

Grace, Grace and More Grace

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Date: 19 August 2018

Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 00] Let's turn for a little to the chapter that we read in Ephesians, chapter 2, and we're looking at it from the beginning to verse 10. I'm not going to read right through it.

I'll just read at the beginning. 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, and so on.

And then verse 4, but God, being rich and messy because of his great love with which he loved us, made us alive together with Christ. And verse 8, for by grace you have been saved through faith.

This is not your own doing. It is the gift of God. Verse 10, for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus. Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus is uplifting, it's exciting, and it's enriching.

And Sam Gordon, in his little commentary on Ephesians, he says this at the beginning of it. And that, in a sense, almost sums up this letter to the Ephesians, because it is all these things.

[1 : 36] Now, Paul in this letter is telling us what God has done in Christ Jesus. And it's a letter we all, we've, this is probably one of the most familiar chapters in the Bible.

It's, I'm sure it's almost a chapter a lot of people know by heart. But I think in light of the communion next Lord's Day, it's good for us to remind ourselves just where we were and what God has done for us, what God is continuing to do for us, and what God is yet going to do for us.

And all of this is summed up in what we have here before us. And Paul in this chapter, he opens up to us, and he's really telling us of how we have been saved by grace.

Grace, that's really the great theme of this, grace through faith. But before he comes to that, he first of all reminds us what we were.

And it's actually very important for everybody, for all people to hear how we are spiritually, because it's not something we can work out ourselves. If we had a closed book, a closed Bible, it would be very difficult to be able to come to a full understanding of who God is, and of who we are, and how we are in relation to him.

[2 : 57] There are many things that the natural creation tells us about God. It tells us about his power, about his eternity. It tells us these things.

The Bible tells us that nature itself tells us these things. But the word of God is very specific and reveals to us. It's like opening up more and more and more of who God really is, but also who we are and who we are before him.

And of course, this is why it is so important that we understand that. And it's important for people who have never come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to realize just where exactly they are.

And sometimes it can be a very uncomfortable discovery. Sometimes people will say, surely that's not how it is. That's surely, surely what you're saying.

That's not the situation or condition that I'm in. Well, this is what the Bible tells us. This is God's word. And it's also very important for the believer, again, to reflect upon what God has taken us from.

[4 : 09] And even although God has taken us from what we see in these first three verses, there is still a continual battle with these powers and these forces of the world and Satan and the flesh.

So we're told in verse 1 that we were dead in trespasses and sins. And that actually is a fearful situation to be in because when a person is dead, a person who's dead cannot do anything.

A person who's dead can't feel anything. And that's the situation that we're in by nature. We're dead to the things of God. The fall that occurred when Adam and Eve sinned and fell wasn't just a matter of them kind of losing their way and going out of the garden.

It was catastrophic. It changed everything. The fall was a shattering. An absolute shattering. And so we are in such a situation that by ourselves we can't make ourselves right with God.

We can try all we want. As the apostle said, supposing we give our body to be burdened, but have not loved the love of God. What does it profit us? And so that's the situation that we're in.

[5 : 27] And that deadness is understood because when you, and I'm sure many of us can remember exactly what that was like, because when you sat under the word of God, and sometimes the law was thundered, it just went over your head.

It didn't mean anything to you. Other times, when the sweet invitations of Jesus were given, and you were compelled, you had been compelled to come into the kingdom, again, it didn't mean anything to you.

They were just words. Because you were dead in trespasses. And since you, you were dead to the things of God. They didn't mean anything to you.

And so Paul is saying to the church, that's where you were rescued from. But on top of that, you were dead in trespasses and sins.

But then there was a threefold bondage that they were in, which all are in, and in which you once walked, following the course of this world.

[6 : 38] In other words, the world's aims and philosophies and standards and ambitions and all that, that's what, that is how you lived. Now, of course, we live in this world.

We work in this world. We interact with this world. We have so many friendships. Our day-to-day life is lived. And the Lord doesn't call us out from that.

Because otherwise, you would become a hermit or you'd not be interacting with anybody else. The Lord doesn't call us from that. Jesus himself became very involved with people in all their situations in life.

But there's a huge difference because for the believer, the aims and the philosophies of this world, which don't go any higher than this world, the achievements of life, don't go beyond what we can get out of life, what we can do in life, what we can contribute in life.

They never go heavenward. They never go beyond just the physical, natural world in which we live. And that is how so many people live.

[7 : 49] They just live out their day and their night without thinking of God, without realizing that it is in him that we live, move, and have our being, without having regard to him, without depending upon him, without seeking to glorify him, without seeking his help, without wanting to share and fellowship with him.

That's a big difference. Now, I don't mean for one moment that when a person becomes a Christian that they become immune to what this world is enticing us to.

And that is why, over and over again, the Bible says, let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. Set your mind on the things that are above.

