

Book	Ephesian – Study 6
Topic	
Reference	Ephesians 2:4-10
Date	2 May 2018
Speaker	Dr Peter Ng

Our passage today can be divided into three sections:

1. What God did
2. Why he did it
3. How did we receive it and what do we do with it.

1. WHAT GOD DID?

Ephesians 2:4-10 (ESV) 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 Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

So now we are going to look at being made alive. Being made alive is structured in such a way that it is a complete reversal of last week's verses. We read it previously,

Ephesians 2:1-6 (ESV) 1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 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 Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

we were by nature children of wrath by the rest of mankind and then he seated us with him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Each sentence is a reversal of the previous condition. That's how Paul structures his argument. So what God did. God being rich in mercy because of his great love with which he loved us. So this is the enormity of his love, even when we are dead in our sins. So now make us spiritually alive, which means we are responsive to God and so it is tied up with what Christ has done for us. There is no contribution by us or man, he made us alive. This is all in passive voice, which means it is a God's doing. He has made us alive and is also a perfect tense, meaning it is a completed action with ongoing results. So it is continuous. It has to be miraculous process, not something you do. So there are parallel ideas to John chapter 3.

- It is a miraculous process you cannot do it yourself, the person is totally helpless.
- There is a radical change
- It is brought about outside a person's ability
- It is brought about by God and always through Christ

*John 5:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and **believes him** who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, **but has passed from death to life.***

So he has raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Not only he made us alive, the legal status that we actually have is that we are actually seated up in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. We are like the Roman emperors where they win wars but up there in the chariot next to them marching triumphantly down the street.

John Bunyan in the 1600s was an itinerant preacher and he wrote the second most popular book in the history of the world, 'Pilgrim's Progress'. There are about 138 editions, it printed out 1000s of 1000s of times and very-very popular book, talking about Christian life. He was at one time struggling with this issue of this passage in Mark about the blaspheming against the Holy Spirit, an unforgivable sin. He had a lot of doubts and then he actually pondered about this issue and he wrote,

One day as I was passing into the field . . . this sentence fell upon my soul. Thy righteousness is in heaven. And . . . I saw with the eyes of my soul Jesus Christ at God's right hand; there, I say, was my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, he [lacks] my righteousness, for that was just before him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, "The same yesterday, today, and forever." Heb. 13:8. Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed. I was loosed from my afflictions and irons; my temptations also fled away; so that from that time those dreadful scriptures of God [about the unforgivable sin] left off to trouble me; now went I also home rejoicing for the grace and love of God

It is only when you are actually thinking about where we actually are. We are no longer in the cell, we are actually seated at the right hand of God in Christ and that is a very powerful motivation for us.

*2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV) For our sake he made him to be sin **who knew no sin**, so that in him we might become the **righteousness of God.***

2. WHY GOD DID IT?

So now we are going to look at why he did what did

7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

God saved us so that he could show us the richness of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ. So there is a purpose there, so in the coming ages how beautiful his grace is and in kindness towards us in the coming ages, for future audience. So it is like fireworks, he displayed his love to us, so that it would be displayed through the whole universe.

*Ephesians 1:4-6 (ESV) In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the **praise of his glorious grace**, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.*

So it is all done, so that we in the end would have praise towards him.

3. HOW DID WE RECEIVE IT AND WHAT DO WE DO WITH IT.

*8 For **by grace** you have been saved **through faith**. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

So we will look at '**by grace**'. So we actually have the meaning of grace, it is His Work, it is a gift of God, not your own doing, not results of work so that no one may boost. This is very-very important. You have been saved through faith. Faith is not a work. So the first issue that we are going to be grappling with is this issue of grace and works. In theological terms **monergism** means 'work alone'. That means God works alone. **Synergism** means God works together with somebody. Theologically grace is monergism, which means God does everything on his own. There is no participation from us in terms of salvation, it is given by grace, otherwise there will be boasting. Goliath went to the Israeli army and he bangs his chest and he challenges them. He says

