

GROW 201 – What We Teach

Lesson 3

RG² and One's IDENTITY

KEY PASSAGE(S):

⁸“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8, 9)

THE BIG PICTURE – THE *Story*:

The gospel will shape one's identity. It changes one's identity from being identified by Adam to that of being identified by Christ. In Adam, there is nothing but condemnation. In Christ, there is nothing but justification. Both are thorough and both are equally true.

We have already noted how God had to deal graciously with us based on the person and work of Jesus Christ or all would be lost. It is because Jesus Christ is God that His work could satisfy the Father's wrath and remove our shame, fear, and guilt. Our rescue from sin and death is the single greatest act we will ever experience. It far surpasses anything we have done or ever hope to do. This chapter explores the implications of His work in behalf of His people. Every believer needs to know these foundational truths. Here we will address our old identity **in Adam** versus our new identity **in Christ**. We will answer the question as to why it is important to study *what we once were* and *what we now are*.

INITIAL TRUTHS TO REMEMBER:

Although our story speaks to Adam and Eve's refusal to obey God, their sin became our sin. How is such possible? Two ideas fuse together at this juncture in the *Story*. **First**, Adam and Eve are **race progenitor** [Seminal headship]. All of humanity existed in the loins of Adam and Eve. We carry within us their DNA. Their sin is intrinsic to our very makeup. Who he is becomes who we are. This is *original sin*. **Second**, Adam is **race representative** [federal headship]. Because of his position of headship, he represents each part (Rom. 5:12-21). Thus, the Scripture speaks of humanity as **in Adam**. This is *imputation*. Who he is forms our identity before God.

BASIC IDEAS:

1. It is only by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, that anyone can be saved.
2. In Adam, all are condemned. In Christ, all are justified.
3. The need for Jesus never changes regardless of whether one is in Adam or in Christ. One's relationship to Christ, however, does change.

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Collectively, in Adam, all of humanity is guilty of transgression. Yet individually, we all like sheep have gone astray (Isa. 53:6). **We are in the *Story* through Adam but also by our own choice.**

The human condition necessitates God's action of grace. The Scripture describes the unbelieving as being "dead in their trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1-3). Because they are neither good nor righteous (Rom. 3:10-12) they are "by nature children of [divine] wrath" (Eph. 2:3). Their present condition is so atrocious that the wrath of God is even now abiding on them (John 3:36). Fortunately, *what we once were, we no longer are.* The Bible describes for us the condition of the lost. The picture painted is anything but flattering. We will attempt to answer three questions: **first**, what were we in Adam; **second**, why is salvation by grace and not works; **finally**, what happened to our old self, in Adam, at the cross. We will begin with the first question.

OVERVIEW OF THE LESSON:

Why the stress on what we were in Adam? **The purpose of the study is to show us our inability.** We cannot live our lives in a way that is pleasing to God independent of Him. To study our **fallen nature** is to receive a healthy dose of reality. Because all this is true, we need to consider what we are as believers. This is what makes our justification or salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone **so exceptional and essential.** What we could not do, He did. This leads us to consider Ephesians 2:1-10, which provides for us a context to look at His grace holistically. "In chapter one Paul wrote of the great purposes and plan of God, culminating in the universal headship of Christ."¹ This purpose finds its inception in the salvation of man. The entire passage accents God's greatness and man's debasement.

Without further delay, let us walk through Ephesians 2.

TODAY'S LESSON: Read Ephesians 2:1-10

I. The believer's past sin (Eph. 2:1-3).

A. We were dead in trespasses and sins.

This speaks of our essence. This is what we were (v. 1). This is the consequence of our rebellion against God. We rejected Him and we died. We are dead in trespasses and sins. We have nothing to offer, no merit, and no ability. The divine sentence is such that "none are pronounced good, none are righteous, no one seeks Him and no one understands Him" (Rom. 3:10-12). Such is the unending condition of all humanity. We have no hope before a holy God of ever measuring up to His righteous standard.

