

## Lesson 7: Grace (Eph. 2:8-9)

Grace is the free and unmerited favour or kindness of God. I like this definition of David Seamands best: "Grace is what God is and what God does when He meets the sinful and undeserving. Grace is a pure gift, free for the taking."<sup>1</sup>

Yes, grace is a free gift and moreover, it is the giver Himself. Grace is gracious God Himself who never stops loving sinners and the undeserving.

### I. Man needs to be saved

#### Eph. 2:1-3

<sup>1</sup> As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature object of wrath.

This is true for everyone when we were born on the earth.

Many people believe that a man was just born, he was pure, and had no sin. But as he grew up, little by little he committed sins, and gradually he started to be caught by sin, and finally he had become a "good" sinner. But, the Bible says that by birth, man has sinful nature. Man was born as a sinner in sin therefore he bears fruits of sin. He was separated from God completely. He was the object of God's wrath. There is no exception.

When we misunderstand our natural state and how we need to be saved, we also misunderstand about salvation. The Bible declares that "There is no-one righteous, not even one. (Rom. 3:10)" All are the object of God's wrath. All are going to be thrown into eternal death. All of us were born as a sinner, were dead in our sins. Moreover, no-one is able to get out from the situation.

The simple fact we often forget is how hopeless and totally bankrupted we are without Christ. And there is no way by which we can make ourselves right with God by our own effort or works.

### 2. To be saved by grace through faith

#### Eph. 2:8-9

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. Seamands, *Healing of Damaged Emotions* (David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, 1981) p.84

<sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith --and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.

The Bible clearly says "By grace you have been saved." That's right. Sinners can be saved! It is only by grace. Jesus came to save us, you and me. And his salvation is perfect. There is nothing we have to add for our salvation.

Let's imagine, you are in a deep pit called sin. There is no way for you to get out from the pit. You are just waiting for eternal death. And Jesus has ability to save you. But you need something to connect you and Jesus. That is faith. Faith connects you to Jesus. You read the Bible and understood grace of God. That's very good, but it's not enough to be reconciled with God. You need faith in Jesus to live in grace practically.

Some may say "I have my own way of faith, my own way to come back to God, my own way of relationship with God. After all, what is important is faith, right?" You may have a great faith, but in what/whom do you have faith? What is the base of your faith?

#### John 1:17

... grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Grace of God comes through Jesus. It is impossible to enter grace if we reject Jesus. There is no other way to be saved, but Jesus is the only one who God has prepared for us.

Salvation is to be found through Jesus alone (Acts 4:12): God shows his promise through the Bible (2 Pet.1:21), and speaks through Jesus (Heb. 1:3). Jesus is the one we have faith in (Rom. 3:22), the Bible speaks about Jesus (John 5:39), and the Bible is the only base of our faith (Rev. 22:18-19). Jesus is the only way to enter grace (John 14:6, Heb. 7:25, Heb. 10:20).

For salvation it is not optional whether to have right relationship with Jesus or not. If we want to be in God's grace, we need to remain in loving relationship with Jesus.

### 3. Standing in grace

#### Romans 5:1-2

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup> through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Romans 5:11

<sup>11</sup> Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

We can stand in grace. That is the only way that we can have peace with God. There is nothing in us which makes us right before God. Actually we deserve eternal death because of our sins. We don't even have right to ask for God's forgiveness.

Nevertheless, Jesus died on the cross and received all God's wrath on our behalf. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:21)" Therefore, in Christ, we can have peace with God. And we rejoice in God. God loves us as we are, God accepts us as we are, God is pleased with who we are. Knowing that, we have relationship with God. It is only by grace that we can enjoy having relationship with Him. We can enter into grace by faith.

Would you ask yourself this question? Do you have either peace with God or frustration with God? Surprisingly many Christians have feeling like this. "Looking at me, God must be disappointed with me. He is telling me, 'Can't you do a better job?', 'Work hard!', 'Try harder, much harder!'" So, they would work hard to do better. They try to be better persons. They imagine God is always frustrated with them and is yelling at them, God is always scoring their performance and judging them. If you do that, you would never have peace with God. You would feel as if you were in the heavy storm, tossed around by winds, and there will be lightning and thunder all around you.

