

Title: Living in Light of God's Grace

Text: Ephesians 2:1-10

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on 3/4/2007

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One of the things that has really blessed me in recent years is reading church history and especially biographies to see how God has used His truth to work through real people in the past. One story that I first heard a number of years ago in a sermon on the very text we'll be looking at today, has always impacted me in relation to the truth we'll be considering today, and by way of introduction I want to invite you back with me briefly to the year 1725 where a boy was born to a godly young mother and a very ungodly father (*Below is adopted from messages by Chuck Swindoll, John Piper, and Iain Murray*).

- For the first few years of his life, his mother taught him the catechism and did her best to bring him up in the fear and training of the Lord. But this mother, who was the only godly influence in his life passed away when he was just six years old.
- The boy dropped out of school after a few years, determined he was going to live his life to the full, sin to the max, threw off every restraint, indulged every desire of the flesh, walked fully in the course of this world, and at this time he was only 10 years old.
- The father couldn't handle the lad, so he shipped him off to a strict military school. The military school couldn't handle him either; the military isn't exactly known for its holiness but even they saw him as one of the worst. He was a constant rebel, the discipline and authority didn't break him, it couldn't reform his heart.
- He deserted the military only to be captured like a common criminal and publicly humiliated, stripped, and beaten.
- He would later flee from there to go to Africa, to get as far away as he possibly could from his life. Looking back on that later he would write that he tried to commit suicide many times but what kept him alive was his lust, rage, and hatred.
- He committed his heart to the devil, made a pact to live for him while he was a teenager. In his own words he would describe himself as a wretch, an infidel, a libertine. Through a series of events he ended up with a Portugese slave trader who had a very mean wife. This woman took her frustrations out on him and would beat this young man. She would force him to eat on the floor like a dog and if he refused, she would whip him like an animal.
- He fled from there and made his way to another area where he built a fire and in so doing a boat came by that was another slave-trading ship that brought him aboard and gave him an opportunity to be apart of the business. Slave traders and sailors in those days were really the dregs of society, they were the lowest of the low, the outwardly most depraved group of people, but even this crew thought he was a wretched human being.
- No one could stand him and when he caused trouble they would beat him up and throw him down below. One time after he got the whole crew drunk they threw him overboard, and when they realized he couldn't swim, rather than letting him die the captain actually harpooned him right in his side and dragged him back on board, and till the day he died he had a scar the size of his fist in his side.
- This is all a true story. Iain Murray, a biographer, quotes a secular writer who said: "This story enshrines one of the most fantastic fairytales that was ever a true story of a human being"

- He almost died many times and just when you think it couldn't possibly get any worse, he got demoted down below on the boat where he had to go down and work with the pumps. He ended up being basically the servant of the black slaves, he was the lowest of the low, a slave to slaves, humiliation upon humiliation, insult upon injury.
- There finally was a storm at sea where this man was certain he was going to die. He was working feverishly under the ship and would later write that at that time he feared God for the first time in his life, and he began to think back on some of the things his mother had taught him. It was dark down below, but there was a crack in some of the beams overhead where he saw a glimmer of light and as he remembered some of the verses he'd been taught as a kid, he cried out to God begging him for his grace. He believed in Christ that very hour.
- God saved this man and transformed him. He would later give up his life as sailor and slave trader and became a force for the abolition of slavery in Britain. He became one of the most tender and loved pastors in his area, and was personal friend to Whitefield, Wesley, missionaries like William Carey, and many notable Christians of his day. Every place he spoke was standing room only to hear the incredible testimony of sovereign grace in his life and the power of the gospel. One of the sermons he preached later in his life relates to our message today, and he wrote a song to accompany this message which was his spiritual autobiography:

*Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me
I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see
Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed
Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come*

His name was John Newton (I'm told there is a movie out now called "Amazing Grace" about Wilberforce and his relation with Newton)

The point of me telling this story is not just how amazing it is that God would save someone like him who was a wretch in the world's eyes, but I want us all to be amazed that God would save people like *us*. We may not seem as hopeless and depraved, but all humanity is hopeless and depraved sinners in the eyes of God.

