

The Parade of Grace Ephesians 2:8-10

Introduction

Ben Malcolmson was just a walk-on football player at USC in 2006 – but was grateful for the opportunity. It was a great year for USC football as they won the Rose Bowl that season. Ben now serves as an assistant to Coach Pete Carroll who is coaching the Seattle Seahawks.

While Ben played at USC - he felt God had him there for a reason – he had a desire to share his faith with the other football players. He tried to start a bible study – no one showed up. He started a prayer group – no one. Then – Christmas that year – he decided to place a Bible in each of his teammate’s lockers. He later returned to the locker room and was shocked to find all of the Bibles torn up and shredded all over the locker room.

As far as he knew – the gift of bibles was a complete waste. However – four years later – an old friend connected up with him and told him that one of the Bibles was picked up by a teammate – who read it – and accepted Christ – shortly before he passed away in a tragic accident.

The Apostle Paul has described the human condition in the first few verses of Chapter 2

Men and women dead in trespasses and sins / subject to the sway and influence of the devil – children of wrath - - - more inclined to tear up a Bible than to read it

Human history has been one long parade of sin and folly / rebellion

But – there has also been another parade running alongside of the parade of sin and folly

It is the parade of grace

God Himself reaching out – and calling men and women to turn from their sins and embrace the Savior

In grace – this God gives life to the spiritually dead – forgiving them of their sins – making them into new creatures in Christ.

We come to one of the classic gospel texts this morning

Paul reminds us the very basis of our salvation

He says that it is all of grace – it is a gift of God

Eph. 2:8, 9 -'By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.'

I. By Grace - vv. 8, 9

Paul first introduced the topic of grace back in Chapter 1

In 1:5, 6 – He said that God the Father has predestined us to adoption as sons thru Jesus Christ according to the kind intention of His will – to the praise of His glorious grace

In v. 7 – we have redemption thru His blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of His grace.’

The Christian message is a message of grace – but that grace is intertwined with the person and work of Jesus Christ – the cross of Calvary

Theologian Carl Trueman says that he was watching the news program – *Morning Joe* a few years ago and a Presbyterian pastor was being interviewed about his new book on grace. The pastor spent 8 minutes talking about grace but never mentioned the name of Jesus Christ.

Trueman: ‘Those lacking a theological background would have come away with the impression that grace was simply a divine sentiment, a decision or a tendency in God to overlook sin as an overindulgent parent might when dealing with a naughty child. Grace seemed to be nothing more than God turning a blind eye to human rebellion. It was as if grace was a free pass to do whatever one chooses.’

Trueman: ‘God does not turn a blind eye to human rebellion. In fact, He tackles it head-on in the person and work of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible constantly connects grace to Christ and the best theologians of the Christian faith have always made this connection central to their understanding and articulation of grace. To talk about grace is to talk about Christ.’

Grace is found in Jesus Christ

Jesus died – so God could bestow His gracious gift of salvation upon us

Grace was an important concept to the Reformers during the Great Reformation

The Reformers argued that the true gospel had been buried and corrupted by the RCC

It was buried under a system of indulgences / penance / the mass / ritual / pilgrimages / relics / purgatory – works

The Reformers declared that salvation was in fact – by grace thru faith – not of works

They said that we are justified by faith alone

Justification is another word for ‘saved’ - - - it means to declare righteous

Rom. 3:24 - ‘being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.’

In justification – God imputes / credits the righteousness of Jesus Christ to our account

Jesus takes our sin / gives us His righteousness

Romans 4:1-5

When a person exercises faith in the promises of God – God credits the righteousness of Jesus to their account

Wayne Grudem: 'It is essential to the heart of the gospel to insist that God declares us to be just or righteous not on the basis of our actual condition of righteousness or holiness, but rather on the basis of Christ's perfect righteousness, which He thinks of as belonging to us. This was the heart of the difference between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism at the Reformation.'

[Systematic, p. 727]

It is Christ's righteousness that saves us – not our own

Roman Catholic theology to this day – still argues the position that it is man's own goodness that allows him to merit heaven

Karl Keating: 'For Catholics, salvation depends on the state of the soul at death. Christ has already redeemed us, unlocked the gates of heaven, as it were. He did His part, and now we have to cooperate by doing ours. If we are to pass through those gates we have to be in the right spiritual state . . . the Church teaches that only souls that are objectively good and objectively pleasing to God merit heaven, and such souls are ones filled with sanctifying grace.'

