

# The Grace of God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, let's hear the word of God. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will, to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment, to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you are marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession, to the praise of his glory.

[ 1 : 36 ] And then in chapter 2 at verse 1, As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live, when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions. It is by grace you have been saved.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

For it is by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast.

[ 2 : 44 ] For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. So we can keep our Bibles there as we think together about the saving grace of God.

What do we mean by grace? When we think about saving grace, it's important to have some clarity in that. I was thinking about a bad reading habit of mine that perhaps some of us can empathize with.

I'm trying to get a little bit better, but I read a lot of older books and some newer books as well. But whenever I come across old words, sometimes fancy words, often, maybe you recognize this, I try and have a stab at the meaning.

I kind of presume that I get the gist of it so I can hopefully fill in the blank. Sometimes that goes okay. Sometimes it means my understanding of a sentence or an idea is not very precise. Sometimes it's just going to be flat out wrong. And that can happen when we think about Bible words. Sometimes that can be the fancy Bible words, the big long words, technical words, but it can also be the case with a word like grace.

[ 4 : 01 ] We can hear it perhaps a lot, we can use it perhaps a lot, and maybe we're not very precise about it. Sometimes we can even get it just plain wrong. So we're going to try and bring

some clarity for ourselves to recognize realities like God's grace is his love that's freely shown towards sinners who do not earn or deserve it.

We're going to see that very clearly. We're going to see that grace is God showing his goodness to people who deserve only judgment. And Paul brings that to us very clearly.

And to recognize that the gospel tells us that there is full and free grace for all who come to Jesus. In other words, the message of the gospel stands as good news for all people, and it doesn't insist on conditions before receiving it.

It doesn't say, here's the list of criteria you need to pass, here's the standard you need to reach. So that, as hopefully we have greater clarity on the gospel of grace, as we think about God's grace, it will cause us to love the God of grace and the grace of God more.

To appreciate, in that sense, the gift that we have been given. Now, I think there are at least four basic truths that stand behind saving grace.

[ 5 : 30 ] for clear biblical truths that are not necessarily popular truths or truths that would be recognized and valued in the times that we live in, and perhaps never.

The first is that we, by nature, are morally undeserving. That's one of the premises of grace.

But we live in a culture where we are encouraged from a very young age to have a very high view of ourself, to have a high view of our own goodness and ability.

And you couple that with a loss of the sense of God, a view of God's holiness, a loss of the idea of sin. And it's very easy then for people to imagine, well, if there is a God, then he must judge what makes a good person the same way that we would judge what goodness looks like.

But the Bible is really clear, isn't it, in the language that it uses. So it will speak of people by nature as being fallen or being rebels against God, of being guilty before God, of being unclean and therefore unworthy of standing in God's presence.

[ 6 : 47 ] So that's one basic truth. Another one is, and it's connected, is that we are spiritually powerless. And again, this can be hard for us to hear, especially if our understanding of religion is about what we do.

And what Keith was talking about this morning, religion without grace will work on the assumption, well, if there's a broken relationship with God, well, I can fix it.

I can do something to put God in my debt to make God owe me the way I live by showing sacrifice by my religion, by my morality, by my charity work.

That's a common misunderstanding of how we are to be before God. Because the Bible, again, is clear that by the law, by law-keeping, by our own goodness, no one will be declared righteous.

So we're morally undeserving and we're spiritually powerless. And that's part of the backdrop to grace. But then we also need to understand realities about God as well.

[ 7 : 56 ] Again, centrally, the justice of God needs to be held in view if we're to understand God's grace and appreciate it. Again, think about the cultural air that we breathe.

The essential virtue of our time is tolerant. Punishment is out. We are often hearing, you know, a person has no right to impose right and wrong on another.

Each one is free to decide right and wrong for him or herself. And that is to exclude the ultimate standard of justice that is God.

But, of course, the Bible declares to us that God is just, that God will judge, that God's character is holy, therefore he must deal with sin.