People try to justify themselves by many ways. Doing a good deed each day, volunteering to do some activities, charity works, self-enlightenment, ascetic practice, religious rituals, etc.

We, Christians knew we were saved only by grace through faith, and not by any of our work. But, as for victorious Christian life, somehow we feel it all depends on our hard work: my discipline, my zeal, prayers, Bible reading, witnessing and serving, helping others and giving offerings. But you never feel you've done enough. So, you always try to find excuse for yourself. You can't have peace with God.

Where are you standing now? In grace or in observing the law? Are you standing in guilty feeling, resignation, emptiness, or performance treadmill which drives you to work harder? Or are you standing in grace?

It's not about if you have experienced God's grace. After you have entered grace, it is possible that you fall from grace (Gal. 5:4). If you fall from grace, you no longer stand in grace. It is important to know where you stand

now. In other words, do you have peace with God? Do you have right relationship with Jesus? Do you rejoice in his presence? Or do you have frustration with God?

#### 4. Barriers to grace

Grace is the free and unmerited favour or kindness of God. We receive it by faith. Grace is not something we have to work hard to get. Grace is also not something we would be given based on our achievement. Christians suppose to know this. But, there are many Christians who fall into Performance trap or legalism. And usually they don't recognise it, and they are frustrated with themselves and about others. So they work harder. Then they more fall into Performance trap or legalism, deeper and deeper.

According to David Seamands, a former missionary and pioneer Christian counsellor, professor at Asbury Theological Seminary, some major problems which plague performance-oriented Christians are: 1) continuous feelings of guilt, the disapproval of God, 2) a sense of worthlessness, low self-esteem, 3) a sense of phoniness, a feeling of not knowing who they really are, 4) many negative emotions such as anxiety, anger, fears, resentments, excessive mood swings and depression, 5) difficulties with interpersonal relationships.<sup>2</sup>

Why is it so difficult to live in grace? There are some common reasons.

##### 1) Pride

We tend to think "I'm good. I'm better than others. I can do it by myself." Actually there is something which we cannot do by ourselves although it is about ourselves. But we don't want to admit it. We feel that if we admit it, our value will be reduced. Then, we will say "God, if you help me a little more, then I can fix all my problems, I can manage my life well. I can do it by myself." Simply, it's the matter of pride.

##### 2) Low self-esteem

This is actually the other side of pride. Although we understand the meaning of grace very well, but we always look at ourselves as a person who is not worthy to receive grace. Sometimes, we choose not to receive grace, in this way we are punishing ourselves. And by doing this, we feel the judgement is done. Or we justify our bad life, character or everything.

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<sup>2</sup> D.A. Seamands, *Healing Grace* (Scripture Press Foundation [UK] LTD: Herts, 1995) p.19-22

### 3) Custom of give-and-take

We think if we receive something we have to return something which has about the same value. If we don't do that, we feel ashamed of ourselves. We think when we take something, we have to give something which has about the same value. If we don't do that, we feel guilty. But the value of grace is the life of Jesus. If we receive such an expensive one, we cannot return, or we have nothing of the same value to give back. We don't want to feel ashamed or guilty, so it hinders us from receiving grace.

### 4) Performance orientation

Our society is working based on performance and achievement. In our society we are evaluated by our performance and receive reward according to the result. In our working place, we try to work hard and make our result better in order to gain better pay. In our school and home, we try to work hard and get better mark so that teachers treat us better and parents are pleased with us and buy something. In a church or Sunday school, if we behave well, we would receive gift. If we behave badly, we would be punished. We have been trained in this system, therefore we naturally think that we need to achieve something in order to receive the love of God.

Performance-trap is Satan's old trick. Legalism is his favourite weapon to attack Christians.

Satan keeps speaking lie into our mind. "God is disappointed with you. He wants you to work harder and do better jobs. God is angry with you. He is counting your sins and planning how he can punish you. God doesn't love you. He hates you."

"You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. (Gal. 5:4)" By performance-trap and legalism, Satan is working hard that you will fall away from grace, Jesus.

The fact is this. God loves us and He loved us even when we were sinners, his enemies, and he sent his beloved son to die for us on the cross so that our relationship with Him will be restored. For God, the biggest sadness, the heart breaking moment is that we believe Satan's lies and reject God's word.

