

EPHESIANS 2:8
The Wonderful Work of Salvation
Message 8
May 7, 2012
Words: 4273

INTRO: We are in the second chapter of Ephesians, in Paul's first great digression from sharing his prayers with them. This first great digression has to do with the salvation of the Gentiles. His second digression, chapter 3:1-13 has to do with the mystery of the Gentiles salvation. And so, we are in the midst of dealing with the salvation of the Gentiles.

In 2:1, we saw that we, as Gentiles, were dead in trespasses and sins. In 2:2-3 we saw the cause of this death. Before we were saved we walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air. We were under the dominion of the spirit who works in the sons of disobedience. Among those, we conducted ourselves in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind and thus we were by nature the children of wrath.

But in verses 4-10, we are considering how we were delivered from so great a death. We saw that God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love for us raised us out of that great death and made us alive together with Christ and raised us up together with Him and seated us in the heavenly places.

And in our last message we saw the reason why He did all that for us. It was for His own glory. It was that in the ages to come, He might show of the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus! And oh, what a glorious message that is. It is all about Him. Today's Christianity constantly wants to bend toward man. True salvation always wants to exalt God, and certainly it should do that.

And now I ask this question: What is it that will enable God to be able to show in the ages to come of the exceeding riches of His grace in Christ Jesus in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus? What will give Him the right to do that? Why will He be able to do that? Here is the answer, "For, because, for this reason, we are saved by grace through faith, and that not of ourselves; it is the gift of

God, not of works, lest any man should boast." That is why!

If we were able to contribute anything to our salvation, it would no longer be all of His grace, and no longer would He be able to show of the exceeding riches of His grace toward us. And tonight, we will content ourselves with looking at just one word, the word grace.

(2) Why God released us from this death - that He might show (7-10) cont'd

So, we want to answer this question tonight: What is it that will give God the right to show of the exceeding riches of His grace into the ages to come? It is because He made salvation available to us entirely by grace through faith. Not one little, teensy, tiny piece of salvation comes through anything else than grace and faith!

-Grace

So, verse 8 begins like this, "For by grace you have been saved through faith..." We want to look at this word 'grace'. In my estimation, it is one of the most misunderstood words in the Bible. And it is also one of the words we use so much. Twice we have passed over this word in Ephesians 2 without dealing with it, but I told you we would do so in verse 8. It is used in verse 5 (read). Then it is used in verse 7 (read). And now it is used again in verse 8.

It is many years now that I have worked on a definition of grace. I thank God for men such as LE Maxwell, who contributed to my understanding of this word.

Someone, somewhere has given this acrostic of grace: Grace is God's Riches At Christ's Expense. Others define grace as unmerited favor. Those are both correct. But we need to put the concept of grace into understandable terminology. I fear that is the greatest problem with people's understanding of this great word.

I believe that a good sized part of why the Church today is in the state it is in is because of a misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the word 'grace'. So, before we look at this word, let me share just a little bit of what has happened and is happening in the Church today with regard to this word 'grace.'

Let me first give you a quote from Charles Swindoll's book titled, "The Grace Awakening." Charles Swindoll meant well and has many very good things to say. His book is copyrighted in 1990. I have heard that it has led, in some places, entire congregations into licentious liberties that destroyed them. You will be hard pressed to point out theological error, and yet the results of the book have, in some cases, been disastrous.

He writes in the introduction, "Scarcely a day passes when I am not reminded of the need for a book emphasizing the full extent of grace, giving people permission to be free, absolutely free in Christ. Why? Because so few are! Bound and shackled by legalists' lists of do's and

don'ts intimidated and immobilized by other's demands and expectations, far too many in God's family merely exist in the tight radius of bondage, dictated by those who have appointed themselves our judge and jury. Long enough have we lived like frightened deer in a restrictive thicket of negative regulations. Long enough have we submitted to the do's and don'ts of religious kings of the mountain. Long enough have we been asleep while all around us the grace killers do their sinister nighttime work. No longer! It is time to awaken. The dawn is bright with grace.

"Too many folks are being turned off by a twisted concept of the Christian life. Instead of offering a winsome and contagious, sensible and achievable invitation of hope and cheer through the sheer power of Christ, more people than ever are projecting a grim-faced caricature of religion-on-demand. **I find it tragic that religious kill joys have almost succeeded in taking the freedom and fun out of faith.** People need to know that there is more to the Christian life than deep frowns, pointing fingers, and unrealistic expectations. Harassment has had the floor long enough. Let grace awaken."

