
The Glory of the Grace of God in Salvation

A Study of the Attributes and Applications of the Doctrines of Grace in the Life of the Believer

Ephesians 2:1-10

1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 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. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Last week we started a new series entitled, *“The Glory of the Grace of God in Salvation.”* That is a rather alliterated way of referring to the historic teaching of the Church that has come to be known to us as the “Doctrines of Grace.” The word “doctrines” simply meaning “teachings” – and “grace” refers to that quality and attitude of God by which a person, quite apart from anything he or she has done, receives the favor and blessings of God, most especially the blessing of salvation. We define grace simply as “unmerited or unearned favor.” Grace, along with its companion “mercy,” are but two sides of one incredible spiritual coin; grace speaking of the receiving of that which one does not deserve; and mercy speaking of not getting what one does deserve. In other words, the doctrines of grace reveal to us the biblical teaching that because we are sinners deserving of death; grace is receiving salvation from our sins (something we do not deserve at all); and mercy is not receiving the wrath of God our sins have earned us (not getting something we do deserve).

In the realm of the salvation of men and women, salvation is CLEARLY taught to be an event of God’s grace. In our text, Paul is emphatic, insistent, and dogmatic about this, saying not once, but two times, ***“by grace you have been saved...”*** in verses 5 and 8. That saving grace is quite apart from human effort is made clear again by Paul in Titus 3:5 where we read, ***[God] saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit...*** What do we bring to entice or even in the slightest earn our salvation? Nothing, for the moment we bring something to the table, besides the sin that made our salvation necessary, “grace” – this unearned, unmerited favor of God who, on His own and for His own purposes, chose before the foundation of the world those whom He would save, such grace is no longer grace at all. This is in fact what Paul spoke to the believers at Rome. In Romans 4:1-5 we read:

1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." 4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. 5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,

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Did you catch verse 4? If salvation is in any way, or in any part a human effort, a human work, then there is no more grace, but only that which is due. I share all of this because if we are to truly understand what is so amazing about the grace of God as it relates to our salvation, we must first come to understand and appreciate just how desperate our situation is. When we start to entertain, or believe, even in the slightest, that we are bringing something to the table as it relates to our salvation, then the grace of God diminishes and our own self-imposed greatest consumes us. The more we recognize just how *undeserving* we are of any of the blessings of God, much less the blessing of salvation from our own dearly held and beloved sinfulness, the more incredible, the more astounding, the more wondrous, the more fascinating, the more stunning, the more exceptional, the more extraordinary, and the more unprecedented becomes the grace of God.

Having read Ephesians 2:1-10, let me make a general overview of the text. To begin with, in verses 1-3, Paul stresses what it is that we bring to the table with regard to salvation. In these verses, Paul stresses that our part includes sin, trespasses, disobedience, lusts of the flesh and that we are, by nature, children deserving of His wrath. Then, beginning in verse 4, in great and stark contrast to what we bring to table, Paul then points out all that God has brought to the table regarding our salvation. The point to be made is this; that we have been clearly and most wondrously blessed with salvation in spite of who we were before God saved us. And just who were we before God saved us? We were in a most desperate state, a most horrific condition, one that theologians refer to as “total depravity” or, perhaps more better understand as “radical depravity.” But I get ahead of myself.

Let me quickly remind you again of the history of what became known as “The Doctrines of Grace” and the acronym of TULIP. We go back in history to the year 1610, almost 100 years after Luther started a debate which became the Protestant Reformation. Just a year after his death, the students and followers of a Dutch professor of Theology, Jacobus Arminius, rejected what Luther and all the other Reformers taught about salvation, and presented five alternative propositions. These were based on the belief that though a person is severely affected by sin, such persons still have the free-will or ability to choose to try and do the right thing towards God. For His part, God foresees this basic desire or faith and responds by giving the person the help they need to achieve their salvation. God graciously makes available the death of Christ for forgiveness of sin and the Holy Spirit’s assistance to live the life God desires of His people.

