

LAVISH GRACE

| | Total debt owed by U.S. consumers |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| Credit cards | \$779 billion |
| Mortgages | \$8.48 trillion |
| Auto loans | \$1.16 trillion |
| Student loans | \$1.31 trillion |

Credit card debt continues to skyrocket in the U.S. The total credit card by U.S. consumers is almost \$800 billion and every home owes an average of \$17,000 on their credit cards. Hopefully, most of you are well below average.

Some people carry debt on their credit cards. Some pay them off every month. Then there are the select few who don't even have credit limit. I knew there were some fancy

credit cards out there, but these are ridiculous..



The Dubai First Royale MasterCard
 Created to meet the needs of a royal lifestyle, the Dubai First Royale MasterCard offers its invitees exclusive luxuries like no-limit spending, a dedicated relationship manager, and an exclusive offering of "Royale Lifestyle Management."

The Visa Infinite Eurasian Diamond Card
 "The black card Visa requirement for this exclusive credit card is a personal recommendation from either the management board of the Eurasian Bank in Kazakhstan or from two current Eurasian Diamond cardholders."



Unless you are from the royal family in Dubai or a billionaire from Eastern Europe, chances are you won't be getting any junk mail to sign up for these cards. These super elite credit cards and the kind of spending that goes with them would be considered lavish. Lavish is one of those words that almost sounds like what it means. Lavish. It just brings to mind elegance,

extravagance and luxury. People who have a lavish lifestyle live in ten million dollar mansions on the beach.

That's why I have long loved these verses. *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight.* Lavish is the adjective and grace is the noun. Lavish grace. I love the sound of it. Even more, I love what it represents. God's grace is so overwhelming, so all-consuming that lavish was the best way to describe it. I realize that Paul did not actually write the word lavish but the word he did use means a super-abundance. God gave us a super-abundance of his grace. In other words, it was more than enough—way more than enough. It was excessive even. But not excessive in a wasteful way like a ten million dollar mansion is excessive; or an unlimited credit card from a bank in Dubai is excessive. Those are lavish and excessive but they are also wasteful, unnecessary and extremely selfish.

But God's grace is lavish in the opposite way. It is the ultimate work of unselfishness and sacrifice. It was extravagant and costly but the price was paid on our behalf. Dubai credit cards are used to purchase a third Lamborghini for its owner. God's grace was used to purchase us from our own helpless sin and from the wrath of God.

By the way, the credit card illustration does have another use. Christians always wonder how people in the Old Testament were saved if Jesus' death and resurrection were still to come. One of the best illustrations I have ever heard was from Walt Kaiser who used a credit card illustration. He said that the believers in the Old Testament were saved in the exact same way we are, which is by grace through faith. However, their sins had yet to be actually paid for so it is as if their sins were placed on an unlimited, divine credit card. Over the centuries, the balance continued to grow until Jesus' death and resurrection paid the bill in full.

I think that's a helpful illustration. Now, like all illustrations, it falls short because we're not sure that is the way God views the whole subject. From his perspective, believers were chosen from before the foundation of the world. From his perspective, believers were predestined to be adopted as sons and daughters. As we know, God is not limited by time and space, so from his perspective, it all runs together. This is why he can declare that we were chosen and adopted even before the creation of the world, not just prior to the cross. But since you and I are bound by space and time, the credit card illustration is helpful because we can understand the idea of sins

being charged in an account, just like a credit card, until they are paid in full.



Bring this coupon to your local IKEA® store and get
\$20 off
a purchase of \$150 or more before tax!



Valid July 25 - September 5, 2016. One coupon per household. Valid in US stores only. No cash value. Cannot be combined with other IKEA offers or discounts, except IKEA FAMILY product offers. Not valid on Buy for Free IKEA Food Offer and IKEA FAMILY Individual Kitchen Planning Service Offer or in the Restaurant or Swedish Food Market. Not valid on previous purchases or the purchase of IKEA Gift Cards. Not valid online. See store for details.

