Jonah protests grace extended to Nineveh
John	9:2	Who sinned that he was born blind
Acts	7:51	Stephen: You always resist the Holy Spirit
1 Timothy	4:1	In late times some will depart from the faith
2 Peter	3:9	God does not want any to perish
1 John	3:7-10	The devil seeks to lead us astray
Rev.	3:15	I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot