



# CANYON HILLS

## COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Ephesians

October 28, 2018

### **Saved by Grace** **Dr. Steve Walker**

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I'm excited about the Night of Worship in a couple of weeks. I really hope you'll put that on your calendar. It was very humbling to be contacted by the music worship world out there, that somehow word reached them that there's something unique and special about our worship and they wanted to make that available to more than just our church. I hope you'll be a part of that.

I also want to get you excited about today. Today marks the beginning of an annual event that we've had for eight years. It's the annual Canyon Hills Community Food Bank food drive, and I want you to be encouraged by this. We have a goal of raising 25,000 pounds of food in the next week or so.

These bags are familiar to many of you, but if you're newer to Canyon Hills, you may not have seen these. These little bags with the food lists stapled to them are at all the exits today, and we're going to encourage each home to at least take one of these home, fill it up, and bring it back in the next week. You can actually bring it back next Sunday, in case you're not here during the week. We are going to continue to make a difference in our community.

Just to give the Food Bank a little bit of context... You may not know this, but every Tuesday night, our Food Bank is open. This year alone, over 1,700 people have come and visited our Food Bank and we've given out almost 130,000 pounds of food to people in our community who are really needy. Those almost 1,800 people represent family members in their homes of close to 6,500 people in our immediate community who are being impacted by our Food Bank.

The best stat, of course, is that over the last eight years since our inception, 168 people have given their hearts to Jesus Christ because they've walked through the doors here on Tuesday night. So, be encouraged by that! That tells you that the Food Bank is about way more than just food!

We've had several Life Groups birthed out of the Food Bank, just people who were coming and have decided to make this their church home. We have formed Life Groups. We have several

community outreaches now that go on throughout the year to reach our Hispanic neighbors and friends.

What many of you may not know is that during this service, we are translating everything that happens here in English into Spanish in real time. There are people in our service who are hooked up to our app and they're getting what I'm saying in their own language. We are very excited and very blessed to be a part of that.

That's what this is all about, and I hope you will make sure to grab one of those on your way home. You can grab two if you want and just fill them up. There's a list of food there that works for the Food Bank.

Get your Bibles open to Ephesians, chapter 2, as we're working our way through this New Testament letter. In studying for this message and this passage, I was recalling in my head... I remembered reading about a conference that was scheduled for 10 of the top theologians in the world to gather.

The purpose of the gathering of these top 10 evangelical theologians was to research and identify the one distinction that sets Christianity apart from all other religions. Someone got together and reached out to 10 of the greatest thinkers in Christianity and said, "We want you to determine what the one thing that separates Christianity from all other religions is."

After a few full days of debate and discovery, they determined that it wasn't Christianity's Holy Scriptures, because many religions have their sacred writings. Nor was it Christianity's martyred leader. Several religions boast of that, some even including resurrections. They realized it wasn't the suffering and persecutions of Christians, because a lot of religious people have died for their faiths, faiths that don't include Christianity.

It wasn't the promise of a better life or eternity after this life, nor was it the reports of miracles or moral transformation as a result of the message of Christianity. None of that sets Christianity apart from every other world religion.

The report about this meeting says that after several days of head-scratching frustration, a man named C.S. Lewis unknowingly wandered into the room in this seminary where this meeting was taking place. When he wandered in, these theologians, kind of with a half-serious tone and even less expectation, asked C.S. Lewis, "Hey, C.S. What do you think is the difference? What do you think makes Christianity different from every other religion?"

Without even missing a step, C.S. Lewis looked at them and said, "Oh, that's easy. It's grace." And he walked out. The minutes of the conference read that the conference was adjourned at probably that very moment. They had found their answer.

I would say to you, as we come to Ephesians 2:8-9, if the book of Ephesians were a mountain, this passage would be its highest peak, without a doubt. Already, in the first chapter and a half, Paul has written, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that Christians are predestined and

chosen by God before the foundation of the world. We are redeemed and forgiven of our sin. We are adopted as God's very own sons and daughters. We are sealed with his very own indwelling Holy Spirit inside us, guaranteeing our inheritance of eternal life to come.

Paul has also written and told us that we are already raised up and seated with Christ at the right hand of the throne of God. Although it hasn't happened yet, it is as good as done in God's mind and in heaven. He has already taught us all of that and reminded us of all of that, and all of that points to one word now as we get to the highest peak of this letter. One majestic word, and that word is *grace*.

