

PRAISE GOD FOR HIS AMAZING GRACE

2 And [he raised] you [also,] when you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you once walked in accord with the course of this world, [which is] in accord with the ruling prince of the air, [that is,] the spirit who is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³Indeed, we all formerly lived among them for the lusts of our sinful nature, doing the will of the flesh and of the mind, and we were by nature children of wrath just like the rest [of mankind]. ⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in transgressions made us alive with Christ (by grace you have been saved) ⁶and he raised us with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms—in Christ Jesus. ⁷[He did so] in order that in the coming ages [of eternity] he might display the immeasurable riches of his grace [expressed] in kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸It is by grace that you have been saved through faith—and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹it is not of works, therefore no one can boast. ¹⁰We are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance in order for us to walk in them. (Eph. 2:1-10)

Introduction

You may be acquainted with the story of John Newton. That former captain of a slave ship became a preacher of the gospel and the author of perhaps the most beloved Christian hymn of all time, *Amazing Grace*.

John Newton wrote, “Amazing grace—how sweet the sound—that saved a wretch like me!” Those words of testimony and praise to God for His amazing grace not only apply to John Newton—a notorious sinner; they apply to every sinner who has been converted to Christ and redeemed by God’s amazing grace.

Although we may not have lived the same infamously ungodly life as did John Newton, we by nature possessed the same heart that produced such a life. The Lord Jesus Christ declared, *“out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. ²⁰These are the things that make a man ‘unclean’”* (Matt. 15:19-20.)

We join John Newton in our guilt before God and in our need for redemption; and as believers in Christ the Savior we may join John Newton in praising God for His amazing grace. We must never forget that our salvation is due to the fact that we are the recipients of God’s amazing grace. As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ let us praise God for His amazing grace.

I. Praise God for His Amazing Grace, ...as You Recognize What You were by Nature (2:1-3)

The apostle describes us by nature as being *“dead in your transgressions and sins”* (vs. 1.)

This state of spiritual deadness (separation from the life and fellowship of God) was initially caused by sin, Adam's initial disobedience to God in the Garden of Eden, his disobedience of the divine command recorded in Genesis 2:16-17, *"Jehovah God commanded the man, saying, From every tree of the garden you may freely eat; ¹⁷but you shall not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."* This state of spiritual deadness is presently characterized by an active lifestyle of sin. Prior to his conversion, the Christian is described as being *"dead in ... transgressions and sins in which you ... walked;"* that state of spiritual deadness is characterized by an active resistance and animosity towards the law of God. The Apostle Paul describes the mind of the natural man in these terms: *"the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so"* (Rom. 8:7.)

By nature, we *"walked [or, lived] in accord with the course of this world."* Apart from the saving grace of God, our lives would still be in harmony with the course or current (the mentality, outlook, perspective) of this present world. The Apostle Peter describes the course of this world as it truly is when stripped of all godly restraint and influence:

... you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. ⁴They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. (1 Pet. 4:3-4)

The course of this world itself is directed by *"the ruling prince of the air, [that is,] the spirit who is now working in the sons of disobedience."* It is the devil himself who exercises an evil dominion over this world, note Luke 4:5-6a, a passage in which the devil speaks of the evil dominion he presently exercises over this world and its inhabitants: *"The devil led [Jesus] up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And he said to him, 'I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me.'" The devil who operates in the natural man in a way that parallels the working of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian: In Ephesians 2:2 we read of *"the ruling prince of the air ... who is now working [ἐνεργέω] in the sons of disobedience."* In Philippians 2:13, addressing the Christian church, the Apostle Paul informs us, *"it is God who is working [ἐνεργέω] in you both to create the desire and to produce the work for the sake of his good purpose."* According to the Apostle John, *"We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one"* (1 Jn. 5:19.)*

By nature, *"we all formerly lived among them for the lusts of our sinful nature."* That is to say, our lives were dominated by our sinful nature and devoted to gratifying the desires of that nature; there was a natural addiction to sin and self-centeredness. This is as true of the religious man (Paul) as it is of the pagan Gentiles; note what Paul says about himself in Romans 7:18a, *"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature."*

By nature, we were *“children of wrath just like the rest [of mankind.]”* We are not sinners because we commit acts of sin; on the contrary, we commit acts of sin because we are sinners. Let us hear the testimony of Job: *“What is man, that he could be pure, or one born of woman, that he could be righteous? ¹⁵If God places no trust in his holy ones, if even the heavens are not pure in his eyes, ¹⁶how much less man, who is vile and corrupt, who drinks up iniquity like water!”* (Job 15:14-16.) Again, there is the testimony of the Lord Jesus Himself concerning man in our natural state: *“out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. ²⁰These are the things that make a man ‘unclean’”* (Matt. 15:19-20a.) The Minnesota Crime Commission came to this frightening and factual conclusion in its study of infant behavior:

