

The Miracle Of Grace

On Sunday we continued our new sermon series on the book of Ephesians by focusing on the second chapter, which talks about sin and grace.

1. Warm up question. If you were God and you had the power to add a new sin to the list of forbidden things – something that really annoys you that you wish people would not do – what would you add to the list?
2. Ephesians 2:1 begins by saying, “You were dead through trespasses and sins in which you once lived.” Before diving into the specifics that follow in chapter 2, let’s first grapple with the broad concept of sin. The Hebrew word for sin – *chatah* (khaw-TAW) – means missing the mark, like when someone shoots an arrow at a bull’s eye. Since “God is love” and “those who live in love, live in God” (I John 4:8, 16), Jeff suggested that the bull’s eye represents love. In this way of thinking, sin is the opposite of love, i.e., any unloving act.
 - a. How does that way of thinking about sin sit with you? What do you like or dislike about it?
 - b. In the churches of your past, how have they talked about sin – and was that helpful to you or not?
 - c. Name something that you used to think was a sin that you don’t anymore, or something you didn’t think was a sin, but now do. What changed your mind?
 - d. Historically, Christians have placed a lot of emphasis on “the problem of sin” in our lives and the importance of finding a solution to that problem. Do you think it’s healthy – or not – for a person to live with a keen awareness of his/her capacity for sin?
3. Read Ephesians 2:1-3.
 - a. What does the word “dead” mean in the context in which it’s used in verse 1? Dead in what sense?
 - b. Verse 3 says that, left to our own devices, we all have a natural tendency to become “children of wrath.” What do you think that means – and do you agree?
 - c. Within the past week or two, have you seen any examples of people behaving like “children of wrath”? What happened?
 - d. Reflecting on his life, Bruce Springsteen says, “I wanted to kill what loved me because I couldn’t stand being loved. It infuriated and outraged me [that] someone [had] the temerity to love me – nobody does that . . . , and I’ll show you why.” In your own life, what tends to generate the deepest levels of anger within you?

4. Read Ephesians 2:4-10.
 - a. Is there any word or phrase in this passage that particularly intrigues you or jumps out at you? If so, why?
 - b. Most people tend to respond to their moral shortcomings by buckling down and trying harder to live better. Verses 8 and 9 seem to suggest that trying harder is not the solution to spiritual wholeness. Have you ever known someone who approached religion as an exercise in willpower and rule keeping? How did that approach seem to work for them?
5. In verse 8, Paul says that we are “saved by grace through faith.” Let’s wrestle with each of the key words in that statement.
 - a. “Saved” from what? In your own life, have you felt the need to be “saved”? If so, from what?
 - b. Jeff suggested that the best way to understand “grace” is to experience it. Think about an experience you’ve had (or witnessed) that exemplified grace. What happened? Based on that experience, how would you define “grace”?
 - c. How (or why) does “grace” save us?
 - d. What role does “faith” play in all this? What kind of “faith” is Paul talking about in verse 8?
6. Jeff offered a four-part explanation of the process by which God’s grace transforms us. He said that “grace” is:
 - The process by which God radiates our souls with unconditional love,
 - Which, when received (instead of being rejected) by us,
 - Gradually transforms us into creatures of unconditional love,
 - So that the character of our being becomes a reflection of the character of God’s being, i.e., we become children of God instead of children of wrath.

Critique that model. What resonates with you? What doesn’t?

7. Sunday’s sermon ended with the story of an elderly South African woman who heard the confession of the police officer who, years earlier, had killed both her son and husband in hate crimes. When the judge asked the woman what she wanted, she asked the judge to sentence the officer to regular visits in her home (so she would have someone to love) and asked to be able to hug the officer right there at the trial, so he could feel her forgiveness. As she approached him, the officer fainted. What do you make of that story? Does God really expect that kind of behavior from us? Is it healthy? Are there any limits to grace?
8. Who in your life are you feeling called to show grace?