B. We walked according to the devil.

This speaks of our action. This is what we did (v. 2). This walking speaks of deliberate progress

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in a particular direction. The idea of walking speaks of a course of life, a manner or conduct of living. Desire, circumstances, and consequences direct our will and volition.

C. We were sons of disobedience.

The word “disobedience” speaks of one who is in opposition to the divine will. In other words, the spirit that characterizes lost humanity is the same spirit that characterized us before salvation. Like Adam and Eve, **we have chosen our way over God’s way**. It is neither more complex nor far reaching than that simple statement.

D. We were defiled in our bodies.

This speaks of our attitude. This is what we desired (v. 3).

E. We were under divine wrath.

We chose to do what pleased us (v. 3). We were the embodiment of Psalm 1. To walk away from the divine record still believing in our own innate goodness is to be blinded by the one who will snatch from us the life giving seed of God (2 Cor. 4:3, 4; Mark 4:15).

³“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴in whose case the god of this world **has blinded the minds** of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:3, 4).

“These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately **Satan comes and takes away the word** which has been sown in them” (Mark 4:15).

God could have chosen to leave Adam and Eve in their sin. When we read the narrative as found in Genesis 3, **it is disturbing how there is no statement concerning Adam and Eve’s confession and repentance**. Nowhere does it say they repented of their rebellion. In fact, the text says, “The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them” (v. 21). Again, by implication God had to save them for they could not save themselves. Salvation is always from the LORD; humanity cannot save itself. If the record stopped here, our despair would consume us, yet the record continues.

II. The believer’s present standing (Eph. 2:4-10).

“The atonement of Christ is the mechanism of grace. Without the atonement, the grace of God is a beautiful dream.”² The fullness of grace exists against the backdrop of man’s despair. This is the message of hope echoing through the corridors of holy writ, “But God.” Such a contrast brings hope to those consumed by despair. Such words are the relief we seek from our helplessness. Oh, thank Him sinner and saint alike that He has not left us to ourselves. Praise His holy name – “But God.” These are two of the greatest words in the Bible.

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This paragraph provides the reason as to why Paul believes it is possible for us not to follow the ways of the world, to follow the ruler of this world, or to gratify the cravings of the sinful nature by following its desires and thoughts. **It is because Christ has made us alive.** It is through Spirit baptism we have been crucified, buried, raised and are now seated with Him. We are now in a “one flesh” relationship with Jesus Christ. Such a truth provides for us the power to live apart from the living dead. Three ideas explain this.

A. The Mercy of God (vv. 4-6 [His Provision])

God’s resources are rooted in His very character and thus are infinite and limitless. He draws from Himself. It is because of His love that He loved us. Would any other platform or motive do? God is rich in mercy. His mercy is abundant. It is excessive. It is greater than the need. Titus 3:5, 6 speaks to this.

“He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, **but according to His mercy**, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:5-7).

The mercy of God is His action of restraint. His motive for extending to us mercy is His love. Notice how the text states it, “He loves us even when we were dead in sins.” Even, to this degree. How do we see mercy, how do we see love? Notice the union.

1. He quickened us (v. 5) – made alive.
2. He raised us up (v. 6) – position.
3. He made us sit (v. 6) – preservation / perseverance.

These last two expressions reflect the believer's new position of being in Christ (cf. Col. 3:1-3; Phil. 3:20).

¹“Therefore if **you have been raised up with Christ**, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³**For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God**” (Col. 3:1-3).

“For **our citizenship is in heaven**, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:20).

Because of the same language employed in Ephesians 1:20-23, we understand this to refer to our co-regent role with our Lord. We will reign with Him over all of the created order. Garden dominion will exist (Gen. 1:26-28).

²⁰“which He brought about in Christ, **when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places**, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²²And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, ²³which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:20-23).

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Colossians tells us “[our lives are] hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). Moreover, Christ “who is [our life]” guarantees our future glorification (Col. 3:4; Rom. 8:29, 30). This is grace! Our identification with Christ is all an expression of grace. It is all of grace so that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus (v. 7).