My Goal today: I want to plead with you to be more amazed by God's grace not just in people like John Newton but in saving people like us ... so that we will glorify God by our humility, praise, and obedience.

I. OUR NEED FOR GRACE, v. 1-3

I remember one time my family was together singing carols and hymns one holiday, and after singing that famous hymn by John Newton, one of our guests said, "That's a nice song, but I really don't like the part 'that saved a wretch like me' – I don't really consider myself a wretch." And we tried to explain to her that that's the whole point of the song, that's WHY grace is amazing. In fact if we don't believe we're ALL wretches (desperate sinful people) we can't be saved and experience the truths of that song.

Notice with me first the **SPIRITUAL DEATH, v. 1** – “*and you were dead in your trespasses and sins*”

The way this sentence begins in the original is very unusual and emphatic – and it draws a lot of attention to the state of death, using comprehensive and plural terms for sin. DEAD -> Not dead physically – v. 2 says we are walking around and v. 3 says we *live* according to our lusts.

- When it comes to the flesh and our sinful choices, we’re very much alive and active.
- But we’re dead *spiritually* – no positive response to spiritual things, no movement to God, not doing good or seeking God by God’s definition, to use the language of Romans

¹⁰ as it is written, “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; ¹¹ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ¹² ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.” (Rom. 3:10-12)

In Ephesians 2, Paul uses a present tense verb to emphasize this was a continual state of deadness, which is the state of every human – he says “you all” in v. 1 and then “we all” in v. 3 – the language is universal

Some people try and downplay this metaphor, and say man is not really spiritually dead, “he’s only *mostly* dead.” Some theologians will object that Paul doesn’t really mean we’re as dead spiritually as people are dead physically, what Paul really means is just that sin is serious, it’s a struggle, it’s only death in the sense of separation, “the dead can still reach out.”

BUT READ 1:19-20, then 2:1 “*And you were dead*” -> The word and context is clear: just 3 verses earlier in Ephesians 1:20 Paul talks about Christ being resurrected from literal death, and then look at chapter 2, verse 5 “even when *we were dead* in our transgressions, He [God] ***made us alive*** together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and ***raised us up*** with [Christ]” – this is all about God’s great power toward us (1:19)

In 2:5, salvation by grace is sandwiched between 2 phrases: “God made us alive ... and raised us up” – both of which make explicit this is a state of spiritual death as real as physical death. The analogy and comparison is unmistakable, the physical resurrection of Christ is just as dependent on God as a spiritual resurrection of someone who is dead in their sins. Being saved by grace requires a resurrection no less dramatic than a physical one

Just in case someone still thinks verse 1 leaves a little hope for us, look down at the verse 12 “you were at that time separate from Christ [LOOK AT END OF V.] *having no hope and without God in the world.*” Any human being without God and Christ is in a hopeless helpless state, spiritually dead

The reason grace is amazing is not just sin in general, it’s how desperate our sinful condition is. The Bible describes mankind in a number of similar and un-flattering ways:

- people being lost and we need someone to find us
- we are ALL sheep going astray to our own ways (that’s where our free will gets us, the wrong way)

- Scripture describes us as being in darkness and we need the light
- or it talks about how we are in bondage and need someone else to set us free
- or we are blind and need a miracle of being given sight
- it says we are slaves needing someone else to pay the ransom price to set us free
- we need someone else to adopt us, can't make ourselves born again.
- Every one of those is a pride-demolishing image.
- But Ephesians 2:1 has arguably the most graphic picture of mankind – we are dead spiritually, no response, no movement, can't raise ourselves.