At the Synod or council of Dort in 1618-19, each of Arminius’ five points were answered and these answers became known as ‘The Five Points of Calvinism’ or better, “the doctrines of grace.” These teachings were never intended to say all that Calvin said or to teach all that the Bible has to say about grace and salvation. However, these teachings do outline the major biblical teaching of salvation by Grace alone.

Something that I did not mention last week, but is important to note, is that Arminius and his followers were not teaching something new, but were actually repackaging something that had been taught some 1,200 years early, during the 5th century, when a man named Pelagius began teaching doctrines that would eventually become the dominant teaching on salvation in Christendom until it would be challenged by Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and others in the Protestant Reformation. The teachings of Pelagius took such a deep hold in the Roman Catholic Church, that the Reformers had to react, had to Protest. Pelagius was a British-born moralist of the 5th century, who became well known throughout ancient Rome for opposing the ideas of original sin and predestination; asserting a strong version of the doctrine of the absolute free will of man in salvation and that God chooses for salvation those who He foresees will have faith. His

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“ideas” and theology were handily refuted and rejected by Augustine and the church of the 5th century. Through Arminius, the teachings of Pelagius were brought to the forefront once again in the 17th century. And yet, once again, such teachings were eloquently refuted and rejected by the Council of Dort and regarded as unbiblical. The sad thing is, that now in our day, the teaching of Pelagius and Arminius are the most dominate way of thinking not only in the Catholic Church, but also in most evangelical churches. So, to mention the “doctrines of grace” or “the five points of Calvinism” is often looked down upon by mainstream Christianity. And all this leaves us with a serious challenge. What we are seeking to know and defend from Scripture is not simply a slight different of emphasis. At issue is this, either God saves sinners OR God enables or helps sinners to save themselves.

The “Doctrines of Grace” – the very teaching of Scripture, reveals that people, if left to themselves, will not and cannot believe and thus need the intervention and working of God in them. The first part of this definition points to our topic this morning, that of “total depravity” – that if left to oneself, a person will not and cannot believe the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. Now for the grace; that even in such a hopeless condition, God takes the initiative and acts in and for them, doing everything necessary to bring them to salvation; starting long before they were born and bringing them safely through until they are found in heaven to spend eternity in the presence of Jesus. What I have just shared with you is the ultimate doctrine of grace; or the one KEY point of Calvinism; that God is absolutely sovereign (in control) in the salvation of people.

Let me state this biblical truth again; if left to one’s own devices, salvation is not something that a person would naturally choose; it is not something we obtain through our own efforts or resources (because we have none); it is not a process in which we cooperate with God, God doing His part to save us and we contributing our part. Salvation is not a state of being we come to possess by our own efforts.

Beloved, I know this has been a long introduction, but one I believe to be necessary if we are to understand the key to salvation truth: that is, the Bible’s teaching about sin and its impact on mankind. This is the doctrine of ‘total depravity’ and its companion truth of ‘total inability’. In the time we have remaining, I wish to use this Ephesians 2 text to reveal this truth. While we will be expositing this text, since after this series we will be going through the book of Ephesians, our exposition this morning will be basic. We will get into the details next year.

From Ephesians 2:1-10, there are two key points that Paul makes that we need to pay careful attention to if we are to understand sin and thus come to better appreciate God’s saving grace.

I. Our natural condition - apart from Christ. (2:1-3)

1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 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. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

According to verses 1-3, what is our natural condition apart from Christ? Simply put, it is three-fold. In verse one we are declared to be dead (nekros – a corpse). We can have a hard time with this concept because we see ourselves “alive” – and, we are – alive; physically. What Paul speaks of here is a spiritual condition. This is not simply the way God sees us; it is our spiritual condition. Just as a dead body can do nothing but decay; a person apart from Christ can do nothing to move himself toward God. A spiritually dead person has no life by which he can

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respond to spiritual things, much less live a spiritual life. No amount of love, care, and words of affection from God can draw such a person to respond. A spiritually dead person is alienated from God and therefore alienated from life. He has no capacity to respond. As the great Scottish commentator John Eadie said, *“It is a case of death walking.”* Men apart from God are spiritual zombies, the walking dead who do not know they are dead. They go through the motions of life, but they do not possess it. This beloved, is our condition before Christ. We are dead.

