

**Created By Grace  
Ephesians 2**

Brothers and sisters, it happened that on one particularly cold and snowy winter Sunday morning a wife was trying to persuade her husband to get out of bed and go to church.

“But I don’t want to!” he sulked. “Why not?” she persisted.

“Because its cold and snowy and I don’t feel like driving... and I don’t enjoy the worship leader who is supposed to play this morning... and I don’t like the sermon series for this month... and the coffee is terrible... I don’t have any friends there – the people don’t like me very much and to be honest I don’t think I like them either! Give me one good reason why I should go to church this morning!”

“Because” His wife reminded him “YOU are their pastor!”

So, brothers and sisters - why did you come to church this morning?

Was it because, like me as the pastor, you have to be here, because you’re on worship team or ushering or serving in some way this morning?

Was it out of habit or obligation or duty? Going to church is what Christians do.

Was it because you had a free Sunday – so you thought “hey I’m not doing anything else, I can go to church this morning!”

Was it because you are looking for something or you get something from being here? Community, a sense of belonging, inspiration...

And how did you come to church this morning? And I don’t mean which mode of transportation did you use or which of your vehicles you drove – I mean how was it with your soul as you came to church?

Were you reluctant to come, were you eager to come, were you distracted or burdened from a busy week or feeling a bit

frazzled from hectic morning? Were you rushing here to make it in time for the sermon?

Now brothers and sisters, these questions I ask you this morning are less about having you identify if you came for the right reasons and with the right attitude and more about helping us uncover how we feel and think about church.

Because how we generally think and feel about something is what we really believe about it, and what we really believe about something determines how we respond to it and interact with it – as the old saying goes “actions speak louder than words.”

And, brothers and sisters, you may not realize this but what we really believe about the church, as revealed by our actions, also reveals what we believe about Jesus and salvation – and I think most of us know that it’s pretty important to get things like “Jesus and salvation” correct.

Now last week in our study of Ephesians we learned it is a cyclical letter which Paul had sent out to many different churches - so that in his calling as Apostle to the Gentiles he could give new believers and church members a personal Christianity 101 introductory primer.

And we discovered Paul’s introductory focus in chapter 1 by asking the question “what is God doing?” That allowed us to see that **God** had been working in the lives of these new believers in specific ways, that Paul explains, to bring about HIS plan and HIS idea to make them holy and blameless.

This was the first thing Paul wanted to teach us as he begins this “Intro to Christianity” it is all about God.

Now today as we move on to chapter 2 we should notice that in vs. 5 and 8 Paul repeats the phrase “*it is by grace that you have been saved!*” - and the fact that he repeats this phrase word for word identifies it as the main point of this chapter and everything else plays a supporting and explanatory role for this phrase.

Because grace is one of those words that can say everything and nothing at the same time right? What does it mean that we have been saved by grace?

In ordinary everyday usage grace means things like *“the simple elegance or refinement of movement”* or *“courteous goodwill”* or *“a prayer of thanks before a meal.”*

Certainly as Christians we don’t think that we are saved by graceful movements or a prayer before we eat.

Saying that we are saved by God’s courteous goodwill definitely gets us closer but what does that actually look like and what does it mean?

You may have heard other explanations about Grace which attempt to help explain this – I’ve often used grace as an acronym; God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense – this gets a bit more detailed, but what are God’s riches?? Right??

Or maybe you’ve heard this explanation; that Justice is getting what we deserve, mercy is not getting what we deserve, and grace is getting something really good that we don’t deserve.

Again – it’s a bit more helpful but without a specific context or an example of this it’s left up to our subjectivity about what we deserve or don’t deserve – especially in relation to God and salvation right?

So, that’s why Paul has an entire chapter in this letter to explain the Grace that saves us, and there are five defining aspects of saving Grace that help us to grasp its specifics.

So the first is that Grace has a past.

What I mean by this is that anyone who has experienced saving grace used to be different from what they are now.

Paul says in vs. 2 and 3 that we used to follow the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, and that we

used to gratify the cravings of our sinful nature and follow its desires and thoughts.

So what this means is that before we encountered saving Grace our sinful nature controlled us and we would have been characterized by one or more of the seven deadly sins. The various forms of pride, or lust, or greed, or envy, anger, gluttony, or sloth, would have been evident in our actions, our words and our thoughts.

Looking back from where you are now maybe you can see how this used to characterized the way you were.