2nd reason why Grace is amazing, not just spiritual death but SINFUL DEEDS, v. 2 – Not only is there nothing we can do in the flesh to please God, but the things that we *do* in the flesh are **unpleasing**: *“trespasses and sins in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience”*

Walking according to the world is the biblical way to describe our conduct, our deeds, in fact some translations have “conducted yourselves” instead of the word “walked.” This is the image of dead man walking, a spiritual zombie.

Those types of movies scare us, especially as kids, but the truth of this passage is even more frightening – the fact that billions of spiritually dead people are walking around on this planet every day (perhaps some in this church this morning), who are active physically and outwardly, but are inwardly and spiritually decaying. Like the Pharisees who Jesus said look like white-washed tombs, outwardly putting up a beautiful front, but on the inside is death and what is putrid and offensive to God. MacArthur calls these the “*ungrateful dead*”

Look at the end of the verse: SONS OF DISOBEDIENCE - “Sons of” is a Hebrew way of saying what their characteristic is, what they’re known by in very essence; disobedience is what characterizes us. This disobedience includes the idea of “unwillingness to be persuaded”

This is very bad news: We are dead spiritually to God, even if we could keep the whole law and just stumble in one point (none of us could even get that close, but even if we did) we would still be guilty according to James. The verb tense Paul uses here in Ephesians emphasizes that we constantly walk in transgressions and sins (falling short – includes what we fail to do), we are bad enough ourselves but we also have the course of this world directing us, and to make things worse, the forces of the demonic world are influencing us too. But it gets worse ...

Not only spiritual death, and sinful deeds, but SINFUL DESIRES

³ *Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind,*

Even if we could control our outward actions (which none of us can perfectly), God can see our heart. One teacher has said that the doctrine of depravity is the easiest doctrine to prove. The evidence is all around us (your kids, news, people, etc.) but even more, the evidence is inside us. If we’re honest we don’t need to point to others to demonstrate depravity, the strongest evidence to me personally is in my own heart. It would be bad enough that our outward deeds are constantly sinful, but our internal desires are even worse.

Some people wonder how it can be fair that we are born sinful but still held responsible – we do inherit guilt from Adam but part of the answer is that we’re also doing exactly what we want in sin. Humans *love* their sin with the strongest love possible – John 3:19 uses the word *agape* to talk about how much unbelievers love the darkness and their evil deeds and don’t want to come to the light.

Notice Eph. 2:3 says “lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind” – notice that the source of these desires, what produces them, is us – what’s inside, not anything outside the person. James 1 says “each one is tempted and carried away by his *OWN LUST*.” Many in the world think man sins because of his environment, but the Bible teaches man sins because he is a sinner at heart. The end of Ephesians 2:3 says this is what we are by nature.

Someone may ask “Don’t we have a choice?” Certainly humans make choices all the time, but the problem is our will is not as free as some think because we are not basically good or even morally neutral, we’re fallen sinful people – we have a choice but Romans 3 says all make the wrong choice and don’t seek God when it comes to salvation, and would continue to reject Christ if left ourselves, that’s how stubborn and rebellious we are and how much we love our sin and ourselves. There might be a lot of other things we can choose freely, but only within our nature – we can’t change our nature and heart on our own by sheer willpower.

Here’s how Jeremiah said it: “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.” (Jer. 13:23). The impossibility of change is not an intellectual inability, it’s a moral unwillingness and rebellion.

Many “religious” people believe	But the Bible says
Man is not perfect, but is basically good	Man is evil, desperately wicked and corrupt
Man is struggling in sin, needs renovation	Man is dead in sin, needs resurrection
Salvation involves man’s work or part	Salvation is a work of God alone
Man is a victim of environment / circumstances, not his fault	Man is a villain, responsible for his sin
Man is simply deprived	Man is totally depraved

TOTAL DEPRAVITY

Does not mean we are:

- a) as bad as we could be
- b) as bad as the next guy
- c) unable to do any human good, compared to each other

When Romans 3 says there’s no one who does good, it’s not talking about **man’s** definition of human good or charity, but by God’s definition fallen men don’t do any true spiritual good with proper motive to glorify God. Depravity is from God’s perspective who sees our best works as filthy rags according to Isaiah 64:6 and knows the heart of man is deceitful and incurably wicked.

