

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Scripture Memory		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	19		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Ephesians 2:4-10		
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GOD'S GRACE

“As Christians, we can hardly go a day without saying the word.

“Our most familiar hymn declares how amazing it is (and for good reason). Although the Old Testament only contains several sightings of the word, the New Testament explodes with it. God's grace fills Christ (John 1:14), appears in his person and work (Titus 2:11-14), brands the gospel (Acts 20:24), overwhelms sin (Romans 5:20), founds God's promises to us (Romans 4:16), transforms weakness into strength (2 Corinthians 12:9), defines God's throne (Hebrews 4:16), and characterizes God's Spirit (Hebrews 10:29). God is the God of all grace (1 Peter 5:10).

“And God's grace visits the humble (James 4:6), saves them (Acts 15:11; Romans 3:24; Ephesians 2:5), upholds them (Romans 5:2), chooses them (Romans 11:5), greets them (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2), builds them up (Acts 20:32), strengthens them (2 Timothy 2:1), trains them in godliness (Titus 2:11-12), gifts them (1 Peter 4:10), and, as it comes to us through Jesus Christ, provokes them to an eternity of praise (Ephesians 2:7).

“Grace is the scandalous, active, undeserved favor of God. The Christian life swims within the endless shores of his grace.”¹

The late James Boice noted that most Bible texts that mention *grace* are from the Apostle Paul. Here are more of them:

“*Acts 20:24*. ‘I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.’

“*Romans 1:5*. ‘Through him and for his name's sake we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.’

“*Romans 3:23-24*. ‘All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.’

“*Romans 5:15*. ‘For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!’

“*Romans 5:20-21*. ‘Where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.’

“*Romans 6:14*. ‘Sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law but under grace.’

“*Romans 12:6*. ‘We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.’

“*1 Corinthians 1:4*. ‘I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.’

“*1 Corinthians 15:10*. ‘By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.’

“*2 Corinthians 8:9*. ‘For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich.’

“2 Corinthians 9:8. ‘God is able to make all grace abound to you so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.’

“Galatians 1:6. ‘I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.’

“Galatians 5:4. ‘You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.’

“Ephesians 1:5-8. ‘He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.’

“Ephesians 2:4-8. ‘Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. . . . in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved.’

“Ephesians 3:7-8. ‘I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.’

“2 Timothy 1:9-10. ‘[God] has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done, but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior.’

“2 Corinthians 13:14. ‘May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.’

“Colossians 4:18. ‘Grace be with you.’

“1 Thessalonians 1:1. ‘Grace and peace to you.’

“1 Thessalonians 5:28. ‘The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.’

“1 Timothy 1:2. ‘Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.’

“I count eighty-one verses about grace by Paul, and these are only a few of them. Together they constitute the most profound treatment of this great doctrine in all the world’s literature and assure us that the great apostle of grace was himself formed by it.”²

I. GOD’S MOTIVE (v. 4)

This verse begins with the Greek particle *de*, “but” (compare with Romans 3:21). What men are and deserve is offset with God’s abundant mercy. Notice the way God’s love and mercy are described: *great love* and *rich mercy*. One cannot fail to notice, however, that God’s love and mercy are *selective*. They are poured out on those who *are made alive with Christ*. All are dead in sin, but all are not “made alive.” This is due to God’s electing love and mercy (cf. 1:4, 11).

II. GOD’S MEANS (vv. 5, 6)

When God’s love is directed towards sinners, it is *mercy*. The love of God is made known to the objects of His love (Romans 5:5-8). It is a love that will not fail (Romans 8:39). This text focuses the love of God upon the guilty and undeserving; as such, it is controlled by and issues from *grace*. God’s *love, mercy* and *grace* act; for by these He *made us alive* (*sunezōpoiēsen* – “to make alive together with,” a synonym for the verb “to raise;” can also have the meaning “to keep or preserve alive”) *with Christ* when we were dead in sin. God does not set back and wait for “dead men” to act or respond – they can’t! Notice how Paul quickly adds, lest there be hiding in the hearts of those to whom he was writing the yeast of Arminianism, *it is by grace you have been saved* (*sesōsmenoi*, perfect passive; the perfect tense points to the completed action with ongoing results stressing the continual state). God acted in *grace*. The whole process of quickening the dead and raising them to life in Christ and seating them with Christ in the heavenly realm (note the parallel in 1:20) is the result of the power of God, a theme that Paul had begun in

1:19. Paul is still dealing with this theme, only now he is underscoring the motive and means for God's actions.