Then quoting another, he says this, "You may be able to compel people to maintain certain minimum standards by stressing duty, but the highest moral and spiritual achievements depend not upon a push but a pull. People

must be charmed into
righteousness."

Well, he wrote that in 1990. He wrote, "Let grace awaken." Well, there was a grace that was already awakening back then. Let me tell you what it did. First it took the do's and don'ts out of Christianity. Do you know what that does? I want you to briefly notice verse 10, though we will come to it in some other message. It says, "For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them." But according to Swindoll, those who have lists of do's and don'ts are legalist kill joys. Go to Colossians with me for one moment (read 2:20 and on for a few examples). There are do's and don'ts in Christianity.

Now I understand that there are legalists. They have lists of manmade rules. In our own culture it is things like not driving rubber tired vehicles etc... That is pure legalism. But that is not Christianity. There are many do's and don'ts in the bible that are not legalism. Someone has well said that grace is not the right to live as we want, but the power to live as we ought!

So, this new grace takes the do's and don'ts out of Christianity. That has brought disastrous results in the modern North American church. This new grace is now giving Christians both freedom and fun. People have been charmed into 'righteousness'.

Today's Christians has been set free to live in about every kind of unrighteousness, while they are still wonderfully victorious Christians; so they think. And with this new freedom and fun, as Christians are being charmed into righteousness, you can be converted while you are in the tattoo business, stay in the tattoo business after you became a Christian, tattoo other Christians; and it is all grace. In much of today's church, this so called grace has been awakened! And I say something has gone very wrong!

The seeker friendly movement quickly came on the scene, which then, in a very short time, gave way to the emergent church and New Age ideas in the church. And in the last 20 years, there has been a grace awakening that has given license to sin, and it is all over the North American church. And of course, while you burn that tattoo on the next person, you tell them about Jesus! Yes, you are a wonderfully saved person. And out of all that grace, today we are in the deepest trouble the Church has ever been in, in North America. And our North American brand of Christianity is having an impact on many other countries. And one of the things that has contributed to this is this new understanding of grace, as we desperately seek to charm people into righteousness, and give them fun in their new found freedom.

David Cloud, in an article in April 2012 writes this, "In the

name of 'freedom,' people frequently leave good Bible-believing churches to join one of the looser, easy-going congregations that abound in these apostate times. Commonly, they are lackadaisical about church attendance, putting more emphasis upon personal and family relaxation and recreation, upon sports and the great outdoors and an endless variety of fun. They exchange their feminine dresses for pants and shorts and other immodest attire, even joining the near-naked crowd at the poolside and on the beaches. They trade the sacred hymns of the faith for jazzy charismatic "praise" music and Christian rock. They develop a more tolerant attitude toward doctrine, emphasizing, instead, "love" and "unity," fellowshiping with anyone who "loves Jesus." As they pursue this new path, their ecumenical sympathies and appetite for "liberty" increases, as does their aversion to biblical separation.

"When asked about the change, they say: 'I feel more liberty now, more love; I am having fun; I am glad to be free of legalism; I don't hear criticism at my church; no one judges what others do. It's a breath of fresh air. We're finally free of Pharisaical bondage.'"

[[Recently David Cloud covered the subject of homosexuality in his "Friday Church News." He tells of Donald McCullough, President of Salt Lake Theological seminary who wrote a

book called, *"If Grace Is So Amazing, Why Don't We Like It?"* The subtitle is, *"How God's Radical Love Turns the World Upside Down."* In this book he wrote, "in a world turned upside down by grace, we must distrust whatever feels natural" (pp. 201, 202). What he meant is that it seems very natural that homosexuality is wrong, but we must distrust what feels natural. So, since God's grace covers all sins, you must learn to accept all sin into the Christian circle. You cannot get more debased in your thinking than that, and all of it in the name of grace!

Philip Yancy, a name you need to be aware of, in I believe an article called, "Amazed by Grace" in the Gay Magazine, "Whosoever", writes, "When it gets to particular matters of policy, like ordaining gay and lesbian ministers, I'm confused, like a lot of people." And this is a Christian leader. God help us!