Set your affections. Because it's a battle. It's so easy just to be bogged down in this world and never look beyond. Never look up. Remember how John Bunyan, who so often mentioned us in the Pilgrim's Progress, how he highlights this man and he's scratching around, scraping around, looking just for a wee coin, something in the dust.

And there's all he's raking about. And there's a person up above him holding out this beautiful crown. And if only he would look up. But he's never looked up.

[9 : 07] Just keeps scratching away, trying to find something in the dust, in the dirt. And up above him, the hand held out to him. There's a crown.

Doesn't look up. So that's a picture of how so many people live in this world. But then there's also the prince of the power of the air. And that is the devil.

He is termed the god of this world. And he operates in this world. Someone was saying to me the other day, they were reading. And it just sums up how Satan is that he was patrolling in the earth. Went round patrolling. He's out in patrol. And the Bible says that he goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Patrolling.

And so there's the forces of darkness that are at work. And very often we're oblivious to that. God of this world has blinded the minds of those who don't believe.

[10 : 07] So that people aren't aware. They're not seeing. They don't see. That's part of Satan's great work. I'm going to close your mind so you don't begin to think.

I'm keeping your eyes spiritually closed so that you don't see. I'm keeping your ears spiritually closed so that you don't hear. He's at work. He's doing it.

Wherever the gospel is preached, he's there seeking to take away the good seed that's planted. And then the flesh where we're living, that's what it also says, walking 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 lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.

So that this is really living out our lives exactly as we want, with no regard to God's word. But of course, again, the Christian knows all about the struggles that go on between the flesh and the spirit.

When a person is converted, that doesn't mean that the human passions would seek to just live any way they want, that that is automatically removed.

[11 : 25] It's not. It's always there. The flesh is always there. And that's what the Bible says. The one lusteth against the other. It's like into a collision course that continues to collide.

It's not a once-off. It's not now and again. It's a continual collision between flesh and spirit. And that's what makes Christian warfare so difficult. Because there's no way you can go from it.

It's on. Ongoing. And it is only by grace that we are able to fight this battle. And then, so, when we're reading this, we're saying, whoa, here's this three-fold bondage.

And you know, very often people who are outside Christ, they look with pity at Christians. And they think that Christians are people who are bogged down with all kind of bondage and sort of legalistic way and that their lives must be miserable and it's all can't do and how negative and it's all bad.

And people say, I don't want any of that. Well, nothing could be further from the truth. Because in Jesus Christ, when a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ, there's release.

[12 : 38] There's release from the bondage of the law. There's release from the guilt of sin. There's just so many releases. There's newness. There's a freedom. That's why Jesus says, when the great invitation, he says, my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

When you come to me, you will find what I give you. Yes, in this world, you're on this coalition course and it won't be easy.

But let me tell you, you will experience a freedom that you never had before. There is liberty and freedom in the gospel. The truth shall make you free.

And you know, we don't know that until we come to faith. And again, I've said this before because I remember growing up and I used to think so differently, sadly.

And I used to think that I was free. And I used to think that Christians were bound. Until I came to discover, as Jesus said, that his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

[13 : 53] I discovered what real freedom that I'd never had before was. And where you have an identity, a sense of purpose, a sense of knowing why you're here and where you're going, all these things make such a difference to life.

But then there's one last thing that the apostle reminds us of. And again, it brings before us the awful situation that we're in. And it tells us that we are, we were, by nature, children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

That's a final negative. Children of wrath. Now, a lot of people find this very difficult to understand about the wrath of God. And they say the wrath of God surely is not compatible with the love of God.

And people look at the love of God and say, how can you have wrath at the same time? Well, we've got to remember that God's wrath or anger is not at all like ours.

It's not temper. It's not where someone, where he like flies off the handle. It's not that sort of thing. You know how with her shell sometimes she'll say, oh, my blood was boiling.

[15 : 13] I got so angry. I just, these fits of anger. That's not the way that God's anger is. You see, God is consistent in his being. And the nature of God has an absolute holy hatred of sin.

He cannot look upon sin or tolerate sin. God would cease to be God if somehow that he could overlook sin or ignore it or pretend it's not happening.

The nature of God has to confront sin. That's who he is. And we've always got to remember that.

And the wrath of God is upon, is against all who are against, who are outside Jesus Christ.

That is, that is how we are by nature. And so it's, it's a fearful situation. God's wrath is not incompatible with his love and his mercy and his grace.

They sit together. And this is the beauty where we see God's love. Because God remains God, his wrath is against the sinner.

[16 : 21] But he remains God because his love and his mercy and his grace come into play for the sinner. and what he does is, he takes his son, his only beloved son, and he places his wrath, which is against the sinner, on his son.

And he says to the sinner who accepts what the son has done in this place, you now go free because I have lifted all the wrath, all the condemnation, all your guilt, it's all taken away because of what Jesus has done for you.

