




THE COMMUNITY

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What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Ephesians 2:1-10

As we've already mentioned, Ephesians divides neatly into two sections: chapters 1-3 and chapters 4-6. In the first half of this letter Paul describes what God has done for us in Christ. In the second he describes what it looks like for us to live out our new identity. We'll get to that second section in a few weeks, but for now we get to just continue to reflect on the enormity of His gift to us and all it means.

By way of review, 1:3-14 describes the spiritual blessings all believers possess. The next passage, 1:15-23, records Paul's prayer that our hearts would be enlightened to know the hope, riches, and power that God has given in Christ. In our passage for this week he describes how we moved from being objects of God's wrath to objects of His delight. The key concept you want to explain, demonstrate, and bleed for is that just as we were initially saved by grace (because we were sunk without it) so we live everyday of our lives by grace (because we're still sunk without it.) As Tim Keller says:

The gospel is not just the 'A-B-C' but the 'A-Z' of the Christian life. The gospel is not just the way to enter the kingdom, but it is the way to address every problem and the way to grow at every step. It tells us that we are more wicked than we ever dared believe, but more loved than we ever dared hope- at the same time.

Ephesians 2:1-3

In order to help us understand more fully the grace we have received, Paul gives a fuller description of the life from which we were saved. As my pastor taught me when I was a student, "The good news is so, so good, because the bad news is so, so bad." So let's look at the bad news. According to Paul we were a mess. Our three great enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil left us dead, disobedient and deceived.

Before knowing Christ, we ignorantly followed the "ways and principles of this world." When the Bible talks about the world it's generally referring to the behaviors, values and outlook of the unbelieving masses. It's the standard operating procedure of people and cultures who don't know Christ. Think about the prevailing wisdom on your campus. To most it's "obvious" that the key to a happy life is having money, relationships are for sex, and if it feels right, it is right. That's the world's way of thinking and our default mode is to go right along with it.

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What's the Big Idea?

This passage takes a closer look at the grace God extended to us by raising us to new life in Christ, thereby showcasing His mercy for all eternity. You want your students (not to mention yourself!) to understand that the gospel of grace isn't merely for unbelievers, but is vital for Christians as well. God wants us to live our lives out of a rich experience of His grace on a daily basis.

What's the Problem?

We forget that as believers we still need, and have access to God's mercy and grace just as much as we did before we knew Christ. When we forget the grace of God we can fall into two opposite errors. We may either become filled with spiritual pride or else we may live with a complete sense of failure as we see what our hearts are really like.

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Satan or, “the ruler of the kingdom of the air” is ultimately behind this system and promotes these beliefs to our destruction. Our nature is to follow him.

Our third great enemy is our own sinful selves. Paul says we were driven by a core desire to gratify our sinful and selfish thoughts and desires. Paul uses the phrase “sinful nature” to explain that the sin was not simply external behavior, but flowed from a heart that was hopelessly corrupted. The Christian doctrine of “total depravity” states that in all facets of our very being, we are corrupted by sin. This does not mean that everyone is as corrupt as they can be, are as equally corrupt in all areas, or cannot do benevolent actions. It does mean that in our very nature, we are infected with sin and inclined away from God.

As a result of all this we were “objects of wrath.” What this means is that God’s holiness would be compelled to destroy us, for God cannot be in the presence of evil. God’s wrath can be described with a crass, but helpful metaphor – “vomiting.” Just as our bodies reflexively vomit out what is injurious to our health (such as poison), God’s wrath is His reflexive response to evil, of which we were the greatest perpetrators.

Ephesians 2:4-9

Now the good news. This section begins with a very important “but.” The passage emphasizes that in contrast to what we deserved, we who know Christ have received mercy and grace. Grace is an unmerited, even unreasonable, gift that can never be earned. The only role we played in our salvation was to receive by faith this free gift that God mercifully gave us.

Paul specifically highlights two aspects of this gift that is ours in Christ. First, we were made alive. Paul emphasizes that this mercy was shown us while we were still “dead” in our transgression. This means that we were completely helpless to help ourselves. In fact, when this mercy was extended to us, we were still actively in a state of rebellion. But now we are alive in Christ.