Total Depravity means that sin radically infects and affects the whole person, including not just his actions, but more importantly his mind, heart, and *will*. It is both extensive and intensive so that man cannot do anything to save himself or please God, and left to himself, man doesn't even want to be saved on GOD's terms.

The Westminster Confession of Faith says it this way: "Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to *any spiritual good accompanying salvation*: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and *dead in sin*, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto."

My former pastor Phil Johnson taught a message a few years ago on our fallen nature from Eph 2:1-10 which he titled "We're fallen and we can't get up"

Paul tells it like it is – the true state of man – and it's an ugly picture and couldn't possibly be any worse. No superficial change will do, nothing man can do will solve the problem. Notice verse 4 doesn't say "But man ..." -> **BUT GOD (read v. 4-5)**

II. THE NATURE OF GRACE, v. 4-9

The nature of saving grace, sovereign grace is that even when we were dead, God made us alive. The word "grace" is repeated in v. 5, 7, and 8 – salvation is all of grace.

We use the word "grace" often, but I wonder if sometimes we become so familiar with the word that we're no longer amazed by it. The reason I spent so much time on the first point of sin is because I'm afraid we don't really grasp the seriousness and gravity of sin, and neither do we appreciate the enormity, the immensity, the extravagant and staggering nature of grace. And our prayer life, our humility, our worship, suffers as a result.

If you've been a Christian long you know "grace" by definition is something we cannot earn, do not deserve, and cannot merit or pay for. It's our only hope for salvation.

Many people do realize the seriousness of sin, but they come up with the wrong response: "I guess I just need to try harder and be a better person, and really buckle down and get after it." The problem is that if you are trusting at all in your own efforts as helping you get to heaven, you're not saved. It is by grace *alone*

The verb "to be saved" in Greek is consistently in the passive voice, which shows it's not our doing, not something we contribute to – God is the subject doing all the saving.

"By" literally means "because of grace" or "on the basis / grounds of grace," it's the reason, the instrument – what really saves them. Titus 3:5, 2 Tim 1:9, etc.

A lot of Christians think that man makes the first move in salvation, first we exercise faith and *then* grace kicks in and God works in our heart, regenerates us, etc. But notice the word order: Grace first - The point of context is not that we believe and then God shows us grace, it's that even when we were dead (doing nothing spiritually good, no response, no movement toward God

of our own), God made us alive, gives grace and then by and through faith because of this new life we're given we continually trust Christ instead of ourselves and our own efforts.

*** We do not get resurrected because we respond, we respond BECAUSE we are resurrected!*

It's not that God has already done all He can do and is sitting back hoping that we'll make the *first* move – the moves we make are away from God, so HE must initiate, interrupt, intervene, with invincible or effectual grace that makes Himself irresistible and desirable. Grace precedes faith, not the other way around.

When salvation takes place, it is because God's grace is now irresistible to the sinner who used to resist it. When God wanted to save Saul of Tarsus, He could and did. God is able to conquer and rescue the most stubborn and sinful heart (praise God for that!). Not only can God initiate, He *must* if any will ever be saved

John Newton believed this wholeheartedly: "I once was lost but now am found (God found me – He was the seeker), was blind but now I see (He gave me sight)." I John 4:19 says "We love Him because He first loved us."

And so it goes – the fact that God plans this out and works it out doesn't make us robots – rather He resurrects us, gives us a new heart (Ezekiel 36), and then becomes so beautiful to us that we are now *willing to believe*, and we can't help but choose Him and love Him because He is simply irresistible to our regenerated hearts. There's no force or coercion, it's a persuading, wooing, heart-changing miracle. *THIS IS WHY GRACE IS AMAZING.*

It is also true that man is responsible, and that he must believe to be saved, and we affirm this equally because Scripture is equally clear on this point. Salvation is by grace *through* faith

At this point we need to be clear in distinguishing the true gospel. Many cults will say they believe in salvation by grace through faith. Catholics will say this, I've heard even some Mormons are now saying this. Everybody believes grace and faith is necessary – but the Bible teaches that grace through faith in Christ is *sufficient* for salvation. That's why the Reformers found it necessary to draw a line in the sand over 1 word – ALONE (sola).

