



# GRACE AND THE FREE OFFER OF SALVATION

WEEK 1  
06.04.07

## FOCUS VERSE

### **Ephesians 2:10**

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

## LESSON TEXT

### **Ephesians 2:4–10**

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love where-with he loved us,

5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

### **II Peter 3:17–18**

17 Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness.

18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.



## FOCUS THOUGHT

Although grace is free, it compels a response; the Christian should seek to grow in grace.



# CULTURE CONNECTION

## An Entitlement World

Many people are always looking for what they can receive without any personal cost. People want politicians who will promise them the most freebies—whether in education, housing, or supplements to income. They want something for nothing.

We call this skewed view a “sense of entitlement.” One could even call North America an entitlement world.

More frightening than our view of life and politics, however, is when entitlement finds its way into our thinking toward God—our relationship with Jesus Christ.

One person writing a devotional observed, “Early in my walk with the Lord, a friend told me that as I came to understand more fully how undeserving I was of Jesus’ grace, I’d

embrace it all the more. Many years later, I still think about her exhortation when—on occasion—I move from acknowledging my sins and desperate need of a Savior to wondering if perhaps I’m entitled to special treatment based on my ‘good works’” (<http://www.ourdailyjourney.org>, “Undeserved Grace,” accessed February 10, 2016).

We are tempted to begin thinking we are pretty good; we really deserve God’s blessings.

If there is any arena of life in which I pray I do not get that to which I am entitled, it is that of salvation. I do not want to receive what I know I deserve. Please put me in the category of one continually endeavoring to embrace Christ’s grace all the more. I really need it.

## OUTLINE

### I. SALVATION IS A GIFT OF GOD

- A. We Are by Nature Sinners
- B. We Can Do Nothing to Earn Salvation
- C. God Grants Us Grace
- D. We Access God’s Grace through Faith

### II. BECAUSE HE SAVED US WE ARE CALLED TO LIVE DIFFERENTLY

- A. We Are New Creatures
- B. We Should Desire to Continually Grow in Grace
- C. We Should Walk in the Spirit

## CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Grace is one of the highest, most sacred themes in Scripture. Believers most often tend to think of grace as a dispensation, or a period of time in which God deals with humankind in a specific way. However, grace is so much more than just a specific era of time. Grace is a major aspect of the nature and character of the Almighty.



**The first definition of grace given by Merriam-Webster Dictionary is the theological definition: “unmerited divine assistance given humans for their regeneration or sanctification.” The most commonly presented popular definition of grace is simply “the unmerited favor of God.”**

Suppose a person were to examine the Bible by dividing it into different periods of time according to the way God has dealt with humanity. An honest evaluation of these eras would cause that individual to recognize the vital role of God’s grace and mercy within each of them. Were it not for His grace, the possibility of human redemption never would have registered on the scale of opportunity. Grace is the aspect of God’s character that made possible the provision for human salvation, despite mankind’s complete lack of merit. We did not deserve redemption, but by God’s grace He extended to us the invitation to experience salvation.

This quarter we shall contemplate the many aspects of growing in grace. However, before anything can grow, it first must be born. Before believers can grow in grace, they first must experience the initial gift of grace—salvation through Jesus Christ. To understand the need for redemption and the great opportunity God has given humanity to experience salvation, we have to look back to the beginning of human history—all the way to the Creation, Adam and Eve, and the Garden of Eden.

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

### I. SALVATION IS A GIFT OF GOD



**Quicksand is of such a consistency that it can be difficult, if not impossible, to extract oneself from its clutches. Although not quite the “killer” envisioned by many individuals, it is true that the more one struggles in quicksand, the more one tends to sink, even though it usually is rather shallow (“How Quicksand Works,” [www.science.howstuffworks.com](http://www.science.howstuffworks.com), accessed August 25, 2015).**

Some situations in life are difficult for people to escape by their own efforts; some are impossible to get out of without assistance. Human sinfulness is one such condition individuals can escape only through the intervention of the Almighty.

#### A. We Are by Nature Sinners

The human experience began in the Garden of Eden. God first created the world and all that is therein. In six days He made everything and brought order to the universe. He examined His delightful creation and observed “it was good” (Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25). Still, however, God was not through with His creative work. As intricately beautiful and inspiring as His world was, God completed the six days with His crowning act of Creation when He made human beings in His own image and after His own likeness (Genesis 1:27). First, He made man—Adam—and then from Adam, God removed a rib and created a companion for him—the woman, Eve.

*“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Genesis 1:27).*

God had something special in mind for this final work of creation. God had a beautiful world full of unique and inspiring creations, and He had a host of heavenly angels to worship Him around the clock and do all His bidding. But God desired a creation who, with intellect, creative imagination, and free will, would choose to love Him, serve Him, and live for Him. God was not interested in robotic responses of a creation void of choice, but He wanted individuals who, in spite of other opportunities, would choose to live with an eternal purpose—a purpose beyond this human plane, one focused upon and dedicated to the Creator.

The only way to have creatures of choice, however, was to set a choice before them. Consequently, God gave to Adam and Eve the gift of human will. God abundantly cared for their needs through the many trees and provisions of the Garden, but He forbade them to eat the fruit of just one tree: “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:17).

