

Change Based on God's Grace - Ephesians 1:1-2 – January 7th, 2018

- I've titled today's teaching, "Change Based on God's Grace."
- I've really been looking forward to the Book of Ephesians for a number of reasons, chief of which is it's different than the others.
- Especially the Epistle's to the Corinthians and the Galatians, both of which he wrote to address serious problems in the church.

- As such, Ephesians is, as one commentator noted, "highly praised and prized by commentators as the 'Queen of the Epistles.'"
- This because, here in Ephesians the Apostle Paul expounds upon and even sums up the doctrinal theme's of his other Epistles.
- He starts with the doctrine of grace upon which everything is based, and foundationally, it all begins with our salvation by grace.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV) — 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

- Before we jump into our text, I think it would be good to point out a couple of interesting details about the book of Ephesians.
- First, Paul, as he did to the Philippians, writes this from a Roman prison, where he sits incarcerated, unjustly, and faces death.
- Second, the city of Ephesus was one of the most occultic and sexually immoral cities in that day, home to the Temple of Diana.

- The reason I point this out is that conspicuously absent from Paul's writing is any mention of him complaining about anything.
- Instead, his focus is on the grace and goodness of God in spite of the unfair, life and death situation in which he finds himself.
- The question becomes one of how he was able to do this. Answer, because he had drunk deeply from the cup of God's grace,

- Enter our text today, where in the first verse, Paul starts by referring to himself as an Apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.
- He then addresses the letter to "God's holy people, or if you prefer, "saints" in Ephesus, who he calls the faithful in Christ Jesus.
- Then in verse two, he greets them by saying to them "grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

- Notice its grace and peace, not peace and grace. Why? You can't know the peace of God unless you know the grace of God.
- Simply put, the peace of God is based on the grace of God. We cannot have peace with God, or of God, absent God's grace.
- Pastor Chuck used to call grace and peace the Siamese Twins of the New Testament, such that they go together in that order.

As one commentator so aptly put it, "Grace is always first, peace always second. This is due to the fact that grace is the source of peace. Without grace there is, and can be, no peace, but when grace is ours, peace must of necessity follow."

- Now, with grace in its proper place, a victorious Christian life leaves the realm of only a theory and enters the realm of reality.
- By that I mean, with grace at home base, my obedience to God is now based on what I don't deserve, and not on what I do.
- In other words, when I realize that my relationship with God is based on grace and not works, it will change my Christian life.

- We do err greatly when we try to live our Christian lives under the banner of, "if I do _____, then God will do _____."
- To have this mindset is to live my Christian life based on what my works deserve, and not on God's grace that's undeserved.
- Conversely, a grace-based relationship with Christ doesn't depend upon what I do, or don't do. It's based on what He did do.

- This makes willful disobedience against God, more difficult because I've been the undeserving recipient of grace from God.
- When I come to this realization in my Christian life, it will totally change my life by virtue of how it changes the way I live my life.
- Now, instead of thinking that God's hammer is going to come down when I mess up, it's God's grace that comes down instead.

Romans 5:20 - Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,

- If you're anything like me and I suspect that you are, you want more than anything to know specifically how grace really works.
- The reason being is that if the grace of God can really bring about the much-needed change in my life then I want to know how.
- Thankfully, we need look no further than to examples replete throughout the pages of scripture to know the truth about grace.

1 Corinthians 15:9-10 (NIV) — 9 For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

Matthew 26:69-75 (NIV) — 69 Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said. 70 But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. 71 Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth." 72 He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!" 73 After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away." 74 Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. 75 Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

- The common denominator with Paul, Peter and the many others with them is that they were recipients of His magnificent grace.
- They did nothing on their end to be deemed worthy of it; they simply embraced God's grace, which in turn changed everything.
- Here in lies the key to living a victorious Christian life. It's all of grace in the power of the Holy Spirit and not in my own strength.

Zechariah 4:6 (NKJV) — 6 So he answered and said to me: "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the LORD of hosts.