We have an easy go of it today in the sense that the title of the message is simple: *Saved by Grace*. That is the center of everything we believe. So, with your Bibles ready now, I'm going to ask you to go ahead and stand for the reading of God's Word. We're going to back up to chapter 2, verse 4, just to get the full context and impact of the passage we're going to look at together.

**"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."**

Father in heaven, I ask you with every fiber of my heart right now that you would explode our hearts with a new awe for what your grace is and what it has accomplished for us. God, I pray that if there's too much familiarity in our hearts with your grace that you would change that and restore in our hearts this sense of worship, gratitude, and pleasure that comes from knowing what you have done.

God, I pray for those who are in our midst right now who have never really heard about your grace, thought about your grace, or even tried to understand it. May today, God, open their hearts forever to be saved by your grace. Lord, have your way now. We invite your Holy Spirit to do miraculous things in our minds and hearts. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Paul refers to grace 11 times in the book of Ephesians. That's more than any other of the other epistles, with the exception of Romans. Paul is perfectly and consistently clear. His message is that there is only one way to be forgiven and only one way to be saved from our sins, and we have nothing to do with it.

Paul is saying God absolutely refuses to allow or require sinners to save themselves. There's a good reason for that! The Bible tells us many things about grace that remind us that if we were to ever try to save ourselves, it would be a futile attempt, and the reasons are many.

In my favorite morning devotional, called *New Morning Mercies*, by Paul Tripp, he wrote this on June 3. He said something like, "It's just so incredible. It's so counterintuitive. It's so beyond

anything else in our experience that it's very hard for us to wrap our brains around its majesty. There's no human being so creative and imaginative as to be able to pen such a story. Only the gift of divine grace is able to help you grasp even a portion of the wonder of divine grace. The expansiveness of God's initiative of grace is so beautiful and transformational that it is the reason John Newton chose the best qualifying word, *amazing*, when he penned his famous hymn about that grace."

That hymn and this passage are about one thing, and it's that *our salvation is a gift from God*. Salvation belongs to God alone, and if someone is saved it is wholly God's doing. Everything necessary to be forgiven and redeemed is provided by God. It had to be that way, because the Bible teaches that all human beings were created in the image of God. That means Adam and Eve were created with no guilt, shame, or fear and able to love God and each other with no selfishness.

When humanity was created, Adam and Eve were created to know God and to live with God forever, but when Adam and Eve sinned and disobeyed God's command, that image of God in them was broken beyond repair. Sin is so serious that Adam and Eve were immediately cast out of the garden away from the presence of God, because God is holy and sinless. The sheer, pure, holy presence of God is dangerous and dreadful for sinners. That's how serious it is. They had to immediately be separated from God.

Sin is also very deadly. Because they were separated from God, it brought physical death into the human equation, a death that could not be stopped or avoided. So, the rest of humanity, including us, now born in sin, even with all of our efforts to try to better ourselves, to try to make peace with God, only continues to get better at worshipping ourselves and hating God. That's what sin-broken hearts can accomplish.

Christianity is the only religion in the world that has an explanation for all the evil in the world. We have the only logical explanation. It is the heart of man broken by sin, and the harder we try to make ourselves better, the worse we get at it.

Here's where God's grace enters in. God enters the world in flesh and blood in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. He became the way by which an utterly hopeless situation could be changed. Jesus willingly came to do for us what spiritually-dead people could never do for themselves. Jesus said we need to be born again with a new nature. We need to be forgiven and freed from the deadly sin that destroyed our souls in the first place.

Yet man is unable to bring a worthy payment. We are unable to bring any good deed that could satisfy the just punishment of God that's coming upon sin. We are unable to do that, first and foremost, because our sin separates us from God. We have no access to God. We can't get to God. We have no right to God in our sin.

Yet secondly, we have nothing of worth to bring him even if we could. The Bible says all of our righteousness is like filthy rags before a holy God. Every ounce of any goodness we could

conjure up within ourselves is already stained by our sin-broken hearts. We have no access and nothing of worth to offer God to appease him for the punishment our sins deserve.

So, where does grace come in? Jesus stands in our place in the presence of God and offers himself as the only sinless, holy sacrifice that's acceptable to God. He received all of God's wrath for every ounce of your sin and my sin, and he did that while we were still sinners. While we were still enemies of God, he died for us.