The serpent slyly approached Eve and convinced her God was withholding something good from her. When she partook of the forbidden fruit and gave it also to Adam to eat, everything changed within their utopian environment. Suddenly they encountered the judgment of God, the curse of sin, and banishment from the Garden. They came face to face with pain, struggle, hurts, and weariness they had not known previously. They fought with thorns and thistles to try to eek out an existence that beforehand had been provided by God. They experienced the pain and curse of sin. (See Genesis 3.)

As is always the case with sin, they did not suffer the curse alone. Sin always affects others besides the one who commits it. Adam and Eve introduced the pain and hardships of sin to the entire human race. Soon they experienced more of sin’s evil face within their own family when Cain rose up and slew his brother, Abel (Genesis 4:1–8). So the pain went on and on and continued through the ages throughout every era and generation of

humanity as individuals were born into a world of sin, and as each person inherited a fallen, human, sin nature.

*"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. . . . death reigned from Adam to Moses. . . . But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. . . . For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. . . . For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Romans 5:12–19).*

Humanity's failure did not catch God by surprise. He knew the human race would fall to temptation and sinful disobedience. "Why, then," one might surmise, "did God take a chance on and create human beings in the first place?" In His foreknowledge God already had a plan in place to provide the missing component—the necessary assistance—so humans could indeed choose to live above sin through the redemptive work of the Savior. God envisioned the Incarnation, and He planned for the Lamb of God who would one day take "away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Though the Cross was centuries in the future, God saw its redemptive work and the price He personally would pay for the sins of humanity.

*"And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). (See also 1 Peter 1:19–20.)*

The purpose of the Incarnation was that the Son of God—God in human flesh—might provide the sacrifice for the sins of human beings, a holy and righteous work they could never achieve on their own and would never deserve on their own merits.

## **B. We Can Do Nothing to Earn Salvation**

Like a person caught in an impossible situation, we can do nothing to extract ourselves from the sinful state into which we were born. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Try as we might to escape the sinful nature, we are like one caught in the trap of quicksand, only sinking deeper into the mucky mess of sinfulness. Because all have sinned, no individuals are qualified or able to redeem themselves or do what is necessary to escape the sinful state. They are completely dependent upon a Savior—One who is qualified and able to redeem them from sin.

The only One who could perform such an act of redemption is that "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). Through the Incarnation, Jesus Christ was the only human who ever has avoided the taint of sin. The God-man—God in human flesh—Jesus Christ was both free from sin and also willing to pay the eternal sacrifice for the sins of all mankind.

*"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).*

Through the Cross, Christ paid the price of sin we could never pay; He provided the sacrifice we could never render. Because we could never qualify to provide the sacrifice and we would always bear the marks of sin, we could never merit or deserve the sacrifice that was made for our sins. Our hopeless dilemma called for something beyond human ability. Our pitiful plight called for the grace of the almighty God.

*"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9).*

We were in a hopeless circumstance, trapped in the vices of our own sinful state. We could never save ourselves; we could never deserve redemption. Still, God extended to

us the offer of His grace—the gift of salvation from sin.

### C. God Grants Us Grace

Redemption comes only through the gift of God by His grace. As Paul wrote to the believers in Ephesus, we too were once “children of disobedience” and “children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:2–3).

*“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: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4–7).*

Only through God’s grace are we able to experience salvation, and the only way to gain access to His grace is through faith. Our abilities and good fortunes benefit us nothing in the realm of redemption from sin. Our heritage, lineage, or possessions cannot purchase redemption on our behalf. Our charisma and character will never increase our favorability in the eyes of the Savior. Only by underserved grace and mercy through faith can we experience the redemptive hand of the Almighty at work on our behalf.

### D. We Access God’s Grace through Faith

*“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).*

Every relationship with God must begin with faith. Without faith, we cannot please God (Hebrews 11:6). Faith is the foundation upon which relationship with God is built. How can we have a relationship with anyone in whom we have no trust or confidence? Consequently, relationship with God also begins with trust, or faith in Him, which then forms the foundation for that relationship.

*“By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:2).*

*“According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him” (Ephesians 3:11–12).*

We access God’s grace through faith, but that is only the beginning of a redemptive relationship with Him. How can we grow in grace and knowledge of Christ if we never respond to His grace by receiving His offer of salvation?

Faith and grace are conduits to salvation. Some people want to stop at only having faith, but that does not even allow a person to begin to experience the greatness of God. Others want to stop at grace, but again, they have not even begun to experience God’s works within their lives; they have only stepped through the door opened by grace through faith. What is inside that door? Inside that door we discover the full realm of redemption from sin, which God alone can provide.

Faith empowers us to believe that God’s grace will reach out to us in spite of our sinful condition and that He will give to us His gift of salvation. It opens the way to a relationship with God wherein we can experience His plan for our redemption. What is His plan? The Jewish audience who heard Peter preach on the Day of Pentecost wanted to know His plan; after hearing Peter’s sermon and experiencing great conviction in their hearts they cried out, “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). They wanted to know how to be saved. Peter’s clarion response provided a pathway forward to them as well as to all of us:

*“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).*

Faith and grace lead us to obey Christ’s call to repent of our sins. Sin destroyed humanity’s relationship with God, but Jesus Christ has paid the price that we may experience a

restored relationship with Him. The way to embrace His plan begins with faith, but it moves forward by His grace and through human repentance of sin.

