

File: FRT “Transformed by Grace” Ephesians 2:1-10

Dear Friends in Christ, Grace to you and Peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen!

Here’s a list of just a few of the things I’ve taken for granted and frankly more times than I’d like to admit. Clean water, a furnace in the winter and AC in the summer, antibiotics, anesthesia, physical health, an internet connection and decent cell service and yes at times my family.

We get in to our daily routines and take for granted things and people assuming they’ll always be there. Then something happens like a hurricane in Texas or Puerto Rico where we go “Wow I’m not going to take clean water for granted anymore”. Or the internet connection goes out or we lose our phone. Or maybe a child or someone important to us doesn’t check in when they were supposed to and our mind starts to wander and wonder and you hope and pray something hasn’t happened and when they check in you’re incredibly relieved. We all know the feeling of discovering we’ve taken something or someone for granted and when we discover there’s a threat of it being taken away and it’s restored there’s a huge sigh of relief. “I’ll never take that for granted again we tell ourselves.”

I think sometimes we take God's grace for granted and because of that it doesn't always seem so amazing. I hope that somehow—some way the Holy Spirit will restore in you a sense of awe in God's amazing grace

In the passage from Ephesians we find one of the most often quoted passages in Scripture Ephesians 2:8-9 *“For it is by God's grace that you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God---not by works, so that no one can boast”.*

The entire Bible is the account of God's graciousness to His people and that includes you and me. And it would seem that most people are onboard with the Biblical principle that we're saved by grace—right—we hear it over and over. But here's the deal---in national survey after survey at least 50% of people who describe themselves as Christians say we're saved by what we do. WOW! How does this happen?

Because while grace is Amazing it can also be annoying. God's grace is amazing when it applies to us! We are thankful God is graceful, we trust God for salvation and we're really glad that when we repent God doesn't keep a record of our wrongs. But it's also really annoying when we start thinking about that it applies to others who we think maybe haven't tried as hard as we have.

It doesn't take long to come up with a list of historically horrible rulers through the centuries who it's hard to believe grace might apply---or a list of people we know or see in the media who have either made a mess of their lives or the lives of others, or who are just down right mean, who don't seem to learn, who make stupid decisions, treat others poorly, have anger issues or personalities we just don't like and it's really annoying to think that the Lord might be graceful to them too, because it's clear they haven't tried as hard as us.

In Middle America where most of us live, people can at least pay most of their bills, some have periodic vacations, pursue different hobbies and interests and in general people have worked pretty hard to get what they have. To paraphrase author Phil Yancey "As Isaac Newton studied the universe, he came up with fixed rules like this "Every action deserves an equal and opposite reaction." Seems like everything including politics and the economy runs that way. Stop making your car or house payments and the bank repossess them. It makes it hard for grace to be amazing because we just assume God works the same way. Get your act together and you get grace—at least make an effort.

Many years ago, in the summer of 1977, my father was diagnosed with cancer and given just a few months to live. Because of all that goes along with that my mom decided to hire a house keeper for a few months because obviously her physical and emotional energy was elsewhere. And as you might imagine one of

the things we had to do was get everything cleaned up before the housekeeper came. If you could have seen my room you would understand why that would have been necessary and at this stage of life I do get it.

But it makes me think, when it comes to grace, that one of the reasons it loses its amazingness is that we've bought into some notion that we have to clean ourselves up before we come to the Lord. As if God doesn't see through it. We somehow think that if we clean ourselves up a bit we are just a little bit more acceptable, maybe a little bit more worthy of grace. Maybe that's why so many Christians still think that ultimately we're saved by what we do.

And maybe just maybe we are pretty sure that others have to clean themselves up too to make themselves presentable to God. You pick the person, you pick the group, You pick the issue, sometimes it's just pretty hard to believe that God might show the same kind of grace to them that the Lord shows to us.

We humans like someone to tell us "If you just follow these rules and this program, you'll do the right thing and be accepted by God." And we're pretty sure for the most part that we've followed the rules (at least we've tried to) and we've tried to do the right thing (most of the time) so we at least have tried and therefore God will show grace to me because at least I've tried of course that other person or group really hasn't at least as much as I have.

There's a lot of people out there who if you were to ask them the question "What is a Christian?" They wouldn't respond with words like love, compassion or grace. Typically they'll describe a Christian as someone who's anti-something or uptight and judgmental. Why? Because somehow someway there's still a part of us that think we can earn it and we've got to get ourselves cleaned up or that we've gotten ourselves cleaned up (at least a little) and we deserve it. And Amazing grace becomes annoying especially when God shows it to someone we think doesn't deserve it, it goes against our sense of fairness.

So how do we recapture Amazing grace? Grace only becomes amazing when we get to the end of ourselves, and we discover we too don't deserve it. And maybe that's the hardest part of grace becoming amazing because who wants to get to the end of themselves and recognize they aren't worthy of grace. That even with our best effort, even with our best trying, that no matter how good of a Christian we think we are it could never be good enough and then and then yes then something transformational happens—Amazing Grace.

Grace moves from annoying to amazing when we discover we don't have to pretend with God like we do with others that our life is perfect when it's not, or that we believe when we have doubts, or that we don't have to maintain the image of a perfect marriage with well-adjusted children- and grace becomes amazing when

we actually admit that we sin—oh I don't mean in general terms but I mean the specifics of every day life.

Oh I know there are still those self-appointed grace monitors, who rarely if ever come out and say it but you can feel it, who want to make grace more responsible and make sure everybody's life is cleaned up and sanitized before receiving grace. But God still loves the imperfect, those whose lives aren't all cleaned up and perfect.. God seemed to use Moses the murderer, David the adulterer, the prodigal son not the responsible older brother, Lazarus not the rich man, the good Samaritan not the rabbi and the list goes on.

I know some get real concerned when we talk about grace that there's a danger of excusing behavior or lowering standards. But that's why Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount raised the bar so high, so high that anybody who takes it serious can only come away, recognizing their need for grace. You don't murder--do you get angry with your brother? You don't' commit adultery---do you lust? Let those who are without sin cast the first stone—and everyone walked away.

Think about it, think about it long and hard and all of the standards God has, what do we really deserve? Do we really want God to give us what we deserve? I don't think so. Instead through faith and repentance we receive grace. That's Amazing.

Yeah God's grace can seem annoying when others get it who we think don't deserve it but in reality it's amazing

Our Scripture read "For it is by Grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." And the very next verse says "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do". So yes, we keep on trying we do good works, not to earn anything but to reflect God's amazing Grace. In Jesus' name Amen!