And when we followed the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air - it means that we used to be under the spiritual authority and influence of the devil and his kingdom.

And certainly for some people this means they are into the occult and outright Satanism, but for the vast majority of us it simply means that we are powerless against the devil's influence and we rebel against God by determining what is

right or wrong for ourselves, just as Eve and Adam did when Satan convinced them to eat from the tree in the garden.

Brothers and sisters the way we used to be, the ways in which the devil influenced us, the ways in which we lived our lives is the evidence that we were spiritually dead - and had it not been for grace, we would have stayed that way.

And notice that Paul includes himself in this. He says at the beginning of verse 3 "*All of us.*"

And this is important because Paul grew up as one of God's people – and yet he considers himself to have been under the sway of the devil, characterized by sin, and spiritually dead until he encountered Grace.

So even if we have grown up in the church and lived a good moral life... we still need Grace because without Grace we are dead – powerless – and unable to re-connect to God as the source of life. So grace has a past – we all used to be different from how we are now.

The second aspect is that Grace requires wrath.

And this is tough for us to hear, so I want to try to present this as gently and graciously as possible, and that means acknowledging that the sinful and broken state of our world and our lives has caused us experience anger as something capricious, destructive, painful and harmful and we think of it as the opposite of love.

So it is difficult for us to hear Paul say in vs. 3 that in our prior state “*we were deserving of wrath.*” We automatically think “how can God love us – and yet be angry with us and his wrath be against us, I can’t love a God that is angry with me.”

Brothers and sisters, the truth is that God’s anger is not affected by sin like human anger is – so God’s anger is not capricious, it is not a blind rage that lashes out indiscriminately, it is not unmerited punishment, it is not like our human anger – and it is not the opposite of His love.

Friends, God’s love and his anger both come from His Holiness- and when we begin to grasp just how awesome and amazing God is as the creator of all things, how far beyond comprehension God is because he has no beginning and no end, how good and true and perfect God is... then we begin to understand that He cannot tolerate the rebellion and disobedience of His creatures.

So the point is brothers and sisters, that if God was not angry about the state of sin and evil in His creation, and if the sin and evil in the world did not rightly require God to punish wrong doing and bring about justice as we deserve it, then grace would not be grace.

Grace is only grace when the judgement and consequences we deserve are taken away – and we receive something good from God in their place. Grace requires God’s wrath or it is no longer grace.

Now the third aspect is that Grace puts us IN Christ.

Paul says in vs. 6 that God has raised us up IN Christ and seated us with Him in the Heavenly realms.

This is the mechanics of how Grace takes away the judgement and consequences that we deserve and give us something good that we don't deserve instead.

Since Paul has already made the case that in our former way of life we were spiritually dead, He now emphasizes that when God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, He included us that resurrection so that we can receive Life to bring us out of the death of our old way of living.

And when God includes us in being seated with Christ – as Paul says in chapter 1:21 *“far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked”* this means that we are no longer under the authority or influence of the Devil.

So grace is the means by which God gives us resurrection life and breaks the power of the devil over us – IN Christ.

And IN Christ means that it happens both because of Jesus but also IN his very being where He is fully divine AND fully human - and that is how Grace puts us IN Christ.

Now the fourth aspect is that Grace must be received.

You see it's all very well and good that we can understand what Grace is and get a handle on the specifics of how Grace has a past, how Grace requires wrath, how Grace puts us IN Christ... but Grace must be received and responded to by us.

But it must be responded to in a way that reflects and shows we truly understand what Grace is and the underserved benefits which we receive from it... and that way is faith.

Paul says in vs. 8 that it is “through faith” that we are saved by grace – and then goes on to qualify that *“this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.”*

That's the undeserved nature of grace...

Now the definition of biblical Faith is found in Hebrews 11:1  
*“faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”*

So we put grace and faith together by having the assurance that even though we do not see any “works” in our own life that would deserve God’s grace – we are confident that He gives us grace anyways – we have faith.

We trust and believe this is what God is doing in Jesus Christ even when we don’t see the evidence that we deserve it... even when we see the evidence that we DO deserve His judgement and the consequences of our sin instead.

Once we truly understand Grace - we are able to receive it and respond to it and continue to trust that it has been given to us... through faith - that’s the only appropriate way to respond to grace.

Now here’s the last aspect of Grace - Grace produces good works.