He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. 9 If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us. 1 Samuel 17:8-9 (ESV)

So he comes up and he challenges them. Before they fight in the ancient days, they will always send people out in the front and they will make noise. They scream at each other before they fight to drive fear in hearts, not only drive fear in hearts but also drive fear from your own heart. Because when you go and fight in the battle, most probably you are going to die, so how are you going to rush forward. You gather all your mates, because you are also scared. So boasting is something to give you confidence to face something really hard. Boasting is the antithesis to grace, it is completely opposite,

*Jeremiah 9:23-24 (ESV) 23 Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man **boast in his wisdom**, let not the mighty man **boast in his might**, let not the rich man **boast in his riches**, 24 but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord."*

So God hates human beings boasting, why, because they boast in their wisdom, in their might, in their riches, all of which were given by God. So it doesn't make sense. So here we are, we are looking and doing all sorts of things, so that we have got something to boast about. Human life is like this; we need to gain our self-esteem. This is a line from the movie Rocky, it is about fighting Apollo Creed

*I can't do it. ... do is go the distance. Nobody's ever gone the distance with Creed, and if I can go that distance, you see, and that bell rings and I'm still standing', I'm goanna know for the first time in my life, see, that I weren't just another **bum** from the neighbourhood*

So if he can stand when the bell rings and he is still standing then he will know he is not a bum. That's what human beings do, we all have to ravel in work. Everything we do is based on work. So the common thread of all religion is works, every single religion in actually based on works. So therefore they cannot actually get together to have a pray meeting because Christianity is completely different from everything else. Christianity is based on grace. Grace is threatening, grace diminishes us, grace received is transforming.

I remember years ago when my father first dead and I was about 8 years ago, we were very-very poor and so whenever the relatives will come and it was a huge number of them. The most threatening time is Chinese New Year because of Ang Pao. So if they give us Ang Pao, even though we were poor, we have to match the Ang Pao. So every time the three of us will take the Ang Pao, we run back to the room and we calculate how much it was and then we distribute back. We do it because grace is threatening. If we took their money it diminishes us, so therefore we make sure that we don't lose to people, so it doesn't diminish us, because even though you are poor, you are still proud of your own ability to stand and hold your head high, but that is pride and when somebody gives you something and you say, oh no good, I must give back or something like that it shows the works part of our lives.

But if true grace receive it is actually transforming. That's why grace is actually antithetical to human nature. Human nature is like that, we don't want to lose to anybody, we don't want to take anything free, everything we have to work for it as it were. True grace brings contentment, everything is a gift and I got more than I deserve. If you are able to accept grace, then true grace is what you don't deserve and actually got more than what I deserve then the Christian is content. If you believe in works, then it brings out anger.

- Life is unfair
- Looking for something to boast about
- I want what she has and I deserve
- Always working
- Things go wrong ...anger at God or at life...cynical
- Life has never treated you well. I deserve so much more

So therefore if you have works based thinking, it brings a lot of anger and basically works based thinking is basically due to pride. So we also have identity markers, we don't have to be rich. We have identity markers that we put in place in our lives. For example, I may not be rich but I am honest. Then we got another marker, I am generous I give money away, the other fellow swindles everybody. I am brave or incompetent, these are identity markers and when you actually have identity markers you use to compare it with other people. They are always looking at other people in order to look down, because yours is works based theology.

FORGIVENESS:

If you have got works based theology, it is very hard to forgive because that fellow did that sin. If grace comes and you are forgiven for all the sins that you have ever-ever sinned and how horrible they are, you cannot point a finger to somebody else. That's why when you actually have the Lord's Prayer, forgive me of my sin as I forgave others. The true meaning of grace is understanding that you have been forgiven so greatly that whenever you look at everybody else, you don't judge them.