[Catholicism and Fundamentalism, p. 166]

In the Roman Catholic system – grace comes and makes us good enough to merit heaven

Protestants rejected that idea as being not only unfaithful to Scripture - - - but impossible

They argued – 'Who can ever be righteous enough to earn heaven?'

Such a view [the RCC view] reflects a failure to grasp the ongoing conflict the believer will have against sin in this life

Paul himself said: 'I am not perfect – but I press on' - - Phil. 3

If we are ultimately saved by our own righteousness – we are in big trouble

Charles Spurgeon: 'You could sooner drink the ocean dry than save yourself by your good works.'

The Reformers said – here is the issue: Where is your hope placed for salvation? In Christ alone or Christ plus . . . your good works?

They came up with the 5 Solas of the Reformation – [Sola (latin) = alone]

The 5 Solas of the Reformation:

- *Sola Gratia*
- *Sola Fide*
- *Sola Christus*
- *Soli Deo Gloria*
- *Sola Scriptura*

By grace alone / thru faith alone / in Christ alone / to the glory of God alone / on the authority of the Scriptures alone

Our trust is in Christ alone – not Christ plus our own good works

Jesus showed the fallacy of works based salvation in Luke 18

Luke 18:9-14

The Pharisee in Luke 18 – ‘I tithe of all I possess / I fast twice a week . . .’ - - - works!

In His prayer – he is patting himself on the back!
I am a pretty good guy! – ‘I am worthy!’

The Publican – he looks to grace

He simply says, ‘God be merciful to me the sinner’

Jesus says that this guy is the one who gets it

One man thinks he is earning his way to heaven
The other looks to grace

If salvation were by works – The thief on the cross – would have had no hope

Jesus should never have said to him – ‘today you’ll be with Me in paradise’ - - - He should have said to him – ‘Oh boy’ – I can die for you – but you have got to get down off this cross and start racking up some points in the righteousness department

But – he didn’t say that – because of this thing called grace

If we are to be saved at all – it must be a matter of grace

We are saved by grace through faith

What is faith?

*** Faith is trust in / reliance upon the promises of God and the gospel / trust in Christ alone for your salvation

Faith is simply a channel thru which God's blessings flow to us

We are not technically saved by faith – but through faith

We are saved by grace / we are saved by Jesus and His death / resurrection

Alister McGrath: 'Faith is like a channel, thru which the benefits of Christ flow to us. Faith is the means by which the work of Christ is applied to our lives.'

Faith is the empty hand held out to receive what God offers

'Nothing in my hand I bring - simply to Thy cross I cling'

Faith is saying: 'God I have nothing to offer to make me worthy of heaven – I cling to the cross of Christ.'

John Owen: 'Faith is that act of the soul whereby they who are hopeless, helpless, and lost in themselves, do, in a way of expectancy and trust, seek for all help and relief in Christ alone.' [Works 5, p. 293]

Faith is set in contrast to works / and placed in the context of one's response to God's Word

Romans 4:3 - 'Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.'

Abraham [the OT saint] believed the promises of God – that was his faith

The sinner must respond in faith to the message of the gospel: 'I believe!'

Rom. 10:17 - 'so then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ.'

Faith is more than mere mental assent to a set of gospel facts – it is trust in the person and work of Christ

John Ortberg makes the point that faith says to Jesus – ‘Jesus – you are right about everything you say.’

Faith and trust are one and the same

Ortberg: ‘Imagine saying to Jesus, “I trust that you’ve deposited merit in my heavenly bank account, and I will consume your merit to get in, but I don’t trust you enough to actually do what you’ve said in my everyday life. I’ll use your blood to avoid hell, but I’d like to retain control of my own life.” that kind of trust would be both insulting and nonsensical.’ [Eternity is Now in Session, p. 36]

i.e. – it doesn’t make any sense to say, ‘I believe in Jesus – I’m a Christian’ - - - but then to have no interest in reading God’s Word / fellowshipping with God’s people / learning what Jesus taught – putting it into practice

Faith says, ‘I believe Jesus is the package deal - He died for me - - - His Words are true wisdom / His ways are true ways - - - I’m not just signing up for heaven – I embrace Him as My Lord and Savior

II. Crafted By God - v. 10

Here Paul calls the Christian – God’s workmanship / God’s handiwork

The Greek term - Ποιημα – trans. As workmanship / refers to something made by a craftsman / a work of art - [a literary work - - - we get our word poem from this]

Harold Hoehner: ‘This word denotes a work of art or a masterpiece.’