B. The Motive of God (v. 7 [His Purpose]) “He might show the exceeding riches of HIS grace.”

- The duration / “that in the ages to come”
- The disclosure / “that He might show us as trophies of His grace”

The salvation of sinners and the adoption of sons is an expression of His overflowing grace. God’s *Story* celebrates the richness of God. Paul uses the statement, “Exceeding riches of His grace.” The idea is that of surpassing, of being above measure. We cannot sound it out. That is why Paul says “that in the ages to come,” heaven will be an unfolding of His glorious grace. Jesus Christ is everything. He is mercy. He is love. He is grace. He is goodness. **To have Him is to have all things.** Jesus Christ is the embodiment of God’s love (John 3:16). Jesus Christ is the embodiment of grace and truth (John 1:17). To have seen Christ is to have seen the incarnation of the Father’s essence (John 14:9).

- The display / “for by grace . . .”

“God manifests ‘common grace’ toward all men because they are His creatures (Ps. 145:9, 15; Matt. 5:45), but the overriding exercise of His grace lies in the provision of salvation in Christ.”³ The only possible way for fallen humanity to stand right before God is for God to condescend, to stoop and do for humanity what humanity could never do for its self. This redeeming grace is learned from Scripture, whereas common grace might never be recognized.

C. The Method of God (vv. 8-10 [His Plan])

1. Salvation is a gift from God (v. 8)

a. The reason for this display – grace (Rom. 3:24)

“being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24).

Why did God save us? There is no earthly basis for the giving of the gift or it is no longer a gift, but rather a wage or earning (Rom. 9:11; 11:6).

“But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace” (Rom. 11:6).

It is the gift nature of salvation that is contrasted with sin’s wages (Rom. 6:23).

“For the wages of sin is death, **but** the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

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Paul makes it emphatically clear that whatever might be our attainment or acquisition, it is definitely not of ourselves. “No human effort can contribute to our salvation; it is the gift of God.”⁴ Grace is God’s response to man’s need.

b. The result of this display - salvation

Salvation is the result of God’s gracious dealings with us. Notice the wording of Romans 11:5 (the choice of grace) and 11:6.

⁵“In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice. ⁶**But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace**” (Rom. 11:5, 6).

We often speak of being “saved.” What exactly does this entail? Romans 8:28-30 provides an excellent description of **salvation’s progressive nature**.

²⁸“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. ²⁹For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; ³⁰and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified” (Rom. 8:28-30).

We were once full image bearers and will be again when He finishes conforming us to the image of His Son. Inside of this short passage, two words are notable. We will add the third element for thoroughness.

- First is the word **justification**. Justification speaks of our past. Justification deals with our righteous standing before God in Christ. **God saves us from the penalty of sin** (2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9).
- The second word is **glorification**. Glorification speaks of our future. Glorification deals with our righteous standing before God in Christ fully seen in my body with the absence of the old nature (1 John 3:2, 3). **God will save us from the presence of sin**.
- The one word absent from Romans 8:28-30 is **sanctification**. There is an aspect of salvation that is progressive and deals with the manifesting of justification through the body (Cf. L5), but notice that it is God moving forward the progression. Sanctification speaks of our present condition. It deals with our righteous standing before God in Christ progressively manifested in my body of flesh (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 2:14, 15; 3:18; 4:7-11). **God saves us from the power of sin** (Cf. Lessons 4 and 8).

Salvation is the provision of God for His people. The means through which His people secure the provision is by **faith**.

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c. The route of this display - faith

The only action we contribute is the exercising of faith. Moreover, even the exercising of faith is a gift from God (Phil. 1:29; Acts 11:18; 13:48).

“For to you **it has been granted** for Christ's sake, **not only to believe in Him**, but also to suffer for His sake” (Phil. 1:29).

“When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, ‘Well then, **God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life**’” (Acts 11:18).

“When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; **and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed**” (Acts 13:48).

Because all this is true, there is no room for personal or individual boasting.

