

A Gospel Foundation for Our Church

By Pastor Matt Black

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Lord's Day morning

Ephesians 1:2

Introduction: Open your Bibles to the book of Ephesians. The title of our message this Lord's Day morning is "A Gospel Foundation for Our Church." We could subtitle it: "Church Growth the Gospel Way." We will be dealing specifically with verse 2 this morning. Let us stand together as we read the entire first chapter.

[Read Ephesians 1]

This morning my burden is to lay the foundation of the ministry of the Tabernacle Baptist Church. "It would be patently [irresponsible of us] to begin construction on a building without first knowing what kind of building we plan to construct."¹ In the same way, if we have no plan in place to build our church according to the Scripture, then we are doomed to failure. So this morning, we have an all important choice to make. What we decide will have consequences for years and generations to come. So, how shall we build our church? Shall we pattern our church after what's popular in the world? We'd certainly generate buzz, and with a little pop music and culture, we could bring in a crowd. Or we could build this church on mere preference. Perhaps you want to feel affirmed in church. You don't want to be made to feel like a sinner. Or we could model the church after a Fortune 500 company. Come and find out how you can be successful in life and reach the next level of your potential. What is wrong with all these foundations? Well, no matter how fantastic they look in their beginning stages, no matter how sensational and exciting and appealing these methods of church growth may seem, they are all doomed to failure. Whatever is built on man's foundations will collapse. There is only one legitimate method of church growth. There is only one rightful foundation and Cornerstone!

1 Corinthians 3:11

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

So let's be clear: Jesus Christ is the foundation and Cornerstone of our church. This morning, we are going to look at how we can build our church on the foundation of the Gospel of Christ. The truths found in the book of Ephesians touch every part of our lives—but all the truth and doctrine rest on the Gospel foundation found right here in verse 2:

"Grace and peace"

Paul says, "Grace *be* to you, and peace, from God our Father, and *from* the Lord Jesus Christ"

This declaration is the Gospel in its most simple and basic form. So we must build our church on the Gospel. We need to offer to sinners the grace and peace found only in Jesus Christ. It is the Word of the Gospel, God says, that goes forth out of His mouth: and it shall not return unto Him void, but it shall accomplish that which He pleases, wherever He sends it (Isaiah 55:11). And He has sent it this morning to

¹ Mark Dever and Paul Alexander. *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* (Crossway Books, Wheaton, 2005), 25.

Hanover Park. We will not be disappointed with the results of the Gospel, for it is the Gospel that is the “power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth” (Romans 1:16).

We are not gathered here for programs, personal charisma, or because it is popular. We are gathered today to guard the message of the Gospel and to promote it to sinners so that they might come to know God savingly. That they might be “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever...this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you,” so says Peter in his first epistle (1:23-25). That is what brings real meaning to life. That is what brings hope and joy and love and a clean conscience. We want to build our church on the Gospel because we want to live Gospel lives.

With that in mind, let us now turn again to our text in verse 2.

“Grace *be* to you, and peace, from God our Father,
and *from* the Lord Jesus Christ” (v.2).

There it is! GRACE!

I. If we are to build this church according to God’s plan, we must first take to heart that it is Grace that sets the foundation stone. “Grace be to you” Grace: that word comes so easily out of our mouth. Everyone from the school children to entertainers sing of God’s “Amazing Grace.” What a powerful, life changing word, and yet most people have no idea what it is.

A. Grace is God exercising His free pleasure to unworthy sinners. The principle of grace is found on every page of the Bible. Grace is the source and fountain of God’s unmerited favor to wicked and defiled people who are worthy of nothing else but to be destroyed by God’s wrath in the eternal refuse pile of Hell, and yet God shows them free grace—it’s God’s pleasure to show you His favor. Grace is God giving you heaven, when all you deserve is condemnation.

∅ Grace has been called “favour you receive but to which you have no right or title in any shape or form, and of which you are entirely unworthy and undeserving.”²

∅ Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, “Grace is the free favour of God, the undeserved bounty of the ever-gracious Creator against whom we have offended, [Grace is] the generous pardon, the infinite, spontaneous loving-kindness of the God who has been provoked and angered by our sin, but who, delighting in mercy, and grieving to smite the creatures whom he has made, is ever ready to pass by transgression, iniquity, and sin, and to save his people from all the evil consequences of their guilt.”³

Grace is freely given. God planned it that way. Grace was not an afterthought following Adam’s Fall. God did not say “O now look what they’ve

² D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. *God’s Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1*, Baker Books (Grand Rapids, MI: 1978), 37.

