

# EPHESIANS PART V; LETTING PAUL DEFINE GRACE

Ephesians 2:11- 22

Please turn in your bibles to Ephesians 2.

We've covered a pretty good bit of ground thus far in Ephesians. Granted, we are just now at the second half of chapter two, but we have been mining Paul's letter for all it's worth. We have talked about the fact that Paul is focusing on unity between Jewish and Gentile believers – as we have seen by his use of “you” and “us.” He has used the term, “saints” to speak of Israel. That is important as you read through his other letters in the NT. We also spoke of how important it is to allow Paul to define his terms, such as, “predestined” and “foreordained.” And just as with how he uses the term saints, we can also carry these definitions over into his other letters where context allows.

Paul has used a great deal of theological jargon thus far, but once again the overall theme is that of unity between the Jewish and Gentile believers. This was the plan from the beginning. God is putting together one big family, one temple, one nation, one new man, one new Israel, to re-take sacred space here on earth. This was what was supposed to happen in the earliest chapters of Genesis with the dominion mandate. But, as we know, that failed due to the fall in the garden. Now, in the NT, because of Jesus' resurrection and the gospel, the perfect solution has now begun to come to fruition.

In the first ten verses of chapter two, Paul spoke of things from more of a cosmic perspective. What I mean by cosmic is that he gave a synopsis of the history of the Gentiles in that they were separated from God, (they were far off) and how Israel was near, being the covenant people. Let's read that again.

***Eph. 2:1 <sup>j</sup>And you were <sup>k</sup>dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup><sup>l</sup>in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following <sup>m</sup>the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in <sup>n</sup>the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup>among whom we all once lived in <sup>o</sup>the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body<sup>1</sup> and the mind, and <sup>p</sup>were by nature <sup>q</sup>children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.<sup>2</sup> <sup>4</sup>But<sup>3</sup> God, being <sup>r</sup>rich in mercy, <sup>s</sup>because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup>even <sup>t</sup>when we were dead in our trespasses, <sup>u</sup>made us alive together with Christ—<sup>v</sup>by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup>and raised us up with him and <sup>w</sup>seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable <sup>x</sup>riches of his grace in <sup>y</sup>kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>For <sup>z</sup>by grace you have been saved <sup>a</sup>through faith. And this is <sup>b</sup>not your own doing; <sup>c</sup>it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup><sup>d</sup>not a result of works, <sup>e</sup>so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup>For <sup>f</sup>we are his workmanship,***

***<sup>g</sup>created in Christ Jesus <sup>h</sup>for good works, <sup>i</sup>which God prepared beforehand, <sup>j</sup>that we should walk in them.***

Paul says that “you”, (y’all) the Gentiles, were dead in trespasses and sin, having followed the enemy, who he refers to as the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the disobedient. He will get back to the “powers” later as he makes his case that the deeper issue is more of a spiritual one and not JUST cultural and/ or behavioral. However, God in His infinity mercy has made the Gentiles alive together with Christ. This puts the believing Jews AND Gentiles together into one family. While that may not seem to be much of an accomplishment to us who are accustomed to the doctrine, it was a MAJOR deal in Jesus’ day, as Jewish and Gentile culture were worlds apart. That gap in cultures may not seem to be as large to us today due to the fact that our culture has been so affected by the Bible. I would also like to point out the anti-Semitism that we are now seeing as an example of just how difficult it can be to unite people from different cultures and faiths. Last week, talking with the Moore and Ostrander families, they mentioned how the war in the DRC is really tribal and cultural, not political. In a place, a world of tribal cultures, where your first allegiance is to your tribe and not an ideal of right and wrong as defined by God, hostilities are inevitable.

So, as Paul covers this unification from a cosmic/ overall, 30k foot perspective, he points out the unity in the plan of God and how we are to act on and live out that unity in Jesus, who is now to be how we are defined and not the old ways of tribal, socio-economic status or being free or slave, male or female. Jesus now defines us. And being a part of the same family, (which is a way of pointing them back to the point that we are now in the same tribe,) now makes all those other ways of defining each other immaterial.

Paul then makes the point that this entrance into the family of God, an OT idea, is by something called grace. Salvation is not of works, so no one can boast.

We have been talking about how Paul is making his case as more of a communal, corporate context than the personal way many read these passages – applying them to personal salvation. However, Paul’s language is corporate, speaking of large groups – either Israelite or Gentile. This is why we say he is coming at this, as from a cosmic perspective. We saw as Paul is defining his terms, that he is speaking in a much broader way than most think. You can go back and check this out in the previous lessons. He then states in verse 10 that we are God’s workmanship, created for good works, from the beginning – meaning once again that this was always the plan.

