

AMAZING GRACE • UNDERSTANDING GRACE



WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

READ EPHESIANS 2:1-10

Having mentioned God's grace to us in our salvation in chapter one of Ephesians, Paul focused in that chapter on the great riches and blessings we have received. Paul, in this chapter, expands further on the idea of "God's grace" that was shown to us at the moment of our salvation. He first examines the kind of life from which we were saved. Then, he describes more fully the grace shown to us, and concludes by teaching us that we are to live out our Christian life by this same principle of grace.

Both chapter one and two teach us about our salvation, yet with different emphases. While chapter one focuses more on the blessing we have received as a result of our salvation, chapter two focuses in on God's grace and mercy that motivated our salvation.

Ephesians 2:1-3

In order to understand more fully the grace we have received, Paul gives a fuller description of the life from which we were saved. In other words, we won't know how good we have it until we understand how bad off we were.

Paul begins by describing our "unsaved" condition as being characterized by "transgression and sin." Sin was originally an archery term that meant "to miss the mark." This describes the fact that our behavior failed to live up to God's standards. Transgression is another word for trespassing, meaning that we not only morally failed to do certain things, but we also did things that were expressly forbidden for us to do.

At that time, we ignorantly followed the "ways and principles of this world," which the text tells us are ultimately energized by Satan, "the ruler of the kingdom of the air." Some examples of these worldly ways would be: pride, lust, greed, ambition, and self-fulfillment. While the time and culture we live in might affect which of the principles are dominant, the principles themselves comprise the same basic pallet throughout time and history.

The passage goes on to describe our behavior as disobedient to God, driven by a core desire to gratify our sinful and selfish thoughts and desires. Paul uses the phrase "sinful nature" to explain that the sin was not simply external behavior,

WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

This study takes a closer look at the grace (unmerited favor and mercy) that was shown to us when we came to Christ. It then examines what it looks like to live out our Christian life by this very same principle of grace.

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but flowed from a heart that was hopelessly corrupted. The Christian doctrine of “total depravity” states that in all facets of our very being, we are corrupted by sin. This does not mean that everyone is as corrupt as they can be, are as equally corrupt in all areas, or cannot do benevolent actions. It does mean that in our very nature, we are infected with sin and inclined away from God.

A last description of our state is that we “were objects of wrath.” What this means is that God’s holiness would be compelled to destroy us, for God cannot be in the presence of evil. God’s wrath is described in the Old Testament with a crass, but helpful metaphor—“vomiting.” Just as our bodies reflexively vomit out what is injurious to our health (such as poison), God’s wrath is His reflexive response to evil, of which we were the greatest perpetrators.

Ephesians 2:4-9

This section begins with a very important “but.” The passage emphasizes what we deserved, “but” rather, we were shown mercy and grace. Grace is an unmerited gift that can never be earned. It is a gift. The only role we played in our salvation was to receive this free gift that God mercifully gave us. This gift was Christ himself, and in fact, comprises two gifts. First, we were given the gift of forgiveness—our sins were completely wiped out. Second, we were credited with Christ-righteousness. This means that when God sees us, in a sense, He sees the perfect life of His Son that has been credited to us. We are like a dirty page hidden within a book. That book is Christ.

Paul emphasizes that this mercy was shown us while we were still “dead” in our transgression. This means that we were completely helpless to help ourselves. In fact, when this mercy was extended to us, we were still actively in a state of rebellion.

Ephesians 2:10

This final teaching can get lost in the discussion on God’s grace that was shown to us when we trusted Christ. This passage, however, adds a completely new thought. What Paul is saying here, is that this principle of grace is not only how we came to know Christ, but also how we grow as Christians.

How did we come to Christ? We acknowledged our helplessness and our need to be saved, and we received the free gift of God’s rescuing us. In the same way, now that we are Christians, we don’t launch off on our own trying to live out the Christian life by our own efforts. We live in constant reliance and dependence on Him and His grace. We do this in several ways:

First, God Himself has planned out the good works He has for us to do. They, too, are gifts from God that provide us opportunity to glorify Him. In order to “walk in,” or discover the good works God has planned for us to do, we must stay vitally connected to Jesus through His Word and prayer.

This causes us to live out our Christian life in close communication and reliance upon God and not in self-effort. We must stay closely connected to Him throughout the day (in His Word and constant prayer), looking “with eyes of faith” to uncover the good works we were meant to live out.

Second, as we sin in our daily life, we, by faith, must continually receive the free gift of God’s forgiveness. Last, as we need strength and wisdom to live out a godly life, we must ask God to graciously provide us with the empowerment to do so. Colossians 3:6 states this principle well. “In the same way you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in

WHAT IF THERE'S A PROBLEM?

