

Clear About the Gospel Bible Study
Theological Focus 2: Grace & Faith
10-11-26 - Dr. Clay Brown, MDPC Adult Discipleship Pastor

TEACHING OUTLINE

1. Start with announcements and prayer. (5 minutes)

2. Discuss how Scripture shows both the “bad news” that reveals the “good news,” that the truth of the human condition shows our desperate need for God’s grace. (15 minutes)

- Eph 2.1-3 not an exception, but a restatement of Biblical reality about humans
- The bad news of the human condition as expressed in the ECO Essential Tenets (III.A.) “The present disordered state of the world, in which we and all things are subject to misery and evil, is not God’s doing, but rather a result of humanity’s free, sinful rebellion against God’s will.”
- What theologians call “the Fall,” Adam and Eve’s rebellion against God (Gen 3.1-24), sets the scene for every human being: “For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.” (Rom 3.23 NLT)
- Other passages recounting the reality of human sinfulness: Exo 32.1-35; Jung 2.10-23; 2 Sam 11.1-27; Mt 5.17-46; Rom 3.9-20
- Even God’s chosen ones (see previous session on election) reveal this recurring tendency to sin: Abraham in Genesis, not long after God’s first expression of His covenant with him (12.1-9), lies and misrepresents his relationship with Sarah to Pharaoh (12.10-20)
- Except for Jesus, no Biblical figure exempt from sinful patterns and practices, including such luminaries as Moses, David, Peter, and Paul
- Grace as defined in the last session: unmerited, undeserved mercy shown to us by God only because of His immense love for us, not because of anything we do or inherently deserve
- If we could earn it or do it, we wouldn’t need grace... we wouldn’t need Christ’s life, death, and resurrection to do what we are unable to do

3. