



**EPHESIANS: WEEK 2**

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## WEEK 2: THE IMPORTANCE OF GRACE

**Bible:** *God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Ephesians 2:8 (NLT)*

**Bottom Line:** God has extended His grace to us even though we don't deserve it and we can't earn it.

### REVIEW OF WEEK 1

We began this study by looking at Ephesians chapter 1.

Remember, what we call a "book" in our Bibles was actually a letter written by Paul and some friends to believers in Ephesus.

It was originally hand-delivered and read out loud. Then it was passed around so many different churches could all hear it.

We discussed last week how it is divided into two parts.

The first three chapters focus on the Good News or Jesus' story.

The last three chapters focus on how Jesus' story impacts our story, directing and empowering us to live holy lives.

In chapter one specifically, Paul begins with a poem that praises God and points out how He has been working throughout history to make it possible for all people to be part of his unified yet diverse family under the leadership of Jesus.

The end of chapter one describes how Paul has been praying for these believers to know and experience the power and love of God.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When you hear that God doesn't just want followers of His religion, but He wants people to be adopted into His family, how does that affect your view of God?
2. If you were to write a poem or a piece of creative writing to describe the great characteristics of God, what are some things you would include?
3. We looked last week at how Paul said that the same power that God used to raise Jesus from the dead and bring him back to life is available to help us and work through us today as Believers.

How does that give you hope in a world that seems so dark and frustrating at times?

**Read Ephesians 2:1-10** - The “dead” become alive because of God’s grace.

*1 Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. 2 You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. 3 All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else.*

*4 But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, 5 that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!) 6 For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. 7 So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.*

*8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. 10 For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*

## **TEACH**

Paul makes a stark contrast between our lives before Jesus and after.

Here he does so by describing our disobedience, sin, and selfishness.

He points out that this is not real freedom because in living this way, we are "obeying the devil."

Paul even goes on to say that the devil is the "spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God."

This is a dark scene that leads us to being subject to God's anger.

Chapter one seemed to open with a bright, musical number of poetry and prayer.

Now we seem to have gone into a very dark and intense part of the letter.

But we don't stay there.

Paul simply points out this darkness so that he can more fully explain the great extent of God's actions in giving us mercy and grace

Remember, mercy is not getting the punishment we do deserve, and grace is receiving a gift we don't deserve.

Many people have talked and written about how much they love a person or a country or a cause.

Here, Paul describes the actions God took to show the extent of His love.

And he points out something significant: "It is only by God's grace that you have been saved."

We might think this is obvious.

However, if you heard that someone was drowning and refused the help of a lifeguard, that would seem strange, right? Someone who is drowning needs to be rescued by someone else.

This is what it sounds like when we start to think that we have to pray enough, go to church enough, read our Bibles enough, or do enough of anything to "earn" God's love and forgiveness.

The truth is, we were dying in our sin when Jesus came and rescued us.

Nothing we did caused us to be rescued. In fact, much of what we did in disobedience to God just caused us to be in more danger.

It's good for us to feel guilty about the sin in our lives so that we can change and stop giving in to temptation.

But we should never confuse that guilt motivating us to change with a change in God's love for us.

He already showed us how much He loves us—even while we were sinning—when He sent Jesus to rescue us.

We don't do any of those good things to earn God's love. We do them in *response* to God's love, showing Him how thankful we are for such an amazing gift!

As Paul wraps this section up with verses eight and nine simply re-emphasize what was stated in verses 4-8.

And then verse 10 is where Paul describes us in artistic language as being God's "masterpiece."

A masterpiece the best of a great artist's work.

There is no artist greater than our Creator God.

And nothing He has made is as amazing, complex, and beautiful as people!

He gave us this gift to make us new people with new purposes and tasks.

He forgave us when we believed, gave us the Holy Spirit, and now sends us on a mission to live like Jesus and help others enter this process, too!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Paul's words may be shocking when he describes our lives before Jesus as "dead."

As you look at verses 1-3, how do you see that struggle going on in the world around you or even in the community or social media around you?

2. Verses 4-7 point out God's mercy and grace again.

In a way, Paul is describing us as being zombies - living dead. Compare how easy or hard it is for you to forgive someone who is mean or hurts you with what God offers to all people, regardless of how much we have sinned and hurt Him.

