

A Series on Ephesians
“Grace to Faith to Work” (Ephesians 2:1-10)
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I. Introduction

Good morning! Welcome to New City!

We are in the middle of a series on the Letter to Ephesians.

Let's read Ephesians 2:1-10.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,² 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.³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature^a and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,⁷ 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.⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

This passage tells that that there was a momentous and cataclysmic change when a person becomes a Christian. It is not just a degree of change in one's life. It is a dramatic change.

You go from being dead in your sins to being alive with Christ. Death to life. You are dead in the sense that you are not even aware of the reality of God in your life. And being alive with Christ means your senses have come alive. You see the reality of God and the Kingdom of God. That's a pretty dramatic change.

You go from bondage (where we know what the right thing to do is but we don't do it—even after we swear to do it, we fail to do it, and end up doing exactly what we don't want to do)—that's slavery and bondage. But, in Christ, he has seated us with him in the heavenly realms (meaning we are freed and have power and authority over the things that bind us).

^a Or *our flesh*

You go from being a subject to God's wrath because of our sins to being a recipient of God's incomparably riches of His grace.

II. Now, how does this happen?

Verses 1-3 tells us what we were like before we were Christians, and verses 4-7 tells us what happened after we became a Christian. And verses 8-10 tells us how we become a Christian—how we move from one to the other. How do you go from our condition in verses 1-3 to the power of verses 4-7?

The answer is: You go from grace and that leads to faith and that leads to work.

A. First, grace

Verses 8-9 say: **“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.”**

Grace means a favor given to someone who deserves the opposite. So, the opposite of grace is work. A person who works deserves his wages. So, if he gets paid, that's not grace, that's his wages.

Grace, when it is offered, it is costly to the giver and transformational to the recipient. It is costly because he didn't have to give it. He does not owe it. He can be just and fair without giving it. He gives it anyway. The recipient, however, did not deserve it, and if that person knows that he didn't deserve it, it is powerful and transformation. It has the power to break through hard callous hearts. It has the power to dramatically change people.

In Victor Hugo's *Les Miserable*, Jean Valjean, is put into prison for 19 years for stealing a loaf of bread. By the time he gets out, he is bitter, hardened criminal. In a way, his life is in bondage to bitterness and hate. When he was struggling without a place to go because no one wanted to have anything to do with a criminal, a very kind bishop invites him to stay at his home. At night, he decides to steal the silverware from the bishop's house and run away. But, he is captured by the police who are suspicious that a homeless person is carrying so many valuables. The police brings Valjean to the bishop and asks whether the Valjean stole the silverware. The response of the bishop is shocking and powerful. He could have said, yes, and Valjean ends up in jail and

hardening his heart even more. But, the bishop said, so good to see you, why did you leave without saying goodbye and why did you forget to take the candlestands and gives him the silver candlestands. Valjean is literally flabbergasted; he is shocked. After the police leaves, he just breaks down into tears. The bishop demonstrated grace—he gave him a favor that Valjean didn't deserve. And it was costly. But, it was transformative. His experience of grace changes the direction of his life forever. Grace softens the heart. Grace shocks the heart, breaks the callousness and the bitterness. It leads him to say, [“My soul now belongs to God.”](#) Real grace when it is received is transformative.

Grace is not: “be good, follow the footsteps of Jesus, and he will bless you.” This is not the offer. This is not grace. If you think that's what Christianity is, you are not a Christian. If this is what you believe in, you will continue to keep an air of superiority or fall into despair. It will not change you. You will not lose control of your life. This is not how you move from death to life, from bondage to authority, from condemnation to splendor.

It is through grace you have been saved. And not works--meaning by reforming ourselves and becoming a good person. You know why we are saved by grace and not works?

In verses 8-9, after it says we are saved by grace ... and not by works, WHY?? “so that no one can boast.” If you are saved by grace, if you didn't deserve it, then you can't boast about it. You can't look down on people who are not Christians. You are not any better than them. What you have in God is because of his grace and not your good efforts or work. No one can boast.

Everyone has a tendency to want to be the top dog. We want to feel like we are better than other people because it validates us. So, we have a tendency to create a pecking order. That's where racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, judgmentalism, holier-than-thouism come from. And people do this with religion. They get off of being more spiritual than others. Wasn't that the problem of the religious leaders at the time of Jesus? But, the Bible here says that because we are saved by grace and not by works, there is no ground for boasting. There is no ground for judgment. There is no ground for looking down at other people. We are all just recipients of God's grace.