God has graciously provided a substitute to pay for our sins, to die in our place, because we could never meet his standards of perfection and holiness in our brokenness. So, Paul says, with great joy, "It's by God's grace! It had to be this way. There was no other hope!" The question arises, "Well, how does this salvation by God's grace become mine personally?" Paul answers that question in this verse. He says our salvation can only be received by faith.

It is **"...by grace you have been saved through faith."** Through faith in Jesus being fully God and fully man. Faith that Jesus, in his humanity, died in our place for our sins. Faith that God raised him from the dead after three days. Faith that Jesus, in his risen deity, conquered the power of sin and death for us. Faith that only Jesus can save us, and no one else. It's through that conduit of faith that we receive the glorious grace of God.

1. *What faith is not.* I want to take a minute and make sure we know what faith is, because there's a whole lot of messed-up ideas in churches today as to what true saving faith is all about. I think the best way to do that is to talk about what faith is *not*.

A. *Faith is not a gut feeling.* You can convince yourself that you're a Christian. You can believe way down deep in your heart that you're saved and going to heaven, but that's not what makes biblical saving faith. If you deny anything that's true about Jesus, if you reject anything that's true about Jesus, whether it's the fact that he's fully God and fully man at the same exact time...

If you reject his sinless life, his death on the cross, his resurrection, or anything that's true about Jesus, the Bible says you are not a Christian. In fact, in 1 John, chapter 2, it says you are lying to yourself. You cannot reject anything that's true about the only one who can save you and still be a Christian, and still think you're saved. It doesn't matter how you feel.

I was talking to someone recently and they just said, "I'm not sure why, but I just think I'm going to heaven." What does that mean? Let me clarify a little bit more.

B. *Faith is not blind agreement apart from evidence.* See, this person accepts Jesus because Jesus is a good guy or because nice people believe in Jesus. This kind of faith typically believes in more than one way, usually. They say things like, "All religions worship the same deity." They'll say stuff like this out loud. "We're all on the same mountain; we're just on different paths." Have you ever heard that one?

That's Oprah religion. That's exactly what it is. "We're all on a journey and we're all headed to the mountain. We're all going up, and when we get there, we're going to realize we've all been

searching for and worshiping the same thing. That is not true, saving faith. Most of the time, these people accept many truths in spite of evidence to the contrary. They accept many messiahs, many religions, and many writings...anything that's spiritual that they like...without regard for the contradictions in these so-called truths. Faith without evidence is not saving faith.

*C. Faith is not just spiritual optimism.* It's not some form of positive thinking or religious self-confidence. This person usually refuses to think there's anything wrong or bad about them. This is how they would feel. They would feel like things like sin, hell, judgment, God's wrath, and all those things are so negative, and so they will say to themselves, "I will ignore or deny those things, and I'll just speak my positive opinions and my desired future into existence.

They actually believe that if they just think it to be true about themselves long enough, then that makes it true. You just work hard at just brainwashing yourself into thinking it's true, regardless of fact or evidence, and that makes it true for you. Listen, church. None of that is saving faith. That is not what Paul is talking about in Ephesians 2.

2. *What faith is.* In Charles Spurgeon's work, *All of Grace*, he speaks against these distortions that somehow faith is based on an individual's feelings, attitudes, or opinions. No, he defends the fact that true saving faith has three elements to it. I want to share these with you. They're biblical elements about what makes up true biblical saving faith so we receive God's grace.

*A. Faith includes knowledge.* It's impossible to believe in something unless you know what it is in which you believe. You have to know what it is you're believing. For those with true saving faith, this knowledge is the gospel. It's everything Paul has been writing about up until this point in Ephesians, chapter 2. He has been writing about the fact that in our natural state, we are dead in our sins and we're objects of God's coming wrath.

Yet he tells us God never gave up on us! As we read in verse 4, in his rich mercy and great love, he reached down to save us through the life, death, and resurrection of his very own Son. All of this is of grace! This is what we have to know in order to have biblical saving faith.

*B. Faith includes a heart response.* It's not just intellectual agreement. It's not just understanding the facts. The Devil understands the facts. The Devil agrees that Jesus lived, died, and rose again, and James 2 tells us the Devil is not a Christian, the last time I checked. The Bible is clear that it's not just agreeing with some good stuff about God and Jesus that makes saving faith.

Here's how we know that. Romans 10:9... You will remember this verse. If we confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord... There's the knowledge. There's the truth. There's the fact. If we admit that Jesus is Lord... Then, the next part of the verse says, "...and believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead, we shall be saved."