And we need that. And the last basic truth behind saving grace that we're going to think about just now is the idea of God's freedom. The freedom of God in extending grace.

[ 9 : 05 ] There is, I guess, again, a popular view. It would say, well, God will forgive me. God will forgive people. That's his job. If there is a God and if he does anything, then surely he's there to forgive and to accept and it's tolerance, sort of, bread large.

Is God obliged to save everyone? And maybe when pushed, some people might say, well, maybe not the mass murders and the tyrants and the dictators.

But we are at risk if we lose sight of the reality that mercy is optional with God. What we deserve is justice.

If God shows mercy and grace, that's his right, that's his freedom. Exodus 33 and Romans 9 both say the same thing. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.

And so, essential to understanding the doctrine of the grace of God is that God is free in extending grace.

[10:14] So, when you put these four truths together, we need to conclude that our destiny, then, as people, lies in God's determination salvation to save his people from sins by his free grace.

Now, we could think about, I was thinking, I was finishing off Knowing God again by J.I. Packer. He makes the excellent point that from a psychological point of view, when a person comes to faith, we make a real decision.

But theologically, we understand that that faith, too, is a gift. That from beginning to end, salvation is a gift of God's grace. That we need God's grace, I think, would have become apparent to us, having read Ephesians 2, reading those first three verses.

But doesn't it become apparent to us as well when we switch on the news or switch on our computers and see what happens in the world? When we were listening to, some of us were listening to a chap from OMF, Rico Villanueva, talking about lament.

And somebody asked a really helpful question. You know, how do we deal with the reality that we could constantly, 24 hours a day, be confronted with the sadness and the horror that's happening all around the globe?

[11:38] We recognize that, don't we? Global news coverage means we can constantly feel overwhelmed by the distress and the sadness. But you know, one thing that that also presents to us is the overwhelming case for human wickedness and brokenness.

That 24-hour news cycle challenges a naive optimism that perhaps leads many towards despair. One of the things that can happen is we watch news coverage, we think we can divide into them and us.

We recognize true evil and folks like Putin and dictators and those kind of things and we can divide and say, well, yeah, of course they're evil, but, you know. Solzhenitsyn, who was himself Russian, when he was writing his book, The Gulag Archipelago, he was forced to make an honest assessment.

He went to prison for criticizing Stalin and he made the assessment that the line between good and evil doesn't cut between states, but it runs through every human heart.

And Ephesians 2, as we come to Ephesians 2, it's going to do two things for us as we spend a little bit of time here. It's going to, again, reveal to us a dark portrait of humanity without Christ.

[13:00] And it's going to give us a dazzling picture of the beauty of God's grace. So we'll see what it teaches and we'll think about what difference it can make for our everyday lives.

So let's begin with this dark portrait in the first three verses of people by nature. Now I imagine we are familiar with amnesia and what happens when a person has amnesia.

It means that for some reason or other, perhaps a trauma or some kind of injury, a person forgets their past. They forget their story. They can even forget their identity, who they are.

And one of the things that's certainly true for us as Christians is that we can easily have spiritual amnesia. And perhaps that can be a danger the longer we go in the Christian life.

We can forget the amazing miracle of being saved by grace when we spend a prolonged period of time in the family of God.

[14:07] And so here in Ephesians 2 we have this reminder of living death without Jesus. That we wouldn't have that spiritual amnesia that would lead us to take grace for granted.

So we can see three different things happening in each of these verses. So chapter 2 verse 1 begins, As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.

So this was a reality for Christians in their past before knowing salvation through Jesus. Dead. Dead in transgressions.

That idea of trespassing into forbidden territory. Guilty of sins. Missing the mark. Like aiming in archery and falling short of the target.

Missing God's perfect standard. Spiritually dead. Walking corpses. Spiritually dead and also verse 2 and into verse 3 slaves.

[15:11] Dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air. And then verse 3 all of us who lived among them at one time gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts.