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To redeem your coupon, bring it to your local IKEA store or display it on your phone at checkout.

The credit card illustration has another use in this text because of the word redemption. *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.* Redemption is a type of payment. This IKEA coupon has a cash value of \$20, but you can't use that \$20 to buy gas at Kwik Trip, can you? It only has a cash value of \$20 IF you use it at IKEA and IF you spend at least \$150 in the store. At the very bottom of the coupon, in small print it says, "To redeem your coupon, bring it to

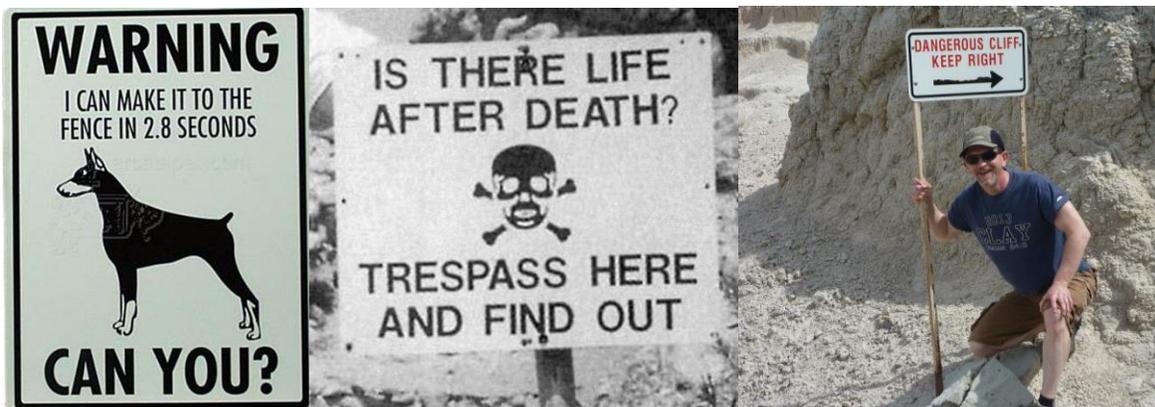
your local IKEA store or display it on your phone at checkout.” So even if you have the coupon and do spend \$150, it’s still not worth \$20 unless you redeem it; unless you cash it in, so to speak.

Believers have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. His blood has purchased—it has redeemed—our salvation. The redemption of his blood paid for our trespasses. Galatians 3:13 says, *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.* Romans 3 states, *For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith* (Romans 3:22-25).

Now what was so bad that would have required such a price in order to redeem? This is the blood of Jesus we are talking about. We were redeemed by the blood of the Creator of the universe, the pre-existent God who took on human flesh for us. Did you know that before Jesus gave up his life, he first gave up his rights? When he was born in Bethlehem, Jesus had already laid aside his glory. In the garden before his arrest, Jesus prayed: *And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.* He did not cease to be God but he did lay aside his full glory. He purposefully laid aside his rights as God. He gave up his rights before he gave up his life.

So what was so bad that required such a sacrifice? What was so horribly broken that would require such a lavish payment? What was wrong with us that would necessitate the suffering and death of God himself? What was so bad? Our trespasses were so bad. *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.*

In this week’s Table Talk I asked you the difference between a sin and a trespass. Did anyone do that? What did you find? There are slight nuances between the two words. Unless we are saying the Lord’s prayer, we almost never use the word trespass. We don’t apologize to others by saying, “I’m very sorry for trespassing against you.” It’s no surprise that the word trespass in the Greek means about what it does in English. It means to trespass. If you are walking in a trout stream or hunting for that elusive 30 point buck and you see a “No Trespassing” sign, you know you need to respect that boundary. That is someone else’s private property and you know that you need to respect it. I found some interesting No Trespassing signs.