A question that could yield some disagreement is whether non-Christians, in their sinful nature, are capable of performing truly good works. In one sense, the answer is “yes, they can.” Clearly non-Christians can do morally good things. In another sense, the answer is “no.” The design of man is to glorify God. Therefore, any benevolent action that leads to our own glory apart from God is “sin,” and falls short of God’s ultimate design.

UNDERSTANDING GRACE • PG 3

WHAT'S YOUR POINT?

Most Christians can understand the grace we have received, and how we received it, when we trusted Christ. However, understanding versus living out our lives by this same principle of faith and grace, is a radically different orientation of life. This is often a principle that is learned experientially over time, and takes a lifetime of maturing to fully grasp. Yet, it is critical that you are introduced to the basic concept and at least begin to understand it on an intellectual level.

him.” We were saved by God’s incomparable grace, and we continue to live out our Christian life by this same principle.

This study is accompanied by an article. Take the time to read it.

MEMORY VERSE

Ephesians 2:8,9 “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

WHAT ARE THE ANSWERS?

1. Sin is failure to live up to a standard, while a transgression is doing something expressly forbidden.
2. It means that in our very nature we are infected with sin and inclined away from God. See “What If There’s a Problem?”
3. Pride, lust, greed, ambition, self-fulfillment are a few examples. While the time and culture we live in might affect which of the principles are dominant, the principles are the same.
4. Perhaps to show Satan’s world dominion.
5. Write down your own experiences.
6. What this means is that God’s holiness would be compelled to destroy us, for God cannot be in the presence of evil. Discuss.
7. To fully illustrate the magnitude of the grace of God we are in need of.
8. Take time to summarize the list of things God has done for us.
9. Unmerited favor or mercy.
10. We simply received a gift.
11. God’s grace, not our effort, would be praised.
12. Our good works are not done independently from God, and are themselves gifts from God for us to use to serve and worship him.
13. We were saved by God’s incomparable grace and we continue to live by this same principle.
14. Through His word, prayer and walking by faith.

AMAZING GRACE • EPHESIANS 2:1-10

Read Ephesians 2:1-3

1. The word “transgression” means to trespass. Sin is an archery term which means “to miss the bull’s-eye.” With this in mind, what is the relationship between transgression and sin?
2. What does it mean to be spiritually dead? Do you think it’s possible for spiritually dead people to do good things?
3. What are the “ways of the world,” and do these ways change depending on when, and where, you lived? (See 1 John 2:16)
4. Of all of the ways Paul could have described Satan, why do you think he labels him here as “the ruler of the kingdom of the air?”
5. How did you follow these “ways of the world” before you came to Christ? Because of habits you established, what areas of the world still call to you to follow? (See Rev. 12:9; Ephes. 6:12)
6. In verse 3, what does Paul mean when he says “that by nature we were objects of wrath?”

Read Ephesians 2:4-10

7. Why was it important for Paul to devote the first four verses to describing our condition apart from Christ?
8. Put the list of things that God has done for us in verses 4-9 into your own words.

9. From the way “grace” is used in verses 5,7,8, what would you say it means?
10. According to verses 8 and 9, what is the role we played in our salvation?
11. Why is it important to know that salvation cannot be earned (See Eph. 1:5-6
12. Having been taught that it is clearly not our good works that have saved us, we might conclude that now that we are saved, it is up to us to engineer a life that pleases God. How does verse 10 clarify the role of good works and grace after we have been saved?
13. Colossians 3:6 states this point well: “In the same way you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him.” Describe how the same process that brought us to salvation is the same process by which we live out our faith.
14. Learning to walk in these good works is a process. Look up the following verses and describe some of the ways God leads us in this process.

James 1:5-8

2 Timothy 3:16-17

John 15:5,10

Summary: Unless I _____ I will simply be living out the Christian life on my own, and may miss the good works that God has planned for me, and miss Him being fully glorified in my good works.

Memory Verse

Ephesians 2:8,9 “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

ACCEPTANCE • MIKE J. STANFORD

There are two questions that every believer must settle as soon as possible. The first one is, “Does God fully accept me?” And, “If so, upon what basis does He do so?” This is crucial. What devastation often permeates the life of one, young or old, rich or poor, saved or unsaved, who is not sure of being accepted, even on the human level.

Yet so many believers, whether “strugglers” or “vegetators,” move through life without this precious FACT to rest and build upon: “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted IN the Beloved” (Eph. 1:5,6).

Every believer is accepted by the Father, in Christ. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). The peace is God’s toward us, through His Beloved Son—upon this, our peace is to be based. God is able to be at peace with us through our Lord Jesus Christ, “having made peace by the Blood of His Cross” (Col. 1:20). And we must never forget that His peace is founded solely on the work of the Cross, totally apart from anything whatsoever in or from us, since “God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

Our faith becomes a fixed attitude, once it begins to rest in this wonderful fact. Then it can be, if necessary, “rejected of men, but chosen of God, and precious” (1 Pet. 2:4). This is the steadying influence most believers are in need of today. A century ago, J. B. Stoney wrote, “The blessed God never alters nor diverges from the acceptance in which He has received us because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Alas! We diverge from the state in which God can ever be toward us as recorded in Romans 5:1-11. Many suppose that because they are conscious of sins, that hence they must renew their acceptance with God.