Following the ways of the world which here means that world system those values that stand opposed to God. Following the devil the ruler of the kingdom of the air believing his lies living in disobedience and following the desires of the flesh those sinful desires of the body and of the mind and with the reality that there was no escape from that condition slavery.

And because of that end of verse 3 like the rest we were by nature deserving of wrath. Natural condition standing under the condemnation of God deserving his wrath.

God's righteous personal hostility to evil. His refusal to compromise with it or to sweep it under the carpet.

God's necessarily acting in line with his perfectly holy character. And so Paul brings us a reality check brought it to those first century Christians.

[ 16 : 55 ] Here is God's view on humanity without Jesus. This was our story without Jesus. Spiritually powerless dead people have no power morally undeserving choosing the path of disobedience in the way of darkness.

As John said in chapter 3 of his gospel Jesus came as light and the people chose darkness instead and actually hate the light. And outside of God's grace Paul is saying this is everyone's story.

We think about some of the famous stories that Jesus taught the parable of the lost sheep. By nature we are hungry and helpless and at the risk of the elements and of enemy forces and what we need is a good shepherd.

Think of the good Samaritan story. By nature we are the guy who's lying on the roadside powerless and dying and what we need is a good Samaritan to rescue us.

By nature think about the parable of the prodigal son. We are either far from home and destroying our lives walking away from our father or we misunderstand his character and we're slaving away trying to earn something he would freely give and what we need is the welcome of the good father.

[ 18 : 21 ] And so Paul reminds us that to love the grace of God and the God of grace we first need to see and appreciate and constantly remind ourselves I think of our need and of our spiritual state without Jesus.

So that when we get to verse 4 to 10 we see this dazzling wonderful picture of God's grace. When we think of the hymn that probably most captures for many people the idea of God's grace we probably think of John Newton's amazing grace in that first verse he has those lines I once was lost but now I'm found was blind but now I see we find that same kind of idea here in Ephesians 2 verse 4 this is what we were by nature this was our past but God but because of his great love for us God Ephesians 2 wants us to sing amazing grace as we recognize this was us by nature but God transformation comes four things to recognize about God's grace in these wonderful verses first of all

God's grace is the motive for salvation look at verse 4 and 5 but because of his great love for us God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions it is by grace you have been saved how are spiritually dead people made alive how are slaves set free how do condemned people receive honor because of God's desire to save people by grace God's grace demonstrates God's love to us God's grace is an expression of his rich mercy towards us end of verse 7 God's grace is expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus all of those phrases drawing us towards the same part that salvation flows from God's own heart not our earning it not our deserving it not our working our way up to it the love mercy kindness grace of

God is the motive for salvation in a sense that's where that wonderful opening section chapter 1 verse 3 to 14 takes us as well you almost have that sense of a snowball effect of these spiritual blessings in Christ just piling up and growing in momentum and growing in speed and just to get a wee flavour at the beginning of all these spiritual blessings that are ours by God's free grace look at chapter 1 verse 4 he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight so chosen before creation so there's a great demonstration this is God's freedom this isn't down to us and here's the extent of God's grace that he's lavishing his grace on us so that we might be holy and blameless it's grace from beginning to end verse 5 continues the same idea in love he predestined us for adoption to sonship in accordance with his pleasure and will there's his motive God's pleasure God's delight in calling saving predestining his people to be adopted into his family verse 7 in him we have redemption through his blood the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace grace this gift of grace was decided in eternity past but it comes to us in the person of Jesus and his sacrificial death on the cross so that we might be redeemed the point of Ephesians 1 and 2 is that all of salvation is motivated by God's free grace comes to us in the sending of Jesus and it's a grace that's costly we are saved by the blood of Jesus his blood atones his blood propitiates it redirects the wrath that should fall on us instead it falls on God the Son it's through that costly grace that the dead are made alive that slaves are turned to sons so God's grace is the motive for salvation we're told in Ephesians 2 we can push that a little further and

recognize that God's grace is also the goal of salvation verse 7 is a wonderful verse it says in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ

[ 23 : 32 ] Jesus so this has got the coming ages in view so if we were to ask ourselves the question what is the point of God saving a people for himself what is the point of unending eternal life in the new heavens and the new earth what's the ultimate reason for salvation if we were to ask that of verse 7 so that God would eternally overwhelm us with his incomparable grace and kindness to us in Jesus that we are going to live in a flood an ocean of God's love and grace picture a dam holding the water back and the water's building and rising and it's full and then the flood gates open and the water gushes out that's going to be the Christian's experience of God's love for all eternity Jesus our Saviour is longing to pour love on his bride in the new heavens and the new earth the father is longing to give us his incomparable kindness to us in

Jesus that we'd be overwhelmed by his love for all eternity we've been chosen before creation to enjoy the wonders of his grace in the new creation to experience that perfect love and mercy and kindness and goodness we will never stop singing of amazing grace another thing we can say from Ephesians 2 is that God's grace is the source of salvation verse 8 and 9 for it is by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not from yourselves it is the gift of God not by works so that no one can boast God's Paul has in his mind two alternative views of salvation and of religion there's the religion of works that depend on us hitting a certain standard us earning

God's reward us being able then to boast of our salvation yeah I did it of course God should receive me into his family because I was good enough I lived up to his standards so that's that's the religion based on works but then there's religion based on grace which is altogether different it says Jesus has met God's perfect standard God in his life and his death and his resurrection perfect obedience perfectly glorifying God perfect love for God and for others Jesus paid for my salvation it comes as a gift not as a reward therefore rather than boasting it leads to humble dependence recognising Jesus is the saviour I need that I don't deserve

God's grace rather receive it as a gift which is it that Ephesians 2 celebrates which is it that the Bible celebrates of course it's God's grace isn't it because God is a God of grace perhaps it might be helpful for us to think of Jesus words on the cross when he said it is finished what did he mean there here is God's eternal plan of salvation being accomplished in his sacrificial day here is payment for sin being completed as he takes the justice of God that we deserve and what does that say to us when we hear Jesus on the cross saying it is finished it should say to us that we cannot add to the work of Jesus he has paid for my salvation so there is nothing for me to pay and the danger of presuming that we can add to our salvation is that we are then going to make Jesus a liar he has said my death is enough but if we think we are going to add to that we're going to end up subtracting we're going to end up losing the gospel of grace that was going on in Galatia that's where the letter of Galatians comes in in verse 10 we're reminded we are God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do even in our works we've been reminded that we're God's masterpiece we're a new creation and God works in us and through us for God's glory even that faith that causes us to respond to Jesus to welcome him into our hearts and that's a real response by real people that we're invited to do even that Paul says that comes as a gift salvation is from God God's grace is the source of salvation and the last of the things to notice about

[ 29 : 07 ] God's grace before we think about it in everyday life is that God's grace comes to us in Jesus Paul does something really interesting and lovely in verses 5 and 6 so in Ephesians 1 and verse 3 he spells out that we've been blessed in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ so it's as we are united to Christ it's as we are in Christ that we receive all these spiritual blessings and so then when we think about grace we don't think about grace in the abstract we recognize that grace comes to us in the personal work of Jesus and look at how in verses 5 and 6 of chapter 2 Paul wants to show us that by connecting the pattern of Jesus life and the reality of saving grace so in verse 5 God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgression so there's dead and alive and that should remind us of the work of

Jesus his cross and his resurrection and what's the impact of the cross and the resurrection according to our passage according to Paul here is that now by faith in him I am dead to sin and I am alive in Christ so the personal work of Jesus is connected to the work of grace and then we see that continuing in verse six and God raised us up with Christ when was Jesus raised up on the third

day but he was also raised up returned to glory ascension and that's our true home as well that by God's grace that's our ultimate destination that just as Jesus was raised up we will be raised up continuing verse six God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus so when