Every baby starts life as a little savage. He is completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it: his bottle, his mother’s attention, his playmate’s toy, his uncle’s watch. Deny him these wants, and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness that would be murderous were he not so helpless. He has no morals, no knowledge, no skills. This means that all children—not just certain children—are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in the self-centered world of his infancy, giving free reign to his impulsive actions to satisfy his wants, every child would grow up a criminal, a thief, a killer, a rapist. (from the archives of *Pulpit Helps*; 6815 Shallowford Road, Chattanooga TN 37421; www.pulpithelps.com)

It is not accurate to say that God loves sinners but hates their sin; on the contrary, God has both a grieving love as well as a holy wrath directed towards sinners themselves—because it is sinners who produce acts of sin! The Psalmist declares, *“God is a righteous judge, a God who has indignation every day”* (Psl. 7:11.) The Apostle Paul writes, *“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness”* (Rom. 1:18.) Neither is it true to say that the love of God is greater than the wrath of God; on the contrary, these two divine attributes exist side by side in all their intensity. At present, it is the mercy of God that causes Him to restrain His holy wrath and that moves Him to offer Christ as the Savior. But the day is coming when God’s righteous wrath against unbelieving, unrepentant sinners will be expressed in full measure.

As a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, recognize what you were by nature, and praise God for His amazing grace!

II. Praise God for His Amazing Grace, ...as You Recognize What God has Done for You (2:1,4-7)

Ephesians 2:1 begins with the word *“And.”* This indicates that what follows in chapter two is directly connected to something the apostle has already presented in chapter one. We must trace our way backward into chapter one to find the connection:

[I pray that you may know] the immeasurable greatness of his power [available] to us who believe; [that power is] in accord with the working of the might of his strength, ²⁰which worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹far above every rule and authority and power and dominion and every title that can be given, not only in this [present] age but also in the coming age. ²²And “he put all things in subjection under his feet,” and he appointed him to be head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (Eph. 1:19-23)

We must trace the connection back beyond Christ’s headship for the church, back beyond Christ’s lordship over all authorities, back beyond Christ’s ascension, all the way back to Christ’s resurrection. Here is the connection: God raised Christ from the dead ... and you. Note: This connection is expressed in our present translation of the passage, in which the words in brackets have been added to the Greek text in order to more clearly bring out the meaning. This connection between Christ's resurrection and our relationship to it is confirmed in Ephesians 2:4-6,

... God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in transgressions he made us alive with Christ (by grace you have been saved) ⁶and he raised us with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms—in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:4-6)

May we appreciate how awesome is this connection. It is by God’s **justice** that Christ was raised from the dead. In his message delivered at Pentecost, referring to Psalm 16, Peter points out that it was by virtue of God’s justice and righteousness that He raised Christ, the Holy One, from the dead:

But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him; ²⁵for David said about him: I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ²⁶Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, ²⁷because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. ²⁸You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence. (Acts 2:24-28)

But it is by God’s **grace** that we have been raised with Christ.

Verse 7 continues, “[He did so] in order that in the coming ages [of eternity] he might display the immeasurable riches of his grace [expressed] in kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” One result of our salvation is that in His act of kindness towards us the riches of God’s grace are visibly and publicly displayed—to the praise of the glory of His grace. By way of illustration: A little boy invests much time and skill in making a model airplane; then he displays his handiwork at the Boy Scout craft exhibit and rightly takes pleasure in the compliments and praise he

rightfully deserves. The Lord God puts us on display as an exhibit of His amazing grace, and rightfully receives the praise.

Note how this passage of Scripture speaks of *“the immeasurable riches of his [God’s] grace.”* This same theme is presented by the Apostle John when he writes of Christ, *“from his fullness we all received grace upon grace”* (Jn. 1:16.) Literally, John informs us that in Christ and by His work of atonement, we have received *“grace instead of (ἀντί) grace,”* or, *“grace against grace.”* What is being emphasized here is the superabundance of grace that is bestowed upon us from Christ’s fullness. Again, by way of illustration, it is like the waves of the ocean at high tide pouring themselves upon the shore, one wave replacing the previous wave, such is the lavishness of God’s grace bestowed upon His people in Christ.