Paul says in vs. 10 that Grace makes us *“God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

Now Paul doesn’t give us a list of what constitutes good works... that would most likely result in us becoming legalistic with that list and not allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us to do what is good in our various different situations and lives.

But Paul does use the new believers he is writing to, and their membership in the church as an example of the good work(s) that Grace produces.

That’s why he starts vs. 11 with *“therefore”* and then proceeds to apply the aspects of Grace to these gentile believers.

So the first aspect is Grace has a past right?

Let’s read vs. 11 and 12 *“formerly (in the past) you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised... at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise”*

Do you see how Paul is applying this and giving the specifics of the Gentiles had a past with regards to Grace?

Then comes the next aspect, Grace requires wrath; the consequences of being outside of the Covenants and the relationship with God which they provided was that the Gentiles were *“without hope and without God in the world.”*

I hope you can see how Paul is being very gentle in helping the Gentiles understand how God’s wrath applies to the – he’s not preaching hellfire, he just plainly states that they were without hope and without God – and that is sufficient.

Then Paul explains the mechanics of how Grace puts them IN Christ and thus IN God’s family and people so they may receive the promise and its benefits.

Vs.13 *“you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ”*

Vs. 15 and 16 *“His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross...”*

Do you see how Paul is explaining the mechanics of how Grace has worked for them IN Christ this way?

And then in vs. 17 Paul implies that they responded through faith – so he applies the forth aspect of Grace as he mentions how this gospel news has reached them *“He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.”*

And then in vs. 19-22 Paul describes how God is creating His Church out of the Gentiles and Jews, and how this is primary example – and also source – of the good works that Grace produces.

Paul says that both Jews and Gentiles are members of God’s household – and then Paul shifts the metaphor to say that the members of the household are being built into a house... a

building where Jesus Christ is the cornerstone. And then Paul says that this isn't just a "house" it's actually a Temple. And what happens in a Temple? Well God is present there and He served and worshipped by His people.

So what Paul is saying is that the greatest good work that Grace produces is the building of the Church. Anyone who has experienced God's saving Grace is being built into a dwelling place for God by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Grace is the mortar and cement that binds us together – because God when puts His Spirit with-in us individually, that same Spirit in each of bonds us together as the Church. SO, brothers and sisters the Church is created by Grace

And if we know and we believe this – then as I said earlier, it shapes the way we interact with and participate in and belong to the Church.

So let's apply those aspects of Grace to how God is building us together here as His Church at Valleyview.

Grace has a past – Friends, we can accept anyone who God brings to us here at Valleyview regardless of who they used to be – or even who they currently are...

Because we too have a past – a time when we were different from how we are now – thanks to God's Grace.

And God builds us closer and cements us together when we talk about this and share how God's grace has changed us.

Grace requires wrath – Brothers and sisters, I've said it many times before that the Church is not a bunch of nice people who are nice to other nice people.

God's Grace is not cheap, Christ suffered greatly to give us the good that we don't deserve and so we hold each other accountable to live in ways that honor Christ and serve God.

We may not always be nice to each other – but we will be loving and truthful and Graceful, and that brings us closer together as well.

And friends Grace put us IN Christ – and that is why Paul says other letters that the Church is the body of Christ. Each of you is an important member of the body, and has a specific function in the body.

When you are missing... the body is not fully functioning.

And this all has to be accepted in faith – because once you get to know your fellow Valleyview-ers, and once you have been around us long enough – you will see, and experience things that will make you wonder just how much we are saved... or if we are really Christians.

You will see and experience why the Church is made up of those who are sinners – saved by Grace, through faith and trust and believe that in spite of how far we still need to grow, God is still working in us by His Grace.

So brothers and sisters – regardless of whether you are here for all the right reasons or wrong reasons this morning...

Regardless of how you came in to worship this morning...

Hear the truth about God's grace – all of it – and be encouraged that while we may justly deserve to be rebuked, corrected, challenged for How we come together as the Church and whether we are bringing what God deserve in our worship...

In Jesus Christ - God forgives us and by His Grace He pours out His Holy Spirit on us to bless us anyways, and to empower us with Spiritual gifts to build each other up, and to go out and serve Him as the Church in our society – in our workplaces and homes, and schools or where He sends us.

So – if you are looking for one good reason why you should go to Church, if you are looking for one good reason why you should BE the Church?

Paul gives us one good reason – and that reason is Grace.

Amen