3. It can be easy to think that we need to do enough good things to earn God's love and forgiveness.

But Paul clearly states here that God offers His forgiveness to us as a gift given to someone loved simply because they are loved.

Combine that with his description of us as a "masterpiece," the best of an artist's work. How does that make you feel?

And how does this compare to searching for value in the likes, approval, and comments of others in person and on social media?

**Read Ephesians 2:11-22** - Hope and peace in Jesus.

**11** *Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called "uncircumcised heathens" by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts.*

**12** *In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. **13** But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.*

**14** *For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us.*

**15** He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. **16** Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.

**17** He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near. **18** Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.

**19** So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. **20** Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself.

**21** We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. **22** Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

## TEACH

As this section opens, it's easy to get confused.

A "gentile" is anyone who is not a Jew, which is most of the world.

Paul is writing to these believers—and us—describing in verses 11-12 how outside of God's family we were before Jesus made it possible for us to be adopted into the family.

He contrasts that with how things are now. In verse 13, he emphasizes the unity and closeness we have with God made possible because of Jesus' death.

What he goes on to say about Jews and Gentiles speaks loudly and clearly into today's world.

He says three different times in three different ways for emphasis in verses 14-16 that Christ's death on the cross broke through the barriers that divide us and made it possible for us to have unity even with all our differences: socially, politically, ethnically/racially, economically, etc.

Paul points out in verse 17 that the peace Jesus offers is offered to all people.

And this peace Paul describes draws us back to the way peace was described throughout the Old Testament.

This is not simply a lack of fighting, arguing, or warfare.

The kind of peace that Paul is describing is a restoration of wholeness, making things the way they should have been.

In other words, even though the world is full of people who have a variety of differences, because of Jesus, we can have healing, wholeness, and unity as members of the same family of God.

In verse 19, Paul goes back to where he started in verse 11 by pointing out that the way things used to be is not the way things should be now.

Those who want to be in God's family, no matter how they used to live, where they are from, what language they speak, their socioeconomic class, popularity, etc. are now invited to be adopted into God's family and become full citizens in the Kingdom of God.

The temple is no longer a building people go to visit and worship God.

We, the people in God's family, are now the place where God lives through His holy spirit, and everywhere we go is a place of worship and holiness because of His presence in us! Wow!

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Have you ever felt like an "outsider"? When and why did you feel that way? Did it ever change?
2. Some may look at the state of the world around us and say that the peace Paul is describing here is impossible.

But the very same power of God that raised Jesus from the dead is working in us and through us.

What is something you need to do differently this week to decrease the dividing damage being done and increase the healing, wholeness, and unity available through Jesus?

3. If everywhere you go as a believer, God is with you, then how should that change your attitude, words, and actions?

**Read Ephesians 3:1-13** - God's grace is extended to everyone.

*1 When I think of all this, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the benefit of you Gentiles . . . 2 assuming, by the way, that you know God gave me the special responsibility of extending his grace to you Gentiles. 3 As I briefly wrote earlier, God himself revealed his mysterious plan to me. 4 As you read what I have written, you will understand my insight into this plan regarding Christ. 5 God did not reveal it to previous generations, but now by his Spirit he has revealed it to his holy apostles and prophets.*

*6 And this is God's plan: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God's children. Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the promise of blessings because they belong to Christ Jesus. 7 By God's grace and mighty power, I have been given the privilege of serving him by spreading this Good News.*

*8 Though I am the least deserving of all God's people, he graciously gave me the privilege of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ. 9 I was chosen to explain to everyone this mysterious plan that God, the Creator of all things, had kept secret from the beginning.*

*10 God's purpose in all this was to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was his eternal plan, which he carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord.*

*12 Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence. 13 So please don't lose heart because of my trials here. I am suffering for you, so you should feel honored.*

## **TEACH**

Paul begins this section and then immediately interrupts himself. But don't worry, what he starts out saying in verse 1, he'll pick up in verse 14.

Until then, let's focus on his interruption.

Paul describes his unique role, even though he used to be a Jew, as a messenger sharing this Good News about Jesus with Gentiles—or non-Jewish people.

