
The Grace of God in New Covenant Realities

Ephesians 2

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God's grace is essential to understanding the spiritual realities of the New Covenant.

The Craftsmanship of Grace (2:1-10)

¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² 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— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Problem - Our Spiritual Ruin

(v.1-3)

Here is the horribly stark reality of our sinful estate.

Its Condition - Deadness

(v.1)

Separated from His life.

The unbeliever is not sick: he is dead! The dead sinner needs life. "The only difference from one sinner to another is the state of their decay."¹ (Wiersbe) Every sinner ever conceived is in this condition.

Its Course - Disobedience

(v.2)

Separated from His Spirit and mind. - Sons of disobedience

All the members of a symphony are following a score written by a composer and led by the conductor. So all men dead in sin live lives of disobedience shaped by the world (evil components of culture). And the world system mediates the evil purpose of Satan. O, how the *zeitgeist*, the spirit of the age, paves the way for sinning disobedience. O, how Satan destroys his subjects (sons) by his lies.

Its Conduct - Depraved

(v.3a)

Separated from His holiness

All sinners are driven by the depravity of their lusts. God given desires are turned into God dishonoring satisfactions. Men will feed from the slop of sin while God is the manna of heaven for hungry souls. The sense here is that of wallowing and indulging in the thoughts and acts of sin. Note here the partnered roles of the flesh and the mind: here the body and the thoughts join together to pursue pleasure instead of God.

Here is the full picture of sin: inner drives of depravity shaped by the outward spirit of the age all to disobey and dishonor the Lord Jesus Christ. Though outward sin may look different in different ages, the essence of sin is still the same. Soon we are slaves to self and sins. There is no freedom in sin, only a deep dark abyss of ever growing but less and less satisfied cravings.

Its Condemnation - Doomed

(v.3b)

Separated from His family - Children of wrath

If we are by deed, sons of disobedience (v.2) then we are by nature, children of wrath. Even the infancy of sin in our nature grows up into adulthood of sinful thoughts and

actions. And so we are doomed to the just and eternal wrath of God. The wrath of God is not only shaped by His holiness but it is exactly suited to our sinfulness.

The word "children" use here for "objects of wrath" shows the close relationship between sinners and the wrath of God. Have you ever so discovered your sinfulness that you were in dread of God's wrath?

Provision - Its Saving Riches

(v.4-6)

What sweet words these are in the sinner's ear: *But God...*

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

We were dead, depraved, disobedient and doomed: *But God made us alive, raised us up and seated us in the heavenlies with Him so that He might show the surpassing riches of His grace.* This is the core sentence

Its Source

(v.4)

What would move God to do this? Well, there are ultimate ends in God's saving purposes: the glory of Christ and the delight God has in Him. But here it is the relational ends that are in view.

Character - We have a rich in mercy kind of God. The holiness and mercy of God come together in our God in a powerful moving of God to save and make sinners holy in His sight.

Cause - God's love for us is a great kind of love. It is a full and overflowing and deep and wide and sinner redeeming kind of love. It is not only great in its size, but great in its outreach and great in its expression.

Thank God for all the ways in which He is rich according to Ephesians: He is rich in grace (1:7), in mercy (2:4), in kindness (2:7) and in glory (3:16).

Its Specifics

(v.5-6a)

What does the mercy and love of God do for those who are dead in sin and transgression? How does what Christ did in his death and resurrection change us?

Regeneration - made alive - This is Paul's term for the new birth. It is God's solution for our deadness. He makes us alive by joining His Spirit (John 3:5-8) and His Word (1 Peter 1:23) and thus imparts to us the life of God in the soul so that we are born spiritually and come to life.

Resurrection - moved us from the sphere of the flesh into the sphere of the spirit. The resurrection brought up Christ out of the earth and out of the body of the first creation and moved Him into the body of the new creation. This is why the resurrection of Christ is different from, say, that of Lazarus. Lazarus soul was rejoined with a body that would die. Jesus' soul was clothed in a body of glory that will never see death.

Exaltation - shifted the focus of our existence from the earthly to the heavenly. Now many Christians today are not well taught in this. But saints of old had greater and clearer light. Today we are so surrounded by the New Age and oriental mysticism that we are hesitant to move with freedom among the garden of this truth. As a result, the necessary strengthening vitamins and spiritual antidotes to worldliness and materialism simply aren't a regular part of a Christian's diet. I will have much more to say about this as we move through Ephesians. Suffice it to say this now: if you are a Christian, the source of your life and the focus of your soul is in heaven and on Christ. Now we live in both

worlds: we are yet earthly until we put off this tabernacle. So there is an already (seated in the heavenlies in our spirits, and a not yet (walking here in earth). But there will come a day when Jesus comes and brings the greatness and glory of the not yet and we will be in all ways made new. Maranatha, Lord Jesus.

Its Scope

(v.6b)

I want you to notice two very important phrases: (v.5) together with Christ and (v.6,7) in Christ. Nothing that God has done for us is done apart from Christ. These phrases point to both our position and our present experience of it.