³ Charles Haddon Spurgeon. *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 3115.506.

gone and done—I guess I have to think of a solution.” No, God created the world knowing and allowing it to fall into sin so that He might demonstrate His grace. Before He founded the world, Jesus Christ was given as a substitute for His people, for Jesus is the “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). So it was the Lord’s free pleasure that motivated Him to pour out His wrath on His Son instead of us, and instead grant us repentance and faith and eternal life. Indeed, listen to Isaiah preach about grace in Jesus Christ. He says in the 53 chapter concerning the Lord, “...it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put *him* to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his* seed, he shall prolong *his* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.¹¹ He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities (Isaiah 53:10-11). Praise the Lord that God exercised His free pleasure. As David says, “Our God *is* in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased” (Psalm 115:3).

Luke 12:32

Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

That’s grace!

- B. Secondly, Grace is always personal. In the Bible, grace is never some far removed outdated theological concept. Every word of Scripture is inspired and is breathed off the page to the reader. This word “grace” is God-breathed, and God-directed to you. It is intensely personal. It arrives intended for action in your life. “Grace to you,” says the apostle. Paul does not simply say “grace exists” or “there is grace,” but he says, “grace to you.”

Paul demonstrates this personal nature of grace throughout his letter to the Ephesians personally. He says things like:

Ephesians 1:4

“[God] hath chosen us in him...[and that] we should be holy and without blame before him in love”

Ephesians 1:11

“In whom also we have obtained an inheritance”

Ephesians 1:12

“That we should be to the praise of his glory”

Ephesians 2:1

“And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins”

This is not some generic Christian way of greeting, but a personal invitation to ponder and own the precious treasure of God’s truly unconditionally love that He offers to undeserving wicked creatures. It’s personal. You and grace are connected. That brings us to our next point.

- C. Because Grace is personal, it is then, of necessity practical. Grace is to “you” and me so that it might bring *change* in our lives. Grace runs after us—it refuses to collect dust in our pharisaical, self-righteous minds. Don’t ever

say you know about grace unless it is working in you. Anyone who knows anything about God's grace has been broken as an undeserving sinner. Are you broken today? If you're not, you have no right to speak of God's grace. You see God has a personal agenda to transform you and He has the omnipotence to back that agenda up. That is why we call it sovereign grace. God has the sovereign power to enact change on your life through the power of the Spirit and the Word of God.

Paul introduces grace here in the very beginning of his letter, but he spends the rest of chapters applying it to our daily struggles against sin and self and to our most intimate relationships in life. Paul never just presents theological truths about God—no, Biblical truth arrives in action. So many times we talk about grace in this “happy-go-lucky” nonchalant superficially sweet tone. No, grace is known by those who smell the battlefield. Grace is known by those who fight for righteousness. They are crucified to the world, and crucified to self. You see grace is a living, breathing, transforming principle that makes its mark on every area of our lives. Truth is alive. Dead truth is no truth at all. Dead truth kills spiritual life. The superficial Christian says, “Look how great I am, I memorized the Ten Commandments. The person touched by God's grace says, “I'm just a broken sinner, but I want to obey God; Oh God help me to obey you!” A superficial Christian thinks, “I better do right because I'm in church, and so-and-so will see me, and I don't want to disappoint the pastor.” A person touched by God's grace lives like God is here every minute of every day regardless of who is watching. He doesn't just want to know the truth, he wants to awake, arise, and live the Truth!” Grace is practical. Grace gives us the answer to our broken relationships, and it gives us the power and the plan to bring restoration. You see the key to making all our actions and all our relationships whole again begins with getting our relationship with God right. You may have wasted your life up until now thinking you were ok because you know all the right stuff, you have all the right answers. Today, don't just be filled with religious words and knowledge—let grace give you a right standing with God. Grace is not about simply knowing truth, but about knowing God. It's practical.

D. And then, Grace is pervasive. This is just a further implication that “Grace” is “to you” and to me. It is to this church. It is to this society. Let grace wrap its fingers around every aspect of your life.

