

# The Case for Grace

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[0:00] We're going to be looking at Ephesians chapter 2. You can turn in your Bibles, that passage, if you like, or you can turn in the Pew Bible, I think it's 1159, or you can just look at the back of your bulletin. All right, the text is printed there. It might be the simplest. We're going to take a look at that, but first we are going to pray. Father, thank you for allowing us to be here.

May you be pleased with what is preached, and may you be pleased with how we respond to the text of your holy word. Thank you for your Holy Spirit who works in us to open our minds and hearts to both understand and to trust in you. We thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

I think among the first verses that I ever memorized as a kid were Ephesians chapter 2, verses 8 through 10. You know how it begins right in front of you there, for by grace you have been saved through faith. It's a great verse. It's a foundational verse for those who are saved. We speak about grace, and we sing about grace, grace, and we use the word grace for various things, but I'm not sure if we really understand the gravity of grace, the essence of grace, or the wonder of grace, or the absolute necessity for grace. I'm not sure that we do understand that. And so I want us to take the time this morning to process this passage, and I'm going to attempt to, from the passage, make a case for grace.

When Paul began to write the book of Ephesians, he started talking about the greatness and glory of God, and that can't be overstated, though it's often underappreciated. Paul does his best to adequately praise the Father for his multiplied blessings, for his eternal purpose and plan, and flowing from that, Paul praised the Son for his redemptive work, which included not only the forgiveness of sin, but also the unveiling of the mystery of God and the application of his inheritance to us. And flowing from that, Paul praised the Holy Spirit for the guarantee of certain application of all that God had promised for those who he has redeemed. Paul makes it crystal clear that God did all of that, all of this, to magnify the glory of his grace. As Paul considered this awesome God, he wanted more than anything else for the Ephesian believers to know God better. He earnestly prayed for them, that they would understand what Paul was saying, that their understanding might be open, that they might know this God who saves and who sanctifies and who glorifies.

This almighty God who has exercised his great power and wonderful grace on their behalf. That prayer was actually last week's benediction here at Christ the King Church. All that's from chapter one. Now, if there was any way to make the more clear the majesty of God and the necessity of God's grace, it would be against the backdrop of the sinfulness of those whom God has determined to save. Like stars against the darkness of the sky, so God's glory appears all the more brilliant against the darkness of our sinful condition. Chapter two provides such a backdrop because actually it just shouts the wonder of God's amazing grace. We can't begin to fathom the concept of grace without really seeing the real condition of our hearts laid bare before a holy God. And then see that this, what this holy God does by grace alone for those who trust him. So in the process of showing God's majesty, frankly, our portrait's not a very pretty one. It's dark, it's evil, it's perverted, it's dead. Not easy to look at. Some will turn away in disgust or worse, denial. Others will make every effort to try to freshen up the image, but whitewash and perfume cannot hide the stain nor the stench. However, against this dark, this deep darkness will shine the brilliant light of the gospel of God's grace. So we can't miss it. We shouldn't miss it. We shouldn't hide from the truth about ourselves. But Paul is explaining to us that we can be forever changed by the one who is endued with all power to make us new and forever acceptable to God. Think about that. Acceptable to God only by grace.

[5:09] So first the darkness and then the light. Here's the first three verses of the text. And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience,

among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and of the mind and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

Not a good picture. In fact, he is telling us that we are dead and doomed without grace. No grace. We are in that position. So the subject and verb actually of this text, when Paul writes, he would flunk English. He just would. I mean, he has run on sentences like you wouldn't believe.

Actually, the subject and verb of the sentence are not even in the first three verses. Okay. The subject and the verb and the object of the verb are in verses four and five. And the subject is God. God, the verb is made alive and the object is us. But before we get to the wonderful news about God making us alive, we must first wade through the bad news of our condition, which made it necessary for God to act upon us by grace. You ever looked in the mirror and either thought maybe and thought this, that's not me. Or I don't look like this. This looks terrible. Well, it is you and you are what you see.

And sometimes it's not that flattering. The picture is this way. It's not pretty. In verses one through three, it's hideous. None of those who are in Christ. Now for those of us who are in Christ Jesus, that's in our past. But for those who are not truly believers, that's your exact portrait.

[7:24] Don't close your eyes. Don't look away. We need to see this if we are going to better understand and appreciate the good news of God's grace. All right, let's start with the first one. We are dead.

