

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
Ephesians 2:8-10

Intro: The Church in Ephesus & the letter to the Ephesians

"Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:2) is in all of Paul's epistles. It is always in that order, grace and peace. 'Grace' is the work of God by which salvation from sin comes. 'Peace' is the condition of the believer's heart after grace has done its work. They are in that order because there can be no peace in the heart until grace has done its work.

The ethical application (unity) of the theological concept (grace):

- I. Criticism ... even Jesus himself was often criticized.
"...glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners." Luke 7:34
- II. We all know the P-A-I-N of being criticized. How do we respond?
P – Prayer Pray for the person criticizing you; for understanding of criticism.
A – Attitude Consider the attitude of the person who is criticizing you.
I - Intention Be aware of the intention of the person who is criticizing you.
N – Nature Examine the nature of your response; Is it biblical? Or defensive?
"When He was reviled, He did not revile back. When He was insulted, He did not insult back." I Peter 2:21-23
- III. Ten one-word ways to respond to criticism (John Maxwell)
 1. Bye - They never grow; they just go.
 2. Spy - Looking for their critic to do something wrong so they can criticize back.
 3. Fry - When that person gets criticism, they get so mad they just fry.
 4. Deny – Accepts no truth to the criticism at all.
 5. Cry - It hurts to be criticized but some play the victim to stop the criticism.
 6. Sigh - "Nothing I can do about it! That's just the way I am."
 7. Why - Becomes defensive - "Why is everybody picking on me?"
 8. Pry - "What is it that I did wrong? How can I do better?" They want to get better.
 9. Die - Don't deny the criticism; die to its truth, resurrect from it and become better.
 10. Fly - They learn from criticism and they elevate themselves to new heights.

Conclusion: When we know who we are--children of God by the grace of Christ, who sometimes make mistakes-- sometimes the criticism is deserved and sometimes it isn't; but it shouldn't take away from who we are.

You are God's child that He loves. Soar above the attacks of others as you do good works in Jesus' name!

One of the Bible's most beautiful books, Paul's "Letter to the Ephesians" is central to the 'Pauline Epistles' in laying out not only the church's earliest theology, but its practical application for living our daily lives. Study it with prayer and you will be blessed!

Monday – Read *Ephesians 1:1-23*. Scholars agree this letter was a 'general' letter and the reference to Ephesus is only found in later revisions of the letter; probably it was intended to be circulated to churches in Ephesus, Colosse, and the surrounding area. *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. These words begin all of Paul's epistles and always in this order: Grace comes first, which brings our salvation; then peace, which becomes the condition of the believer's heart after grace has done its work. Paul's use of 'predestined' (*vs 5,11*) has led some to believe that certain of us were destined before birth to be saved, but probably has more to do with God's plan of salvation coming to fruition (*v. 10*)

Tuesday – Paul turned to a song of praise and thanksgiving to show the blessings of redemption (*1:15-2:10*). He wanted his readers to know Christ better, the Christ who enables believers to have the incomparable power that resurrected Christ and that now rules in this age and the one to come. This power can come to persons who were dead in sin but are saved by grace, being raised up with Christ to participate in His rule but also to live out of grace in the good works God has planned for His people to do.

Wednesday -- Following a frequently used pattern in Paul's epistles, two basic themes are developed. First there is a major section on some theological theme. Second there follows a major section in ethics growing out of the theological theme. In the New Testament, theology and ethics are bound together; they are never to be separated. In his theological part (*1:13-3:21*) Paul centered attention on the plan and propagation of redemption. He began with a literary pattern of a poem or song to praise God for what He has done in providing salvation for sinful humanity. The provision of redemption is presented as the work of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. A refrain "to the praise of the glory of His grace" repeats itself after each section, each with a slight variation.

Thursday -- Focus on *Ephesians 2:1-5*. Before we know God through grace, we are subject to 'God's wrath' (*v 3*); but after grace saves us we are subject to God's discipleship (*v 5*). Paul writes that all of us have gone through this progression, and so is not singling out anyone who has not as yet had eyes opened by God's grace: *All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.* (*v 3*)

Friday – Paul stresses the theological truth that we are saved by Grace alone (*2:6-10*). How about you...have you trusted in Christ alone for your salvation? If not, do it right now! *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*