B. This Grace leads to Faith.

We receive the grace through faith. The faith does not come first. It is the grace that comes first. Faith is a response to God's grace. Grace is like throwing a lifesaver to someone who just tried to drown you, but faith is grabbing hold of the lifesaver. Is it the act of throwing of the lifesaver that saved you or the grabbing hold of the lifesaver that saved you? Yes. It is both. Grace works through faith. All of these things are a gift.

But, grace comes first. Grace is a kiss that wakes you up from a death sleep. Have you ever kissed someone who was sleeping and he or she wakes up and grabs you and hugs you. I think the fairytale of "Sleeping Beauty" is a good illustration of the relationship between grace and faith (yes, I do have little girls in my family in case you're wondering). Remember, Princess Aurora was in a death sleep, but the princess comes and kisses her and she wakes up and embraces him. The Bible says every human soul is in a death sleep—you are incapable to bring yourself to consciousness. And a prince comes and kisses you. Then, that death sleep is broken. Grace awakens faith and faith immediately grabs grace on the neck. Faith is awakening and becoming conscious of the one who kissed you.

In the great parable of the prodigal son (a story that Jesus told), the younger son demands his inheritance even before the father is dead. The father gives it to him and he goes out to a far away land and squanders all of the money on prostitutes and parties. He has nothing left. He decides to go back to the father's house to beg him to let him be a servant. But, father sees the son far off and runs and kisses him before a word of faith came out of his mouth. Jesus was telling us that the father kisses you before you demonstrate faith. This is the relationship between grace and faith. God comes and kisses, you awake, and faith grabs grace. Faith is a response to grace.

So, faith is not deciding to follow the moral teachings of Jesus. Faith is not deciding to live a better life, deciding to quit drugs, deciding to do better. That's not faith. If you thought that was the saving faith, you completely misunderstood the Bible. And it's true that so many churches and so many people in this world have failed to deliver the real gospel. The real gospel is not moralism. I think there is such a misunderstanding of this in the world right now. Faith is responding to God's grace, responding to his kiss, his love, and grabbing a hold of him.

Here's another illustration of faith: I've written out a check here. It's written on the Bank of Heaven.

- Instead of writing out a sum of money, it says: "from death to life, from bondage to freedom, from condemnation to embrace of God."
- All the riches of heaven on the dollar amount. None of us deserves this check. There is no way we can ever work enough for it.
- It is signed by the Lord Jesus Christ because He's the one who made it possible, the one who paid the price.
- And the date is today's date because in a sense it's today that He makes this offer to every one of us.
- I've left the name blank so that you can fill in your name. Because it's to each one of you that God makes this offer, today.
- And you and I have a choice. We can **reject it and say, "No thanks.** I don't want it. I'd rather pay the penalty myself if there is a penalty to pay."
- Or we can **accept it, believe it,** and say, "Thank you. Thank you that you died for me. I put my trust in you. I receive the gift that you offer." That is faith. The act of receiving it.

C. But, it does not end there. We don't just accept the grace and just stop. Faith leads to Work.

If you go back to verse 8-9, after he says it is by grace you have been saved through faith, not work so that no one can boast, he continues in **verse 10: "for we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."**

This verse means that two things always happen when you become a Christian: You become God's workmanship and you do good work. You become and you do.

First, being comes before doing. Of course what we do affects what we are, but essentially, Christianity teaches that what we are determines what we do. If you are going to love, you need a loving heart. You need a new identity first, then you do good works. If you try to do good works without first having the identity, you will really mess

things up. If you do a lot of good works, you will feel superior to other people. Or you don't do it.

Here, it says through grace and faith, God comes into your life and you become God's workmanship! Workmanship is this word "*poiema*" where we get our work poem. It means you are a work of art. Have you ever seen a masterpiece slashed and defaced? The original beauty of makes the slashing worse. The greatness of the thing slashed determines the horror. Think about slashing the Mona Lisa vs slashing a car in a junkyard. The Bible tells us that you and I are his masterpiece. Do you know what this means? Art is beautiful, valuable, and an expression of inner being of the artist. That's who you are. He is the great painter, sculptor and you are his masterpiece. I love what C.S. Lewis said: "You wanted a loving God. Well you have one. But not a senile old benevolence that drowsily wishes you all to be happy in your own way. But rather we have a love which is a consuming fire, the love that created the world, as persistent, as venerable, as exacting, as an artist's love for his work." And how does an artist approach his art: she sweats over it, she honor it, she gives a part of herself into it. You have to soak in this knowledge that you are His artwork in progress.