“The truth is that God has not altered. His eye rests on the work accomplished by Christ for the believer. When you are not walking in the Spirit you are in the flesh: you have turned to the old man which was crucified on the Cross (Rom. 6:6). You have ‘to be restored to fellowship,’ and when you are, you find your acceptance with God unchanged and unchangeable. When sins are introduced there is a fear that God has changed. He has not changed, but you have. You are not walking in the Spirit but in the flesh. You have to judge yourself in order to be restored. ‘For this is my blood of the new testament, which was shed for many for the remission of sins’ (Matt. 26:28). But if your sins are not met there, where can they be met? ‘Now where remission of sin is, there is no more offering for sin’ (Heb. 10:18). God has effected the reconciliation; He always remains true to it. Alas! We diverge from it and the tendency is to suppose that the blessed God has altered toward us. He certainly will judge the flesh if we do not, but He never departs from the love which He has expressed to the prodigal, and we find that when the cloud, which walking in the flesh produced has passed away, His love, blessed be His Name, had never changed.”

God’s basis must be our basis for acceptance. There is none other. We are “accepted IN the Beloved.” Our Father is fully satisfied with His Beloved Son on our behalf, and there is no reason for us not to be. Our satisfaction can only spring from and rest in His satisfaction. It is from God to us, not from us to God. J. N. Darby was very clear on this: “When the Holy Spirit reasons with man, He does not reason from what man is for God, but from what God is to man. Souls reason from what they are in themselves as to whether God can accept them. He cannot accept you thus; you are looking for righteousness in yourself as a ground of acceptance with Him. You cannot get peace whilst reasoning in that way. . . .”

Sad to say, most believers actually reason just the opposite—from themselves to God. When all is going well, and God seems to be blessing, then it is that they feel He loves and accepts them. But when they are stumbling, and everything seems dry and hard, then they feel that He does not love and accept them. How can this be? There is nothing about us to commend us to God, our acceptance being in Christ, plus the fact that most of our true spiritual development comes through the dry

and hard times. Thank God, He has accepted us in His Son, and upon this FACT we must rest our faith. As in Justification, our Acceptance is by GRACE alone. In his classic, *Romans, Verse By Verse*, Wm. R. Newell presents some penetrating thoughts regarding this Grace:

“There being no cause in the creature why Grace should be shown, the creature must be brought off from trying to give cause to God for His care.” “He has been accepted in Christ, Who is his standing!” “He is not on probation.” “As to his life past, it does not exist before God: he died at the Cross, and Christ is his Life.” “Grace, once bestowed, is not withdrawn: for God knew all the human exigencies beforehand: His action was independent of them, not dependent upon them.”

“To believe, and to consent to be loved while unworthy, is the great secret.”

“To refuse to make resolutions and vows; for that is to trust in the flesh.”

“To expect to be blessed, though realizing more and more lack of worth.”

“To rely on God’s chastening (child training) hand as a mark of His kindness.”

“To hope to be better (hence acceptable) is to fail to see yourself in Christ only.”

“To be disappointed with yourself is to have believed in ourself.”

“To be discouraged is unbelief—as to God’s purpose and plan of blessing for you.”

“To be proud, is to be blind! For we have no standing before God, in ourselves.”

“The lack of Divine blessing, therefore, comes from unbelief, and not from failure of devotion.”

“To preach devotion first, and blessing second, is to reverse God’s order, and preach law, not grace. The Law made man’s blessing depend on devotion; Grace confers undeserved, unconditional blessing: our devotion may follow, but does not always do so, in proper measure.”

Have we been afraid to really believe God? Have some even been afraid to allow others to really believe Him? “Ye must never forget that ‘God’s ways are not always man’s ways.’ To some men constant peril is the only spur to action, and many religions and psychologies are dependent on fear to keep their disciples in line. Fear, too, has a place in Christianity, but God has higher and more effective motivations than fear, and one of these is love. Often fear after a while produces only numbness, but love thrives on love. To promise a man the certainty of his destiny may seem, on the human level, like playing with fire; but this leaves God out of the picture. Those who have the deepest ‘appreciation of grace’ do not continue in sin. Moreover, fear produces the obedience of slaves; love engenders the obedience of sons.”—J. W. Sanderson, Jr.

“For if the trumpet give forth an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?” (I Cor. 14:8). Until the Christian is absolutely and Scripturally sure of his standing, he is not going to do much standing. “Stand therefore . . .” (Eph. 6:14a).

“Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work” (II Thess. 2:16,17).