2. Salvation leaves no room for boasting (v. 9 [cf. Romans 3:27-31])

No one can boast. On what basis could we boast? On what ground could we stand to make such an appeal? We are the objects of His workmanship; He is a Master artisan. He is working a masterpiece. “One cannot earn salvation by ‘observing the law.’ Scripture consistently condemns such an approach to salvation (or sanctification). No one can take credit for his or her salvation.”⁵

3. Salvation produces in us and through us the ordained goal of good works/fruit-bearing (v. 10 [Cf. Lesson 13])

Verse 10 is not introducing a new thought of obedience but rather continuing the thought begun in verse 5. Obedience is part of a continuation of the salvation experience. Obedience is part of salvation from its inception to its glorification (Rom. 8:28-30). The work He has begun and He alone is doing is a work of grace. “Because we were once in Adam and have his DNA, we still have the ability to sin. But this sin has no authority over us. It no longer screams for death and judgment. It now leads us to Jesus, our new Lord and master, who reminds us that He along and forever has washed and redeemed us with His mighty work and we can rest in that alone.”⁶

CONCLUSION:

The believer must live with the tension that exists in possessing two natures continually in opposition to each other (Rom. 7:14-24). Sanctification is the process by which God renews the mind of the believer to live in light of his new nature rather than his old nature (Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 5:15; Col. 3:1-14; Titus 3:11-12; Eph. 5:8 [Cf. L5]). **It is not a process where God cleans up the old nature in order to make it good. The old nature is non-redeemable (Eph. 4:22). The new nature is non-corruptible (Rom 6:9).** Choices made, experiences interpreted, truths believed either exist within the framework of our old nature or according to His Spirit living within us. As our choices are made according to His life within us, our new nature shines forth more brilliantly (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:10-11). The good news is Christ always wins and therefore His life within us is always victorious (Rom. 6:5-7; 1 Cor. 15:57; 1 Thess. 5:24; 2 Thess. 3:3-5).

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When a believer dies, he leaves his old non-redeemable nature behind with all that is corruptible. The indestructible life of Christ lives on forever (Rom. 6:9) and since the believer is inseparably linked with Him, it is the believer's new nature that lives on for all eternity (Rom. 6:5-7; 1 Cor. 15:49). For the unbeliever, all he has is his old corruptible nature and he will find himself unredeemed and condemned forever (2 Thess. 2:12).

So as we "strive" to be more like Him, we need to remember we already possess all that He is (1 John 4:17). We are living vicariously through Him (Cf. L12). He is the One striving to renew our minds to live as if we really believe that "Christ in you" is our hope of glory (Col. 1:27). I cannot think of a more sure foundation to rest upon.

Christ is sufficient. Friend, learning to rest in the perceived difficulty is to see that we are who He is before the Father. Do not be satisfied with anything apart from Christ.

How do we battle an enemy that is of our own doing? We need to see Him. My prayer is that it would please the Father to show us who we are in His Son and what His Son is for us.

Listen to this powerful conclusion by Dudley Hall.

Grace doesn't just change your destiny, it changes your identity. You're no longer a slave to unrighteousness, but a slave to righteousness. Every chance you get to obey, to submit to Christ, do it. For in this you are establishing righteousness in your life. Then, when you look in the mirror, you will not be tempted to judge yourself by your history but you can, with sincerity of heart, agree with God and judge yourself by your destiny. ⁷

BASIC APPLICATION

1. What did you find helpful from today's lesson?	7. Does the Father ever see us as anything other than what we are in Christ?
2. What did you find confusing from today's lesson?	8. Must we maintain by our works what we have merited by His grace?
3. How does this lesson help you in thinking through the gospel?	9. Does the Father ever deal with us according to our sin?
4. How does this lesson help you in how you view yourself?	
5. What was your "aha" moment?	
6. How might this text challenge you in your daily activity?	

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Romans 1:18-3:20; Eph. 2:1-10

¹ *NIV Study Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

² Zahl, *Grace in Practice*, 114.

³ W.A. Criswell, *Criswell Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1981).

⁴ *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

⁵ *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

⁶ Joe Herriges, Grow 201 class

⁷ Dudley Hall, *Grace Works* (Multnomah Pub., 2000), 263.