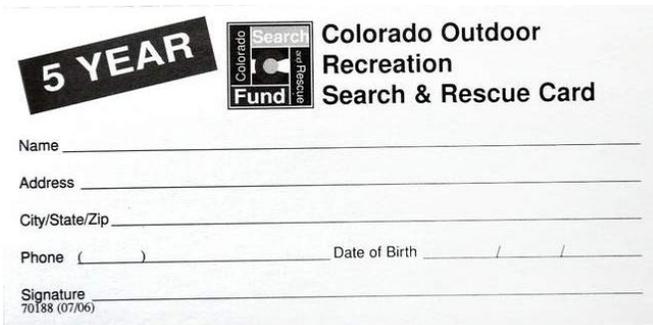


The first two are humorous and the last one is a photo of me when we went to the Badlands. I thought it would be funny to get a picture next to this warning sign. Believe me, you did not want to walk on the left side of this sign! And that is the difference between a typical no trespassing sign and one like this. Everyone who has ever walked past a No Trespassing sign has been tempted to cross that invisible border, am I right? There's just something about that sign that makes us want to do it. We think, "What's the big deal anyway? I'm alone in the woods and I'm not hurting anything if I walk fifty feet beyond that sign." Right? That's what happens when someone tells us we can't do something.

This is the power of the Law we see Paul writing about in Romans 7. *What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment produced in me all kinds of covetousness. (Romans 7:7-8).*

If the owner of the land had not placed a "No Trespassing" sign right there, you would not have known you were sinning and you would not have been enticed to trespass beyond his border. But the very presence of the sign itself elicits a rebellion in our hearts and makes us want to trespass.

But what we fail to realize is that the "No Trespassing" signs that God places in front of us are much more like this sign in the Badlands. The sign is there not just for the benefit of the owner but for our benefit as well. If I were to disobey that sign I could have lost my life. God's "No Trespassing" signs are also "Danger" signs that spell our doom. Both aspects are true. On the one hand, our sin is a trespass on God's boundaries. We have gone beyond what is allowed. We have encroached upon not just his property, but his authority. A trespass is telling God that he has no right over us. It's telling our Creator to buzz off and leave us alone. But it is also a danger sign warning of severe consequences. And the severe consequences come at Ephesians 2:1—*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins. Death. Spiritual death. Eternal spiritual death.*



5 YEAR

Colorado Search & Rescue Fund

Colorado Outdoor Recreation Search & Rescue Card

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone () _____ Date of Birth ____/____/____

Signature _____

70188 (07/06)

During the same vacation when we were in the Badlands we also went to Colorado. Ryan, Ethan and I were hiking down this mountain with a guy we had just met. He told us that if you hike often in the mountains that you should get one of these—A Colorado Outdoor Recreation Search & Rescue Card. I thought that was cool. I never heard of a search & rescue card

before. If you are injured on the mountain and need a rescue team to save you, this card will pay the costs for your rescue. Because we have spiritually trespassed on God's authority and his domain, we need the equivalent of a spiritual search and rescue card.



Speaking of rescue missions, if you were born in the late seventies or earlier, you will remember the story of baby Jessica. In 1987 when she was only 18 months old, little Jessica fell 22 foot down an 8 inch well pipe and was stuck there was 58 hours. Rescuers had to drill parallel to Jessica through solid granite and then sideways to get under where she was stuck. Here is a photo of 31 year old Jessica who is married and has two beautiful children. Ironically, she only lives 2 miles from the well pipe which trapped her.

Jessica’s rescue is a good picture of our redemption. Dozens of rescue workers paid a high price for her rescue. Jessica did not crawl back up the well pipe because she was not able to do so. She didn’t take a job with the fire department so she could also rescue other children like her. You could say that her rescue, as dramatic as it was, did not have a huge lasting impact upon her. She doesn’t remember any of it since she was so young so it has not radically affected the way she lives her lif

Now compare her story to the rescue of Joshua Milton Blahyi. Here is Joshua with three of his four children. And he is a shot of him preaching to a small crowd of churchgoers. Joshua is a pastor in Liberia, which by itself is not that extraordinary.