Jesus ascended he then we're told returned to the throne of heaven so Jesus right now is ruling and reigning over this world over the church history is working towards his purposes and what Paul is saying to us is that by God's grace we too will rule and reign with him this is our certain future because of God's grace that unites us to the Lord Jesus so we're reminded through Ephesians 2 that grace comes to us in the person and the work of the Lord Jesus and so the key thing then for us to be saved for us to appreciate to know God's grace is that we would get into Jesus Christ and him crucified our faith would rest in him now to think briefly about how

God's grace transforms everyday life we already mentioned John Newton's amazing grace I want to just either mention or remind us of a conversation John Newton had actually the day before he died where he said to a friend although my memory is fading I remember two things I am a great sinner and God is a great saviour isn't that the message of Ephesians 2 John Newton was someone who didn't have spiritual amnesia he knew and celebrated God's transforming grace and the grace of God saving grace isn't supposed to be a doctrine that we just sort of consider it's supposed to have a transforming impact on our lives in many ways we're just going to think of three let's think about our preaching or to broaden that out our proclaiming of the good news of the Lord Jesus since grace is full and free

Christ can be is to be freely offered to all people remember in Matthew 11 Jesus said come to me you who are weary and burdened I will give you rest people in Jesus day the people in our day us today were invited to come in our weakness with our burdens with our sense of unworthiness with the reality that by nature we are disqualified and we have that promise of rest that promise of salvation of knowing peace with God and that's a message not just for churchy types and it's certainly not a message that says clean up your act first it's a message of God's grace and kindness for all people something I think we can be praying as we meet together Sunday by Sunday and especially as we think about the next three weeks of hope explore to pray that people would hear that free offer of

[ 34 : 38 ] God's wonderful amazing grace and we'd respond as God would open up people's hearts but it's not just in our message that God's grace transforms think about perseverance how God's grace then shapes our perseverance on the Christian journey since God's grace is incompatible since it's beyond measure that has some important things to say to us it says to us that God's children will never exhaust God's love the grace that overcomes our sin and resistance at the point of salvation is the grace that continues despite our unfaithfulness despite our ingratitude despite our spiritual amnesia despite our sin back to amazing grace to his grace that brought us safe thus far and grace will lead us home our hope doesn't rest in ourselves we don't begin with grace and then switch halfway through to rely on our own works no it's grace from beginning to end our hope in salvation is our hope every day until glory that the

God of grace is our good father he is our good shepherd he is our good Samaritan so the doctrine of grace should help us to remember we have good news to share it should help us to persevere and also it should lead us personally to praise so I was browsing this week on the international justice mission website so they're a Christian organization looking to free people from trafficking and modern day slavery and they had the story of two brothers from Myanmar who because of the trouble going on in Myanmar went to Thailand to look for work and they eventually were forced into labor in Cambodia and their passports were taken and their wages were kept back IGM heard about it and after a year they were released and ready to go home and can you imagine how thankful you'd home of course you would be from slavery to freedom what's

Ephesians 2 told us it's told us that spiritually without Christ we were held in the chains of sin and unbelief we were in the grip of the enemy the devil we are without hope and without God without his grace but God in grace what did we discover from Ephesians he planned from all eternity to send his son Jesus planned from all eternity to send Jesus to be that ransom price to bring his people home and again not because we deserved it what we deserve is judgment but because of his free grace and so a grace filled life is surely a praise filled life as we learn daily to count all of those spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ let's pray briefly before we sing

Lord our God we are so thankful for your grace we recognize that this is from you this is not something that any person would ever make up by ourselves we are always inclined to try and prove ourselves and earn things for ourselves and so we thank you that you and your kindness and your grace have revealed this truth in your word and you have revealed your grace to us love and your grace

Lord that we would be known as a people of deep and abiding joy because we never lose sight of your amazing grace towards us please help us towards that end we pray in Jesus name Amen now let's sing together before we close this part of our evening the modern rendering of amazing grace my chains are gone let's stand together to sing