In addition to being dead, we are also disobedient. In verse 2, because of this inability to respond to the word and will of God, we follow instead a course of disobedience. We do what the *“prince of the power of the air”* – that is the devil, desires; doing things in a manner contrary to the will of God. Listen to how the apostle Paul brings these two ideas of death and disobedience together in Romans 8:5-8 where we read:

5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so (total inability), 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God (total depravity).

So, our natural condition is marked by death, disobedience, and finally, in verse 3, by destruction. Before Christ, *“we were by nature, children of wrath...”* – that is to say, we were on a path of destruction. Why is grace and the doctrines of grace so amazing? Because before God intervened, we were dead, disobedient and destructive. This is the condition of man before Christ.

And so we see that on the matter of sin, Paul is absolutely clear about the extent and severity of human sinfulness. In graphic pictorial language Paul says that at one time every person is like a corpse in terms of their relationship with God. Every part of their being: body, mind, attitudes, emotions, affections and will was spiritually dead, leaving people totally unaware of their true spiritual situation and unable to do anything to change their spiritual state.

How did this desperate situation develop? Again, looking at verse 2, we find it to be the direct consequence of sin or rebellion – the expression of which is following Satan’s refusal to submit to God and his determined opposition to doing things God’s way. In other word, a person left to his natural inclinations is actually hostile to God. No you say, “Wait! Wait! I know unbelievers who are not “hostile” toward God. Beloved, such hostility does not always reveal itself in an aggressive and active rejection of God. It can also reveal itself in the most religious of persons; those who rebel against God in their religious practice by reducing God and making Him fit their practice.

And all of this leads to a legal problem with God as God then responds to rebellion by justly condemning the rebel. In verse 3 we find that people are guilty before God, they are the objects of God’s wrath. And the great tragedy here is that unbelievers do not even perceive their predicament and they do not realize that they are unable to please God in any way. Any attempt to win God’s favor or to make one’s self acceptable to God is doomed because such a person has nothing to offer. Now, let me address to objections that tend to come up at this point.

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1. Are people really this bad?

I have purposely avoided giving a concise definition of “total depravity” up to this point. It would be helpful for me to give one now. Beloved, total depravity does not mean a person is as bad as he could possibly be. Nor does it mean that a person is incapable of doing some “good” things in our world. Nor does it suggest that the typical person is unaware of basic ideas of right and wrong. The Bible nowhere states such things and it is clear that much good is done in our world by many unbelievers. This is not what is meant by total depravity. What is meant by total depravity is that a person is in as bad of a condition as he could possibly be. IT means that the condition into which a person is born is not morally or spiritually neutral. The reality of the sinful nature into which every baby is born is that every person has been re-wired by sin to oppose and reject God’s rule in his or her life. Sin has so mutilated and disabled every faculty of our being the image bearers of God that a person cannot think, cannot choose or do anything while in such a state that would be acceptable to God. Total depravity then is not that people are so bad; but that they are so bad off. This leads to a second objection...