That's pretty straightforward. We're dead. No reformation program can bring life into a dead person. This one is not sick. This one is not mostly dead. This one is dead. No stimulus can be applied that will cause the dead person to respond. He's dead. He can't respond. Paul says that we are dead in our trespasses and sins. We're dead to God. Now to trespass means to slip or fall or to travel on the wrong road. Most of you, you may not remember the reference, but in Proverbs 14, 12, you probably know the verse, there is a way that seems right to man, but the end thereof is the way of death. To sin means to miss the mark. One of the reasons there's so much confusion about sin and Christianity is that I don't think we really understand what sin is. We sort of understand sins, but we don't understand sin. We can list sins, but missing the mark is the real issue.

The standard is perfection way up here. And the Bible says that we fall short of the glory of God. We missed the mark. Because we missed the mark, we were unacceptable, shut out from God and condemned already because of our sin. We are dead and we are unable to respond to God. Can't do it.

Now I'm aware that from a human perspective, there are some pretty good people in the world. They're nice. They do nice things. But this isn't a matter of nice. They are dead if they do not know Jesus. They're dead in their sins. They're dead because they've missed the mark. The degrees of decay are often different. Some dead people look pretty good. I work in a funeral home. I see dead people all the time. Some of them look alive dead. And some of them look dead dead. And all of them are dead dead.

Okay? And I can't say, hey, good morning, rise up and shine. And they don't do anything. They're dead. Well, what I see in the physical realm is what's true in the spiritual realm.

[10:06] For all who are outside of Jesus, for all who have never experienced the grace of God in Christ Jesus, they're dead in their sins. And we were born that way. We were born in sin, spiritually dead.

The whole of unredeemed humanity are the walking dead. Now, not only are we dead, Paul says we're dependent. We walk according to the course of this world. We can't get off the road we're on. Have you ever been driving somewhere and you can't get off? It's like, are we ever going to get off this? No, I can't get off this road. I keep going. I'm going the wrong direction. I can't turn around. Well, that's the way the world is. We're going in the wrong direction. We can't get off that road. We can't. A lot of people think, well, you know, I'm free. I can do whatever I want. I don't want to be shackled by God. I'm not going to do any of that. The opposite is true. We're locked into doing whatever the world is doing. Whatever the world is selling, we're buying. We walk according to the prevailing attitude of our age. We're into humanism. We're into materialism. We're into self-gratificationism. You know, we're into all that stuff. We're death walkers walking according to the course of this world, unable to free ourselves from Satan's control over this present world. We can't change direction. We're also disobedient. Under the power of the evil one, we disobey God at every turn. Every turn. I've discovered something in life that we don't need to be taught to disobey. You notice that? When our kids were small, I didn't have to say, you know, honey, this kid just does

not seem normal. We're going to have to teach him how to be naughty. Didn't have to teach that lesson. We are disobedient people by nature. That's the way we are. Paul says that's the way we are. We're dead. We're dependent. We're disobedient. We're also depraved. We had all of our manner of life after the lust of the flesh. In our imaginations, as well as in our actions, we indulged the flesh, the sinful nature. Now, depravity doesn't mean, doesn't suggest that we always behave as bad as we could, but it does say that our core is corrupt and it's impossible for us. Don't miss this. It's impossible for us to do anything that would ever merit any positive response from God in regard to gaining his favor. Not a thing we can do where God would say, very good.

If we are dead in our sin, if we are dependent on this world, if we are disobedient to God at every turn, we are depraved. We're in deep trouble. In fact, we are doomed. We are by nature, the children of wrath. That means that we are subject to the wrath of God. The wrath is described in part in Romans chapter 1. It's a good place to look if you want to read about it. Verses 18 to 32. We're without excuse and in the direct line of fire for the application of God's wrath to be applied to us without mercy. Judgment is certain and it will be complete. There will be no appeals, no time off for good behavior, no deals, no mercy. Paul paints that picture as dark as he knows how to make it and as accurate as he could possibly write. He reminds us that we have not a shred of reason, a shred of reason to feel good about ourselves. We are before God. I was trying to run these things together. What are we before God outside of Jesus Christ? What are we? Here's what I came up with.

We are the most vile, sinful, godless, ungrateful, unworthy, unholy, destitute, degraded, depraved mess you could ever imagine. That kind of sum it up? That's what he's telling us. Les, please don't tell us all these bad things, you know. Well, I'm sorry. That's what we are if we're outside of Jesus. [14:22] That's what he says. We're engulfed in sin. We can never offer anything to God. We're condemned. There's nothing we can do to alter God's judgment on all of this. However, we're about to be introduced to two of the most important words in the Bible. Verse 4. Would you look at that? What does that say?