If there is anyone you cannot forgive then how do you expect God to forgive you. That means you are not transformed by grace. A true Christian is transformed by grace. If you won't forgive, God won't forgive you it is a fact. So therefore grace gives you a level playing field. Everybody sin, now repentance is a different matter. I will forgive you and it doesn't matter whether if you are repentant or not, because repentance is between you and God. He may keep on doing the same thing again but repentance is between him and God. As far as forgiveness is concerned, it is already given because God has forgiven us of our sin. Now if God said, I won't forgive you till you completely repent of everything and tomorrow you sin again. Grace means you can forgive.

The second issue is the issue of grace and faith. There is a tension between the two, which comes first grace of faith. Some people says, well I have heard the gospel, I believe in Jesus Christ and because I believe in Jesus Christ, he gives me power to love and grace and blessing. Why, because I said the sinner's prayer. Once I said the sinner's prayer, I am now a child of God and blessings will come. That is a problem, because if the cause of grace is faith means it actually is work.

Ephesians 2:8-10 (ESV) For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

So grace first, faith second and after that works come. The analogy is like you are sleeping beauty, you are lying there and then prince comes and he kisses you. So when he kisses you, then you woke up, you were resuscitated, the kiss of life. When you saw the prince, he is so handsome then you have faith in him. So that is a picture of Christian conversion that you are dead, Christ brought you to life and because he brought you to life then only you have faith as it were. It is like the prodigal son, half way walking back, the father runs to his son, forgive before he opens his mouth.

The son has taken his inheritance and now he wants to be just a servant, let me work so that I can earn my place back, that's called salvation by works. He wants to earn because grace diminishes him. If I give you something free, it diminishes you, you have to earn it. All of us are like that in our hearts, even though we deny it. So grace is so beautiful, that the father comes and actually grabs hold of the son.

Faith is a method on which we hold onto grace. So if you believe first, faith and then comes grace then you can actually boast. Then faith becomes a work. You feel that you need to have so much faith, so in the end God will give me grace. It happens to a lot of us, you see if I am naught and God is not going to answer my prayer and we hide, it is artificial. God can see past that and you are depending on human effort. That's the problem. When there is enough faith, when do you have enough surrender to God, because faith becomes a work and it becomes so heavy, you get crushed, after a while you just give up the faith because you are not good enough. So faith becomes a work and work becomes a boast.

So grace must come first and then faith will come and when that happens you don't boast, you don't look down on other people. Here is an example in Acts 16

*One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord **opened her heart to pay attention** to what was said by Paul.*

So when Paul is preaching, God opened her heart. So that's grace, if God don't open her heart. When you actually have the Holy Spirit give you grace then grace open your heart. So you actually listen and you are actually interested and you actually understand and you didn't actually fall to sleep and if it is the other way around then it becomes very-very tedious and very-very difficult.

Whether it is faith or no faith. Unbelief is not absence of faith; it is a presence of some other kind of faith. There is no such thing as anybody in the world got no faith. If the ship is sinking, you can either have faith in the sinking ship or you got to have faith in the lifeboat, but you got to choose. It is impossible to have no faith. The reason why you don't want to accept Christ is because you don't want to put your foot on Christ and rest on him, you rather put your foot on the rest of the other things, your own works. This is an example of people who don't believe

Matthew 11:16-17 But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates,17 "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn."

So it is like children sitting in the marketplace, you play a nice song and nobody cooperated, you play a sad song and you didn't mourn. So either way you are not cooperating. It is like a child, you are supposed to bring him back a present for Christmas, you forgot. He gets really upset at you. Then you ask him, you want to go to circus, no. You want to stay at home, no. You want to go and eat ice-cream, no. Why is he saying no all the time, even though he desperately wants to go?

He wants control, it is an issue of control. It is a primordial instinct for control and in unbelief we go back to like a child, we are primordial, we want to control our own lives. It is not that we don't see Christ, it is just that we don't want to give up the control.