2. What about man’s “free-will”? People must be able of their own accord to choose to serve the Lord, right?

Let me say that I have never been a fan of the term – “free-will.” I am hard-pressed to find anywhere in the Scriptures the notion that man, apart from any outside influences or any predisposed internal inclinations can make a choice that is “free.” There is no such thing as “free-will” – all “wills” are influenced by either outside ideas; by internal inclinations; or by a combination of the two. Even our Lord Jesus Christ was influenced by God the Father as well as His own internal inclinations to only do that which the Father had told him. Can anyone, even for a moment, suggest to me that Jesus, the perfect man, was the only man without “free-will?” Let me give a couple of illustrations. If I go to the jewelry store to buy my wife a ring for Christmas, upon looking at the many rings available, am I “free” to choose any one of them; that is not to be influenced by any outside ideas and not to be predisposed to any internal inclinations? Will I not be influenced by the question, “Which of these rings would my wife like the best?” Isn’t that very question limiting my choices? That is an example of an outward influence limiting my so-called free will, but what of this question. “Of these rings, are there any that I don’t like?” Let’s say I just really don’t care for the color brown and the sales person shows me a ring with a brown Tiger’s eye gem. If I don’t like it, if I have an aversion to it, I won’t buy it.

You see, the problem I have with “free-will” is that people confuse real choices with what is called free will. Let me give another illustration, one not as pleasant as my ring analogy. Imagine a tiger that has not eaten for a week. We prepare two trays for him, one with 50lbs of fresh red meat and another tray with 50lbs of salad. When presented, which will the tiger choose? Clearly the tiger makes a real choice, and is free to do so. But it will always make the choice based on how it is hard-wired. A tiger by nature will choose the meat. We must never mistake real choices with “free-will.”

It is this way that sin has affected humanity. Because of sin, people are now hard-wired to reject God in their hearts, minds, and attitudes. While they will make real choices, these choices will be limited by their sinful nature. In practical terms, people are not sinners because they choose to sin, rather people choose to sin because they are sinners. It is who we are. Our internal inclination is to disobey God. And then, on top of that, we have the external influences of the world and the devil that also push us to rebel against God.

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So, where do we go from here? When you seek treatment from a doctor, the doctor's assessment of your illness determines the treatment he prescribes. If you have a headache, he will tell you to take two aspirin and call him in the morning. However, if you have life threatening heart disease, he will do major surgery. The doctor's starting point determines his course of action. And this is precisely Paul's point in our text. He does not suggest here that people are just slightly off the mark, or just sick with a spiritual cold that will clear up with a little boost to get them back to the point where they can help themselves again. Rather, our predicament before God is much more serious than that. According to God, we are spiritually dead and therefore helpless and unable to do anything that would help ourselves. Notice how Paul put it down in verse 12 saying – **“having no hope and without God in the world.”** Now that is a devastating prognosis, is it not? This is our natural condition. This is from what we need to be saved from; yet, as we noted, we are so dead, we do not even know we need to be saved. So what had to be done? This leads us to our second point...

II. Our supernatural condition – with Christ. (2:4-10)

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

Let us read verse 4, *But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us...* Beloved, let this truth sink in for a moment. **“But God...”** In contrast to our condition in verses 1-3, God now steps in; God now intervenes. And, if you will notice, everything that follows down to verse 10 is that which God does for us or does in us. In other words, just as we saw in Romans 8:28-30 last week salvation, from start to finish, is the work of God.

In salvation, God's love, grace and mercy combine to give “new life” to the sinner. Beloved, it would not have been sufficient if God simply announced to humanity that new life was possible through Jesus. Why? We just read why. Because people are dead, and being dead they must first be renewed or resurrected, something that only God is able to do. So again, it would not be enough to simply have the gospel message preached to people. Preceding the preaching, God must draw the sinners to the Savior and actually make them (did you catch the word?) - alive. It is not that we came alive by our own choice, it is that God made us alive. In verses 5-7 we find that God has given Christians the same resurrection privileges of Jesus. Look again...

