

THE BEAUTY OF GOD'S AMAZING GRACE

BY DR. JERRY VINES

By the Book™ A Chapter by
Chapter Bible Study Series
from Jerry Vines Ministries
2295 Towne Lake Parkway
Suite 116 #249
Woodstock, GA 30189

Let's Begin

A theme rarely pursued, but resounding again and again in the Old Testament, is the beauty of God's presence and His character. The Psalmist exhorts the worshiper to, "Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness" (29:2; cp. also, Psa. 96:9; 110:3; 1 Chron. 16:29; 2 Chron. 20:21). The fact is, in God's grace is revealed His amazing beauty.

Ephesians 2 overflows with God's wondrous and beautiful grace. And, no event explains His grace and love more than the cross of Jesus Christ. In the cross, not only was grace magnificently displayed, but the battle believers have with the flesh was decisively won.

As we make our way through chapter 2, let's follow the outline below:

I. The Beauty of Grace Displayed at the Cross (vv. 1-10)

II. The Battle with the Flesh Decided by the Cross (vv. 11-22)

I. The Beauty of Grace Displayed at the Cross (vv. 1-10)

Chapter 1 revealed the magnificent riches of God's redemption in Jesus Christ. As we examine chapter 2, we feel this truth being driven deep down into our hearts, gripping our souls in a very personal way. Paul, in effect, is saying, "This is your life; this is my life." If one is a believer, chapter 2 stands as his or her spiritual autobiography. Paul begins in grace but ends in glory.

Our *past*, *present*, and even our *future* is all here in this chapter. First, Paul records our *past*, what we used to be. He writes, "And you *hath* he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (vv. 1-3).

The phrase "in time past" is the key to understanding this section (vv. 1, 3). If one is saved through faith in Jesus Christ, Paul is describing what that person was before conversion. However, if someone is an unbeliever, Paul is describing what that unbeliever is now. And, notice carefully that the picture is not pretty. It is as if Paul is digging around in a graveyard! Corruption and decay saturate this description. How so? Paul says, we were *dead*. The human family apart from God is one gigantic grave plot. On every marker, a single inscription is found. It reads, *dead in trespasses and sins*. Obviously, Paul is not referring to physical death. Hence he must be referring to spiritual death, the death Adam and Eve experienced in the Garden of Eden. God told them

While physical death was surely a consequence of their disobedience, the moment Adam (and Eve) bit into the forbidden fruit, is the very moment he died spiritually within.



concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, “in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:17).

While physical death was surely a consequence of their disobedience, the moment Adam (and Eve) bit into the forbidden fruit, is the very moment he died spiritually within. Hence, Adam ran for cover when he and Eve heard God coming through the Garden, “Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden” (Gen. 3:8). Why? Simply because Adam had died within. His spirit no longer drew nourishment from God.

In fact, his spirit was separated from God. And, *separation* is the essence of death. *Physical death* is the separation of soul from body; *spiritual death* is the separation of soul from God; and *eternal death* is the separation of soul and body from God forever. Spiritual death is what Paul is describing in verses 1-3. Therefore, we may conclude that the world in which we live is filled with the walking dead, men and women who are breathing, eating, and walking, but nonetheless are dead because they are separated from God spiritually.

*Adam had
died within.
His spirit no
longer drew
nourishment
from God.*

In addition, not only are unbelievers dead, unbelievers are also disobedient. Paul refers to us as having been “children of disobedience.” We were born as rebels against God. And, according to Paul, rebels bear certain marks. As rebels, we were marked with domination by the world, direction by the devil, and defeat by the flesh. The world, the flesh, and the devil constitute the unholy trinity against which believers must contend until Jesus comes for them or believers go to Him (cp. Rom. 12:2; John 12:31).

Furthermore, Paul’s description of unbelievers does not stop with *death* and *disobedience*. Instead, unbelievers are also *depraved*. Paul describes our depravity by remarking that we are, “by nature children of wrath.” Notice Paul’s wording, “by nature.” When we reference the nature of an object, we are referring to its essence or what the object innately is. Our problem is not that we disobey God. Instead, our problem is that we were born in disobedience, born as sinners (Psa. 51:5; 58:3). From Adam we inherited this “children of wrath” nature (cp. Rom. 5:12). Humans are born neither neutral toward sin nor as “basically good.”

Second, Paul records our *present* (vv. 4-6; 8-9). He writes, “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus” (vv. 4-6).

The picture Paul just painted is dark and appears hopeless. Left to ourselves, no avenue leading to life remains a possibility to consider. Yet for all the darkness oozing from the picture of our past (and present unbelievers), God sets a glimmering gem of grace on this dark background of sin and shame.