Second, He “seated us with Him in the heavenly realms.” In 1:20-21 Paul had described Christ’s resurrection. Now he explains that we too will be raised to live a new life in the world to come. In fact, it’s as good as done.

All of this is a gift, motivated by God’s great love for us. It doesn’t get any sweeter than that.

Ephesians 2:10

If the passage ended with v. 9 we could be left thinking that grace paid the entrance fee to heaven, but we’re on our own from here on out. Verse 10 however, dispels that thought. What Paul is saying here, is that this principle of grace is not only how we came to know Christ, but also how we live our entire lives and grow as Christians. How did we come to Christ? We acknowledged our helplessness and our need to be saved, and we received the free gift of God’s rescuing us. In the same way, now that we are Christians, we don’t launch off on our own trying to live out the Christian life by our own efforts.

Take a look. First, We are “His workmanship,” that is, God is the one who is continuing to form us and mature us. Having saved us He hasn’t moved on to other things. And His dealings with us are always by grace. Second, He has “good works prepared in advance for us to do.” We aren’t making this up as we go along, but He has a plan for our lives. There are doorways all over campus and everywhere we go for the rest of our lives that He wants us to walk through. These are gifts themselves (grace). And as we walk through them with varying degrees of success He’s there to redeem what we mess up (grace) and love us all the way (grace).

The very act of participating with Him in His eternal purposes causes us to live out our Christian life in close communication and reliance upon God and not in self-effort. As we need strength and wisdom to live out a godly life, we must ask God to graciously provide us with the empowerment to do so. Colossians 2:6 states this principle well: “In the same way you received Christ Jesus as lord, continue to live in Him.” We were saved by God’s incomparable grace, and we continue to live out our Christian life by this same principle.

What’s Our Response?

Most Christians understand the grace they received when they first trusted Christ. Many however, having come to Christ by faith, mistakenly think they now need to live their lives by their own effort. Living our lives by faith and under God’s grace is a radically different orientation to life and exactly what the Scriptures call us to.

Believing the gospel of grace and letting it permeate every area of our lives is in large measure the essence of Christian maturity.

Your task in this study is to help your students see that everyday they need to experience the mercy and grace Jesus purchased at the cross.

Ephesians 2:1-10

The Questions

Q: As you read through this passage, what jumps out as significant to you?

A: *Allow your group to discuss. Keep an open ear to what they saw in the passage.*

Q: What terms does Paul use to describe our life prior to Christ in vv 1-3?

A: *You can go through and highlight the terms he uses. Once they understand these, jump right into the next question.*

Q: How would you describe a person's spiritual condition before knowing Christ?

A: *There could be a lot of good answers here. We want them to understand that the overarching umbrella term for this is "spiritually dead."*

Q: Why do you think Paul paints such a vivid picture of life before Christ?

A: *Paul wants Christians to understand the ugliness of the backdrop against which grace is seen.*

Q: Reread verses 4-10. God's grace is the central idea of this passage. From this passage, let's develop a definition of grace.

A: *With you group, come up with a definition for grace. Something resembling, "unmerited/undeserved favor" should be what you steer them toward. You want them to see the undeserving nature of people contrasted with God's lavish works of love toward them.*

Q: Why, does the Bible say, God rescued us from our spiritual death?

A: *This is very important. People need to understand God rescued us because he is rich in mercy and grace. We did not earn it. We were not owed it. We did not deserve it.*

Q: What do you think happens in our lives when we forget how bad off we are apart from God's grace?

A: *We begin to stink. Arrogance, pride, legalism, harshness, etc begin to overflow out of our lives instead of humble freedom produced by the gospel of grace.*

Q: "The gospel both saves and *sustains* a Christian." How can the reality that God has unlimited grace for you change the way you go through your everyday circumstances?

A: *Hopefully, this question get's a bit more personal as people share specifics. Facilitator, can you be bold and share vulnerably? We want our groups to understand that, in everything they encounter, they can be sure that God is fully pleased with them and fully delights in them. There is not a world where God is ever disappointed with them or thinks they are shameful.*

Memory Verse

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8-9 ESV