## 5. Living in grace

Most of us have a sound biblical understanding about grace, but often that's not the way we live, or the way we look at ourselves. We believe grace in our heads but not in our gut level feelings or in our relationships.

## 2 Peter 1:2

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

We have entered into grace by faith in Jesus. By listening to his words, we will understand more and more about being in His grace. By having relationship with Jesus, we will experience His grace deeper and deeper.

How did Jesus accept you? He never says "if you want to come back to me, first you have to be person worthy to be accepted by me." He accepted you when you were bound by sins. How has he treated you? He has cleansed you and put the best clothes on you because you are His treasure. And He continues to transform you to be more like him.

What did he do for you? He died on the cross for you. Is it because you were morally good person? Or is it because you were superior in anything? No, it's not so. He died on the cross for us, you and me because we were sinners. We opposed God. We were God's enemies and the object of His wrath. For our redemption, he died on the cross to pay all the cost for us.

How does he look at you? Does he think of you and say, "He keeps making the same mistake. He is still doing silly things. How can I punish him?" No, never. He always looks at you and says, "You are precious in my sight. I love you. (Is 43:4)" How can we know it is true? He died on the cross for you and me. He didn't spare his life, but he sacrificed his life to redeem you. On the cross, He made total surrender. That is how much he loves you, how worthy you are for him.

Do you want to know the secret of experiencing "grace"? The secret is to confess your sins before God and ask forgiveness. It is not to say vaguely "I am a sinner, forgive me." But confess your sins concretely and clearly. It is not to repeat something easy to say or something you know that you're already forgiven. It is to honestly confess before God the sins hidden deep down in your heart, which you don't want to think about, which you are still feeling guilty, powerless against and despaired of. Then, ask forgiveness. And declare forgiveness by the cross, based on the promise of God's Word, for example, 1 John 1:7, John 8:11. Then, imagine how much you are loved by Jesus. In many cases, it is much more effective if you can have a mature Christian to do the declaration with you, rather than you do it alone.

"Living in grace" is not a licence to keep sinning. It is a way to set you free from the bondage of sin.

By listening to his words, we will understand more and more about being in His grace. By having relationship with Jesus, we will experience His grace

deeper and deeper. The power of grace has to become real in our lives, and it must penetrate our whole being.

## 6. The incomparable riches of his grace

We must understand that God's grace is so much more than what we find in our conversion experience. It is not something only done in the past, but it also operates in the present, and will continue throughout the future.

### Eph. 2:6-7

<sup>6</sup> And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> 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.

Not only were we made alive with Christ, but we were also exalted with Christ and seated with Him in the heavenly realms.

Many of us here have already experienced God's tremendous work of grace, but the Bible says, we have not yet experienced the fullness of the riches of his grace. There is still more for us to experience and discover about his grace. Grace will continue to show us its incomparable riches throughout eternity, because His purpose for us is to have closest relationship with Him in His glory eternally.

God loves us as we are, but he loves us so much that he can't allow us to stay as we are. God loves us and accepts us as we are, that's why he reached out to us while we were still sinners. But he also knows how wounded we are in this sinful world, how distorted our self-esteem is as we have been captivated by the devil for so long, and we still live in this broken world. And he doesn't want to keep us in the sufferings by the pains of the past and despair with low self-esteem. God wants to repair our damaged emotions, recycle our hang-ups into wholeness, and transform us into Christ-likeness.

He wants to show the "incomparable riches of his grace" to us and through us. Now we, Christians have been identified with Christ in his resurrection and exaltation, so we too have a position of authority over the evil powers. As we live in this world, and take our stand against the devil's schemes, and struggle against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph. 6:11-12).

Grace alone is, and always will be, the basis of our relationship with God. God will not share His glory nor allow us to claim any of the credit for our salvation.

And salvation is much more than forgiveness of sin. Yes, it is deliverance from eternal death, slavery and wrath, but moreover it also includes the totality of our new life in Christ, the whole process of our transformation.

Rev. 21:1-3

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

Rev. 22:21

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

By grace alone, all God's people can be sure that they will be there. Yes, we will be there because of His grace. "There is no other basis for entrance into the kingdom of God – here on earth or in heaven."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Seamands, *Healing Grace*, p.216