Note the transition, “But God.” These two words may be small but stand as the most significant phrase in any person’s autobiography. When all was helpless, God stepped into the frame of our lives. God intervenes; God acts; God moves in and takes charge.

The phrase “But God” translates into several different nuances in our lives. “But God” means we are *saved*. “By grace are ye saved” Paul excitedly proclaims (vv. 5, 8). And, because it is by grace, it is God saving us, not we saving ourselves. Salvation is God’s gift to us (v. 8b). Therefore, because it is a gift, there is nothing a person can do to earn a gift. Gifts are given on the basis of love, not obligation (cp. Rom. 6:23; also Rom. 5:8). Besides, what could a dead man do to *earn* God’s favor?

Not only do gifts reveal the *love* of God, gifts also reveal the *mercy* of God. When we receive a gift, we are not receiving what we deserve. Mercy is broader than all humanity and deeper than all sin. Our God is rich in mercy (Tit. 3:5). Gifts imply mercy; gifts imply grace. And, with grace comes forgiveness and a new life. The beauty of God’s grace is fully captured in Paul’s little transition, “But God”!

As we noted earlier, even when we were dead, God made us alive in Christ (v. 1). Paul now explicitly affirms this marvelous truth again—He “hath quickened us” (that is, *made us alive*; cp. John 5:25; Rom. 6:13). We who were dead have been raised to walk in an entirely new life. How? Only by grace through faith can this resurrection take place (vv. 8-9).

“But God” further implies we are *seated* (v. 6). Our salvation in Christ naturally supposes our being seated with Him. Once we have life, we now are lifted to the heavenlies with Him. Christ, Who went down to the depths of sin to save us, carries us to the heights of glory to seat us. Because He identified with our guilt, we may identify with His glory! Our identity with Christ in glory, being seated with Him in the heavenlies, reveals the position we have in Him.

Note: this is decidedly not in some future event that this identity takes place. Paul is not referring to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Instead, he is speaking of our present position in Christ as His saved, sanctified people. This means we may claim authority over all things. It remains totally unnecessary for Christians to live defeated lives.

Third, Paul records our *prospect*, our future autobiography (vv. 7, 10). Observe the words Paul uses, “in the ages to come.” Accordingly, we have a glorious future because of the cross of Jesus Christ. The beauty of God’s grace knows no timeline. It extends to His children throughout all eternity. In fact, the

*When all
was helpless,
God stepped
into the
frame of our
lives. God
intervenes;
God acts;
God moves
in and takes
charge.*

Reflection Connection

Meditate on the moment when Paul’s “But God” invaded your life. How was your life different from before? Was God’s invasion noticeable to others? If so, in what ways? If not, why do you think that is so?



Apostle says we are “His workmanship.” In eternity, we remain a display of art upon which the angels may look. He “created” us, “in Christ Jesus” for this very purpose. A saved soul is God’s work of art, and will remain so throughout infinity.

Know also, the work of art God prepared us to be was created to be a “working” piece of art; that is, we were created, “unto good works.” He saved us not to be seated in soft pews, comfortably awaiting the moment when we slip off to eternity. While it is true, our salvation resulted in our being seated with Him in the heavenlies, Paul was referring to our *status* in Christ not our *service* for Christ. Our status (position) reflects our *established relationship* to God the Father. Believers are firmly positioned in Christ now and forever. On the other hand, when Paul affirms our *service* (purpose), he is reflecting our *empowered fellowship* with Christ. Believers who are firmly positioned in Christ are believers who are fully empowered to serve Christ. In short, we are saved by Him to walk in good works for Him (cp. Titus 1:16; 2:14; 3:8, 14).

II. The Battle with the Flesh Decided by the Cross (vv. 11-22)

The second portion of chapter 2 is structurally similar to the first part of the chapter. Paul contrasts what happened in “time past” to what happens “now.” In the first part above, he was referring to sinners in general, we were all dead in trespasses and sins, “But God” saved us. Now the Apostle speaks of Gentile sinners in particular and makes a specific application to us all.

Even more than today, hostility soared between Jew and Gentile in Paul’s day. In fact, this latent hostility stood as part of the reason for the first Jerusalem council of the church (Acts 15). Does God love Gentiles as He loves Jews? Does His grace extend to saving only a select few or does He love and offer grace to all peoples? Even today, there exist some extreme groups that teach God does not love everybody the same way. Another form of this teaching is, Jesus died only for a select few, not the entire race of men and women. Of course, Jesus Himself corrects such unbiblical error (John 3:16).

*Neither Jew
nor Gentile
deserve
salvation.*

Hence, Paul is concerned with the blatant hostility between Jew and Gentile as he pens this portion of the letter. Not only is the beauty of God’s grace wonderfully displayed at the cross of Jesus Christ, but also the battle with the flesh, expressed specifically in ethnic prejudice, is decided once and for all by the cross of Jesus Christ.