5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, [God] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Notice the progression here: loved of God; dead because of sin; raised up to newness of life from the dead; ascended into heaven; a monument of grace. Jesus was beloved of God; died for sin, was raised up to newness of life; ascended into heaven and is our monument, our reminder of grace. Now, remember verse 4? Whose doing all of this? God. It is God's initiative, it is God's work. Everything here in verses 5-10, except the sin that made God's actions necessary, is clearly the initiative, the action and the work of God. This is important as we come to verse 8 where we read: *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God...* Here we learn that even our faith, which is our response to Christ, is a gift from God. God, through His Spirit, actually opens our eyes to our predicament, changes our desires, attitudes and inclinations so that we reach out and take God's gracious gift of salvation.

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Then, in verses 9-10, we see what happens to those who receive God's gift of salvation: *9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.* Those who are saved give the credit, the glory, the honor and their boasting to the Lord. And then, even their changed lifestyle of new obedience and service of Jesus, that results from being saved, from having new attitudes, desires, and inclinations, is something that God had intended for us to do all along, in fact from before time.

Let's wrap all this up by answering a couple more questions that tend to arise from such biblical truth.

1. Why is it that people struggle accepting this truth of salvation being solely the work of God?

Sin. Sin and this doctrine of total depravity. At issue is the starting point for thinking about God and people and salvation. Throughout history, the pattern is the same; as people move away from God's description of sin and the sinner, then people start to believe they can save themselves with varying degrees of help from God. We see it even today as so many so-called evangelical, protestant churches have as their starting point the humanistic philosophy of our society rather than the God-centered worldview of the Bible. The world's view is that man is the center of things. The world believes that man is inherently good and given the right circumstances, using our own reason and logic, we can control our world. This thinking has crept into the church, believing that somehow we, apart from God, decide our own spiritual destiny.

What happens when we start with such an idea is that we lose the real sense of God's holy character and of God's demands. We start to think that God is happy to respond to what we think and to what we decide is right. Such an idea also leads to the loss of the real sense of sin as sin no longer is seen as an offence against God, but is rather a breach of accepted standards in our world, and that people are free to change these acceptable standards if they desire and can get enough people to agree with them. And so, they turn the gospel into being about meeting people's needs and desires. It might be the gospel of self-esteem – that Jesus will help you feel fulfilled and happy and strong. Or, it could be the gospel of good Christian disciplines and commitment, believing that if I read my bible enough; pray enough; go to church often enough; and kick all my bad habits, then I will be saved. Do you realize that the Bible is in total opposition to such thinking? God saves sinners. God acts contrary to what we deserve (we call that mercy) and God does for us what we could never do for ourselves (what we call grace). Why do people struggle with the doctrines of grace? They struggle with it because it is such a blow to human pride, the human sense of self-confidence and self-sufficiency that people prefer to replace such truths with a lie.

One final question...

2. In light of the condition out of which God has saved us, what kind of people are Christians to be?

Ephesians 2:10 reminds us that we have been saved for *"...for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."* What are these good works? The scriptures are clear that God's ultimate purpose in saving sinners in this age is that He would have a great multitude of people, that is the Church, who desperately seek to honor Him and who live by His Word though which they give Him the glory and the respect He so richly deserves.

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Beloved, if you and I really believe that we were as dead as described in verse 1 in respect to a relationship with God; and that God and God alone has made us alive by His great love and by His own powerful mercy and grace while we deserved only His condemnation and wrath; then surely we will be fanatically devoted fans who will love to sing the praises of our God and Savior as well as pointing others to our saving God. If you and I really believe that we were dead in our sin and under God's wrath before God's grace burst into our lives, then we will be both humble and compassionate, not looking down our noses at the sin and desperate situation of others. We will put into practice the words of Titus 3:1-7 where we read:

1 Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, 2 to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. 3 For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. 4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, 5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Beloved, if you and I really believe that sin is so offensive to God that nothing less than the death of His own Son, Jesus Christ could deal with it, then we will be careful about our own sin, realizing our own ongoing propensity to set our own agendas even at the expense of rejecting God's word. May it never be! In Christ, may our death be turned into life in Him; our disobedience into obedience to Him, and our destruction into the hope of eternal life.

Soli Deo Gloria

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