

Ephesians: God's Road Map



#3 What you need on the way – Eph. 2:8-9

Intro

She moves so gracefully. She graced us with her presence.
He had the good grace to apologise.



In common conversation today, how do you use of the word “grace”? I don’t imagine, away from your church friends, that you use it we see it in The Letter to the Ephesians, which says...

“...by grace you are saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:5)

Journalist Julia Baird recently asked her followers on Twitter to post about the



last time they observed “grace”. Many of them just posted the name “Jacinda Ardern”. It seems grace today is humility, poise, and respectfulness.

Elaine Benes from Seinfeld made it clear in a disastrous job interview. She confessed: “Ok - I don’t have grace, I don’t want grace. I don’t even say grace.”



What do we mean when the Bible refers to the “grace of God”?

Let’s take a look at the summary given by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9. We’ll unpack the meaning of the word “grace” in terms of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in 3 points from these verses.

1. Grace – saves

Firstly, God’s grace saves.

In Ephesians 2:8-9 we read...

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— ⁹ not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

The ancient Greek word *Χάρις* (*charis*) simply meant that which brings joy, happiness. Paul tells us what made him bless God so effusively in Ephesians chapter 1 – God’s grace saves us.

This leads us to ask, from what are we saved?

I love that scene in the film based on Nick Hornby’s book *About a Boy* in which a young schoolboy, Marcus, is saved by his new and unconventional adult friend, Will, played by Hugh Grant.



Marcus is bullied every day at school, and he stands on stage at the school concert before them singing the song his mother chose, “Killing



me softly”. As he is “dying” on stage while singing solo, Will is watching from the wings. In a rare moment of selflessness, Will joins Marcus on stage, guitar in hand, and sings alongside Marcus. In doing so, Will draws the mocking and shame away from Marcus, onto himself.

Yes, I’m suggesting that Hugh Grant is kind of like Jesus in this scene, but not in many others 😊. Will “dies” to save Marcus from his “death” on stage.

The Apostle Paul writes about life and death. In Ephesians 2:1 he depicts people without Christ as the “living dead”. And throughout the letter, he points to Christ’s death for sin as that which saves us and makes us truly alive. Paul uses polarizing comparisons to get the reader’s attention...



| Before | After |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| “Dead” | Made alive in Christ |
| Trespassing | Doing good works |
| Self-serving | Living for God’s glory |
| Boasting | Humble |
| Following insatiable desires | Guided by God’s Spirit |
| Under the “ruler of this world” | “Seated” above with Christ |
| Autonomous | United in Christ |
| Liable to God’s wrath | Receiving mercy, kindness |

With these opposites in view, review the early verses of the chapter...

2 You were dead through the trespasses and sins² in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient.³ All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us⁵ even when we were dead through our trespasses, 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 immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

- Paul is not saying that there is no life in us at all before knowing Christ, but that life lavished with God's grace is amazing by comparison
- Paul's not saying that there is no good in us at all before knowing Christ, but that without Christ our own "goodness" was not sufficient to untangle us from forces in us and in the world that are opposed to God. We need saving!

The death of Jesus Christ for sin (the basis of Paul's praise for God in chapter 1) is the act of grace that saves us from lives characterised by death.¹

Though our lives were as good as dead, he says in verse 4, "But God..."

- "made us alive" with Christ (he sees believers as resurrected)
- "raised us up" with Christ (he sees believers as ascended)
- "seated us" with Christ (he sees believers as already in session with God)

It's as if one of the great creeds of faith is being recited about us!

Even though our journey as Christians is still amidst trials and troubles, the grace of God in Christ always inextricably links us to the new life displayed in his resurrection. It's what we need on the way; on the journey of life that still must navigate difficult and challenging paths - "...by grace you have been saved" (vs. 5). The Greek text² here refers back to a point in time (the cross of Christ) and it applies moment by moment since that time – we have been saved and are *being* saved.

¹ through the redeeming work of the one sent as Saviour, Jesus Christ (1:7)

² In the perfect passive tense

Author Philip Yancey wrote...

“I love [Bunyan’s] *The Pilgrim’s Progress* because it gives such a realistic picture of the Christian life. Virtually every time the pilgrim faces a choice, he makes the wrong one! He chooses bad companions and makes bad detours all along the road. The message of grace is that we fall down, and God picks us up and dusts us off again and again...”