And that's what we find coming in place in verse 4. But God, being rich and mercy. People often highlight how often we find that but regarding God.

Things look bad, but God intervenes. grace. And that's, we have it again and again, this section is very familiar to everybody and I'm sure we often, and you often heard it preached, but just looking at it, I said, we're an overview, but God, rich in mercy.

As we've said before, grace is giving us what we don't deserve and mercy is not giving us what we do deserve and that's what God has done.

[17 : 54] We deserve hell, we deserve his condemnation, but he's not going to give us that because he is rich in mercy. We don't deserve his face and his favor, but he's giving us that because he is rich in mercy.

Mercy, it's an amazing thing where God gives us here we are and when a person displays mercy to another person, what they're doing is they are in a situation where they can help.

The person they are helping is in a situation where they can't do anything for themselves. That's how it is and that's how it is, how it was for us. We were in a situation where we couldn't do anything for ourselves.

We were hopeless and we were helpless. But God, rich in mercy, he becomes involved in our situation. And of course, the greatness of this mercy is that first of all, he shows us our need because we didn't know we had a need.

God's mercy is so great that first of all, he shows us and he says, you are in dire straits. You are in a terrible situation, but I have what you need.

[19 : 14] And then we see that the reason behind this great display of mercy is because of God's great love with which he loved us. And this is one of the most amazing things of just this display of God's love.

But God being rich in mercy because of his great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in trespasses and sins. God didn't love us because he saw something good in us.

God didn't say, you know, I'm going to love this passion and love that passion and love that passion because that passion has something nice in them, something worthwhile. I'm going to set my love on him, on her.

That's not the way God works. He loved us, it tells us, when we were dead in trespasses and sins, when we had no feeling for him, when we had no desire for him, when we were without God and without hope in this world.

That's when he loved us. He loved us and washed us from our sins. And, you see, this is the wonderful thing about grace.

[20 : 24] And God has made us alive. This is what it goes on to say by, even when we're dead, made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places.

There's a double resurrection here. There is a first resurrection that takes place when a person is born again. Because that's what happened. You're dead and you've been made alive.

A spiritual resurrection, that's what happens in your life. You're made alive with Christ. Christ has come into your life and there is now life. And every person who is born again knows it.

I don't mean that you'll know it instantly. You might struggle with what we term lack of assurance for a long, long time. But the thing is, if you have walked in darkness, you know when there is light. When you have walked with trouble in your heart and you then get God's peace, you know it. The Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of God.

[21 : 42] You see, there is a witnessing taking part. God sees to it that you realize that you have been brought from death to life. You cannot have the life of Christ within you and not know it.

Because there's been a change. You have new appetites, new desires, new hopes, new longings, things you didn't used to have. That's part and partial of your life now.

And so there is this spiritual resurrection being made alive in Christ that happens in the here and now. But there is also going to be another resurrection and raise us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places.

so that there is a spiritual resurrection here and now, but there will also be a final resurrection, a real physical resurrection will take place when your body will be reunited with the soul in the heavenly places with Christ Jesus.

And the Lord tells us, and the Word tells us that he goes to prepare a place for us. Peter tells us about this inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, reserved in heaven for you.

[23 : 01] Sometimes when I go away, I occasionally go in the train. And if you book the train, whether it's going to Aberdeen or Glasgow, if you book it early enough, you can get a very good deal on it.

And I even because I got one of these senior rail cards and you can book and you get a third of it, so you can book well in advance and you get a really cheap train journey.

And when you book it in advance, when you go on the train, your seat is there, the number, the ticket, everything, so that you can go up and down the train and then you find there's your seat. It's reserved. It's not anybody else's seat. It's been reserved for you. That's your place. Well, that's what Jesus is saying. You know, he says, I'm going to heaven and I'm going to reserve a place for you.

When you go to a wedding, very often nowadays, and you're going to the reception, your name will be there at the table. That's your place. It's been reserved for you. That's what the Lord is saying.

[24 : 10] This place that is, this inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, reserved in heaven for you. This place that never fades away.

This is all part of his grace. This is all part of what he has done for us. So that in the coming ages, he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

In heaven, that's what the Lord is going to do. He's going to show us the immeasurable riches of his grace. And it's going to take the whole of eternity, and endless eternity to show us that.

All the time, there will be this unending display where we will bathe in the delight of what he is showing us forever and ever and ever.

No wonder it says, I hath not seen, nor he had heard, nor yet hath entered into the heart of man what God has prepared. God has done. It's wonderful. And this is all part of what he has done.

[25 : 18] And it is all by grace. For by grace you have been saved through faith. This is not your own doing. It is the work of God.

And I think, you know, that's one of the hardest things for people to understand. That grace, the G's, grace and gift, they go together. And people have a real difficulty in understanding this, laying hold upon and grasping it.