Secondly, notice that by grace we are saved, explains the dynamic, not the motivation. The powerful life of God in the resurrection and ascension is the enabling grace that is moving for us and in us. Again, I say to you that "God's riches at Christ's expense" is not only an inadequate explanation of grace, but may actually trivialize the super-amazing power that is grace to us and in us.

Purpose - Its Surpassing Reasons

(v.7-10)

How simple the truths of Scripture can be in their connections: we were (v.1-3) but God (v.4-6) so that (v.7-10).

⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

We were dead, but God raised us *so that He might put on lavish display the wondrous wealth of His glory in grace.*

Its God Exalting Declaration

(v.7)

Salvation is God centered. God saved us in order to bring Him glory. It is amazingly and sadly easy to fall into a man-centered orientation. But what God has done for us is ultimately for the praise of His own worth and grace and glory. So the plan that provided salvation has as its objective the magnifying of God. So though out all the rolling ages of eternity (not just the centuries to come, nor just in the Millennial Age, but in all the unfolding eons of glory) God might put on exhibit the splendor of the fabulous wealth of His grace. This grace for us is His kindness and tenderness and covenant faithfulness in Christ (the Messiah).

Its Grace Centered Description

(v.8-9)

Here is the first reason God is exalted in His salvation: it is by grace.

By grace - It is God's initiative: His free favor that gives the sinner the right and power to believe; that is, it is all grace.

Through the gift of faith - That we believe is not of ourselves it is the gift of God. So a saving belief in God is not natural in man nor is within the ability of man nor is it like man's belief in other things. It is a God given trust and rest in God.

Not of works - the faith that grace gives is not a work that merits salvation. There is no work that merits salvation. It cannot be earned because it has already been bought; it cannot be earned, because we have not the currency; it cannot be earned because it is not for sale. What currency of works we might offer are mere menstrual rags in God's sight. Why would we bring that when we have in salvation the wonder of the worth of Jesus' righteous merit and sin bearing work.

Now hear this and hear it well: a right and spiritual understanding of these truths produces humility and a deep sense of the great supremacy and worth of God. Yet, I hear believers professing sovereign grace with pride and boasting and self-exaltation. May God have mercy on us when we take the grace centered, God exalting, man humbling purpose of grace and turn it into a ground for boasting. That grace saves is so that no man may boast. God forbid that we should glory save in the cross of Christ Jesus our Lord!

Its Holiness Producing Design (v.10)

Here is the second reason God is exalted in His salvation: it is for good works.

Three words shape this design:

Workmanship - God's fashioning of believers is a work of art: it is a poima a fine and skilled craftsmanship. Mediate on that for a while...

Works - God has created us in Christ Jesus for good works. Grace saves for sanctification. Usefulness and holiness are why God has formed you in Christ and is fashioning you to be like Christ. We therefore do not work to be saved, but work because we are saved. All who are truly saved know they have not worked for it and are working because of it.

Walk - Each individual work is woven together into a walk. Each act of obedient faith is forming the conduct and character of a godly lifestyle. And it is not just the individual acts, but the whole of all that it means to be godly in a dark world in the light of the glory of heaven that God has prepared beforehand.

The Unifying Design of Grace (2:11-22)

¹¹ Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— ¹² remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Plight - Separated without God (v.11-12)

The first half of the chapter speaks of the personal plight of individuals. Now Paul turns to the corporate problem of the Gentiles as a people.

Identification of the Subjects (v.11)

This verse places two ironic statements back to back.

God's Evaluation- Gentiles in the flesh

Human Expression- The "uncircumcised" by the so-called "circumcised"

Notice that in both, it is a matter of the physical. There are those who are Gentile in the flesh and those who are Jews in the flesh. Neither of them are spiritual. There is no inherent spirituality to being a Jew. Never was. There was an advantage: but not salvation.

Description of their Condition (v.12)

The text describes the sad condition of the Gentiles. It is largely characterized by the word, *separate*.

Separated from the privileges of the Jews: Christ, citizenship and the covenants

Separated from the presence of God: no hope, without God in the world.

For the Gentiles it appeared hopeless. They had no ground to come to God at all. They were separate from the Jews and without God in the world. So they are lost personally

(v.1-3) and corporately (v.11-12). Jesus' death and resurrection provides a personal redemption (v.4-10) and it provides a corporate reconciliation (v.11-18).

Provision - Brought Near, by Grace (v.13-18)

The solution to the terrible plight of the Gentiles rests in the person and work of the Messiah. Separation from Him is the essence of their plight and the hope of their salvation. But the Jew is also lost, dead in sin, and without God in the world because he is merely the so-called circumcision in the flesh.

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

So, God brings them both, Jew and Gentile, together into one body (v.14-15) and then reconciles them as one to Himself (v.16-18) as He is building a single, corporate entity (v.19-22).

Its Summation in God's Word (v.13)

Were far... brought near... by Jesus' sacrifice. The Gentiles were far off from the Jews. This is not talking about physical geography but rather spiritual reality. The Jew and Gentile were separated by the Old Covenant, the Mosaic or Sinaitic Law. It set a wall around about the Jew and a Gentile could only come in by accepting the Abrahamic Covenant by being circumcised and the Mosaic Covenant by keeping the Sabbath.