Luther said that justification by faith alone is the doctrine by which any church, organization, or individual will rise or fall.

One Greek dictionary says it especially means "trust ... reliance upon Christ for salvation [and] constancy in such profession."

Heb 11:1 – often contrasted with what we see (walk by faith not by sight)

Repentance is often tied with saving faith. Mk 1:15 "Repent and believe the gospel"

A theologian named Warfield clarified it's not so much *your* faith in Christ that saves, it's Christ that saves those who have faith. The object of faith is what's critical – Christ ALONE
Faith is the MEANS not the cause of our salvation. It's the channel, what salvation is "through"

The Bible never uses the construction of faith as the cause or basis of salvation.¹

Keep reading “... *and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God*”

Literally “not out of yourselves” it’s not anything from you within you

Here’s an important question, what is not of ourselves, what is the gift of God? Is it grace, faith, or salvation? Faith is the last word Paul used right before, and is the most natural antecedent, but is Paul ONLY talking about faith, or does the gift also include grace and/or the whole statement about salvation?

First, each of these things is described as a gift in other passages:

- Salvation / eternal life – Rom. 6:23

- Grace – Eph. 3:7 “*the gift of God’s grace ... was given to me according to the working of His power*”

- Faith

Phil. 1:29 “For unto you it is given [charis - gift] in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” KJV

Rom 12:3 “God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” (NKJV)

I Cor 12:3 says no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit and v. 9 says that faith (same Greek word) is a gift as much as any other spiritual gift

Gal. 5:22 “Fruit of the spirit is ... faith” KJV – same Greek word as in Eph 2:8

Heb 12:2 “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith”

The word for *Author* is often translated “beginning” and can mean beginner or source, originator, instigator, the responsible one who started something and set in motion – Jesus is the source, the originator, the beginner of our faith and He also is its finisher

So it’s clear that faith is a gift from God from other passages, the question is what Paul is emphasizing here. We don’t need to debate whether grace *or* faith is the gift, the best interpretation is grace AND faith are both part of the gift, it’s the whole process of salvation. This is not just one person’s spin or opinion, it’s based on the rules of Greek grammar. In Ephesians 2:8, when it says “that not of yourselves, it is a gift” it’s neutral in Greek – so many careful scholars believe he’s not just referring to the feminine noun faith or grace, but to the whole process of salvation which includes both grace and faith. It’s all a gift. We don’t earn or deserve or get credit for any of it. You don’t have to be a scholar to get Paul’s point that it has nothing to do with us or what we do.

READ v. 8-9 purpose clause “*so that* no one may boast.” Even our faith is not something we produced or can take credit for, God gets ALL the glory and all the credit for our salvation.

III. THE NECESSARY RESULT OF GRACE (v. 10)

Chapter 1 says 3 times that ever aspect of salvation is to the praise of the glory of His grace. The necessary result as we read v. 10 is the glory of God – and here it is manifested in good works. “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Mt 5:16)

¹ Greek *Dia* + accusative *pistin* – “because of / on account of faith”, cf. Salmond in *Expositor’s Greek Testament*

The Reformation was marked by Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone) as well as:

Grace alone – sola gratia

Faith alone – sola fide

Christ alone – solus Christus

God's glory alone – soli Deo gloria

To put them all together salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone.

In v. 10, “His” appears first in the Greek and is the emphatic word “*His* workmanship we are” – salvation is not of works but we are His *workmanship*, created in Christ Jesus for good works...” Salvation is like anything God does, for His glory. That’s the purpose for everything, and immediately after saying that no man can boast in what he does, Paul talks about how what God has done. I can’t think of a clearer way to say that God gets 100% of the glory and credit when someone is saved. Our part? Glorify Him.