III. GOD'S MONUMENT (V. 7)

Verse 7 begins with what is called a *hina* purpose clause, usually translated "*in order that*" and used to declare a purpose; that is, why something was done. Why did God do this? To *display* (*endeixētai*, aorist middle subjunctive, lit. "show for Himself") *the exceeding* (*huperballon* cf. 1:19) *riches of his grace* (cf. 1:7) *as seen in his kindness* (*chrēstotēti*, goodness, kindness toward another, used only by Paul, cf. Romans 2:4, 3:12, 11:22; Colossians 3:12; Titus 3:4) *to us in Christ*. Believers are quite literally "trophies of sovereign grace."

IV. GOD'S MESSAGE (vv. 8, 9)

"For it is by *the* grace that you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." Now some have contended that the gift of God refers only to *grace* and not to faith, which they say is our own doing and something that is the result of our freewill. What does *and this is not from yourselves* refer to? Many good theologians say it refers to the complete salvation being spoken of in the text. This is admissible, and is surely correct. But I am inclined to agree with Abraham Kuyper, who writes regarding the grammar of the Greek text, "The general rule is that the demonstrative agrees with the substantive in gender and number – but not always. The antecedent should be looked for in the immediate vicinity of the pronoun or adjective that refers to it." Kuyper then cites a noted grammarian who says, "Very common is the use of a neuter demonstrative pronoun to indicate an antecedent substantive of masculine or of feminine gender, when the idea conveyed by that substantive is referred to in a general sense."³ Now what this somewhat technical definition means is that *faith* (genitive, feminine, singular) is the antecedent of *this* (demonstrative, nominative, neuter) and that the Apostle is declaring that even faith is not from yourselves – something he expressly declares elsewhere as well (cf. Philippians 1:29). This is so *no* one will boast or have any grounds for boasting. I do not see, if freewill is maintained, how men will not have grounds for boasting. *They* responded: all had an equal chance, but some used their free wills and others did not. The ultimate reason they will be saved is not sovereign grace, but sovereign freewill – with which Paul will have no part. It is all of Grace – faith included.

V. GOD'S MAXIM (v. 10)

For his workmanship (*poiēma* – only here and in Romans 1:20) *are we*, so the Greek text reads. The pronoun *his* is emphatic. We are not saved *by* good works, but *unto* good works. God has *created* us in Christ Jesus (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17). If Paul has not sufficiently dealt a deathblow to all "merit-mongers," he does so now with this "coup de grace." Believers have been *created* – they did not create themselves – *for* (*epi*, aorist subjunctive, used in purpose clauses) *good works*, which are the fruits and evidences of faith. Believers are enabled to do good works not only by the power of God (Philippians 2:13), but also by the example of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 13:14, 15). These have been *prepared beforehand* by God, in order that we should *walk* (*peripatēsōmen*, cf. v. 3) in them. Note the contrast with v. 3. The doctrine of sovereign grace certainly does not encourage sloth; on the contrary, it is the great motivation for diligence in the Christian life and evidence of election (cf. 2 Peter 1:3-10).⁴

CONCLUSION: B. B. Warfield wrote that the Grace of God is at the very center of Paul's preaching, "The glad tidings which Paul's Gospel brings to men, then, is just, to put it briefly and in familiar language, salvation from sin in the blood of Jesus Christ. What it means is, in the crispest form of statement, just that Jesus has done it all. He has taken our place and born in His own body on the tree all our iniquities: He has died our death, and He grants us His righteousness that hereafter we may live and live to him. This, according to Paul, is at the very heart of the heart of the Gospel."⁵

ENDNOTES

¹This section is taken from Greg Morse article *When Love Is War: Extending Grace in Conflict* (Desiring God Blog), July 29, 2017.

²J. M. Boice, *Romans: An Expository Commentary III* (Baker, 1993), p. 1305.

³A. Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (rpt. Eerdmans, 1973), p. 412.

⁴The most absurd conclusion that can ever be drawn from this truth is that it gives you the right to sit still. The opposite is true. In its deepest grounding this truth comes down to the fact that you are completely powerless, that you are wholly dependent upon God, that in yourself you are irretrievably lost. To what must such an awesome thought lead you? To continue sleeping calmly on the dregs of idleness? Or, with holy trembling, to call upon that God from whom alone your help can come?" G. Vos, *Grace and Glory* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1994), p. 231.

⁵B. B. Warfield, *The Saviour of The World* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1991), p. 154.