What am I to do? What must I do to be saved? The jailer said in his anguish, Paul said, believe. You see, all the doing has been done.

You can't do anything. You have to believe, to trust, to accept, to take Jesus at his word, to believe him. That's what it says.

And so that it says here, for by grace you have been saved. That grace is a fountain and a stream and faith is a channel through which the grace flows.

[26 : 26] And salvation is a gift of God. We receive it. And when you get a gift, you don't earn a gift. You say, to yourself, you know, I know somebody, maybe you say it to your birthday or whatever.

You say to yourself, I very often get a gift from whoever. I must go and do something in order that I'll get that gift. That's not the way a gift works.

When someone gives a gift, they give it because they want to. They give it to you. You didn't earn it. You didn't do anything for it. It's a present. And that's what God has done.

with this great love that he has for you from all eternity, he in Christ has bestowed this gift upon you. It's yours.

By grace, you have been saved through faith. This is not your own doing. It's nothing to do with who our people were. It's nothing to do with what we, our intellect.

[27 : 29] It's nothing to do with the gifts or abilities that we naturally have. It is a gift given to us by God. And you know, that's part of the great tragedy, is that so many people still don't accept this.

They're still trying to do something to make themselves right with God. Well, we can't. It is, as we say, it is by grace, not a works, so that no one may boast.

Isn't that wonderful? Can you imagine the boasting that would go on if we had something to do with our own salvation? And you'd be saying to people, you know, do you know how I'm a Christian? Well, I did this or I did that. I'm a Christian because of the parentage that I have come from, who my people, my grandparents, who my great-grandparents, that uncle, that auntie.

That's why I'm a Christian. I'm a Christian because I've given so liberally to the cause. I'm a Christian because I am so moral and upright.

[28 : 34] I'm a Christian because I'm a good neighbor. No, it's none of these things, not of works lest anyone should boast. Not one Christian can ever boast and say, I'm a Christian because of, we can only say I'm a Christian because of what Christ did for me.

that's why the apostle Paul said that I will glory in nothing save in the cross of Jesus Christ. And then it says, for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

God's had work in us and we have been created in Christ Jesus. the greatest miracle that takes place in this world is when somebody has been brought from darkness into light.

They become a new person, a new creation. Something of Jesus, Jesus, not something, Jesus has come in. A new creation.

Paul keeps emphasizing that throughout his letters. We are new creations. Greater than the original creation in this world.

[29 : 52] You know, when God created man in the first instance from the dust of the ground, and then from man took the rib and created, built, fashioned the woman, brought them together.

If we had been able to look in, which obviously we can, at that taking place, we'd say, that is the most incredible, amazing, astounding thing I've ever, ever, ever seen.

Well, what God does in Jesus Christ is even more amazing. Where he makes us a new creation. Where Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, comes to dwell within us.

And God has created us and he has prepared. We are his workmanship. And workmanship means that it's an ongoing work. He's working away. He's continuing to work within us for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

God has a purpose for you in your life. And he has made out a particular path and particular things that you should be doing. And through this you will bring glory to his name.

[31 : 06] And you know, the funny thing is that often the path that he sets you on and the work that he has set for you to do, there's times you're saying, I wish I was doing what he's doing or she's doing.

I wish my life was like his or hers. I find my life's difficult. The Lord says, this is the path I have for you because it's through this particular journey you're on and the work you're on, I will get glory to my name through you.

And sometimes we don't realize that. And very often we think we're bringing dishonor on the name of the Lord rather than honor and glory. That's the way we feel. The Lord has a purpose in everything you're going through, for his glory and for your good.

May we give the Lord thanks for what he has done because as we think upon this, it should make us focus more and more upon the coming communion and next Lord's day as we take of the bread and the wine and we remember what God has done.

His intimate and infinite care and precision and planning and purpose and how he's brought it all together and of how you as an individual are unique in his sight.

[32 : 30] You are precious to him. He has died for you specifically, personally. and if you're without Jesus Christ today, then he's offering himself to you.

He says, look, I'm here. I am available today as Savior. Seek and you will find. Let us pray.

Oh Lord, our God, we pray that the reality and the truth of your word may indeed enlighten our path, that we may understand more and more of who you are and what you're doing for us.

Oh Lord, we marvel at your grace. Grace, grace, how amazing is that grace that saved a wretch like us. Oh Lord, we give thanks that you are gracious in all your dealings.

We pray that you will bless us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places. Bless us in our homes and our families. bless us in all whom we love. Watch over us and take us to our homes in safety.

[33 : 40] Keep the evil one away from us and all whom we love. And guide us and keep us in Jesus, we pray, forgiving us our sin in Jesus' name. Amen. We'll conclude singing in Psalm 103 in

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Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[37 : 33] Amen. Amen. Thank you.