



Grace

Series: *The Grand Plan of the Glorious God*

Ephesians 2:1-10

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Introduction John Newton is the writer of one of the favorite hymns of our faith, "Amazing Grace." He was a man who never forgot the amazing nature of God's grace. Born in England in 1725, his mother, the only godly influence that he had in his life, died when he was 7. Not long after, he went to sea like his father at the tender age of 11. He sailed with his father for six years before finding himself on a slave trading ship, subject to a horrible captain who would beat him, abuse him and starve him. Eventually, Newton would become the first mate of a slave trading ship. John Newton was a man who hated God and so he decided to make a pact with Satan that he would sin to the full, becoming a drunkard, a violent man, a blasphemer of God and he encouraged the other sailors to follow suit. They described him as an animal, less than a man and a vile and wicked person. But he was not beyond God's grace.

While returning to England with in 1748 the ship that he was aboard, the *Greyhound*, encountered a severe storm that threatened to sink the ship. Newton, as the vessel filled with water, prayed for God's mercy. It was this experience which he was later to mark as the beginning of his surrender to Jesus Christ. As the ship slowly labored to make its way home, Newton began to read the Bible and Christian tracts and by the time he reached Britain, he had experienced a conversion of heart that changed him forever. So changed was he that this man, who had been by his own admission one of the greatest haters of God, would later write these words: "Salvation is wholly of grace, not only undeserved but undesired by us until God is pleased to awaken us to a sense of our need of it. And then we find everything prepared that our wants require or our wishes conceive; yea, that He has done exceedingly beyond what we could either ask or think. Salvation is wholly of the Lord and bears those signatures of infinite wisdom, power, and goodness which distinguish all His works from the puny imitations of men. It is every way worthy of Himself, a great, a free, a full, a sure salvation. It is great whether we consider the objects (miserable, hell-deserving sinners), the end (the restoration of such alienated creatures to His image and favor, to immortal life and happiness) or the means (the incarnation, humiliation, sufferings and death of His beloved Son)." At 82, Newton said, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things, that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior." No wonder he understood so well grace--the completely undeserved mercy and favor of God.

Grace is the unique hallmark of true Christianity. Paul is going to show that to us today. Paul is going to explain to us just how God has made us his own...by a grace that is greater than all of our sin. This paragraph is really a part of Paul's prayer that we have been looking at. This entire text parallels the work of God the Father to raise His Son, Jesus Christ, from the dead. The work of God in raising His people from spiritual death to everlasting life parallels the glorious work of the Father to raise His Son from the death of the tomb to unending life – we are not to miss this. We are to clearly understand: Jesus Christ was dead, but God raised Him and exalted Him. And you also were dead, but God raised you and exalted you with Christ. So, first Paul wants us to see that just as Jesus Christ was physically dead so

We were spiritually dead (v. 1-3) Paul starts by reminding the Ephesians of their original condition apart from Christ. Now why is he reminding them of their past wickedness and sin? Because once we forget our need for a Savior, we will not cherish God as we should. Bluntly Paul tells us: man is dead. All of mankind is naturally living dead people. How can someone be living and breathing and at the same time dead? To answer that question, we need to understand what death means. Death does not mean extinction, non-existence, or annihilation. Death simply means that a person is separated, either from his body or from God or from both. In the case of natural man, man just the way he is born, it means that he is separated from God. Man was created to know, fellowship, worship, and serve God; but man doesn't do it and we don't do it because we are dead to God and dead to sin. Natural man is separated from God; he is dead to God. Ever since the fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden, when his spirit died as a result of his rebellion against God, every human being that is born is born in a state of spiritual death.

They are dead in their "trespasses and sins." When we look at these words, that is when the nature of death really starts to take shape. Someone dead in trespasses and sins is characterized by wickedness, separation from God, inclination to evil, disregard for the will of God, pursuit of self-pleasure, and indifference to spiritual good. Romans 3:23 says that "**all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**" They have missed the mark of the glory of God. Romans 6:23 says "**the wages of sin is death.**" And that declaration applies to everyone.

Now here is where we start to get uncomfortable. Surely everyone is not in the exact same boat and we all have a favorite whipping boy to pull out to compare ourselves with so that we

can say that we aren't so bad. I usually just go for the home run and pick Hitler – "I'm not as bad as that guy." That's probably true. I'm not as bad as Hitler. I'm not responsible for the extermination of 6 million Jews like Hitler, but that's because of God's restraining grace. Before Christ I am just as dead, just as rebellious against God, just as wicked -- the only difference was the outward display of my corruption, the extent of my decay. Not all of us are equally decayed but we are all equally dead. Someone will ask me, do you really believe that? Yep, I know my heart apart from Christ.