But God. That's perhaps the most unexpected response, and at the same time, the only possible divine response for anything to change in us. And the response is from God, whose righteousness has been offended, the one against whom we have all sinned, and whose wrath is ready to be poured out on us, it is this one who intervenes on our behalf. I'm going to read those couple verses. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. By grace you've been saved, and raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Only when God applies his grace does the portrait in the first three verses change to verses 4 to 6. Loved and made alive only by grace.

So what is God like? Well, God is rich in mercy. The word rich carries the idea of abounding, loaded up, overflowing. It's by his mercy that he withholds his wrath and judgment. It has nothing to do with his perspective on us. Think about that. God does not extend his mercy because there's some little tiny spark of something in you that he finds good. No. He shows us his mercy because he is a God of mercy. It has nothing to do with you. His mercy is based only on his character. He extended his mercy.

He is great in love. How is it possible to describe God's love? We can't. He loved us when we were yet sinners. All of the darkness that was described earlier. Against that, he showed his love.

[17:00] The Bible says that he abounds in grace. By grace you have been saved. The result of his grace is actually a settled condition. Have been saved, as grammarians would say, it's a perfect tense, meaning that something happened in the past, it's a done deal, and the results continue forever.

I was saved, I was saved, past tense, and I remain and will remain in that condition all by grace.

That's what God is like. Merciful, loving, gracious God. What has God done? Well, finally we get to the verb in verse 5, he made us alive. Let that sink in for a minute.

We're dead. He made us alive, if we know Jesus. That's everything. We were dead in the state of awful decay, without hope, and he made us alive. All of the past was reversed in an instantaneous, gracious act by him. There was a day when I was walking in the path of verses 1 to 3, and God opened my mind and heart to believe who he is, and he gave me a brand new heart, and I became instantaneously different. I don't know if my parents saw it, but it happened. I was changed.

I became a new creation in Christ Jesus. The old was gone, and the new had arrived. That's what I am in Christ Jesus. Now, I got some ugly still on me, but the idea is that God is working to bring some of that into the place where I am positionally in him. That's his grace. That's what God has done. What we needed was not some kind of reform or makeover. We needed a resurrection, because we were dead, and that's exactly what Jesus does. He raises us up. God raises us up with Jesus. Jesus was the model of resurrection, and he was the reason that we could be resurrected, because he was the one whose death satisfied God's wrath. Remember, we were children of wrath?

[19 : 22] Jesus took all that on himself. The song, once our enemy, now we're seated where? His table. Part of the family.

God poured out his wrath on Jesus. Jesus didn't make the down payment. Jesus, you sang about it today.

Jesus did what? He paid it all. We have no debt. Jesus rose from the dead and thus guaranteed our own resurrection so that Paul could say here that we are made alive in Christ. We've been raised to new life in Christ. And that, Zach, is a hallelujah moment, right? That should be our response. Look what he's done.

Amazing. That's his grace. Though in real time, we haven't yet been raised in position. It's already happened. Remember the account of Lazarus? Pastor Mike's going to be speaking in John chapter 11 in a few weeks. You know the story. Lazarus, good friend of Jesus, died. Jesus delayed going there for a purpose.

And then four days into all this, Lazarus is in a cave in a tomb, rocks across the front of the tomb. And Jesus comes and he has a chat with Martha and then a chat with Mary. He's at the tomb when Mary is there and he tells the people to roll away. And in good King James English, Martha says, Lord, he stinketh.

[21 : 06] He did. Dead things decay. That was the situation with Lazarus. Jesus didn't stop there.

He called out to Lazarus. Lazarus, come forth. Now, what can Lazarus not do? He can't come forth. Why?

He's dead. He can't come forth. But what happened? He came forth. Why? Because Jesus made him alive. What you see physically in that miracle, you also see spiritually in what happens to us. We become alive in Christ. Now, what was interesting when he comes out, he had only one thing that needed to be done. He's still dragging around the grave clothes that he's wrapped in. You know what? Those grave clothes still had the stench of death on them. And so what did Jesus say to do? Take them off.

Let them go. See, we're the same. We're dead in our sins. So Jesus calls us out and he raises us up. And here we are out of the tomb. The only thing that holds us back are some things from the past that were only present because we were dead. But since we're alive, they are no longer appropriate.

[22 : 23] And in fact, they're a hindrance to our ability to walk and to run. So we get rid of the former stuff so that we can be free to live for the glory of God. That's the picture.

