

All Christians were once spiritually dead and ruled by evil like the rest of humanity, but God magnifies His grace when He creates believers—saving them from wrath, exalting them in Christ, and fashioning them for spiritual life. Feed on His loving grace by living in the good works for which you were made.

Introduction: Christmas is only one week away. You're probably getting exciting now.

Overarching Metaphor: This passage is a roller coaster tour of the Christian's former, present, and future life as related to Christ. It is a heart-pounding ride of steep drops into darkness and soaring heights into glory. How ought we to live after such a ride?

## I. Grace: What Life Is Like Without It

### A. Dead in sin (v. 1)

A spiritually dead person has spiritual faculties that don't function until God gives him life (1 Cor 2:14). Everyone is born with a nature alienated from the source and giver of life. Being spiritually dead in our transgressions and sins is the cause of our miserable condition (cf. Gen 2-3; Rom 6:23). Transgressions are deliberate disobedience to the law of God. Sins are essentially those ways we miss the mark God designed us to hit—missing God's standard by omission or commission.

### B. Enslaved to Satan (v. 2)

Unbelievers are oriented to live in this present age which is evil. Satan is the ruler of this age (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Here he is portrayed as dominating his enslaved human subjects. The spirit of Satan (contrasted with the Holy Spirit) is presently at work in the "sons of disobedience" by the power of suggestion, temptation, threat, condemnation, and even indwelling (Jn 8:44; Acts 26:18; 2 Cor 4:4). This means the devil influences unbelievers who are in rebellion against God.

### C. Condemned by God (v. 3)

The expression "by nature children of wrath" is a summary of Paul's doctrine in Romans 5:12-14, which refers to all humanity "in Adam" when he sinned and thereby all incur sin's guilt. The sinful nature (the flesh) corrupts the divine image making us guilty before God and thus deserving His wrath and judgment (Ps 51:5; Rom 5:12-21). Wrath is the appropriate response to people who reject God, trample His mercy and patience, and flaunt His law by doing evil (Jn 3:36). To escape this prison, God must pour out on sinners His superabundant grace.

## II. Grace: What Life Is Like With It

### A. Conformed to Christ's exaltation (vv. 4-6)

1. The words "but God" are wonderful when directed at our terrible condition. We have been miraculously freed by the work of Christ from the tyranny of Satan. Now we are alive in Christ (Gal 2:20). God is rich (liberal, even prodigal!) in mercy, not because of anything we have done to earn His mercy, but only because of His great love for us (Deut 7:7-8). In His mercy, God doesn't give us what we do deserve. In His grace, God gives us what we do not deserve.
2. God's grace has three effects on us. Grace (1) makes us alive; (2) raises us up; and (3) seats us in heaven. All these benefits and effects of salvation are ours "in Christ"! Thus we experience these three things right now with and in Christ. Although this truth is mysterious, it is plainly rooted in our everyday experience. We have a new life (knowing and loving God) and a new victory (evil increasingly trampled under our feet). And don't forget you will experience these in fullness as Christ does now when he comes at the end of the age (Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15).

B. Enriched forever in Christ (v. 7)

His grace is so rich that every heart it touches will overflow with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Whereas the ground of our salvation is God's love and mercy, the goal of our salvation is magnifying His grace and kindness. Kindness is love expressed as mercy given at the point of most dire need (Tit 3:4-7).

III. Grace: How to Get It

A. Through faith (v. 8a)

Faith in Jesus Christ (WSC 86). Faith is a confident trust in God's declaration that we are righteous in Christ, and not righteous for any of our own achievements or contributions. Faith in Christ is the only thing that rightly relates us to God (Jn 3:16, 36; Gal 2:16).

B. Receive it as a gift (v. 8b)

What does "this" refer to—God's grace or our faith? Grammatically, grace and faith are feminine nouns. But "this" is in the neuter form, so "this" must refer to the entire phrase. In other words, "this" refers to the entire process of salvation wrought by God for us. The NT makes clear that God is the ultimate source of saving faith (Jn 6:37, 44, 65; Acts 13:48; 18:27; Phil 1:29). Salvation is all of grace—even our faith, which is our response as newly redeemed, spiritually alive people.

IV. Grace: What to Do With It

A. Give God all the credit (v. 9)

If you're not completely humbled by God's grace then it's a good bet you're not feeding on it. Why? Because there is absolutely no room for boasting in the heart of one who has been saved by grace alone. Salvation is more than forgiveness. Resurrection is out of death and creation is out of nothing—these together picture the true meaning of salvation. Grace is not just unmerited but de-merited favor toward those who are dead in transgressions and sins, thus deserving His wrath. To the degree you believe that you are dead, enslaved, and condemned without God's grace in your life, to that same degree you'll give God the credit for His grace—even the grace to believe in Him.

B. Live in good works (v. 10)

Repentance unto life (WSC 87). If you don't want to turn away from what life is like without grace, then you don't yet have a saving faith. But once you repent and believe in Jesus, now what should you do? Live as one designed by God and who belongs to Him. God has re-created and ordained us for a better walk of life. Before you walked in evil works, now you must walk in good works that adorn your salvation (Tit 3:8; Jas 2:14-26). Regarding good works, Christ is our Enabler (Acts 2:22) and our Example (Jn 13:14-15; 1 Pet 2:21). Jesus expects and requires us to bear not just a little fruit but much fruit (Jn 15:2, 5, 8). The one who abides in Jesus will live in many good works.

Conclusion: Everything hangs on grace. Without grace, you'd have no hope because you wouldn't have God. Grace is exciting when you understand its roller coaster message. Never forget how dreadful life is like without it. Think often about what your life is like with grace. Feed on His grace by putting your faith in Christ, receive His grace as God's precious gift, give Him all the credit for grace, and live in the good works that God has made for you in His grace. Everything hangs on grace.