Sure, some people have learned how to restrain their sin: because of personal pride and appearances, for the sake of public approval or opinion, because of the fear of the consequences. Whether it is the way of the decent moral individual or the way of the obvious transgressor, it makes no difference. We were all born in a state of rebellion against God. Spiritually dead, blind to the glory of God in Christ, deaf to the voice of the Holy Spirit, no love for God, no longing to be with His people, no desire for his fellowship but alive to the world, alive to Satan, alive to the flesh -- doing my thing, pleasing me – filling up my soul with all manner of rebellion, under the sway of Satan, the original self-centered sinner, disobedient to God and pursuing the passions of the flesh – lust, sloth, gluttony, drunkenness, pursuing the passions of the fallen mind – sinful hostility and the hatred of God. That is who we are apart from Christ and that makes us worthy of God's wrath, makes us children of wrath.

I want to make sure that you understand that this condition described by Paul is the condition of every member of the human race. You, me, your kids, my kids... This is what we are by nature. We did not become "dead in trespasses and sins" somewhere along the way. It is not that bad habits or hanging with the wrong crowd, not poor education or foolish decisions that made us the objects of God's wrath. It was not like that...by nature we are sinners and the wrath of God is the inevitable response. I know there are all kinds of preachers and teachers and talking heads that say that we are all children of God but that is not what the Bible says. The New Testament says that we are all objects of wrath, every single person who is dead in sins, who follows the ways of the world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air, who gratifies the cravings of our sinful nature - all such are by nature the objects of wrath.

As hard as that is to hear, this is what we have to hear before we can eagerly and gratefully embrace Christ. Unfortunately this is not the way the gospel is presented most of the time. This is not what sinners are told these days. We are not told that we are dead, we are told that God is our friend and wants to get to know us if we will let Him, that Jesus wants to help us cope with our problems, that Jesus wants to shore up our sagging self-esteem, that He is there to make our dreams come true.

But the Father did not send Jesus Christ into this world to help us cope with our problems. He did not put His Son on the cross to make us feel better about ourselves or to boost our self-esteem. Christ came and offered Himself on the cross to deal with our most fundamental, pervasive, and eternally devastating problem, that our sins have made us objects of the wrath of the holy God. Before Christ, we were spiritually dead awaiting the judgment of God. And listen dead men and woman don't need a teacher, a friend, a counselor, an encourager, or dreamweaver --- they need a resurrection and that is just what God has done for us. Just as Father made Jesus alive so

He made us alive with Christ (v. 4-5) "But God", that has got to be the best phrase in Scripture. God has come to the rescue, God has made a difference. How? We see it here. Even when we were dead in our trespasses, God made us alive together with Christ. That is what theologians call regeneration. God takes a man or a woman or a child who is dead and cannot understand spiritual truth and has no desire for at all and He makes them alive and able to understand and receive the gospel, to see the beauty of Christ and to desire Him as Savior. It's a resurrection to spiritual life.

And what was God's motivation? What was the motive of God which prompted Him to make a way of deliverance from our condition of sin and eternal death. God was motivated by His mercy and His love for us. God's mercy is not prompted by our potential or by our worth, but by our own pitiable condition. Divine grace was not bestowed on us because we were so worthy, or because God found anything good in us, but only because of the goodness which is in God Himself. Because of God's mercy (His compassion toward us, His pity on us); because of God's love, God did it.

God's love and His mercy were not given to the innocent. God has been merciful, He has loved us who were disobedient, who by nature followed the ways of the world and Satan. **(Rom 5:8-10)** And that's the whole point here isn't it? God the Father made us alive with Christ.

God's motivation won't do much for our self-esteem, but it will do much to promote humility on our part, and deep gratitude toward God. Paul wants us to make sure that we understand and never forget that it is by sheer grace motivated by merciful love that we are saved. God sent Jesus Christ to the world, to suffer and to die and to rise again to save sinners. He did not

do it because we deserved it, but despite the fact we deserved death. He did not do it because we were worthy but because we were hopeless and helpless. He did this so that He could demonstrate His grace, and His power in transforming a “dead” man or woman into a living sacrifice, a living testimony of His grace and power. Just as He raised Christ from physical death, He raised us from spiritual death but there is more. Just as He raised Christ in His ascension so

He has raised us with Christ (v.6a) When Paul says that God has “**raised us up with him,**” he is not speaking of Christ’s resurrection, he is speaking of his ascension. Just as Jesus was taken up into heaven, so our citizenship has changed. We are no longer creatures only of this world, bound by what we can see and hear and taste and touch. We are now citizens of a greater, heavenly realm. **(Php 3:20-21)** We belong more to heaven than we do to earth. In fact from God’s perspective, in Christ we are there already. Just as He seated Christ at His right hand, Paul says God has seated us with Himself in Christ in the heavenly places.