His workmanship – The Greek word is *poiema* which we get our English word poem, which would be the idea that God is a Divine Poet and we are His poetical composition for others to see His work (Plato). In classical times it meant the work of a craftsman, such as the making of a crown. In the Greek OT it is used of a skillful work of art (Ecc 4:4) like a potter with clay (Isa 29:16), what the Psalms 143:5 calls “the work of his hands” or the idea of “handiwork.” This word is only used one other time in the NT, in Romans 1:20 to talk about God’s work in creation. The point is not our greatness but God’s.

“Created in Christ Jesus” – I believe this refers to our re-creation at salvation -> II Cor. 5:17 “If any man *in Christ, new creation ...*” – we’re born again to be holy and walking in good works and newness of life, displaying God’s work. The Greek word *poiema* is only used in the NT once, in Romans 1:20 to talk about God’s work in natural creation which is on display and clearly seen. By comparison, the point in Ephesians is that our spiritual re-creation should be on display and naturally seen if we are really God’s workmanship. Again, the verb is passive meaning the creation is not us doing it, but there is something for us to do in v. 10

We’re not saved *by* works but we are saved *for* works. Or to put it another way, we’re not justified by works but a justified man *does* works – this is the fruit of salvation, but grace through faith is the root. The reformers with all their emphasis on justification by faith were quick to clarify that we’re saved by faith alone but not by the kind of “faith” that is alone, which is the point of the book of James that a so-called “faith” without works is dead and not a saving kind. We’re not saved by faith PLUS works, but through a true faith that works. Grace precedes works and produces works. Salvation is not just a change of eternal destiny, it is the change of a nature, its starting point is regeneration.

The works we do are not to earn salvation, but in gratitude for salvation and from a desire to glorify God.

Eph 2:10b “*That He has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*”

This is the grammatical purpose or goal of this whole thing. Salvation itself is not the end or ultimate, it's just the beginning – the end result and design is that we would as trophies of God's grace, witnesses to the grace and miracle in our life in the way we live and the good deeds that we do. *“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”* This is why I think Soli Deo Gloria fits perfectly with this passage – God is glorified in salvation, but He also deserves to be glorified in our sanctification and increasing godliness.

Jonathan Edwards wrote: “All true grace in the heart tends to holy practice in the life” (*Charity and its fruits*).

Application:

Extending Grace to Others

Newton: “A company of travellers fall into a pit: one of them gets a passenger to draw him out. Now he should not be angry with the rest for falling in; nor because they are not yet out, as he is. He did not pull himself out: instead, therefore, of reproaching them, he should shew them pity ... A man, truly illuminated, will no more despise others, then Bartimeus [the blind man in the gospels], after his own eyes were opened, would take a stick, and beat every blind man he met.”

Humility (v. 9 – that no one can boast)

This truth should demolish our pride as if it's a matchbox car being flattened by the steamroller of God's sovereignty.

If it weren't for the sovereign and saving grace of God, we would be just as bad as anybody on the planet.
“There but the grace of God go I.”

You may have questions about some of what I've said and how man's responsibility and God's sovereignty intersect, but the hardest theological question on any of our minds should continually be “why in the world would God choose to save me of all people?!!” BE AMAZED BY GRACE!

Grace is not just a thing of the past or salvation only. It is something we depend on every day, sustains us in the present, and it's important to trust in future grace that God will give us whatever we need when we need it.

“tis grace hath brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home”

Do you think of grace constantly as you live your day as something to rely on, or do you rely on your own strength and efforts? Are you trusting that God's grace will sustain you when you're tired, when you don't feel like doing what's right, when your kids need direction and correction, when your coworker or friend or family member offended you?

If you're not a Christian ... today is the day to trust in God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. We would love to help you if that's your desire.

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