One person wrote this to David Cloud: "You are the blasphemer. The Beatles are not satanic. I know people who are a lot more Christian than you that love the Beatles. Do you think your helping people? I have shown many people Christ through bands like the Beatles. If Jesus were here now, he would most likely be at crack houses and rock concerts, not reading the outdated KJB. You should check out my church. We just got done telling the story of Jesus through tattoos and on Good Friday we are telling the

'Crucification (sic) According to Radiohead.' Tell me where GOD says to not listen to rock and roll. This is ridiculous, blasphemous, and your beliefs are the exact opposite of what Christians are called to do. I'm gonna go read my NLT Bible and or listen to As I Lay Dying, a pretty brutal metal Christian band that preaches more good in one song than you have your entire life. Thanks for the laughs" (5/3/2012).

Well, you have heard me quote LE Maxwell many times. He said, "The hardest thing in the world is to keep balanced." They called it Maxwell 1:1, keep balanced. When I read such as I quoted earlier from Swindol, I see some ground for what he has said. That is, a need for liberty in Christ. When I read David Cloud, I see good ground for what he has said. That is a need to know where to draw the line.

And yet, Ephesians 2:8-10 gives us a very good balance. The balance is between how we get saved, verses 8-9, and how this salvation is to affect our lives, verse 10.

So, let us begin by defining grace. Every time I restudy this word, I feel I get a little further in my understanding of it. I would say that grace, when used in the context of salvation, basically describes the way we receive that salvation. There are two major, legitimate ways of getting things. One is by working for them, and thus earning them;

and the other is receiving it as a gift. When we earn something by working for it, we receive it by works. When we receive something as a gift, we get it by grace. It is 'graced' to us. These two are direct opposites (Rom. 11:6).

We might define grace from two perspectives, the same as we would a gift. We can describe it on the part of the giver and on the part of the receiver. On the part of the giver, a gift is something he imparts to someone else because of favor, not because the other has earned it. On the part of the one who gets the gift it is receiving something one has not earned. It has come by grace.

Now when we have earned something by works, works does not define what we earned. It tells us how we got it. What we earned by our works could refer to the amount of money due one. It could refer to receiving something equal to the value of what one has earned. It could refer to punishment according to what one merited etc... The word 'works' does not describe any one particular thing until it is understood in the context it is used.

The word grace is just like that. When we receive something by grace, grace does not define what we got, but tells us how we got it. So, our text says, "For by grace you have been saved..." What we received by grace, or as a gift, was salvation. Grace tells us how we got it. It came as a gift. It did not come by works.

Our text could not be more clear on that.

I have defined grace, in the Christian context like this: It is to receive whatever I need, whenever I need it, either to become a Christian or to live the Christian life. Now let me explain. Let us say the preacher has given a call to come forward in a church meeting to get saved. God is speaking to your heart. And all the demons of hell stand up in resistance to that call. Pride within reaches its maximum height. We need the strength and courage to obey God and humble ourselves. And if we stand up and put one foot forward, God will give us the strength and courage we need. That strength and courage, we call grace. But we mean that strength came by grace.

Let us say I am caught in a certain vice, a certain sin. I cannot overcome but I need to confess this thing in order to deal with it. Once more I need strength and courage to confess it. And then I need the power to overcome that thing. Receiving that strength and courage and power or whatever else it is I need, we call that grace. That means we got it without earning.

LE Maxwell said, "We should note that there are many Christians to whom 'grace' means merely undeserved favor, a kind of indulgent "smile" from heaven. **'But grace, in the New Testament, is force; it is a heavenly strength bestowed on men for**

timely succour; it finds its opportunity in our extremity' "

Now let me mention once more what I said somewhere earlier. Grace is not the right to live as I want. No do's and don'ts, just live as you want. That is not grace, that is licentiousness, a very grievous sin. No, grace is the power to live as I ought. It is divine strength or whatever else we need to live right. Grace will get you out of your bed on Sunday morning to go to church when you don't feel like it. Grace will give you the strength to be honest, when lying is so very tempting. Grace will help you overcome anger, bitterness, etc... etc...

Let me tell you something else. We do not need any grace to live wrong! Go with me to Romans 6 for a moment (read 23). According to this verse, we earn hell by works. For every sin we do, we earn a little more punishment. When we get to hell, we will not say, "We do not deserve this." God will say, "You earned it. These are your wages." But the gift of God, which comes by grace is eternal life. What a contrast!

Now let me go briefly to these two definitions: Grace is unmerited favor, and grace is God's riches at Christ's expense. Let me give you some unmerited favor from my own life. This past week was very difficult for me. Many things, including my own frailties piled up on me. Last night I had not one more ounce to give. I was out.

Four o'clock this morning I realized that this was the first Sunday of the month and somehow I had overlooked that I was to preach tonight. Now I had worked on this message for a long time but it was not all put together. I felt I was in good time until four this morning.