He has seated us with Christ in the heavenly places (v. 6b) Grasp this incredible honor that Paul is speaking of here. Do you see the wonder of these words, the glory of what it means to be a Christian? We are the recipients, the objects of the steadfast love of God. We have been made alive with Christ, and raised with Christ, we are seated with God in Christ Jesus in the heavenly places. And where is that? At the right hand of God the Father. At the place of authority. At the place of intimacy where God shares the secrets of His heart. We are with God in Christ now. Paul is not speaking about the Christian elite whom we have created in our minds the distinguished and eminent people – you know – the Carsons, MacArthurs, Pipers, Bridges, Pauls, Peters or Johns. He is talking about every Christian. All of us. God has given to all believers an entirely new and glorious status. We were once objects of wrath. We lived under the cloud of God's judgment. We were in sin and bound for the outer darkness where the worm doesn't die and the fires are not quenched. But now we are in Christ Jesus and we sit in the heavenlies in Him at the right hand of God the Father. God has raised us up together and made us sit together with Christ.

This is what defines who we are as Christians. These words are more important than where we were born, or the families that we came from, or the schools that we went to, or the degrees that we have earned, than the awards that we have received or the troubles we have endured, or the pain we have known, or the relationships that we’ve made, or the experiences that we

have had, or the jobs we have worked. Here's what defines someone who is a Christian: God together made us alive with Christ, together raised us up with Christ, together seated us with Him in heavenly places. All of these blessings come to us through our union with Christ. And God will spend eternity showing the immeasurable riches of his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. As God the Father has enthroned Christ so that the glory of Christ would be fully displayed throughout every age, so we have been saved **so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Eph 2:7)**

We are the display of the riches of God's grace and kindness through all the ages

(v. 7) We are the trophies of God's grace. And it is God's intention through all of eternity to display the immeasurable riches of His grace to us in Christ. His power and grace in us will be clearly seen. Great sinners – blasphemers, stiffnecks, hardhearts, lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, gossips, liars and thieves, the self-righteous, heretics and atheists, all manner of sinners – all broken by the gospel, all crushed by the weight of their sin, all made alive by God and redeemed by the blood of Christ, though in this life bearing the scars of sin, forever made fully and completely holy, made eternally perfect by the grace of God – to the praise of his glorious grace – nothing lacking in His redemption and salvation. In this, throughout all of the ages, we will rejoice as we see His image reflected in us and in our brothers and sisters. In this the angels and demons and all created beings will glorify God for the power of His grace in kindness to us in Jesus Christ. And God will be able to say: 'Look at this vast and innumerable multitude. None of them is here because they earned it. None of them is here because they merit it. If it was left to them on their own, they would be suffering the righteous condemnation of the Holy God; but, in them I have displayed My steadfast love, My abundant kindness, My rich mercy and glorious grace. They are the display of My grace. They are the evidence, the public witness and testimony that I am a faithful God of steadfast love and grace.' God will be magnified by this display of His grace and mercy. That is what we are, beloved. We are the living, worshipping trophies of God's grace and mercy and kindness in Christ. We are living testimony that God is merciful even to sinners like ourselves. And He deserves all of the glory. Paul is so insistent that God the Father receive all of the glory for our salvation that he tells us in clear and unambiguous terms once more that it is

By grace we are saved through faith (v.8-9) Paul emphasizes once again: salvation cannot be our own doing. We were dead and unable to save ourselves at all. Dead men can do nothing. Salvation is by grace—plus nothing and minus nothing. Salvation does not come by works, by religion, or by anything we might conceive as "earning" God's favor. God saves us by

His grace through faith in the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He saves us by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Faith is not a feeling. It is not just an emotional high. It is not blind faith that accepts something as true apart from evidence. It is not wishful thinking. Faith is not optimism, or a positive attitude, or positive thinking. As you have studied or will study in Sunday School, saving faith is composed of three parts: knowledge, assent and trust.

First there must be knowledge, a content that is understood. To be saved, you must know something about God. God is holy, righteous, just and gracious. You must know that you are a sinner who stands guilty and condemned before Him. You must know that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, who took on human flesh and was born of the virgin Mary, that He lived a perfect life and died on the cross as the substitute for sinners, paying on their behalf the penalty that God demands. God raised Him from the dead and He ascended into heaven. He will return bodily to judge the living and the dead, but also to save all that have trusted in Him as Savior and Lord. These are basic facts, revealed in the Bible, that you must know to be saved.

