



## It's All Grace

Ephesians 2:1-10  
Week 3 | Jan 21, 2018

**Summary:** This text is the *locus classicus* on salvation by grace. As explained in the sermon, Paul first lays out our **need of grace**, being as we are “dead in trespasses and sins.” Then he celebrates the **gift of grace** starting with the famed transition in 2:4, “But God.” John Stott calls these the two greatest syllables ever uttered in the English language. *But God*, rich in mercy and lavish in love, made us alive with Christ and saved us by grace. There is nothing we contribute to our salvation. We are passive; we are acted upon. It is just as it was in our physical birth: We were brought into the world by the power of another, and our first act was to cry out in faith. But now, made alive with Christ, we participate with God in a **life of grace**. There are good works for us to do, suited to our nature. Just as Adam and Eve were naturally equipped to fill the earth and subdue it, to work the garden and keep it, we are spiritually equipped to do good works that God prepared for us. These include a renewed strength to fulfill the original cultural mandate of Genesis 1 and 2, along with power to be Christ’s witnesses to the world, fulfilling his great commission.

### Discussion:

1. Read Ephesians 2:1-10. What emotions does this text evoke in you?
2. When you read that you were utterly dead in sin, following “the world, the flesh, and the devil,” do you readily buy in? Or do you have some sense that *I can’t be that bad*? Explain.
3. How do you understand the wrath of God? What would you say to someone who says that a loving God can’t be wrathful, or that he would never send people to hell? How can love and wrath be reconciled? How is God righteous in condemning people for their sins?

In Romans 1:18-32 Paul provides expanded thoughts on sin and wrath and the compounding effects of both in our lives. You may want to draw this text into your discussion.

4. What has been your experience of salvation by grace? Is it just a doctrine or is it more? In what way does this truth not only inform your mind, but touch and shape your heart?
5. One of the chief purposes of our being saved by grace is that we should do good works (Eph. 2:10). What is your perspective on *good works*? Many people struggle with works—whether because of having too many “shoulds” put upon them, or having a works-based religion—what about you?
6. We said in the sermon that salvation is *monergistic*—God’s work alone. But sanctification is more *synergistic*—a cooperative effort between God and us. Do you agree? How are you growing in this season of life? Do you sense God working in you? Are you working with him?

## Thoughts on Loving and Guarding our Doctrine of Grace

There's an ongoing "discussion" [that is, controversy] in theological circles about the nature of salvation by grace. About 30 years ago the question concerned "Lordship Salvation"—which popularly raised the question of how one receives Jesus. Must a person repent of their sins and receive Christ as Savior and Lord? Or can you just receive him as Savior, latching onto grace with hardly a thought about repentance or subsequent obedience?

Folks in the "lordship party" (like me, GL) said that Jesus is in fact both Lord and Savior, so you take him as he is. Jesus came bringing a *kingdom*, after all, so you have to "repent and believe the good news"—transfer allegiance to the King—just as Jesus said in Mark 1:15. But some see this as adding conditions or "works" to justification by faith. They point out that a few verses later Jesus himself dispensed grace when there was no apparent repentance. When the paralytic was lowered through the roof, Jesus said straightaway, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5). *Now that's grace!* they say. *Yeah, cheap grace,* we retort. Do you really think everyone gets saved who just shows up and checks the box?

Today the term "Free Grace Theology" is more in use. It's the same controversy labeled from the other side. The matter hinges on two questions. One: Is repentance—that is, turning from sin to follow Christ—necessary for salvation? And two: Do good works and ongoing trust necessarily follow saving faith?

The Free Grace people answer both questions, "No, not necessarily." The rest of us who, in our view, adhere more closely to historical, biblical Christianity, answer yes to both.

Many members of our church will not know the academic labels or the ins and outs of the controversy—but they will still hold a view. It's almost impossible to be a Christian and not believe something about grace and works. For my part, I urge us to maintain a classic, biblical, Reformed understanding.

The reformers said we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone. Faith is not "work" but its opposite. It is the open admission that I cannot earn salvation. So I open my heart to receive what God freely offers. And my open heart is God's gift too! (Acts 16:14; Ephesians 2:8-9).

Now, at least implicit in saving faith is repentance from sin. One doesn't turn to anything without turning from something else. Turning to [Jesus] is faith, turning from [Sin, Self, My Past] is repentance. You simply can't do one without the other. Repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. Put another way, you cannot bring Jesus into your heart without displacing the other lovers there.

Not that we need to do a thorough "Step 4 Inventory" of all our sins in order to be saved. You can believe and receive in a moment, like a child. It's good, of course, to count the costs of discipleship (Luke 14:28), but people always respond to Jesus with imperfect insight—and work out the implications as they go. Even 50-year Christians still wrestle with surrendering *all* to Jesus' lordship. The fact that they do so is evidence of their salvation. Without the Holy Spirit, they wouldn't care a bit about obedience.

Additionally, the reformers said we are justified by faith alone—but not by a faith that remains alone. It is always accompanied by works. But these good works become second-nature to us, like trees bearing fruit. It's what they do. But, "What good is it, brothers, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?...Faith without works is dead" (James 2:14-17). If there is no growth or fruitfulness, we have no reason to believe a person's faith is real. But so it goes sometimes. Jesus told a parable in which the seed of the gospel fell on shallow and thorny soils. It sprung up quickly and died out just as fast. Such people are not saved. But we, with faith in Jesus, continue to trust and obey.