There is a difference between faith and the feelings of faith. The feelings of faith and faith are different. It is just like, there is a difference between love and the feelings of love and you need to be able to differentiate the two. For example, you are falling down very fast from a high cliff and all you see is one branch and you decide to grab the branch. The branch becomes the object of faith. The feelings of faith is, 'I am not quite sure whether branch is going to save, it looks pretty weak, I am bit worried', but you grab the branch and what saves you the feelings of faith or the object of the faith? Object of the faith saves you. So it is not how strong your faith is, it is how whether you grab the correct branch or not, you grab the wrong branch you die already. You grab the correct branch, you are saved. So we are talking about Jesus Christ as a branch. It is the object of faith that is important, not your feelings.

Work by Works:

For example, I have sinned against God and I don't think God is very pleased, so you spend the next three days in depression, I cannot pray, I stay away from church. I am not ready to go back to church, because I have done this horrible thing, but you just can't face God and you have to wait until time comes and maybe I will beat myself a bit more and I will give some more money to the church or something like that and then maybe I will come back. That's work based theology.

Micah 7:8-10 (ESV) Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. 9 I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light; I shall look upon his vindication. 10 Then my enemy will see, and shame will cover her who said to me, "Where is the Lord your God?"

Micah is not happy; he is feeling guilty because he has sinned. He sounds like you and me, he is not being righteously nailed on the cross, he has done something wrong and he is feeling very bad about the something that is wrong. He is in the pit as it were. He sits in darkness. That means there is a darkness about him. In Micah there is a tension, on one hand you sit in darkness and you realize when you sin against God, you sit in darkness, you have let him down and you feel quite awful about it, but yet on the other hand there is this idea that I shall rise, the Lord will be a light. He pleads my cause; he will execute judgement for me. So a Christian is actually caught between two worlds, on one hand he is mourning, he is sitting in the darkness, on the other hand he is clinging on to Christ. It is like a person going into a reactor room, there is radiation. God is like radiation, very powerful, you go down there and the most important thing is that you must hang on to radiation suit. That's the only thing that keeps you alive. So although you are in a dark place, you hang on very closely to radiation suit. That's the difference.

CHEAP GRACE:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes,

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. The only man who has the right to say that he is justified by grace alone is the man who has left all to follow Christ. ... We ... have gathered like eagles round the carcass of cheap grace, and there we have drunk of the poison which has killed the life of following Christ.

That's the problem with the modern church today, the modern church has swung so much towards grace, they call that hyper-grace. So when they sit down there, they won't sit in darkness, they are not worried about their sin. They sit in the radiation chamber and they head fell off, you don't hang on to Christ very much. They say, I am okay, I am fine, I don't feel anything. A true Christian doesn't have cheap grace; he understands the enormity of the sin. He sits in darkness yet he also understands the enormity of God's grace. He holds the two together and that's very hard to hold together. Many churches get it wrong, they either go all to grace and you see some churches go all to repentance, everybody dark and forbidding and never rejoice in Christ. Here you actually have a situation where you have darkness and you have light together. It is like walking with a radiation suit as it were. So this is very important to understand grace.

FAITH IS RESTING:

You either rest on self-effort or you just rest in Christ. That's what faith is. We are always resting on something, our knowledge or our research. To have faith on anything we must actually have knowledge, research, we have belief and after that maybe this is true then we have faith and commitment and vulnerability and then we have got certainty. Unless you commit in faith, you

cannot know everything else. If you go into a plane, you will never know whether the plane will get you to your destination until you get inside and they slam the door shut. That is the only time you will actually know. So you will only know when you commit by faith. The thing is that, the bigger the thing is, the more valuable it is, the more vulnerable you will be.

GRACE COMES THROUGH THE GOSPEL

2 Corinthians 4:3-6 (ESV) And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

We get grace when we are in contact with the gospel. The gospel brings grace. Here we have a whole bunch of non-Christians and all of them are blinded. Only God can show grace and when the grace says, let there be light then suddenly the lights come on and the veil falls off. What actually converts us is actually the glory of God, the beauty of God, the transcendent love of God. When you come to know Christ, it is when God opens up your eyes and you can see the value of God. Now that faith involve in conversion, is the same faith that is involved in Christian growth. If you are not growing in Christ today, it is simply because you are not seeing the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and the only way you can see the light is by reading it, meditating on it, taking it inside and suddenly the glory comes out and it pulls you in and the glory makes you grow and that is something that's done not by effort, it is actually done by grace. Justification is by grace, sanctification is also by grace, it means whether you grow in Christ or not it is actually a gift of God.