But what are we to make of this idea of works, yet we are under grace, yet we are to “walk” in these works? This has perplexed the church for centuries and has even caused splits in the church, which is the opposite of what is wanting here. So, how do we square this?

The secret is to allow Paul to define his terms and see how the idea of grace and works was thought of in that day. And that is what we will do as Paul explains this idea in the next 11 verses. Please hear the excitement as he attempts to explain this.

**Eph. 2:11** *Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called <sup>k</sup>the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— <sup>12</sup> remember <sup>l</sup>that you were at that time separated from Christ, <sup>m</sup>alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to <sup>n</sup>the covenants of promise, <sup>o</sup>having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were <sup>p</sup>far off have been brought near <sup>q</sup>by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For <sup>r</sup>he himself is our peace, <sup>s</sup>who has made us both one and has broken down <sup>t</sup>in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility <sup>15</sup> by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in <sup>u</sup>ordinances, that he might create in himself one <sup>v</sup>new man in place of the two, so making peace, <sup>16</sup> and might <sup>w</sup>reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. <sup>17</sup> And he came and <sup>x</sup>preached peace to you who were <sup>y</sup>far off and peace to those who were <sup>z</sup>near. <sup>18</sup> For <sup>a</sup>through him we both have <sup>b</sup>access in <sup>c</sup>one Spirit to the Father. <sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer <sup>d</sup>strangers and aliens, <sup>4</sup> but you are <sup>e</sup>fellow citizens with the saints and <sup>f</sup>members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> <sup>g</sup>built on the foundation of the <sup>h</sup>apostles and prophets, <sup>i</sup>Christ Jesus himself being <sup>j</sup>the cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> <sup>k</sup>in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into <sup>l</sup>a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> In him <sup>m</sup>you also are being built together <sup>n</sup>into a dwelling place for God by <sup>5</sup>the Spirit.*

In verses 11 and 12, Paul once again makes the distinction that once was between Jew and Gentile and uses the term, “covenant.” He also uses the colloquial terms, “circumcision” and “uncircumcision,” which he states is a human/ fleshly distinction. He contrasts how the Jews were “near” while the Gentiles were “far” from God due to the covenant at Sinai. However, God has broken down the “wall of hostility” in/ by his flesh, abolishing that old covenant. Now, all can be reconciled to God through Jesus and no longer have to be aliens and strangers. Anyone, by faith, through grace can now become a member of the household of God. He then goes on to use the image of a new temple, as we are all joined together, being a new dwelling place for the Spirit of God.

Most of that probably makes sense to most people in the church, at least to some degree. So, we won’t go too deep into that. But I do want us to see what Paul means by grace and what is expected of us because of grace.

To many of us in the modern, Western world, there is a disconnect between grace and works, or between the idea of grace and reciprocity – that something expected in return for a gift, such as grace.

Our English word for grace is *charis* in Greek.

**5485.** χάρις *charis*, *khar'-ece*; from 5463; graciousness (as gratifying), of manner or act (abstract or concrete; literal, figurative or spiritual; especially the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life; including gratitude): — acceptable, benefit, favour, gift, grace(-ious), joy, liberality, pleasure, thank(-s, -worthy).

It literally means a physical gift. It is used metaphorically to refer to an attribute of the one giving the gift. Therefore, a gift is a grace. We tend to think of it as God's nature, as He is the giver of the gift, but they're actually one and the same.

What constitutes a gift differs greatly from culture to culture. In our modern, western, capitalist society, the greatest gift is one given with no strings attached. The "no strings attached" part is actually a fairly modern and western thing.

If you go to other parts of the world where customs are still framed by honor/ shame culture, this is not the case. In fact, when westerners such as missionaries go to these places, they are told that if they accept a gift, someone will be at their door the next day expecting something in return, (reciprocity). This is not necessarily rude. It can be done, (the giving of a gift) for the wrong reason, but gifts in biblical times were given in order to establish reciprocity, to establish a bond between the giver and the receiver of the gift. This doesn't necessarily diminish the gift but defines it. I realize that can be hard for us to swallow. But think of it this way. In a sense, we can still see this even in our culture. If someone gives us a gift at Christmas or a birthday, we feel obligated to get them something in return. Why? That is a vestige of old-world culture. The motive is wrong if we intend to simply put someone in our debt, but that was the way things worked at one time. (The Godfather at his daughter's funeral and patronage as examples.) Different cultures have different ways of perceiving gifts. If we don't recognize this, we, like so many others can have a problem reconciling a gift and reciprocity, or grace and works.

If we go back and read what seems to be standing out to Paul in verses 1-10 is the incongruity –

**Incongruity – not in harmony or keeping with the surroundings or other aspects of something; disproportionate**

that is, the disproportion between God's grace and our worthiness of such an elaborate, lavish gift. Look at it this way. Humanity is down here destroying itself and God's gift is a new humanity.

