

Today we continue reading the letter written to the Christians in the town of Ephesus and in the surrounding countryside. We know this letter in the Bible today as Ephesians. Ephesus was a coastal community located in what is now modern-day Turkey which is across the Aegean Sea from Greece.

Because of its location, Ephesus became an important city for commerce and trade. About 350 years before the birth of Christ a new Temple was built which became known as one of the Seven Wonders of the World in Hellenistic times.

The letter to the Ephesians begins by stating that the author is Paul. However, modern day scholars doubt that Paul wrote it. Let me tell you why they have doubts that Paul wrote it. The reason they doubt that Paul wrote this letter is because the sentences are longer, and the language used is different from the way Paul writes in other letters.

It was also common at the time for people to write letters using the names of more famous people. But for simplicity I will refer to the author being Paul.

In the first chapter of this letter that we read last week we learned that through Christ we are given an inheritance. An inheritance that invites us to live in and share hope during many hopeless situations.

In the second chapter that we will be reading today, we will hear about how God's grace overcomes human sin and weakness. About how God's grace sustains us in even the most difficult of situations.

We will hear Paul proclaim that the laws that have been so important in their religious expression are secondary compared to the grace which comes from God. Grace which overcomes the boundaries.

**Read Ephesians 2:8-22**

I am going to invite us to listen to a story of a man that experienced incredible unfortunate circumstances. But rather than allow this injustice to lead him into a life of bitterness he allowed himself to experience the grace that comes from God.

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Paul says that by grace we have been saved through faith and not by the result of our works. He goes on in our reading to proclaim that Christ has abolished the law with its commandments so that God can create one new humanity which brings together diverse people into one peace. Grace rather than works.

Many of us have a hard time accepting that faith in God is a commitment based on God's grace rather than our good works. Many of us have gotten the message that we need to earn our salvation by what we do.

Some of us may be consumed by guilt that we can never do enough to earn our salvation. Maybe you look back to some past actions that you regret. Maybe there were some words you have recently said that were hurtful to someone else.

Maybe you look back over your life and wish you had handled some situations differently with some people. Maybe some decisions you made turned out to be the wrong decision with terrible consequences.

Or maybe, like De'Marchoe Carpenter you were at the wrong place at the wrong time and were thrown into a terrible situation. You look back and think about what you could have done to change the situation you found yourself trapped into.

Each one of us can look back to situations in our lives and think about how life could have turned out differently if we had just made some simple changes. If I had just ....

Others of us feel consumed by guilt because of immoral or unethical acts we have committed. We think about the lies we have told or the fake personas that we have tried to portray.

We feel ashamed by some acts we have committed in our lives. Others of us have encountered lots of bad breaks and conclude that we must have done something wrong and that we are somehow being punished by God.

So, feeling consumed by this guilt, some of us get involved in a church and work hard. We volunteer at whatever is going on in the church. We are there every worship service. We are good financial contributors. Or maybe we become very involved in an important cause or non-profit.

But for some of us, we express our Christianity this way because we are trying to earn our way into God's good graces. If we just do enough good things, then that can make up for all the bad things that we have done or that have been done to us.

But we are reminded by Paul that grace allows us to be saved not by works but by grace. In other words, we do not need to keep doing to earn God's graces. No amount of volunteer work is ever going to relieve us of that guilt.

But what can relieve us of that guilt is accepting that we are saved by grace through faith. In other words, through the love of Christ we are forgiven, restored, and renewed. The old is past and the new is upon us.

So, this morning I invite us to hear the message of true freedom. The freedom which comes from the grace of God. The rules and regulations are secondary.

What is primary is accepting the grace of God. You do not need to make up or earn anything.

Simply accept the grace that God bestows upon you in life. Accept the grace which comes from God through Christ. AMEN.

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-Given: July 22, 2018 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)