If God is the sculptor, God may be coming with a very big chisel. You insist I have to have it. The word of God and the providence of God is his chisel. "I am bring the beauty out." He is turning you into something beautiful but in the process, a work of art can be pretty ugly.

That's who you are! With that foundation, now you are ready to do good works that God prepared in advanced for you to do.

Now, what is that work?

It is the work of grace. That's why your response in faith to God's grace is a critical foundation for the good work that he is calling us to do.

(1) First, that work of grace has to do with sharing the good news of this grace with people. There are people only you can reach. This news of grace is called the gospel, and everyone needs to hear it and understand it. God is calling us to be a missional community that shares the good news. This is the evangelical mandate.

(2) Second, the work of grace has to do with the new standard that Jesus put forth for us to live by. He taught us to live by grace, rather than even by the principles of law and justice. Look at the Sermon on the Mount.

- Matthew 5:38-41: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ [the principles of law and justice—it’s fair] But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him **two miles.**” [this is the principle of grace—giving to people not what they deserve but even more]
 - Note: Martin Luther King Jr. got the non-violent direct action principle from here. It is the principle of grace. It’s not about passively taking it and being a doormat; it’s about responding directly in grace. It might be the strongest thing that you do.
- Matthew 5:43-44: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemies.’ [here’s the principle of law and justice—it’s fair to do this] But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.**” [here’s the principle of grace—loving your enemies and those who persecute you]
- How about the story of the prodigal son? That story is a contrast between the attitude of the older brother on the one hand [who wants fairness and justice—his little brother should get what he deserved for blowing the family estate], and the attitude of his father on the other hand [who demonstrated grace—he waited for day and night for him, ran to him, hugged him, kissed him, killed to fatted cow to celebrate his return, and restored all the rights of a son; the father didn’t give him what he deserved].
- How about the parable of the workers who got paid equally in Matthew 20:1-16? This landowner went out to hire people at 6 am to work on his vineyard and promised them 1 denarius each. He went and hired more people to work at various hours of the day even at 5 pm. Then, he paid everyone 1 denarius. People who started at 6 am complained. They thought it was unfair. [Here is

the principle of law—getting what you deserve] But, the landowner demonstrated grace by paying equally [He gave the late workers more than they deserved]

- He reached out to and fellowshiped with tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners (Luke 5:27)
- He ministered to Gentiles--outsiders (Luke 5:17)
- He spent the entire day on a boat to go across the lake to free a gentile person possessed by demons in Gerasenes, and immediately after the healing he came back and nearly got shipwrecked (Luke 8:26-38)
- We can go on and on.

Here's the bottom line: the movement from law to grace is at the center of the life of Jesus, teachings of Jesus, and at cross of Jesus: It was the reason he came to this world and the reason he died for us.

- I've often wondered how we are to suppose to live by the ethics of grace that Jesus taught us to live by in the Sermon on the Mount. How are we supposed to love our enemies or turn the other cheek? I believe that the only way to do so is to fully immerse ourselves in the grace of God, desperately hungry for the grace of God, and in the relationship that comes from this grace, and as we do so, emulate the giver of grace
 - Luke 6:36: after commanding us to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us (in other words, show grace), Jesus says: **“Be merciful, just as your father is merciful.” Just as, Just as** your father is merciful.
 - “Not justice, but just as”—meaning it is not about justice—giving them what they deserve, but showing grace “just as” God showed grace towards us.
 - You have to remember, you can't do this unless you first experience God's grace, and you know what's the most amazing thing about grace is? God give us grace even when we are not repentant. There is no condition whatsoever! But, when we realize I our sins, his grace overwhelms us.

- So, how do we actually do it? Instead of explaining this more, let me try to paint it

- What would living by grace look like for this woman?

Apply to our lives.

- When someone peevs us, we respond with gentleness
- When our friends betray and disappoint us, we continue to be loyal to them
- When our parents exasperate us, we obey them
- When our spouses hurt us, we try to respond with kindness
- When an airline agent curses us, we respond with gentleness
- When someone is trying to stab our back at work, we don't respond in kind
- When someone really blows it, we respond with understanding, not judgment
- imagine if you forgave your father when he didn't deserve it? Imagine if you extended
- mercy to your ex-spouse not because he or she was deserving but simply
- because you've been a recipient of such amazing grace? What would our
- community look like when we become extension of God's grace in the most
- tangible way?..