Confess with our mouth; we agree. Then, believe in our hearts. What is this believing in our hearts? What is that portion of faith that we must have if we have true saving faith? I think the best way to understand that is to remember Acts, chapter 2. Do you remember when Peter preached the very first gospel sermon that gave birth to the New Testament church, in Acts 2?

When you read Acts 2, it says that after Peter preached the gospel, the people were so moved by what they heard to be true about Jesus that it pierced their hearts. It was like a stabbing sensation that ripped their hearts open when they heard about Jesus, and they pleaded with Peter, "What must we do to be saved? What do we have to do? We get it! We hear you! We believe it! What do we do now?"

Peter said one word: *repent*. This is the heart's response to the truth of the gospel, first and foremost. Repentance is the outward sign of a heart that has truly believed. It is a turning away from sin. Saving faith says, "I give up. I'm a sinner. I surrender, Jesus. I surrender my heart to you. Please save me." That's what genuine repentance is. It is a belief in what we know to be true and a response of surrender to that truth.

*C. Faith includes a life commitment to the truth.* What I mean by life commitment is that we vacate the throne of our lives and we give Jesus complete reign and rule of our hearts. We give him the Lordship our Savior requires. We bow the knee, and we say with Thomas, who first had to touch the nail-prints in his hands and his side, "My Lord and my God!"

This life commitment includes denying and renouncing all false religions, all false gospels, all false messiahs, and all false hopes. True saving faith requires that we renounce all made-up, man-made, ridiculous false hopes that have no truth and no evidence to support them, and we say, "Jesus and him alone."

You see, in Acts 2, it says their hearts were cut, were pierced. Peter said, "**Repent...**" and then he said, "**...and be baptized every one of you...**" Baptism is that outward sign of saving faith that believes the truth, repents, and bows the knee to Jesus as Lord and Savior. I wonder how many people are sitting in churches all over today whose faith stopped at knowledge.

Somewhere along the journey, they heard about Jesus and they agreed with it. They may have even liked it, but they never turned from their sin. They never renounced sin, repented of sin, and said, "I am going to live now in obedience, love, and worship to my Savior." Some of them were never baptized. They've never publicly declared that this is their life commitment, that they are unashamed to be a follower of Jesus. They've heard it. They agree with it. They nod to it, but nothing in their lives indicates a heartfelt response and a life commitment.

3. *God gets all the glory.* Finally, Paul explains why it has to be God's grace through faith. It's so God gets all the glory. None of it is by our works. None of it. Paul harped on grace because he knew what would happen if we believed we had somehow earned God's forgiveness and love. He knew what we would be like if God left any part of this up to ourselves.

Grace eliminates the great faith-killer, which is pride. The greatest destroyer of faith is pride. "I can do this. I can do some of it. I can do most of it. I can do all of it if you need me too, God!" Grace just destroys that. God rejects the proud but he exalts and lifts up the humble. What does this mean? What does grace mean for us every day? What does it mean that salvation comes from the Lord?

A. *I need not fear that God might stop loving me*, because he doesn't love me because of how good I am or because of who I am. He loves me because of how good he is and because of who he is. No amount of my sin will make God love me less, and no amount of my goodness is going to make him love me more.

He already loves me as much as an infinite God can possibly love me. That means there's hope for everyone, and I never have to hide from God in shame. Grace means every single day is a brand-new start. Your mercies are new every morning. That's what grace means.

B. *I don't have to wear a mask with others*. Grace brings forgiveness, patience, kindness, and gentleness into our relationships. Grace is that safety net that invites and treasures things like honesty, transparency, and vulnerability with one another. Grace allows us to be truthful with ourselves and with each other so we can openly face our struggles in sin together.

That's what grace does. It's all him, so we don't have to try to impress each other and hide behind masks, pretending like we're really a lot better than we truly are. We don't have to do that anymore, because we're not earning God's favor. He has blessed us with it as a gift.

C. *My true identity in life is the one whom Jesus loves*. I love this. It's actually in the Bible. I don't know if you know this, but six times in the gospel of John, the apostle John refers to himself as the disciple that Jesus loves. Whenever he's writing and he wants us to know it's him that's saying something or writing something, he says, "the one whom Jesus loves."

When I used to read that, I used to kind of laugh a little bit, like, "That's awfully pompous, John. I wonder what the other 11 disciples up in heaven are thinking right now. They're probably going, 'John... Check him out. Every time he refers to himself, he's "the one whom Jesus loves."' That's how I see the other 11 apostles in my mind.