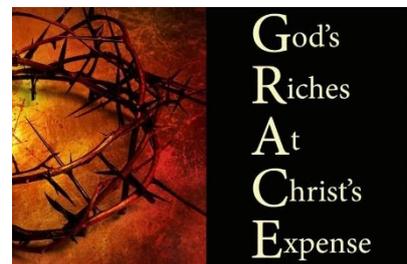
The grace of God in Christ saved us from our sins, to new life with God. The grace of God keeps saving us. It’s what we need on the way.

2. Grace – is the free gift of God

The second feature of God’s grace is that it is the free gift of God. Paul wrote...

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— 9 not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

The Queen of England once asked her chaplain for a simple explanation of the grace of God. He gave her this acronym. Grace is G...od’s R...iches A...t C...hrist’s E...xpense.



The “immeasurable riches” of God grace³ are God’s gift, at God’s cost, despite the reality that we neither earned nor deserved such goodness (not the result of works).

Why is Paul adamant that salvation comes free to the receiver?

In Paul’s day, religious syncretism ruled the lives of Gentile citizens⁴ and it fuelled a competitive spirit:

- they strived to curry favour with many gods and spirits through sacrifices and gifts in their temples

³ 1:7-8

⁴ There was a plethora of Greek and Roman gods, but they had little interest in humanity. Citizens vied to seek greater favour from any mix of “gods” that might help them survive or rise above others. Paul’s God, by contrast, seeks out and responds to human need with love.

- they sought special spiritual insight that they might boast of greater connectedness with the heavens than their peers
- they competed for public honour through daily rituals showing devotion to the Roman emperor.⁵

Paul's worry was that his readers might think they should do the same with God now they were Christians. It's as if they saw themselves in a long queue leading towards God, boasting of their superior rank in the line. One says, "I offer more sacrifices and give more gifts than you, so stay behind me." Another says, "I have superior spiritual knowledge, God favours me more." Another says, "My business is thriving, see how God prefers me to others, step back".

Paul had to warn Jews who became Christians not to be duped into thinking that obedience to religious laws was a necessary means to be on good terms with God, rather than relying on grace alone.⁶ Here he fears that Gentiles who have become Christians will carry over *their* spiritual meritocracy into the Christian life. To do so put them at risk of rendering Christ's death as irrelevant to them, and to experience no salvation at all.⁷

God doesn't rank people according to relative acts of sacrifice, status, race, religious observances, deeds, knowledge, or bribes.⁸ This is what troubled Jesus so much about the rich, young, religious Jewish ruler (in Luke Chapter 18) who asked, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" The man went away sad after Jesus' words. Even if his motives were sincere, his vision of God and his own system gaining God's favour was thoroughly flawed.⁹



We too today are shaped by an "earn" and "deserve" way of life. It might be how many "likes" or followers we can boast of on our social media accounts. Perhaps we think our educational qualifications set us in a special class of people. It might be in the company we keep, the success of our pursuits, our

⁵ The emperor was self-proclaimed as 'divine' so making such devotions a 'spiritual' mindset

⁶ E.g. see Galatians chapter 3

⁷ E.g. Colossians chapter 2

⁸ E.g. Matthew 9:13. French philosopher Simone Weil wrote a book called Gravity and Grace. Her premise was that the world runs by rules like gravity (Newtonian). Every action deserves an equal and opposite reaction. With God comes a "strikingly different pattern," says Weil. "From God we deserve anger and get love; we deserve punishment, and we get forgiveness."

⁹ Luke 18:22-23

postcode, or even our wardrobe. The danger can also lie in “apparently” spiritual trophies – “See how much I give to charity”, “Look at my position in the church council”. Though these may be good things in and of themselves, we may be duped into putting store in them as a means of seeking favour with God, or boast of reasons we think God should rank us more highly than “lesser” candidates for God’s blessings in life.

No wonder Paul uses such dramatic language in Ephesians 2:1-4. We must understand that...

- our trespasses are more serious than we assess them to be (see Eph. 2:1-3),
- God’s holiness is of a higher standard than we would demand it to be (Eph. 1:4),
- God’s free gift of grace fully satisfies, at the expense of God’s own sacrifice, the debt we owed (Eph. 1:7),
- God’s grace bridges the chasm between God and us that sin creates and grants us new life (Eph. 2:4-5, Rom. 6:23)

God’s grace saves. God’s grace is a free gift.