Yet now, the blood of Jesus brings them (Jew and Gentile) near to one another. How? Because the New Covenant is in His blood, that is to say, the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus the Messiah (1 Corinthians 11:25-26). Paul writes, "You have become near [aorist, passive indicative]." So it is something finished on our behalf in which we are passive receivers of it. Once again, the initiative is placed squarely in God's hands.

Though I am going to break these next 4 verses into two divisions for the sake of discussion, do not separate them in your mind.

Its Unification of God's People (v.14-15)

The centrality of the person of Christ in grace's work of unification.

What distinguished the Jews from the Gentiles was the Law; what divided the Jews from the Gentiles was the enmity between them as a result of the Law.

Peace - Christ is our peace who makes peace

Unity - One new man out of the old two

Broke down the dividing barrier of the Law and thus the enmity between the two. The objective was to make the two into one new man (entity). The person and work of Christ was designed from the beginning to make this so. The Church as the Body of Christ is the culmination of the work of God.

The Law has been abolished [loosed, dissolved, released from, done away with] (versus Covenant Theology) and the Jew and Gentile are now one entity in the Body of Christ (versus Dispensationalism).

Its Reconciliation of God's People

(v.16-18)

The centrality of the power of the cross in grace's work of reconciliation.

The Work of the Cross (v.16)

Reconciliation by the cross in this one body. All of those together who were to be reconciled to God were brought in to the Body of Christ.

The Preaching of the Cross (v.17)

Peace to those far away (Gentiles) and those near (Jews)

The Effects of the Cross (v.18)

We all have access, access together by the Spirit to the Father.

So there you have it:

God has brought the Jew and Gentile together into one, new entity called His Body.

God did this by:

- Abolishing the Law that separated them;
- Made peace through the death of Christ;
- Indwelling them individually and corporately together.

Access to the Father for both Jew and Gentile is only and forever together, in one body, by the Spirit.

Product - Fitted together by God

(v.19-22)

This paragraph is so important for us to understand. It gives us the grid through which Paul understands the Old Testament. Since Jesus the Messiah has come, died and reconciled us to God in one body giving us access to the Father in the Spirit, then here are the New Covenant implications for all.

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

What in the Old Testament was a physical nation and a physical temple, has now become a spiritual nation (v.19) and a spiritual Temple (v.20-21) and the residence of God (v.22). God taught us what this meant by dwelling in the Temple of a nation. But these were the shadows of heavenly or spiritual realities that, now in this New Covenant Age, are being fully disclosed by the Spirit.

As a Holy Nation

(v.19)

There are two important concepts for us here:

We are all fellow citizens of God's Kingdom with the saints.

We are all God's household.

This is how the New Testament church understood itself. Peter, the Apostle to the Jews, in writing to Gentiles in 1 Peter 2:9-10 makes the same point.

As a Holy Temple

(v.20-21)

The church is also the Temple of God. God is building up living stones now, fitting them together since Pentecost to a grow an age-long, people wide spiritual Temple for spiritual service and worship.

To Be Indwelled by God

(v.22)

God not only indwells each living stone individually, but also indwells the church as a corporate entity. That is true of us gathered here in this location on this day; it is true of all living believers all over the world today; it is true of every believer ever.

This then is the language of the New Covenant and the church. We are God's nation, people, bride, and temple. Not this building; rather these people.

Reflect and Respond

So how do we flesh this out in terms of living?

Have you ever really seen with your spiritual eyes your deadness, depravity, disobedience and doom in God's sight? I don't mean in a disconnected, academic way: in a soul and self-shattering reality?

Does your life now still look an awful lot like the life described in (v.1-2)?

If we have a rich in mercy kind of God, should not Christians also be rich in mercy as well? The exercise of mercy always has sin in view. So let us view the mercies of God for sinners in such a way that we are merciful to repentant sinners. Let us be slow to believe and accept the worst. And when faced with a believer who is repentant of sin, let us be rich in mercy.

Does the way we live reflect our understanding of our position in Christ? Do we live resurrected, ascended lives?

Does it come as a shock to you that salvation is God centered?

Is the grace of God evident in your life as a faith that believes God in an obeying way?

I challenge all of us who hold firmly to sovereign grace, that we might not boast in ourselves but rather magnify the supreme worth of our glorious God.

We must think carefully about erecting new, unbiblical walls that make the church an "us" and "them". I am not talking about doctrine. Truth will always divide. I am talking all sorts of secondary issues by which we distinguish ourselves and divide from others.

We must hold fast to truth in the midst of a generation who has little patience with truth.

We do not worship or serve God as isolated islands. We do so together, as one.

Let us be motivated to holiness by the understanding that God is raising us up together to be a holy temple in the Lord. We are together in the New Covenant what the Tabernacle and Temple were in the Old.

As Paul is going to do in chapter 3, let all our thinking about ministry be governed by these principles.

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary 2*, (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989), p.18.