Note also that it is especially in *“the coming ages [of eternity]”* that the immeasurable riches of God’s grace to us shall be revealed and experienced. As Psalm 23:6 declares, *“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me [literally, pursue me] all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”* The covenantal blessings of God reach out and touch the Christian throughout the years of his earthly life; but they only overtake him in full measure when he has arrived in the eternal presence of God in the kingdom of heaven. At present, we are not yet morally capable of experiencing the fullness of God’s blessing. Consider Deuteronomy 8:11-14a, a passage that indicates that when the LORD bestows the bounty of His blessing upon His people in this present world, because of the remnants of our sinful nature that still affect our lives, we are prone to misuse those blessings and forget the LORD our God:

Be careful that you do not forget Jehovah your God, failing to observe his commandments, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. ¹²[Be careful] for fear that, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴then your heart becomes proud and you forget Jehovah your God. (Deut. 8:11-14a)

Then, too, at present, we are not yet physically capable of experiencing the fullness of God’s blessed presence, as Paul informs the Corinthian church, in order to experience the full blessings of God in His immediate presence, *“This body, which decays, must clothe itself with what is imperishable; indeed, this mortal body must clothe itself with what is immortal”* (1 Cor. 15:53.) The evangelist, D.L. Moody, tells of being overwhelmed almost to the point of death by the experience of the love of God as the Lord on one occasion revealed Himself to Moody.

Consistently we are reminded that we experience God’s kindness to us *“in Christ Jesus.”* The Greek term translated *“kindness”* (χρηστότης) has the primary meaning of “goodness;” it conveys the sense of doing what is right, giving a just reward. It is Christ Jesus Himself, and He alone, who is the worthy object and

recipient of God's kindness (goodness). With reference to the Lord Jesus, the Psalmist is quoted as saying, "*You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy*" (Heb. 1:9.) It is only because the Christian has become identified with and united to Christ that he comes to share in all the goodness God lavishes upon His well-deserving Son.

As a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, recognize what God has done for you, and praise God for His amazing grace.

III. Praise God for His Amazing Grace, ...as You Recognize that Grace as the Sole Source of Your Salvation (2:8-10)

Throughout this passage the focus and emphasis is placed on God's grace and mercy. Ephesians 2:4 speaks of, "*God, being rich in mercy*" and goes on to speak of "*his great love with which he loved us.*" Ephesians 2:5 declares, "*by grace you have been saved.*"

Verses 8-10 continue this same theme: "*It is by grace that you have been saved through faith—and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God*" (vs. 8.) This passage is teaching that it is not merely that by grace God makes His salvation available to us—and it is left up to us to supply the faith that receives that divine salvation. On the contrary, this passage is teaching that not only the salvation, but also the faith to receive that salvation, are **both** the product of God's amazing grace. Salvation—together with the faith to receive it—is all the gift of God.

The apostle goes on to declare, "*It is by grace that you have been saved ...⁹it is not of works, therefore no one can boast*" (vs. 8-9.) The whole of salvation (its conception, its accomplishment, its offer, and its application to the sinner and reception by the sinner) is all of God: it is all the gift of God by grace, not in any way is it the product of our works.

We are not saved by any works we ourselves produce; on the contrary, we are God's "*handiwork.*" Our salvation and the new creation we have been made are the product of God's work of grace. We have been created "*for good works, which God prepared in advance in order for us to walk in them.*" Even the new life for which we have been created is the product of God's work of grace in us. We have not been saved to produce good works; we have been saved to live by the good works that God by His Holy Spirit reproduces in us. By way of illustration: The LORD takes from us our filthy garments of sin. He plunges us into the cleansing bath of Jesus' blood. Then He does not expect us to sew for ourselves a new suit of appropriate spiritual attire; rather, His Holy Spirit assists us in putting on the garments of the new spiritual life He has provided and for which He has called us. We must ask the Holy Spirit to help us to step out of the old lifestyle of sin and into the new lifestyle of godliness God has prepared for us.

As a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, recognize that the grace of God is the sole source of your salvation—God has redeemed you by His grace, not by your own works; God has redeemed you to perform the good works He has graciously produced, He has not called you to produce good works of your own—and praise God for His amazing grace.

Conclusion

“Why me, O LORD?”

How many times have we heard that question? How many times have you yourself asked that question?

“Why me, O LORD?”

How many times have you heard that question asked—or have asked it yourself—in response to adversity or disappointed in your life? Such disappointments and trials like the unexpected loss of a job, or a broken dating relationship, or a life-threatening disease.

Now it is not necessarily wrong to ask that question in times of adversity—consider the example of Job. But there is something radically wrong when it is only in times of adversity that you raise the question, “Why me, O LORD?”

Consider another way in which that same question is addressed to God by the biblical writers: *“Then King David went in and sat before Jehovah, and he said: ‘Who am I, O Lord Jehovah, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?’”* (2 Sam. 7:18.) David here asks that question in the context of humble gratitude and praise: Why me, O LORD? Why have you made me to be the object of Your favor?

As a Christian, let us pose that question to God in the same way as did David: Why me, O LORD? Why have you made me to be the recipient of Your great salvation? The answer provided by God in His holy Word is this: “It is because of My sovereign grace.”

Let us praise God for His amazing grace.