Verse 6 is key here: Paul points out the shocking truth that both Jews and non-Jews share equally in God's mercy and grace, are equally part of the same body or family, and share in the blessings that come from being united with Jesus!

He really wants the believers who didn't grow up as Jews and who might feel like outsiders to all that God has done and is doing to know that God loves them and wants them to be part of His family.

If he were writing this today, he would probably want to stress to people who didn't grow up in the church that He doesn't love them any less than anyone who did grow up in the church.

Paul's bottom line then and now is that all people—no matter how you classify yourself or how others classify you—are equally in need of being rescued by Jesus and equally able to receive his gifts of mercy, grace, forgiveness, love, and adoption into God's family.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Have you ever felt like there was no way God could love you or that there was no way that He would forgive you for the sins you have done?

Or do you know anyone else who has thought that? What does this section of Paul's letter say about that?

2. Paul considered himself a very unlikely candidate who was humbly grateful that God was using him to help share the message of grace and forgiveness through Jesus with non-Jewish people.

Have you had an experience where God worked in and through you in a way that you thought was unlikely? Do you know anyone in our world today whom this would describe?

3. There's a missionary in Asia who has seen a terrorist become a Christian.

And now, that same former terrorist is going around and helping people get to know the love and forgiveness offered through Jesus.

If God is still making such a radical transformation in people's lives, who do you need to have hope for and not give up on?

If you are bold enough, use a permanent marker to write that person's name on the inside of your wrist or hand to remind you to pray for that person this week, that they might experience and respond to God's power and love.

## Read Ephesians 3:14-21 - Paul's prayer for spiritual growth

**14** When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, **15** the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. **16** I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. **17** Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. **18** And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. **19** May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

**20** Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. **21** Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.

## TEACH

As I said, Paul interrupts himself, and then he gets back to what he started saying in verse 1.

So, we need a quick refresher. Paul spent chapter two talking about what God did through Jesus to bring all people into a right relationship with Him, adopted into His family, as a unified body of diverse believers.

Now, Paul says that when he thinks about that, he prays. These verses are a description of what he says he prays about when this happens.

He points out that God has unlimited resources and asks Him to use those to bring inner strength to believers through the Holy Spirit.

Paul pulls out his creative language skills again and goes "green" by saying that he prays that our "roots" will grow deep into God's love, where they find the strength we need like a tree finds strength and nourishment deep in the soil.

Stop and think about that for a moment. The only reason a tree can stand so tall is because its roots go so deep. And in a forest, a group of trees can stand even taller than a solo tree because their roots grow deep and lock in with the roots of other trees, whether they are the same species or not.

So much of that metaphor connects with what Paul says about us and how we should be living our lives as a unified, diverse family of believers!

In verse 18, he's not telling us that you can measure God's love with specific dimensions. He's actually leading into verse 19 where he'll point out that God's love is too great for anyone to fully understand, but he hopes we'll experience that amazing love.

When he says we'll be "made complete" he's drawing on that wholeness language that connects with the Biblical true idea of real peace.

He ends his prayer by giving glory to God. And Paul points out, almost as if he can sense the doubts that some of his listeners then and today might have, by reminding us that God, "through His mighty power at work within us.

That would be the Holy Spirit, the same power that raises Jesus from the dead. He can do "infinitely more" than we might ever ask Him to do or think He can do!!!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you ever think that your problems or prayers are not important enough for God to give His time, attention, or answers to? Or do you ever wonder if God can help in your situation because of how big or messed up your problem is?

What does Paul say in verse 16 about the resources of God? How does that challenge this kind of thinking?

2. When you think about Paul's "tree" language in verse 17, and what we said about trees and roots in the teaching, how could that be described literally for believers?

How do we grow our roots deep into God's love?

3. If you've ever felt less than enough, Paul reminds you that Jesus' sacrifice makes it possible for you to be "made complete" and whole.

If you've ever wondered *if* God could rescue a person or yourself, Paul reminds us that He can do "infinitely more" than we could ever ask of Him or imagine (and we know what some of you have big imaginations!).

What do you need to do this week to remind yourself or someone you know about these truths?