

Candlelight Christian Fellowship

Ephesians 2:1–10 (NKJV) Part 3

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“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

As believers we have been seated with Christ in the *“heavenly places.”* Our position in Christ has been declared by God Himself. This is how He sees us – in Christ. Paul the apostle further declared that, *“You are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”* Colossians 2:10 (NKJV) Therefore, as believers, we know that these truths about our life in Christ are not the result of human performance but are the declared positions of every believer. You are complete in Him, and you have been seated with Him in the dimension of the heavenly places – on His throne in heaven! Jesus said, *“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”* Revelation 3:21 (NKJV) John said, *“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”* 1 John 5:4–5 (NKJV) Therefore, as believers who have placed our faith in Christ, we are *“the overcomers!”*

As fallen man we are fully incapable of saving ourselves and are therefore incapable of being *“complete,”* or greater still, *“seated with Christ”* on His throne. Such work is the work of Christ - not our own. The salvation we have received, our position in Christ, and our completeness in Him is a work of grace. That is to say, no person on earth could ever accomplish this work on their own – even through the best human effort. For this reason Paul says that it is, *“by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”* (vss. 8-9)

Grace most simply described is *“unmerited favor.”* God has granted favor toward us apart from human effort, works, etc. Any other definition refuses to accept what grace truly is - unmerited! Furthermore, we should add that any offering of salvation, granted by human achievement, be it all or in part, is not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and should be rejected as heresy. (See Galatians 1:3-9; 2:16-3:14) Sadly, the *“gospel of works”* is taught in most churches today. However, the *“gospel”* that couples together any human effort, work, or standard to the true gospel of grace is no gospel at all. For example, if one must be baptized in order to be saved, that is a false gospel. If one must join a particular denomination in order to be saved, that is a false gospel. This is called front loading the gospel. If one must keep up with a certain standard, give enough, serve enough, etc. in order to remain saved, this too is not the true gospel. This is called back loading the gospel.

Many believers don't really understand the power of the Gospel and are trapped in a game of performance. They have been taught that when they respond to Christ they are "asking Jesus into their lives" and then making every effort to live a life pleasing to Him. They expend great energy "working" and "trying" to please God, make good choices, and refuse the impulses of the flesh. They focus their energy warring with the devil/demons, fleshly habits, and the lure of the world – always with little to no success and always with great discouragement. However, they believe that this effort is pleasing to the Lord and therefore He "makes up the difference" for their weakness. This is how they see the workings of grace. In this way they are then "saved," "complete," etc. and therefore are "seated with Christ in the heavenly places." However, Paul makes clear that we are saved "by grace," "through faith," and "not of works." The salvation we enjoy is a "gift." This fact is good news! This is the true gospel!

Nowhere in Scripture are we told to "ask Jesus into our lives." However, we are instructed to trust Christ for the salvation He tells us He will provide. In doing so, we exchange our old and sinful lives for a new life in Christ and are declared righteous, holy, and complete in Him, by the sovereign act of God, according to His grace. As a result, in understanding the true Gospel of grace, we give up spending our lives "working" and "trying" to please the Lord. We simply surrender to Him and rest in His holiness.

Any human effort designed to "please the Lord" by "trying harder" is an assault on grace. It denies the power of God at work in us. As Christians we simply enter into the "Sabbath rest" of a relationship with Jesus, and cease striving to please Him. *"For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His."* (Hebrews 4:10 NKJV)

Therefore, and as a result of God's divine power, and of His sovereign work of grace, we become the workmanship of God. *"For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."* Philippians 2:13 (NKJV) For this reason Paul says that, *"...we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."* (vs. 10)

The word Paul uses for "workmanship" is "poiema." It is where we get our word "poem." We are the poem of God. He is writing the story of our lives. The prose is His, and therefore He receives all the glory.

Once born again, God delivers us from our sin, changes us from within, directs us in our walk, and matures us as we daily enjoy the outworking of His grace in our lives. We don't strive through our human effort to accomplish what He is doing in us. We let Him do the clean up. We trust Him as He changes us. We surrender to His leadership. Therefore, not only will God accomplish in us what we could never do, but we will grow to see that He retains all the glory for Himself. We are His workmanship.

When a believer comes to understand that it is God who is at work in us, and that He is shaping us according to the good pleasure of His will, we will also see that our life will naturally change and we will begin to manifest the nature of Christ in ways we had never dreamed possible. We will begin to grow in righteousness and will likewise be uncomfortable practicing the ways of the old sinful man. We will become a conduit for good as the result of the regeneration we have and are experiencing. This is what Paul means when he says, *"...we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."* (vs. 10) The good work we manifest is the result of His workmanship – not our human effort.

God has designed that we walk in good works. Therefore He empowers, enables, and works out those good works in and through us. These good works (His good work in us) become the “*gold, silver, and precious stones*” that survive the consuming fire that burns away the “*wood, hay, and stubble*” of our human-generated “good deeds.” (See 1 Corinthians 3:12-15) This is just another way of saying that our human effort will not stand the test – His work in us is eternal.

It is also notable to mention that Paul’s declaration of the gospel of grace can carry an additional insight worthy of our attention. He said that it is, “*by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*” (vss. 8-9) He is saying that we are saved by grace: unmerited favor, therefore declaring that grace a gift. He also shows that we receive that gift by faith. Here lies another great truth from the Scriptures. Faith, like grace, is also a gift. We do not possess the human propensity to believe in and of ourselves. In fact, left to ourselves, according to Scripture, the message of the gospel of grace would be too much for the natural man to grasp. Therefore, it is God who draws, illuminates, and gifts us with faith to believe. Therefore, we cannot even take credit for our faith. It, too, is a gift from God – and thus we declare that salvation is all of God and not of man.

“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” Romans 12:3 (NKJV) *“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”* 1 Corinthians 1:18 (NKJV) *“...the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”* 1 Corinthians 2:14 (NKJV) *“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).”* Ephesians 2:4–5 (NKJV) We simply trust Him to do what He says – and give all the glory to Him.

Notes:

Questions

True or False: Grace is unmerited favor.

True or False: If I try hard to do all the right things, God will make up for my shortcomings and save me.

True or False: Front loading the gospel is placing prerequisites on salvation.

True or False: Back loading the gospel is placing human performance as essential to the maintenance of salvation.

True or False: Faith is a work.

True or False: I cannot even take credit for the faith I have. It is a gift from God.

True or False: God only gives faith to some people.

True or False: God has given all men the measure of faith and then allows us to use or refuse it.

True or False: I am a believer, and I have trusted Christ for salvation.

True or False: I deserve to spend eternity without God in hell, but He saved me in spite of me.

True or False: If I am a true believer, God is at work in me – maturing me – and allowing me to grow in righteousness.

True or False: If I sin and disobey God that means that I am not saved and that I am not a believer.

True or False: If I am a believer, I am called to obedience – but I know that the power to obey is not my own; it is the power of God at work within me.

True or False: As a believer, I am the poem of God. He is writing the story of my life.

List some of the ways God has changed you from within and caused you to manifest good works in Him.