What is astounding is that Joshua was once the most feared man in all Liberia. During their civil war in the early 1990’s, he was the general of an army of child soldiers. He was responsible for the deaths of at least 20,000 men, women and children, some of whom he cannibalized on behalf of his pagan God. How did he go from warlord to preacher and father?

“When I looked back, I saw a man standing there. He was so bright, brighter than the sun.” The voice told him, “Repent and live, or refuse and die.”¹

Joshua believes that man was Jesus. He did repent that day and now he has committed his life to preaching the gospel and rescuing child soldiers like the ones he imprisoned. His website states: "To see the man that Joshua is now its hard to believe he once was the feared General. 2Corinthians 5:17 says; Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Joshua is truly a new creation."²

Because of his horrific crimes we might think that he should be rotting in a prison or have already been executed. If justice were to be done in the human realm I believe that is true. I'm not sure why he hasn't been arrested and sentenced. But we have to remember that Joshua has lots of company in the Bible. King David took a census of Israel and as a result, God sent a pestilence which killed 70,000 people. The man who wrote about lavish grace was a terrorist and murderer prior to his conversion.

And Saul approved of [Steph'n's] execution...But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison (Acts 8:1,3).

In terms of religion, Saul had a very important family history. He had the best religious training. He was trained under the famous Jewish teacher Gamaliel. Saul was trained as strict Pharisee. He had good beliefs. He understood the law of God. His Bible knowledge would put most contemporary Bible scholars to shame. He had a good religious family, good religious training, good religious beliefs and good religious practices. In terms of being religious, particularly in regard to the Jewish religion, he was the ideal man. He was on a fast track to religious fame. The young religion students would have marveled at his knowledge. His nephews and male relatives would probably have held him up as their hero—striving to be like their Uncle Saul one day. He not only knew his religious beliefs, he practiced his beliefs. He held his beliefs so strongly that he was convinced these new Christians were blaspheming the name of his God and that they must be stopped. In chapter nine he was granted extradition letters from the High Priest to go to other towns and arrest these vile Christians.

Saul was a Jewish terrorist. But then he saw a great light and heard a greater man.

Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do" (Acts 8:3-6).

David was never arrested for the murder of Uriah or the deaths of 70,000 in Israel. Paul was not tried before a Roman court for false imprisonment, terror and murder. According to God's sovereign plan, these men were spared justice in the human realm, as Joshua Blahyi was also spared. If we cry out for Joshua's execution that we should be just as angry at the apostle Paul. But we don't. Instead, we consider him a hero of the faith, as we should. Joshua was converted twenty years ago, so his conversion seems to be genuine. His trespasses were purchased by the blood of Jesus.

Pastor and professor Steven J. Lawson put it this way.

“Whatever sin has touched and polluted, God will redeem and cleanse. If redemption does not go as far as the curse of sin, then God has failed. Whatever the extent of the consequences of sin, so must the extent of redemption be.” ([Source](#))

That’s lavish grace.

Could it be that the apostle saw God’s grace as so lavish because he saw his sin as so horrendous? Could it be that we don’t see God’s grace as lavish because we don’t think our former sins were so bad. If we perceive our former sins as small then our perception of God’s grace will be small. The depth of our sin and the lavishness of God’s grace cannot change. What changes is our perception of both.

We don’t like to think of ourselves as bad as Joshua Blahyi. We haven’t killed anyone. Sure, we have committed murder in our hearts, as Jesus says that anger in our hearts is the same as murder, but it still is not that bad, right? But we are the same. Our sin has separated us from Christ the same as his. Until you grasp that you will never see God’s grace as lavish.

So we can either be like Jessica or Joshua. Jessica is grateful for her rescue but it has not changed her life all that much. But Joshua’s gratitude for God’s lavish grace has literally changed everything about him, from the indie out.

Rich Maurer
April 9, 2017

¹ <http://www.thewellargyle.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Hebrews-2-1-18-Jesus-is-THE-Man.pdf>

² <http://www.loveliberia.com/about/>