At four in the morning, God gave me renewed strength to get up. I made a hot cup of coffee and a toast and in not too many minutes I was on the road to the church. It was just beginning to dawn. Our town that is usually hustle and bustle had not a car on the streets. And over it, was this huge orange moon. It looked twice its normal size and it seemed to be smiling. And the grace of God strengthened me to do right this very morning.

When we speak of God's riches at Christ's expense, it is the grace to live right. It is the power to live right. It is not something that desires to get rid of all the do's and don'ts. No, it will enable me to do what I ought to do and it will empower me not to do what I ought not to do. Someone living in sin is failing of the grace of God. God would give that person of the riches of His strength to overcome that sin. Oh, I know it takes time sometimes because we are so very human, but by His undeserved favor God will give us what we need to live right!

The Greek word for grace is charis. It occurs some 156 times

in the NT and is translated 'grace' 130 times in the KJV. It is a huge word in the NT. We are not getting that much of it tonight, but I trust we will get enough to help us balance out the idea of grace that is so rampant in the church today. I doubt you would find 1 in 100 Christians that could give you much of an idea of the meaning of this word in salvation apart from clichés they couldn't explain either.

Go with me yet to Hebrews 4 (read 14-16). This throne of grace is in the Holy of Holies in heaven. We can come there boldly. That means nothing to a Gentile mind. In Judaism, only the High Priest could go there and that, only once a year. We can come there boldly at any time. This is simply incredible. And it is the THRONE of grace. I understand that to mean the throne from which grace proceeds.

And what are we to come there for? Well it tells us very plainly. It is that we may obtain mercy and find grace. And what is this grace? It is help in time of need! I believe that grace is whatever I need, whenever I need it, either to get saved or to live the Christian life. It is the power to live right. That power must come to us as a gift, or we will not have it. Many of us fail many times of the grace of God.

Now listen to 2 Corinthians 9:8, "And God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you..." And why do we need His grace to abound

toward us? Well, he goes on like this, "...that you always having all sufficiency in all *things*, may have an abundance for every good work." All those do's and don'ts that a Christian has in order to live righteously, are well within the scope of the grace of God.

CONCL: And so, I want to bring this message to a close. I want to say tonight that I recognize that there is still much legalism in the Church. Legalism has nothing to do with do's and don'ts. Legalism is manmade do's and don'ts added as requirements of salvation. It is a huge sin. But what I see as a much greater danger in our North American culture is a teaching on grace that has snuffed out any sense of obligation to Biblical do's and don'ts. Today you can be a Christian in the tattoo business or the ear ring, nose ring, belly button ring, tongue ring business. You can be in the beer business. You can have beer and Bible study. Now I understand there is Christian porn and Christian Yoga.

It was said of the early church in the book of Acts that they had turned the world upside down. Well, the world's downside was up, and it needed to be turned upside down. But the grace of today's church, and it is not God's grace, is cementing the world in its downside up position. When you supposedly become a Christian and you are doing Yoga etc... and you are told that is the grace of God, now your chance of getting saved is almost nill.

I believe that grace, as used in our verse describes the means by which we get salvation. This salvation comes as a gift. This salvation is FROM sin, not IN sin. A so called salvation that leaves us in our sin is no salvation at all. Rather, it locks us into hell. I believe real salvation will deliver us from beer, or all kinds of alcohol as a whole, from all kinds of worldly rings, from tattoos, from cuttings in the flesh, from lying, from cheating, from disobedience, from, from, from. The grace of God brings godliness, not liscentiousness.

Many of Paul's letters begin something like this: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:2). Many years ago when I was in Bible school, a new psychological teaching had just entered the

school curriculum. And in the course they taught that man's two great needs were security and significance. Well, that came in the mix of all the self esteem teaching then prevalent.

And as I pondered that teaching and how Paul began every letter, I came to the conclusion that if man has two great needs, they are grace and peace. I can tell you in hindsight what the teaching of S&S, as it was called on campus, security and significance, and high self esteem have brought.

The true grace of God will get us saved. And then it will help us to live right. It will help us to live godly. It will give us the desire to read the Bible, to pray, to get baptized, to join a church, to use our gifts for God in a church etc... etc... That is the true grace of God.

You see, receiving salvation by grace is God's part of man's salvation. But man has a part in His salvation as well. But this teaching of universalism, that all will be saved is unbiblical. And man's part is to believe. It is faith. This gift of salvation comes to us BY God's grace, but through our faith. We will look at that next time.