

The Workmanship of God

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*³

READ EPHESIANS 2:1-10

Our Sinful State

In our culture, another way that we pursue our identity is by what we might call the therapeutic approach. We say, “I need to find the real me, the one deep inside.” We seem to think that waiting in our depths is a better and more fulfilled person. We believe that if we could just work a little more on ourselves, the butterfly would burst out of its cocoon and fly away.

Paul thinks otherwise.

Paul believes that down deep inside we are sinners. We are dead, not just repressed. We are not merely one meaningful insight away from finding our true selves. We are people who have already murdered our true selves and now are trying to resuscitate a corpse.

I have no problem with therapy and introspection. I find them both to be very helpful. But they cannot raise the dead.

The church Paul is writing was comprised of both Jews

and Gentiles. In this chapter, he refers to the Gentiles as “you” and the Jews as “us.” “You” and I, the Gentile Christians, were dead in sin, living like this world (v. 1-2). “We,” the Hebrew Christians like Paul, also had lived sinful lives in the past, “even as others” (v. 3). As Paul would write to the Romans, “None is righteous, no not one ... For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:10 & 22-23). Ironically for a group of church members, their most obvious shared trait across lines of race and ethnicity was that they were all sinners.

God loved all of “us,” Hebrew and Gentile alike (v. 4). The big point here is that sin is the common problem, no matter who we are. God is the only answer.

Sin is the problem that God solves in Jesus Christ. Sin is when we break God’s law and go our own way. Sin is like a disease that makes us sick and keeps us from being what God wants us to be. Once we have “caught” sin by our choices to disobey God, we no longer have the power to save ourselves. We need divine intervention.

Sin is a lethal disease. It kills the soul and pollutes the body. Even if we do good actions from now on (which we won’t), that doesn’t change the fact that we are still sinners, sick people in need of a doctor for our souls.

Paul is spending time in this section telling us how bad the life of sin really is. In verse 2, they are said to have walked according to the “prince of the power of the air,” as children of disobedience. This is a phrase that would have made more sense to people back when Paul wrote this letter.

Air was commonly used by ancient Greek thinkers to describe the world of human actions and society (whereas philosophers such as Aristotle believed that the planets and the stars orbited further up in the aether that they thought

existed above the air). Satan is the person who seems to have the most influence in the lives of the sinful people all around us. He was ruling our lives too when we lived in sin. Rather than make God our King, we have made Satan our Prince. We serve him in this little world we inhabit, though all the universe proclaims God the Creator to be the true King who is worthy of all our praise.

Grace and the Faith of Jesus Christ

When we turn to God in faith and repentance, we make him our King and reject Satan's influence. Sin causes us to be spiritually dead, but God has made us alive in Christ by his grace (v. 5).

What is grace? Grace is God showing us favor and kindness that we do not deserve. Grace is God loving us even though we have turned toward sin. Grace is God sending his son, Jesus, to take our place. Grace is what makes salvation possible because we could never have done it ourselves.

Verse 5 tells us how we are saved, and the very next verse gives us a powerful expression of that salvation (v. 6). Grace saves us when the man who is dead to sin is "raised up" like Jesus Christ. Baptism has been the symbol and signpost of this transformation in the New Testament and all throughout the long years of Christian history (Romans 6:4). Baptism is when a person is put into water in faith that Jesus saves him by his grace. When a person is put into the water, God acts to save him and forgive him of his sins. All this has been done so that God can show the power of His grace in the "ages to come" (v. 7). From the time that Paul wrote

until now, God has been showing his saving power in the lives of Christians.

Paul again tells us that salvation came by grace with the simple statement made in verse 8. Salvation cannot take place apart from grace, and grace cannot be found outside of “the faith of Jesus Christ.” This expression “the faith of Jesus Christ” has received many interpretations. Some take it to mean our personal, subjective faith in Jesus. Some take it to mean a system of belief about Jesus, as opposed to the Law which was the religious system of Moses. I think it might be simpler than either of those answers.