How to do really enact that gift?

That means you get on your knees and you say, Lord I don't really like Bible study. I think it is boring. In fact, I don't even find you beautiful, I find you boring. I need you to open up my lights, so that I can want you more and desire you more and be filled. I want to see how beautiful you are. When you pray, quit praying about your children, your wife, your business, all the things that you want in life, get down and say God show me your beauty. That's all I want to know, I want to see your glory. The moment you do that, God will answer that prayer and you will love to read his word and you will be transformed by his word. That's a beautiful thing that you need to understand. It is not trying hard, it is resting on Christ, praying, asking God to reintegrate in your heart.

FAITH LEADS TO WORKS

Ephesians 2:10 (ESV) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

So each one of us is a wonderful masterpiece created for God.

Which is biblical view point?

- Who we are determines what we do
- What we do determines who we are

We are God's masterpiece, and He gets really upset about anything that makes the masterpiece less than what it is. So he is painting, he is fussing, he is preparing and the masterpiece must do what you are created to be. You are created to be the son of God, God's adopted children and you do what you are. Now the world is completely different. The world says what we do determines who we are. Accountancy describes the life of an accountant. If you are retired than you are nobody, you have zero value. The world says you are what you do.

Christianity says, you do who we are, determines what we do. It is completely different. There is a myth of Sisyphus who was a Greek god, who was punished by Zeus and he has to push a huge rock up the top of the hill and then the rock will roll back down. His punishment was to do this for the rest of eternity. Actually if you look at it, in terms of eternal value in life if a human being looks at his job, whatever you do, you may be the brightest scientist in the world, you discover something, when you die 500 years later on whatever you discover all crap, worth nothing.

A lot of things that we do now, a lot of years from that will be useless. We are like Sisyphus, we push the thing up and down, there is no value at all. The only way we can deal with this, Albert Camus was the second youngest person to receive a Nobel prize in philosophy and this is the only way we can survive in life if we are what we do is that we imagine Sisyphus to be happy. You imagine you are happy and that's the only way you are going to survive in life. Now that's very sad, the opposite is that to believe in what God has said. We are God's masterpiece, so even though we are retired there is so much that God is going to look into your life and He is going to see what you are going to do to glorify his name. You are not what you do, you do is because of what you are.

So we are God's workmanship, created in Christ for good works, which God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

The word 'walk' implies conduct, not doing. A lot of people have mistaken this verse. That means God wants me to be the treasurer of the church, God wants me to build an extension over there. It is easy to do, it says whenever the scripture talks about walk, it is a manner of how you live, your conduct.

*Ephesians 1:4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that **we should be holy and blameless** before him*

The emphasis in scripture is not what you do, is who you are. If you are a child of God, you will have holiness and blamelessness. So a lot of the churches make mistake by focusing on spiritual gifts, God is not interested in what you do, God is interested in what you are because you are created so that we may be holy and blameless before him, that we should walk in these works, we should walk in them.

God has prepared beforehand the good works for believers that He will perform in and through them as they walk by faith in His power – Harold Hoener

It is the way you live your life. If you live your life in a manner that is holy and righteous, automatically you will have good works. Your works come out from what you are, not the other way around. So sometimes you are very active in church, you do this or that. You can do all this and that and you are still not a Christian. See when you are holy and righteous you do this but don't get it wrong, get it the right way, personal holiness and we are God's perfect image and he is going to slowly clean us up and make us to be what we are and then when we die and go to heaven we will be perfect at that time. So that should be the vision of our lives and all that is given to us is by grace.

Grace is not only threatening but grace can be transforming because God has chosen us out of nothing and given us and made us his masterpiece, it should transform us, it should reintegrate us and it should inspire us. Each one of us is a God's masterpiece.