1. Grace permeates our resources.
 - a. Your time
Ephesians 5:16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Use all your time for God, or evil will be glad to spend it for you!
 - b. Your money
Proverbs 3:9-10 Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: 10 So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.
 - c. Your wisdom
 - d. Your energy.
Luke 10:27 Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind;

2. Grace permeates our relationships.
 - a. Once grace affects your life, it will inevitably affect your family's life, either for the good or for the better.

Sometimes Jesus says to us:

Matthew 10:34-36

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. 35 For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. 36 And a man's foes *shall be* they of his own household.

Other times, God's grace enters into a family and whole families are saved, such as with Crispus in the book of Acts:

Acts 18:8

And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

Grace doesn't always do that, but it will always have some affect, either for the good or for the better.

- b. Grace will regulate your marriage. Ephesians 5—Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church, Wives submit to your husbands as unto the Lord!
- c. Grace will regulate your relationships with your co-workers. Because you are saved, you will work differently than other people work. You begin to do all your work "as unto the Lord" (Romans 14:8).
- d. Grace regulates your relationship with all creatures. You begin to heed the call to give the Gospel to every creature. You begin evangelizing your family, your neighbors, your friends your coworkers, complete strangers. Perhaps if you let grace have her full work in you, some of you will be so moved by grace that God call you to be pastors and missionaries to even beyond our own land.

So, if we are to build our church, let's build it on the Gospel! Let's be a Word-centered, God-centered congregation. Let's not just say we are Christians, let's be united with by Christ's grace every moment. Let His gracious sovereignty control your thoughts and mind, and actions. Let His grace regulate your resources, your relationships. Let Christ reign over you and be "all in all" (Ephesians 1:23).

So we see in our text that grace sets the foundation stone. Without God's initiative we would all be lost and without hope in the world. Secondly, let us notice,

II. If we are to build this church according to God's blueprint, we must understand that Peace seals the foundation stone. "and peace"

- A. First we see a Separation. This peace recognizes that we are by nature separated from God. Paul explains this in detail in chapter 2:1, "1 And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins." We are dead in sins. When we are born into this life, our physical body is alive, but our spiritual nature is stillborn. Its born dead in trespasses and sins.

Ø Romans 8:6-8, "For to be carnally minded [to have the mind of an unregenerate person] *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. 7 Because the carnal [unregenerate] mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. 8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." In order to understand peace, there must be a peace to make. We need peace with God because we are separated from Him.

B. But secondly, we see an Aggression. We need this peace, because we are not just passively dead. We are not just standing still inactive and unresponsive to God. No, we are by nature responding to God very actively, and our response by nature is hatred. We are born at war with God. By nature, man is born into this world as a God-hater. He not only is separated from God, he fights against God, he is an enemy of God.

Ephesians 2:3 "[W]e all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

Colossians 1:21 "And you, that were...alienated and enemies in *your* mind by wicked works."

Ephesians 4:3 We by nature have our "understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in [us], because of the blindness of [our] heart."

So you see there is a natural aggression against God. Listen to what David Martyn Lloyd-Jones said to his London church last century. He said, "man has brought all this upon himself by his disobedience to God. He cannot get away from this. He has tried to put forward every other conceivable explanation of his condition, but none is adequate. He has tried the theory of evolution and on the basis of that outlook and teaching man should by now have been emancipated and there should be peace; but peace has not come. So man tries to explain his lot in other ways; but he cannot do so."

No he cannot! He cannot bring peace to himself.

C. That is why we see next that peace in its very essence is a Reconciliation. This reconciliation is not proposed by man, but by God. The idea is a bringing together of a man at war with God to right relationship with His creator. The man has stopped fighting. And yet, this peace does not merely mean "cessation of war, rest, and quiet."⁴ Surely it means that, but that's not all it means. Its not that we've simply stopped fighting against God. The actual idea in the Greek language is "a union after a separation."⁵

⁴ Lloyd-Jones. *Ephesians*, 17.

⁵ Lloyd-Jones. *Ephesians*, 37.

God calls us rebels to put down our weapons and be united to Christ! Perhaps you are fighting Him today. Recognize this natural aggression in your own heart. If you deny it is there you are a liar! It exists most obviously in the lost person, but it still remains in the saved person. But God calls us to put down our weapons! It's time for surrender! Come to Jesus with a broken heart! Come to the Lord bleeding and wounded, ready to be brought into relationship with Him. If you have peace with God, you have something the world cannot touch. The stock market may crash, but you are reconciled. Tragedy strikes, but you are redeemed! Bankruptcy, sickness, poverty, persecution, all these things come upon us, but we have a clean conscience. We are right with God. And no one and nothing can take that away. This is what God has done!