So what did the cross do to decide the battle? Paul reveals two truths the cross established. *First, the cross closed the distance between different sinners* (vv. 11-12). In other words, whether Jew or Gentile, the distance from God is the same. Both are separated from God. Neither Jew nor Gentile deserve salvation. As Paul says elsewhere, “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Rom.



3:10, 23, italics added). If one is lost, one is “far off” (v. 13). A separation exists not only for Gentiles but Jews as well.

Furthermore, the distance from God has made us all totally in need of God’s wondrous and beautiful grace. Note the descriptors Paul compiles (vv. 11-12), “without Christ,” “aliens... strangers,” “having no hope,” “without God in the world.” Only two spiritual positions exist for men and women. Either one is “in Christ” or one is “outside Christ.” Another way to say it is, either one is lost or one is saved; one is born again or one is dead in sin. There is no in between concerning our spiritual position, our spiritual status before God.

Therefore, if one is not “in Christ”, one is an “alien” or “stranger” to Christ. And, if a stranger to Christ, His love, His grace, and His cross, then only one conclusion may be drawn—the person remains without hope and without God in this world and the next. If Christians really believed their neighbors and friends who are unsaved possess no hope of eternal life, an evangelistic revolution would take place in our churches.

Second, the cross gave deliverance to all sinners (vv. 14-22). The key phrase Paul uses here is “But now” (v. 13). Note the similarity to “But God” in the section above (v. 4). In both cases, God is stepping in to intervene in a person’s life. In the former, God made us alive together with Christ. In the latter, God closed the distance between Himself and sinful humanity. Whereas before, sinners were separated from Him. Now, Christ has brought us deliverance through His cross, closing the gap between Him and us.

In addition, Paul clearly reveals the *source* of our deliverance. Our deliverance came by “the blood of Christ” (v. 13). The blood is what makes us draw near. Furthermore, the cross gave us the *substance* of our deliverance. Paul writes, “For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (vv. 14-18).

The key in this paragraph is the single word “peace.” The Greek term is *eirene*, which carries the idea of a coming together, a quietness, a rest. While sin always separates—both nations and men—the cross brings peace. For Jewish-Gentile relations, the Gospel was revolutionary. Paul is actually saying that we have become one in Christ Jesus (cp. Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). The cross removed not only the distance between God and sinners (vv. 16, 18), but also between one sinner and another sinner (vv. 14-15). Our world is filled with one barrier after another. Bitterness, jealousy, and guilt stand between varying races and cultures. However, the Gospel comes as the

*While sin
always
separates—
both nations
and men—
the cross
brings peace.*

Reflection Connection

Reflect on racial tensions in our culture today. In what ways does the Gospel of God’s beautiful grace speak to our culture? Or, perhaps tensions in your own church?



Gospel of peace. The Gospel tears down the walls that divide and gives us peace. Imagine it, *deliverance comes wrapped in peace.*

Of course, the biggest, most volatile war rages within the human heart. And, it is not a battle with other men, but a battle with God. Our hearts are at war with the Sovereign. Our sinful depravity yields an innate hatred toward Him, His kingdom, and His Christ. Yet, the cross ends the hostility between the sinner and God.

Not that God is hostile toward us. In fact, the opposite is the case. His love extends toward us even in our hostility—indeed our hostility toward Him (cp. Rom. 5:8). God’s rich mercy delivered us from our war, saving us from our sin, and bestowing upon us a restful peace, a peace only a saved person may ever experience (cp. Rom. 5:2; Eph. 3:12; Heb. 10:19). No wonder the Apostle concludes that the peace of God defies human understanding, “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7).

Consequently, as we are delivered from the hostility we have toward God as well as the hostility we have toward others, God places us in a household, a common family, a new and improved “Holy Temple.” Paul writes, “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (vv. 19-22). We all—both Jews and Gentiles—become a part of God’s marvelous structure. It is the Lord’s habitation. God resides in His people.

Golden Greek Nugget

Paul says, “Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ” (v. 5; cp. Col. 2:13). The Greek term translated as “hath quickened”, is *suzoopoieo*, which means “to make alive,” or “to reanimate.” Through God the Holy Spirit’s infusion of new life, we are spiritually raised from the dead upon our conversion to Christ. In a very real sense, we experience life-changing resurrection when we trust Christ as Savior and Lord.

Wrap Up

In this study, we have observed the beauty of God’s grace as He unveils it to a world filled with “children of wrath.” God’s grace is offered to every person who will turn from sin and turn to Christ. The scope of His deliverance knows no human boundary. God is both able and willing to forgive the worst of sinners if faith in Him is exercised. And, the beauty of His grace will remain a masterpiece of God’s glorious art throughout all eternity.