Yet when you begin to understand grace, he's right. It makes sense. John's not boasting about himself. He's in awe. "I'm the one Jesus loves! I don't get it, but he loves me!" This is our true identity. Talk about knowing who you are! That's who we are, in God's grace. We're the ones Jesus loves. That's pretty good, isn't it? That's what grace does.

D. *I can forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in me*. Here's the truth. Nobody will ever sin against you more than you have already sinned against God. Let me say that again. That's so good, I actually think it's better than the words I chose for the point. I want you to hear this. This is what I mean right here. Nobody will ever sin against you more than you have already sinned against God.

God's grace is that winning heavenly lottery ticket that allows us to give away grace to the undeserving. Forgiveness offers a way out for the forgiver. It doesn't settle all the questions of fairness and justice, but it can break the cycles of blame and pain, and it certainly can loosen the stranglehold of the silent killers of bitterness and anger. Sometimes, if there's genuine repentance

of the one we're forgiving, it can allow a relationship to start over and begin anew. Those are just a few of the things grace means.

Now, let me warn us against making grace cheap. I want to say not to cheapen grace. There are ways we do that. Let's be careful. First of all, *don't refuse it*. The person who cheapens grace basically doesn't let grace save them. They keep trying to go around the gift of God's Son and try to somehow do it for themselves, or they just ignore Jesus and the cross altogether and they cheapen God's grace through Jesus as worthless.

Yet Jesus says, "Don't do that. Come to me, all you who are weary, and I will give you rest. I will give you rest from your sin, shame, frustration, failures, and emptiness at trying to somehow convince yourself or make yourself worthy to be loved by God or anybody. Will you come to me? Don't cheapen my grace. Stop ignoring your only and greatest hope."

Secondly, *don't reduce it*. The person who reduces God's grace is the believer who won't go back to God for more grace when they sin. Instead, they run from God in shame. This means you believe God's grace got you saved, but God's grace can't keep you saved. Paul wrote, "When sin increased, God's grace increased all the more."

Don't cheapen God's grace by limiting it to just salvation only. *Saving* grace equals *sustaining* grace. We need both, and that's what grace is. Don't cheapen it by running away from God when you blow it. Grace opens the door to heaven's throne room and allows us to come back to God for the mercy we need in our times of struggle.

Thirdly, *don't abuse it*. Don't think God's grace is a license to sin. Grace is not soft on sin. It is drenched in the blood of God's Son. It is infinitely costly. Don't cheapen grace. This is the person who presumes upon grace. They say things like this to themselves: "I know it's wrong. I know what I'm doing is sin. I know God says not to do it, but I also know God is forgiving, so I'm just going to do it anyway, and then I'll ask him to forgive me." Have you ever heard that before? That's contrary to scriptural grace.

Grace kills and buries our sin. It doesn't just cover it up and sweep it under the rug. The writer of Hebrews said, **"For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries."** God's grace means there's hope for everyone.

I'm going to ask you just to bow your heads for a moment. If you will, just remain where you are and worship. Bow your heads for a moment and just thank him, just express your gratitude.

God in heaven, hallowed be your name. O God, I pray we would be a people continually in awe and blown away by your grace, that we would be endlessly thankful and desperately dependent every day for your unending, unfailing grace. I pray, God, we would be a church of people who worship, pray, serve, and give out of an overwhelming love for your grace in Christ.

God, I pray for those in this room who have yet to receive your grace by faith. I pray that today would be that day. I pray today would be the day of true repentance and the decision to be baptized and forever follow you. In Jesus' name, amen.

In just a minute, there are going to be some people standing up here for the main purpose of talking with any of you who find yourselves sitting in this room at this moment and desiring with all your heart to surrender and say, "I'm a sinner. I need God to save me by his grace." I'm going to ask those people to come up right now.

If you want to do that, as they're here, before you leave this room, you simply need to walk up to one of these people and say, "Hey, I give up. I need God's grace," and they will help you take that step of faith before you even walk out of this place. I pray you will.

If you have never been baptized, I pray as well that you'll come up and say, "Hey, sign me up. I need to be baptized. How do I start that process?" We want to encourage you to take care of both of those expressions of true saving faith. I hope you'll do that before you go home.

We're going to be back in the passage next week. We're going to look at one verse, Ephesians 2:10. Bring your Bibles. See you then!