3. Grace – is for all people

Thirdly, God’s grace is for all people.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— 9 not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

This point may seem less obvious in the text but remember that Paul is writing to Gentiles – people who were not Jews. In those days Jews had no expectation that non-Jews would fully participate in God’s blessings¹⁰ (even if the Old Testament does).¹¹

By contrast Paul writes in Ephesians 3:6, “..the Gentiles have become fellow-heirs... and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”¹²

¹⁰ The label “Gentile”, meaning “of the nations”, was used by Jews of non-Jews in Paul’s day to identify those they considered to be “outside” of God’s blessing and promise

¹¹ E.g. Micah 4:2

¹² Something Paul was called to make clear to all, see Romans 1:5

We must recognise then, that the grace of God is for best of us and the worst of us; for those near to God and those far from God, whether Jews or not, rich or poor, of high or low status - all are offered this grace, all are covered by this grace.

There's a small cemetery in Olney, England, with a granite tombstone with this inscription:

“John Newton, clerk [pastor], once an infidel & Libertine, a servant of slavers in Africa, was, by the rich mercy of our Lord & Saviour Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long laboured to destroy.” You may not remember his name, but all of us know the song he wrote as a testimony of his life: “Amazing Grace.”

Paul's own storyline had a similar arc to that of Newton...¹³

- Paul once was the epitome of the living “dead”, but God's mercy reached him when he was helpless to save himself
- He was personally accountable for his wrongdoing, but grace overturned the sentence he deserved
- He thought he knew life, but God showed him a life full of love, acceptance, and kindness.

We too then must be sure to see that God's grace is radically inclusive.

Lecturer George Stansberry told a group of Bible college students:

"If you leave this lecture today and see a beggar on the street and give him a dollar, that is unmerited favour. He did nothing to deserve it. But if you leave here and go to your car and someone is breaking into your car to steal from you, and you give him a dollar, that is grace, because that is the opposite of what they deserve.

The parables of parables The Good Samaritan and The Prodigal Son shock us with their suggestion of such a radical and *all*-inclusive scope of inclusion.

God's grace saves. God's grace is a free gift. God's grace is for all people.

¹³ See Acts 9

Conclusion

The big question is, “How do we receive God’s grace?” Paul says, it’s by faith alone.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith...

Faith can legitimately be substituted with “trust” in this and many places in Paul’s writing. It’s not just intellectual assent Paul has in view, but a personal confidence in Jesus Christ, putting one’s life in Christ’s “hands”. Paul is sure of this because in Christ is all we need to be at peace with and blessed by God.

Instead of picturing people in a long queue competing for God’s favour by boasting of their own qualifications, Paul’s image is of two two camps:

| Camp 1 - with faith | Camp 2 – without faith |
|--|---|
| Those who humbly say “thank you” to God, and trust in Christ | Those who reject God’s offer and choose to make their own way |

In one camp are those who humbly say “thank you” to God¹⁴, and in the other are people who reject God’s offer, and choose to make their own way.

- If you’ve never put your faith in the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ, this is what God offers you for the journey of life. It’s what you need along the way. Let me encourage you to read chapter 1 of Ephesians and after, perhaps offer a humble prayer of thanks, and trust in God. Then ask a Christian friend or pastor to help you with your next step.
- If you took that step but you’re still unsure whether faith alone is enough? Let me encourage you to set aside all other systems you think make you acceptable to God. Let the freedom and joy of knowing God’s saving grace lighten your load on your journey. You are, by grace, truly a child of God, fully forgiven, deeply loved, unconditionally accepted and blessed with all you need to walk in God’s ways.
- If you are someone who has that trust in God’s grace alone, I leave you with an encouragement to stay free! Trust and respond with thanks to God again and again for amazing grace. But I also offer a challenge as to

¹⁴ Paul’s own journey testimony bears this out (Phil 3:7) as does the teaching of Jesus (e.g. Luke 18:9-14; Matt. 25:40) and a favourite idiom of Jesus (e.g. Matt. 20:16)

how we might make this word “grace” more widely known in its biblical sense. Consider these words from author, Philip Yancey...

“Jesus was not primarily known for what he was against. He was known for serving people who had needs, feeding people who were hungry, giving water to the thirsty. Think for a moment how your friends might characterise the Church today and why.”

Let's be sure that we understand what “God's Grace” is, and make it known.