III. Finally, if we are to build this church according to God's blueprint, we must also rest in the Union that solidifies the foundation stone. We are shaped into the image of the Father, and the image of the Son by our union with them! Paul says that our grace and peace come "from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ"

- A. So first, let us first see a Gospel union. There is the union of grace and peace. Grace is the source, and peace is the result. Grace elects us, grace provides the Lamb of God slain for us, and grace prepares the way. But grace does not stand alone. Grace brings us to God and travails in birth until you are reconciled to God. That is peace. Perhaps today, God is working in you. Your conscience is not clear. You are not right with God. You know that. You feel that. Something is wrong. That, dear friend, is grace working in you. But don't leave it there. It's not enough to feel guilty. Let grace have its work in you. Let grace work in you until you come to God entirely. Until you are born again by the Spirit of God. Until faith opens your eyes and you live a life of repentance and trust in the Lord! Thank God that grace does not leave us alone, but assaults us until we've come to peace with God! What a union that is. But then we see the union in between the Father and the Son.
- B. This is the union we call the Godhead. "Grace *be* to you, and peace, from God our Father, and *from* the Lord Jesus Christ." Prepositions are pretty important in the Greek language. This word "from" basically tells us that the grace and peace come because of the Father and the Son. The second "from" in is in italics in our Bible. That is because it is there to clarify. The Greek does not need to clarify. The grammar actually links the Father and the Son together as equals this construction.

For example, it would be blasphemous to say that grace and peace come from God the Father and this apostle or that prophet. Why is that blasphemous? Because it puts a created being on the same level with God. But to say grace and peace come from God the Father and the Son points directly to Godhead. Jesus Christ is Jehovah, He is the one high and lifted up. He shares God's glory, He is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Praise God—it is a loving Father that can plan this grace and peace and it is this high and exalted Christ that accomplishes redemption and live and walk on this earth, and die

on a cruel Cross. It is this Christ that is raised from the dead and exalted above every Name! Oh what grace and peace we find in this union.

- C. And finally, we see our Personal union. All of this grace and peace that is from God the Father and God the Son is “to you”! What will you do with this grace? What will you do with this peace? How long will you live with a guilty, defiled conscience? Won't you come to Christ today and put down your weapons? Won't you stop fighting against God? Perhaps you are mad at your boss. Perhaps you are mad at your wife. Perhaps you are mad at your children, your mother, your father. Perhaps you are mad at another church member. Put down your weapons. Make peace with God. Be united with Christ!

Conclusion: As we close, I want to tell you right now where all your problems stem from. We are not seeking God's answer to our problems. We think we can manipulate a solution by our own crafty will. Well I can change this! But you cannot change anything. It takes God's grace to bring peace to your situation.

Appeal: Let's have heads bowed and eyes closed. You say today, I am here today, and I have been fighting against God. I have been running from Him. Perhaps you need to come to know Christ today as your Saviour and Lord. You need to put down your weapons and come to Him. If that is you, will you lift your hand right now so I can pray for you?

How about you Christian? You are saved, and you know God's grace, but are you still fighting God in areas of your life. Is that you today? Will you lift your hand so I can pray for you?

[Give a word of prayer]

Now the front of the church is open. Come and pray. The Holy Spirit has sweetened your heart. Come and kneel in prayer before the Lord. Come with broken heart. The Lord's grace is working in your heart. You come.

Perhaps you need to come and pray with someone. Bro. Larsen is at the front of the church, or if you are a lady, Miss Judy is right here. Listen, if you need to get something right with another member—now is the time. Just walk right over there and pray with that person. Get things right today. God requires immediate obedience. “Today if you hear His voice, harden not your heart!”

Perhaps you are here today, and you want to make your self accountable to God's people here—and you want to inquire about church membership. Perhaps you are here, and you've been saved, but you've never been scripturally baptized. You need to take that step of obedience. Whatever it is, let's get things where they need to be so God can work in this church.

Closing Hymn: 147 Amazing Grace (Ed or Gary leads)