Getting back to reciprocity, does Paul believe that the gift of grace comes with no strings attached? NO! Does he believe that the gift of grace comes with strings attached? Yes! With the gift of grace, there is an obligation to respond in trust. What is trust?

Trust – responding to the one who offered the gift with loyalty. (believing loyalty = faith in)

Though Paul is known as the apostle of grace, he says we will be accountable for our works.

In our culture, especially as of late, we see receiving a gift and being held accountable as being diametrically opposed. "What do you mean you're holding me accountable? I thought this was a gift!"

And while this may seem to be a contradiction to us, it isn't when it comes to the mind of Paul. Grace is a perfect gift because it is given to someone who is not worthy of the gift. But it is a gift given, as they were in that day, with an expectation of reciprocity. Remember:

***<sup>10</sup> For <sup>f</sup>we are his workmanship, <sup>g</sup>created in Christ Jesus <sup>h</sup>for good works, <sup>i</sup>which God prepared beforehand, <sup>j</sup>that we should walk in them.***

Good works is our purpose in life. Imaging God is our purpose in life. Adding to the family of God is our purpose in life. The gift is free in that we can receive it and we don't deserve it. But it does come with expectations and accountability. That is only an issue for our modern minds. And it has brought about some theological arguments that need not be.

The expectation of accountability and reciprocity doesn't mean it's not grace. It just means that it isn't grace according to how we have chosen to define and present it in the modern world. Just as we did with the terms, saints, predestination and foreknowledge, we need to allow to define the words and terms of his theology. I believe this is what Paul means when uses the word "grace" that is surprising to us.

#### **1 Cor. 15:9-10**

**<sup>9</sup> For <sup>v</sup>I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because <sup>w</sup>I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, <sup>x</sup>I worked harder than any of them, <sup>y</sup>though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. <sup>11</sup> Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.**

I believe Paul is saying that he didn't deserve the gift, however, because of the gift and the fact that we were created for works, he labored harder than the others. You see that he is combining grace and works. He doesn't lessen grace. Grace is a free gift because we can't earn it and we don't deserve it. But the gift does come with the expectation that the one receiving the gift will experience a radical change in their life/ walk/ behavior, etc. The way Paul speaks of grace (the gift) it is like a power, an ability to do, a drive/ desire to do good works. It isn't simply a transaction. To Paul, grace isn't just theology, it his life experience! The good works for which we were created are expected – not to earn the gift, but because of it and what it means. John Barclay would say that the grace is unconditioned, not unconditional. What he is saying is that it isn't given on the basis of worth. But that is much different than saying grace is unconditional, (no expectation of return).

**Phil. 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, <sup>f</sup>as you have always <sup>g</sup>obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for <sup>h</sup>it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for <sup>i</sup>his good pleasure.**

Salvation is a gift, but it creates an obligation to respond to the giver of the gift in trust and loyalty while imaging God. For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work...

This idea of God and not me, yet God in me, and God (and me) is floating around in Paul's head. We are becoming one in Christ so that it's me, but not me at the same time. It is Jesus in me, working through me, yet I still have to want to act and be obedient. That is a brain-breaker.

I hope this has cleared up the issue. If we let Paul define the terms in his context, we can walk away understanding that there is no contradiction here. We have been created for good works. That is our purpose. We are now obligated to walk in this. We have received a free gift we don't deserve and therefore there is an expectation of accountability to the one who gave us the gift in the first place.

**James 2:18** But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith <sup>'</sup>apart from your works, and I will show you my faith <sup>s</sup>by my works.

Let's read this again.

**Eph. 2:1** <sup>i</sup>And you were <sup>k</sup>dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> <sup>l</sup>in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following <sup>m</sup>the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in <sup>n</sup>the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in <sup>o</sup>the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body<sup>1</sup> and the mind, and <sup>p</sup>were by nature <sup>q</sup>children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.<sup>2</sup> <sup>4</sup> But <sup>3</sup> God, being <sup>r</sup>rich in mercy, <sup>s</sup>because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even <sup>t</sup>when we were dead in our trespasses, <sup>u</sup>made us alive together with Christ—<sup>v</sup>by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and <sup>w</sup>seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable <sup>x</sup>riches of his grace in <sup>y</sup>kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For <sup>z</sup>by grace you have been saved <sup>a</sup>through faith. And this is <sup>b</sup>not your own doing; <sup>c</sup>it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> <sup>d</sup>not a result of works, <sup>e</sup>so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For <sup>f</sup>we are his workmanship, <sup>g</sup>created in Christ Jesus <sup>h</sup>for good works, <sup>i</sup>which God prepared beforehand, <sup>j</sup>that we should walk in them.

Praise God for His grace, mercy and empowerment.