Though here's the rest of, I'm not even going to talk about verses eight through 10. I'm not going to get to that today. That's okay. But in verses six and seven, he says this.

And raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages, he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in his kindness toward us. So not only we were dead and doomed, and then we were made alive in Christ. Now he says, we are seated and displayed and all of that only by grace. We're seated in the heavenly places. What's that mean? Well, to be sure, this must be about our position in Christ. We're still here. We're living in the world, even though we shouldn't be making an effort not to be of the world. But still, Paul makes the point that we are right now seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

See, the future reality is in view, but there's a present application as well. We were at the bottom, dead in sin and condemned forever, but God, in his amazing grace, raised us up, changed our entire scope of life for eternity. For God, in his amazing grace, raised us up and did all of this. Everything about our life is now different. In other passages, we are told, oh, by the way, where's your citizenship? In heaven. We're told that in the scriptures.

We're told that our gaze should be on things where? Above. Not on things on the earth. We're told to seek after that which is above. We live our lives here, but we're supposed to be laying up treasures where? In heaven. We, like those who live before us, are to be looking for that city whose

builder and maker is God. And while we're here, we are longing and looking for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our Lord and Savior Jesus. That's what we're here for. All of our lives are to have a heavenly perspective. Paul says we are seated, which speaks of completion. When Jesus had completed his work of redemption, he rose from the dead, he spent some time on earth, he met with his disciples, and then at one point he ascended into heaven. And the scriptures say that when he ascended into heaven, he sat down at the right hand of the Father. That means that his work was complete. And when we are saved by him and raised by him and lifted into the heavenly places, our mission in that sense is complete in regard to our salvation. Like Jesus, we're seated. What a difference from the personal portrait in verses one through three. And there's more. We're put on display.

[25:36] There's a purpose for this. Whenever you see words like so that or in order that, those are purpose clauses. They are conclusions. They are reasons why something has happened. So God has saved us.

He has raised us. He seated us for a specific purpose. And Paul says that purpose clearly here. God's purpose is future and eternal in nature in the ages to come. And once again, it is all about him.

God did this. He did all of this so that we might be forever a visible testimony to the immeasurable riches of his grace. All the people that God has saved, millions of them from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, all of them declaring to all the myriads of angels.

What angels don't quite understand and long to know that God is immeasurably rich in grace. His kind grace is beyond description. And so when the angelic world in heaven sees the redemptive work of God, their response is, wow, look how those guys cleaned up. No, no. Their response is, God is gracious. God, wow. Look what God has done. We will be on display as a trophy to the work of God's grace.

That's what Paul was talking about in Ephesians 1. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places. And he's all talking about, look what he has done in us that we become the mark of his glorious grace for all eternity. Bringing glory to our Savior. Considering from where we came and what we will be, we ought to never stop thanking God for his grace. May I suggest that we need not wait till we get to heaven to do that? That's my case for grace. Without grace, no rescue, no intervention, no redemption, but God. Now we can use that phrase and we do a lot and it's okay to use it for many, many things. But primarily, Paul is saying the but God statement is about a redemption. About God pouring out his love, his mercy, his grace upon us that we might know him, that we might have eternal life, that we might be the forever testimony of his marvelous grace. I want you to look at the picture.

[28:34] Again, don't look away. Right now, if you don't know Jesus Christ as your Savior, that picture in verses 1 to 3 is you. But he can make it new. Many people believe, I think, in sort of a philosophy, I'm okay, you're okay. Or maybe, I'm okay, you stink, or something like that. But anyway, it's I'm okay, you're okay, generally. But without Christ, we're not okay. We stink with the smell of death. We are dead, but he can make us alive. So how does that happen? We ask. We ask. We ask God to change us.

When he begins to do his work in us, and we ask, it'll happen. He will save us by his grace. If you trust him today as your Savior, I'd love to hear about it. I would love to rejoice with you in your newfound faith. God is a God of grace. Without his grace, we're lost. With it, we're made alive in him.

I want to tell you a story, and then we'll be done. It's a story, a little bit about John Newton. I'll tell you his story right now.

The ship thrashed around in the North Atlantic storm for over a week. Canvas sails on the ship were ripped, shredded.

[30:13] The wood on one side of the boat was splintered. The sailors had little hope of survival. They were working the mechanical pumps hour after hour after hour trying to keep the ship afloat.

On the 11th day of the storm, sailor John Newton was too exhausted to pump. And so after doing that for many hours, he was tied to the helm of the ship, trying to hold the ship in its course.