Then you must assent to these facts. You have to believe that they are true. These first two alone are NOT SAVING FAITH. This is what the Reformers call "historical faith", and it is not saving. It's the kind of faith the demons have, and shudder (James 2:19).

The last part of this is trust. Saving faith is a reliance or trust in the finished work of atonement of Jesus Christ. Jesus died for me, not for mankind, not for the world of sinners, but for me. It is turning away from every other hope for forgiveness and eternal life and trusting alone in Jesus Christ who God put forward as the propitiation for our sin. Saving faith rests upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. "It means casting yourself upon Christ, resting on His promises and accepting His finished work on your behalf," writes JM Boice.

And Paul wants to make sure that we know that all of it is the gift of God, even the faith that lays hold of God's grace. **For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph 2:8-9)** Even our faith is not of us. It too is part of God's gift of salvation. Now there is debate about

what the word “this” in verse 9 refers to. Is it to the word faith or is it to the whole process of salvation. Though that is a great grammatical discussion, it really doesn’t matter. Either faith is a gift from God or salvation by grace through faith is a gift of God, but either way faith is a gift of God.

Scripture is clear on this elsewhere. For instance, Paul writes to the Philippians: **(Php 1:29)** As Luther said: "God creates faith in the human heart the same way that He created the world. He found nothing and created something." Paul’s point here is that every part of our salvation is a work of God from first to last. God has designed our salvation so that he alone gets the glory! (John Nelson story)

No one at all will boast in heaven that they are spending eternity in the presence of God with pleasures for evermore because of their works. No one will say, "I'm here because of me." We are not going to strut around heaven like some rooster. No one will walk up to Jesus and say, "Way to go, we did it!" Everyone of us will point to the Lord Jesus Christ and say, "He did it all." We will boast in nothing except in the Son of God who saved us and God the Father who planned and completed it all. In fact Paul finishes this section by saying that

We are His workmanship (v. 10) You are God’s “poiema.” We are God’s design, the work of His hands, something fashioned by Him for His glory. We are His new creation – the highest creation of God, able to commune with Him, worship Him, love Him, bless Him. God the Great Potter, the great Workman has made me something that I was not before. I am His workmanship, prepared for good works to the glory of His name and if you are a believer, so are you.

Let that sink into your heart. When it does you will understand something, you were not made for the baser things of life, for careless living, for unholy pursuits; you were made for works that reflect the glory and love of your Creator. You were made for good works that glorify God. As Paul wrote to Titus, **(Titus 2:11-14)** Those works are the ones God planned and prepared in eternity past so that we may walk in them.

These works are not some isolated pursuit apart from the people of God either. We, together, are the workmanship of God which is why I love the local church so much. We together are a new creation, pointing to the glory of God.

Conclusion Ephesians 2:1-10 presents us with a gospel that is a God-centered gospel. It presents a salvation which is all of God.

If you are a Christian, this text should serve as a reminder of what you once were, and of what you now are, in Christ. It should produce humility and gratitude and worship. It should well up within you a desire to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ. It should stimulate you to love and good deeds, knowing that even the good works which you do are those which God has accomplished in and through you, for His glory.

As well, this text should drive us to faithful preaching and proclaiming of the word of God. We have been given the gift of salvation so that the kindness of God to us, coming forth from the riches of His grace, would be revealed through the coming ages. Practically what that means for us is this: the truth of the doctrines of grace should not obscure the message of the kindness and grace of God. All too often, the people who speak of the “doctrines of grace” are themselves ungracious people. Concerns to defend predestination against the errors of “free will” and human vainglory can create an unhelpful zeal for debate. Don’t get me wrong. You know that I have no desire to minimize the sovereignty of God in salvation, but we must remember what election and predestination are all about: the revelation of God’s grace and kindness to sinners. We miss the point when our goal is to promote the doctrine of election and predestination alone rather than proclaiming God’s matchless grace. Rather a right understanding of God’s work and sovereignty in salvation ought to lead to greater humility, love for God, love for his people, and urgency to declare the riches of His grace in Jesus Christ for all who will believe. As important as election and predestination are, as important as the doctrines of grace are, the heart of reformed theology is not only a right understanding of those truths, but an experience of the grace of God which they explain.

If you have not come to faith in Christ, verses 1-3 make it clear that you are no worse and no better than any other sinner. Apart from Christ, you are dead in your sins, without life or hope. But in Christ is salvation full and free.

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