

We Believe in God's Grace Ephesians 2:1-9

Slide 1

“Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.” I love that hymn. John Newton wrote that hymn and many others.

In the late 1700's, John Newton was an ordained minister in the Anglican Church and was quite the evangelist.

What many don't know was that in his younger days he was a slave trader and a captain of several ships involved in the slave trade.

After his conversion, he felt called into the ministry and was very active in the abolition of the slave trade.

Up to the time of his death at age 82 in 1807, the same year the British Parliament abolished the slave trade through-out the British empire, John never ceased to marvel at God's mercy and grace that had so dramatically changed his life.

Shortly before his death, with failing health, eyesight and memory, John Newton was heard to say, *“My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: ‘That I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior!’”*

In Ephesians, Paul wrote about this “Amazing Grace” of God,

Ephesians 2:1–9, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

But 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. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 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, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

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One of my favorite commentators is A.W. Tozer. He had minimal education but was quite the prolific writer about the things of God and was awarded many honorary doctorates.

He had this to say about God’s grace: *“The first truth is that no one ever was saved, no one is now saved and no one ever will be saved except by grace”* and *“The second truth is that grace always comes by Jesus Christ.”*

We are saved by God’s grace that only comes through Jesus. To understand what John and Paul were talking about, we must understand the meaning of this word “grace.”

In Scripture, the word “grace” is often translated as “favor.” For instance, in some translations like Genesis 6:8 it reads *“But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.”*

Yet, in other translations it says, *“Noah found grace in the sight of the Lord.”* Grace and favor have similar meanings.

Another word, often found when using the word “grace,” is the word “mercy.” Both words are complementary but there’s an important difference.

Speaking in terms of God: God's mercy towards us is God not giving us what we deserve.

We deserve condemnation and eternal punishment. We deserve the wrath of God, but God withholds His wrath. That's mercy.

God's grace is giving us what we don't deserve. He gives us His salvation and His blessings. That's grace.

Today's passage explains God amazing grace and His great mercy. But bear with me a minute as I explain some highlights of the Greek in today's passage.

Verses 1 through 7 are just one sentence in the Greek. Paul's known for writing long sentences.

These verse are not run-on sentences connected with the word "and," but are full of phrases emphasizing what's being said.

Let me illustrate. In verses 1-7, the subject of this long sentence is God in verse 4.

The verbs, the action God's performing, is "*made alive*" in verse 5, "*raised up*" in verse 6, and "*seated*" also in verse 6. The object of these actions is "*us*," that is you and me.

So, to simplify what's being said in verses 1-7: God made us alive when we were dead; God raises us up with Christ; and God seated us with Christ in heaven.

Everything else reflects on these actions of God. Keep this in mind as we examine this passage.

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The first three verses talk about our deplorable condition prior to God taking action.

Ephesians 2:1–3, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.”

Prior to our salvation, prior to be called by God, we were dead, only we didn't know it. We were dead men and dead women walking.

Dead spiritual, but being dead spiritual, if unchanged will render us dead eternally.

Being dead eternally doesn't mean a cessation of existence, but it does mean an eternal separation from God in a place of torment.

We were dead in our transgressions and sins. That word “*sins*” in the Greek means to miss the mark.

We have a sin nature, and on our own, we can't hit the mark (the standard of holy as defined by God) no matter how hard we try.

The word “*transgressions*” in the Greek means to overstep a boundary. That's why some translations say “*trespasses*.” Both these words together, “*transgressions and sins*” indicated intentionality.

We not only sinned because it's our nature to sin, but we also intentionally overstepped the boundaries and broke the rules, “*in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world.*”

Because we walked with the world, we followed the crowd. We went along with the current culture and our culture is ruled by "*the ruler of the kingdom of the air*" which is Satan. The world follows Satan.

If you don't believe me, then you haven't listened to the news lately. 1 John 5:19, "*We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.*"

Satan rules this world now, yet his day is coming, and He knows it. But here's the problem:

2 Corinthians 4:4, "*The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*"

Satan has blinded the eyes of those in the world. They can't see what's happening around them.

People who come to Christ often feel they've had a veil or blinders removed and begin to see the world as God sees it.

We call this our Biblical worldview, and this puts us at odds with the rest of the world. Here's the issue, to be of the world, and not in Jesus, is to be defenseless against Satan and the evil in our world.

We were disobedient because the spirit of the evil one was at work in us whether we realized it or not.

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Ephesians 2:3, "*All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.*"

Paul's saying, "*and such was us.*" We all were there. Here's the part I don't want you to miss: "*we were by nature deserving of wrath.*"

We weren't children of God, but we were children of His wrath, and the wrath of God is a most fearful thing.

John 3:36, *"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them."*

We can't fully appreciate the grace and mercy of God without knowing about His wrath.

Romans 1:18, *"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness."*

The wrath of God is coming in full measure against the ungodly in this world. If you have time, read Revelation 16 where the bowls of God's wrath are poured out on the earth. God's wrath is to be feared!

When the Bible tells us that we were dead, this means we couldn't communicate with God. We had no inclination to reach out to Him. We were dead and didn't even know it.

This is the meat of the message. God (the subject of this long sentence) *"made us alive together with Christ."* Just as God raised Jesus from the dead physically, He raised us from the dead spiritually.

Paul even put in a parentheses *"by grace you have been saved,"* meaning it was nothing we did.

In the Greek, *"have been saved"* is in the past perfect tense meaning is a completed action, a permanent state as the result of a past action. It was all because of God's great love.

God not only made us alive, but Ephesians 2:6 says, *"And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus."*

We have been positionally resurrected. We're a new creation. We have new sight, *"I once was blind, but now I see."* We have new thoughts and insights, we have new values.

We even have a new home: *"seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus."* Spiritually we're with Jesus, and where's Jesus?

Jesus is in heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father. Our new home is heaven, with Jesus, not here on earth.

Philippians 3:20, *"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."*

So, considering our citizenship is in heaven, we ought to be different people from the rest of the world. As Jesus said in John 17, we may be in the world, but we're not of the world.

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Conclusion

I would need eternity to just begin to praise God for what He's done for me.

I don't even know the full extent of His grace, but one day that full extent will be revealed. We can scarcely grasp the glory of His amazing grace.

1 John 4:10, *"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."*

Jesus was sent to be the propitiation, the atoning sacrifice, on our behalf. Whole books have been written on that one word "propitiation."

Why's that so important? Because the justice of God, His wrath against sin must be satisfied.

Propitiation means to satisfy God's wrath by sacrifice and that's just what Jesus did for us. *"For the wages of sin is death"* and Jesus took that death upon Himself.

That's God's grace. We didn't deserve His sacrifice but because of His great love for us, and God's grace, the sacrifice for our sins was made. It was all God. None of our salvation was the result of anything we did.

Ephesians 2:8–9, *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."*

We can do nothing to earn God's grace. If we could earn it, it would no longer be grace. There's nothing we could ever do so that God would owe us.

God's amazing grace is offered through His son Jesus. We only need to accept by faith, and that faith, in which we accept this gift of grace, is also a gift from God.

Our whole salvation and our ability to accept that salvation is all wrapped up in God's grace. He sent His Spirit to draw us to Jesus when we had no ability to even turn towards God and ask for mercy.

John 6:44, *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day."*

The only boasting we can do is boast on what God has done for us, not what we have done for Him. Even our acceptance of Christ as Lord and Savior is a work of God.

We do no good works until the grace of God is accepted by faith. Then any good we do is only by what He does through us.

Ephesians 2:10, *“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

We don’t do good to earn God’s grace, we only do good because of His grace.