

The Grace of Faith and Work

Thomas Robinson, *Ephesians – Growing Up Into Christ* 6, October 23, 2011

Ephesians 2:1-10

¹ And when **you were dead** in the **trespasses** and **sins** ² in which **you once walked**,
in step with the **present age** of **this world**,
in step with the **ruler** of the **authority** of the **air**,
the **spirit** that is **now at work** in the **sons of disobedience** –
³ among whom **we all once** went about in the **desires of our flesh**,
carrying out the **wishes** of the **flesh** and the **mind**,
and were by nature **children of wrath**, like all the rest,
⁴ but **God**,
being **rich in mercy**, because of the **great love** with which **he loved us**,
⁵ even when **we were dead** in our trespasses,
made us alive together with the Messiah (Christ) – by **grace** you have been **saved** –
⁶ and **raised us up with him**
and **seated us with him** in the heavenly places **in Messiah Jesus**,
⁷ so that in the **coming ages** he might show the immeasurable **riches of his grace**
in kindness toward us **in Messiah Jesus**.
⁸ For **by grace you have been saved through faith**.
And this is **not your own doing** (from you); it is the **gift of God**,
⁹ **not a result of works** (from works), so that **no one may boast**.
¹⁰ For we are **his handiwork** [*poiema*, thing made, work of art],
created in Messiah Jesus for good works,
which **God prepared beforehand**, that we should **walk in them**.

Galatians 3:1-3

¹ O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that **Jesus Christ** was publicly portrayed as **crucified**. ² Let me ask you only this: **Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?** ³ Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Ephesians 4:1-3

¹ I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you **to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called**, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Ephesians 5:1-2

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And **walk in love**, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Ephesians 5:8-10

⁸ For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. **Walk as children of light** – ⁹ for the fruit of light is found in **all that is good and right and true** – ¹⁰ learning to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

Learning the Language of Grace

Spiritual growth takes in the whole person: mind, understanding, imagination, emotions, actions. We need to break the natural sense of human religion: morality, rites, discipline reaching up to God. Paul is helping us learn new language that fits the Good news.

The Gospel is perpetually surprising and disconcerting. We snap back to old patterns.

Grace (*Charis*) is core vocabulary (2:5, 7, 8). It expresses the astonishing intervention of God for us humans. It encapsulates in one word the whole story on a cosmic and individual scale. It is God's creative work flowing from God's heart of "mercy" and "great love."

Grace is God's action taking seriously our situation of sin, rebellion, delusion, alienation, death, and thus it takes the form of saving us, even when we didn't think we needed it.

In Grace God does the impossible – becoming one of us in Jesus the Messiah – so that we could participate in all that happened to Jesus and share in his life and the Holy Spirit.

Grace is God's ultra long-term commitment to us. He sees us far beyond what we can imagine and wants us to experience his grace through ages to come as we share in Jesus.

Faith – the Power of Receiving God's Gift

Faith (*Pistis*) is our response that corresponds to Grace. God has acted in Jesus Christ. We hear the "Good News," the story of those astonishing events, "the message of the cross." Jesus and the Grace he offers/embodies touch and challenge our mind, heart, and will.

We open our hearts to receive the story/the person/ the grace. God's Spirit enters and the journey begins. Faith is holding out our hands to receive God's gift. We can refuse.

Faith is vulnerable and life transforming. It is surrendering control of my (dead) life – hard! It ultimately changes every part of life as Jesus' lordship brings in new life and beauty.

Faith seeks expression. If invisible it is not real. Change of thinking, Confession, Baptism.

God's work, Our works

Eph 2:1-10 is full of work – mostly God's. Work is good, expressive, fulfilling. All of creation is God's affirmation of work. God wants our active participation in all that good work.

But "works" can also be a word that expresses the human desire to control and define our relation with God or our gods. For Paul it was seeing salvation defined by "works of the law" specified by regulations and ordinances (2:15) that gave special affirmation to his own Jewish people and excluded all other nations. Those markers played a historic role, but the Messiah opened God's grace to all peoples without distinction, apart from works.

Our works (religious practice, morality, asceticism) can never be the foundation of salvation because we are ourselves God's handiwork/work of art both in original creation and in the new creation in the Messiah. We receive, are made alive, are saved. We can't boast.

Walking the Walk

Part of God's new creation is preparing good works as the realm in which we walk and live.

Like the Eden God gave to Adam and Eve. God's process of renewing us is very active.

New values and aims for beautiful life of love, humility, nobility, seeking all that is good.