*“I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3, 5).*

In addition to repentance of sins, Peter explained we also must be baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and we shall receive the Holy Ghost! (See Acts 2:38.) Following this plan that God has extended to us through His grace begins a real and living relationship with Him. That redemptive relationship will lead us to continue growing in His grace as our lives are dramatically changed and we are drawn closer and closer to Him.

## **II. BECAUSE HE SAVED US WE ARE CALLED TO LIVE DIFFERENTLY**

We are not saved by works, nor could we ever do enough to deserve the grace of God and His spiritual formation within us. However, that realization should never diminish the importance of growing into the “good works” He has called us to perform. Paul wrote, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). While good works cannot save us, our salvation should lead us into good works. They reflect the redemptive work Jesus Christ has accomplished within us.

The Holy Spirit is a great leader and teacher. He leads and guides us into all truth, prompting us toward continual, spiritual progress as we grow in His grace and knowledge. “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come” (John 16:13). Further, the grace of God will teach us to pursue holiness through Christ Jesus (Titus 2:11–12). As we pursue His leading, we will grow by denying ourselves of partaking in the fleshly desires and worldly lusts our human nature desires to pursue.

*“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching*

*us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:11–12).*

In denying our fleshly whims and wills, we grow in the likeness of Christ Jesus. In the process of the Spirit’s work within us, we gradually grow into dramatically new and different lives than we knew before we received the Holy Ghost.

### **A. We Are New Creatures**

Through the new-birth experience, we become new creations in Jesus Christ. We are no longer the same, for He has changed us by His grace and power in our lives. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (II Corinthians 5:17).

Our old habits and lifestyles lose their appeal in our lives, and we are drawn to new lives of new disciplines and spiritual experiences in Christ.

### **B. We Should Desire to Continually Grow in Grace**

Even with the dramatic changes of becoming new creations in Christ Jesus, we are not content to stand still spiritually. Rather, we recognize the joy of continually advancing, growing spiritual lives in Jesus Christ. In his first letter, Peter encouraged believers to “desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (I Peter 2:2).

We should desire to “grow up” in Christ, which speaks of growing in spiritual maturity (Ephesians 4:15). Just as babies have to grow up, we need to grow up also. We are to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (II Peter 3:18). (See also Colossians 1:10.)

### **C. We Should Walk in the Spirit**

The way to grow spiritually is to anchor our lives daily in the Spirit, that is, to “walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16, 25). In other words, we are to walk through this life by living in the Spirit—thriving and growing spiritually. Paul wrote to the believers in Rome, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in

## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1).

There are at least two things that will facilitate spiritual growth in us as we resist walking after our fleshly desires and instead walk “after the Spirit.”

1. *Discerning the right decisions.* The Spirit will empower us to discern and make the right decisions if we are careful to follow His guidance and endeavor to live our lives in Him. We all experience times when we are uncertain of the way forward. We are able to rationalize both directions, and we experience confusion as we try to humanly identify the right decision. In times like these, the Holy Spirit wants to lead us to make the right decision. The correct choice may not even appear as positive as the other path when we examine it carnally, but the Spirit sees beyond what we are able to discern in our flesh. Listen to the Spirit and heed His lead! He knows the way forward, and He will help us to discern what is right.

2. *Following spiritual disciplines.* Second, we will advance spiritually as we pursue spiritual disciplines in our lives. These spiritual disciplines will harness our fleshly inclinations and empower us to listen to the Spirit’s gentle nudges. He will lead and guide us into all truth, which includes the decisions we have to make.

*“But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you” (1 Peter 5:10).*

When the Scriptures speak to us of perfection, they are speaking of becoming complete. The word *perfect* in 1 Peter 5:10 is translated from the Greek word *katartizo*, which means “to complete thoroughly, i. e. repair (literally or figuratively) or adjust” (*Strong’s Concordance*).

The Holy Spirit and His work within us completes us. Not only does He complete the new-birth experience as we receive salvation, but He also directs our spiritual growth daily for our future life in Him. He is leading us toward and into full, spiritual completeness.

Jesus admonished us, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Perfection is completion, which is a continually advancing, moving target. That is not to say perfection in Christ Jesus is impossible to achieve; rather, it is to say that growing toward perfection, or completion, is a lifelong pursuit. We are to pursue Jesus Christ all our lives—every day of our lives. We will continually progress, grow, and mature spiritually more and more as we live for Him and walk in the Spirit.

## REFLECTIONS

- Why do individuals often view grace only as a specific era of time? Should they view grace as more than only that? Discuss.
- How did sin enter God’s perfect world? How does that fact affect humans today? Discuss.
- Discuss how “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” was a foregone plan centuries before the actual event.
- What can we humans do to merit or deserve God’s provision of redemption? Discuss.
- Discuss the relationship between faith, grace, and works with regard to human redemption.