Theologian John Stott says during his time as a student at Cambridge – the head Principal of the College - Paul Gibson retired. At a ceremony - a portrait was unveiled which would be used to be placed in the hall already lined with portraits of previous presidents. In expressing his thanks, Gibson paid a compliment to the artist. He said that in the future he believed people would look at the picture and ask not, “Who is that man?” – but rather, “Who painted that portrait?”

As we live our lives – in the transformation that comes about thru salvation - - - we become a living portrait of God’s grace / His workmanship – our lives become markers of His grace

- Look at this God who takes Saul – a persecutor of the church and turns him into an apostle of grace
- Look at this God who takes a man possessed by demons [afflicted by the devil] – a danger to all around Him – and He is now clothed and in his right mind – listening to the Savior
- Look at this God who causes the Ephesians to burn their magic books – cast away paganism - embrace the truth of Christ

- Look at this God who calls out drunkards and prostitutes and thieves – transforms them by His grace

MLJ: 'God is the Workman. God is the One who is fashioning. It is a wonderful picture of God as a kind of artist, as some kind of artificer. The picture invites us to think of God as in some great workshop, and asks us to watch Him forming and fashioning and bringing something into being.'

This verse shows us the proper place for good works

We are not saved by works – but we are saved for good works

Works become the fruits / evidence of such salvation

Westminster Confession: 'Good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith.'

Our paragraph [Ch. 2:1-10] began with trespasses and deeds – v. 1
It now ends with good works – v. 10

John Stott: 'The contrast is complete. It is a contrast between two lifestyles (evil and good), and behind them two masters (the devil and God). What could possibly have effected such a change? Just this: a new creation by the grace and power of God.'

A Christian is someone in whom God is working – refashioning / molding us into the image of His Son

God is putting forth His power and energy – He wants us to grow in righteousness / holiness in this life

Lehman Strauss: 'the Church is God's masterpiece . . . God takes rough, crude sinners, dead in trespasses and sins, and produces vessels meet for the Master's use. Sin-marred, defective material is transformed by God into useful instruments of righteousness.'

What tools does the craftsman / artist use?

The Gospel
The Holy Spirit
The Word of God
Other people of faith
Trials / circumstances / life experiences

Look back over your life and note seasons of growth and change

What did God use there? How did His Word shape you? / what people influenced you?
How did certain experiences shape your faith – or challenge you to rise to greater heights?

God knows what He is doing – He's a master craftsman

He is molding / shaping – crafting the new creation

Do you recognize the design and purpose of the potter in your life?

Spurgeon: 'Be ready to be as clay in the hands of the Potter . . . He can take the infidel, and create in him a mighty faith; the harlot and make her a pattern of purity.'

By design – God is fashioning us for good works

The reformers were accused of promoting wickedness by saying that good works do not save – so they responded to the charges – by pointing to this verse

Works come after salvation

It is part of God's purpose in our salvation – that we should become a people who do good works

Good works are marked out for our path

MLJ: 'It is a part of God's design that we be prepared unto good works. If you think that you can abstract forgiveness only from the plan of salvation, you completely misunderstand the plan. When God looked upon you and loved you and began to work in you to make you a Christian, He had already prepared the works which you should live and perform.'

There is this program

God is not just sitting back and leaving us to our own devices – [In Grace] He is at work / crafting / shaping / molding

He refines and chisels away at His product

He put you where you would hear the gospel / and has placed you where you can grow spiritually - - - and where you can do good works to give glory to His Name

Like the president who resigned at Cambridge – when the artist painted his portrait – and he expressed the idea that people would see his portrait and wonder about the artist who painted it

That is the idea behind our salvation

Matt. 5:16 - 'Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and so glorify your Father who is in heaven.'

Conclusion

Michelangelo was once asked what he was doing as he chipped away at a shapeless rock. He replied: 'I'm liberating an angel from this stone'

That's similar to what God is doing in the case of the Christian.

We are in the hands of the great Creator / sculptor

John Ortberg: 'Jesus never said, "Believe the right things about Me, and I'll let you into heaven after you die." His news was something far grander, more cosmic, more life-changing, more costly, more compelling, and more humbling than that.' [Eternity is Now in Session, p. 51]

God wants us to be His workmanship – to give Him glory right now - - - and throughout eternity – in the parade of grace