From about 1 o'clock in the afternoon until midnight, he's tied to the helm. This was in 1748. While the storm raged, Newton had time to think. His life seemed to be ruined and wrecked and battered as much as the ship he was trying to steer through the storm.

Since the age of 11, he'd lived a life at sea. Sailors were pretty much not noted for their refinement. But Newton had a reputation for such profanity and coarseness and debauchery that he even shocked many of the sailors he was with.

In fact, he was known as the great blasphemer. Actually, Newton was raised by a godly mother for a while, but she died when he was six.

[31 : 24] But when she had him home there, she was praying to God that God would make him a minister. And she taught him early the Bible, and she taught him songs written by Isaac Watts.

And in the middle of all the storm, some of those childhood teachings began to come to mind. One of them, which is quite interesting, was actually found in Proverbs 1, verses 24-31.

And that seemed to confirm to Newton that he was without hope, absolutely. Let me read a little bit of that. Proverbs 1. Because I have called and you refuse to listen.

This is God speaking. Because I have called and you refuse to listen. You have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded. Because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity.

I will mock when terror strikes you. When terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you, then you will call upon me, but I will not answer.

[32 : 26] They will seek me diligently, but will not find me, because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, which have none of my counsel and despise all my reproof.

Therefore, they shall eat the fruit of their way and have their fill of their own devices. Now, you can imagine when that came to his mind, he figures, I'm done, okay? Though he had rejected his mother's teaching and led sailors into unbelief, he was convinced at that point that he was beyond hope, beyond saving, even if the scriptures were true.

But during the storm, Newton's thoughts began to turn to Christ. Somehow, in the middle of being tied to the helm, he was able to get a New Testament, and he began to read a few verses out of that.

He found hope in Luke 11, verse 13. It may not sound like that initially, but here's the verse. If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?

Well, that day, at the helm, March 21, 1748, was the day Newton remembered ever after.

[33 : 42] He wrote, On that day, the Lord sent from on high and delivered me out of the waters. 57 years later, as an old man, Newton wrote in his diary on March 21, this time 1805, Not well able to write, but I endeavor to observe the return of this day with humiliation, prayer, and praise.

Only God's amazing grace could take a rude, profane, slave-trading sailor and transform him into a child of God.

Newton never ceased to stand in awe of God's work in his life. Newton left slave-trading and began to think that he had been called to ministry. His mother's prayers for her son were answered, and in 1764, at the age of 39, John Newton began what would result in 43 years of preaching the gospel. He spent his mornings in Bible study, his afternoons visiting parishioners. There were regular Sunday morning and afternoon services and meetings for children and young people.

There were also Tuesday evening prayer meetings, which were always well attended. Sunday evening services. You'll like this, Zach. Sunday evening services.

[35 : 03] Newton often composed a hymn that supported the lessons in Scripture for the evening. In 1779, 280 of these were collected and combined with 68 hymns by Newton's friend and parishioner, William Cooper, this most famous of hymns was called Faith's Review and Expectation.

Any of you heard that? Oh, yeah, you have. We know it today as Amazing Grace. Last week we sang that. Some of the stanzas, I'm not sure if we sang all these, but it goes like this.

Amazing Grace. You know it. How sweet the sound. It saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind.

Now I see. It was grace that taught my heart to fear. In grace my fears relieved. How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed. Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I've already come.

His grace has brought me safe thus far. And grace will lead me home. The Lord has promised good to me.

[36:17] His word my hope secures. He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures. Yes, when this flesh and heart may fail, and mortal life shall cease, I shall possess within the veil a life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow. The sun forbear to shine, but God, who called me here below, will be forever mine.

Newton lived to be 82 years old. He continued to preach, have an active ministry until the last couple of years of his life when his health failed. Newton never ceased to be amazed by God's grace.

And he told his friends, My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things. I am a great sinner, but that Christ is a great Savior.

Amazing grace. Dear God, thank you for helping us to see how important it is that you save us by grace.

[37:23] We had no hope. We were lost and dead. We couldn't do anything. But you, for people gathered here today who belong to you and your family, you saved us by grace.

And may we forever, starting even now, may we forever glory in your grace. May we forever shout hallelujah to your grace.

May we understand that we came offering nothing but the filth of our life. And you turned it all around by grace. Oh, thank you for your grace.

Thank you for saving me by grace. And dear God, may I never, ever, ever forget that amazing grace.

Don't let me forget it. May that be at least among the last things I ever remember. By grace, I've been made alive in Jesus.

[38:31] Amen.