Jesus was faithful in his life. He did not count the cost of faith too high, but instead, he did all that God asked of him. He obeyed God even when it meant going to the cross to die. He did what we have not—he lived a faithful life. His faith and obedience paved the way for our salvation. No number of things we might ever do could replace the gift that was offered to the world in the form of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. Grace is a gift that was given freely, but it was not free to obtain. Christ’s faithfulness on the cross was at a high cost. When we speak of the faithfulness of Christ, we speak of “the founder, and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Hebrews 12:2).

When Paul says that we are saved by the faith of Jesus Christ, I believe he means quite simply that we are saved because Jesus was faithful when we were not. He did what we could not do and paid the cost we could not pay.

Certainly, your personal faith in Christ is important. Absolutely, your faith and knowledge about Christ are critical. But it is Christ’s own faith that saves you, not your own.

The predetermined plan was that Christ would save us from sin so that we could live and do his work in the world (v. 10). This plan was what God wanted from the very beginning. Though Paul makes it very clear that we could not have ever saved ourselves by doing good, he also tells us that God has saved us so that we may now start doing good! When we do God's good will, we are not trying to earn our salvation or bargain for forgiveness. Our good is done because God has already saved us, and now we choose to live out his purpose. We want to bring God's goodness into this world because God has been so good to us!

The German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously wrote, "Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace." What is the difference? Bonhoeffer explains that "costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock." When thought of in this helpful way, churches can understand themselves outside of the old debates between faith and works. Costly grace is bought at a high price, offered to us freely, and then makes demands of us for the rest of our lives. "Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ."

This is why God created us in the first place. He is a master craftsman, like a great carpenter or potter, who is shaping us into people who do his goodwill in this world. When we learn more about him and about his son, Jesus, we are being shaped by him into the people we were intended to be in the first place before sin got in the way. As Christians, we should be living every day trying to find more of God's goodness in this world and looking for opportunities to help

others.

In God's salvation by grace, we find the purpose for our lives that we lost in sin. When we sin, we think that selfishly doing what we want is best. When God saves us, he reminds us that we were created to do his will.

Who Am I?

I am the work of the Master Craftsman, the result of his genius and power and love. My purpose is not to look inside myself and find out who I *really* am. The person I find inside might be an awful person if I'm being honest. My purpose is to look above and ask who I was made to be.

I am a creature defined entirely by my Creator. "Now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand" (Isaiah 64:8). His goals are my goals. I do not inform my creator of my will and question his intentions. "Wo to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' or 'Your work has no handles?'" (Isaiah 45:9).

I am also a creature who has strayed from the intent of my Creator. I have not served him with my whole heart. By what I have done and by what I have left undone, I have become less than his design for me. I am a clay pot that has fallen to the floor and shattered. I should not look at my broken state and assume this is how I must exist. I must remember how I was made.

I am a creation who is redeemed by my Creator to be his once more. The prophet Jeremiah records his observations at a potter's house: "So I went down to the potter's house,

and there he was working at his wheel. And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do" (Jeremiah 18:3-4). Likewise, even though I am broken, I believe the Creator can remake me again with his costly grace.

Even when I don't know who I am, I can look at Jesus and see who I was made to be.

Discussion Questions

1. How does Ephesians 2:1-10 illustrate the transformation of one's identity through grace? What specific aspects of this passage highlight the contrast between our former identity and the new identity offered through God's grace?
2. In Ephesians 2:1-10, grace plays a central role in reshaping our identity. How can an understanding of God's grace influence our perception of self-worth and purpose in life? Are there practical ways to incorporate this understanding into our daily lives?
3. Ephesians 2:1-10 emphasizes that we are saved by grace through faith, not by our own works. How does this message challenge common societal notions of achievement and self-reliance? How can a deeper appreciation of this biblical truth impact our pursuit of identity and purpose in a world that often values self-sufficiency?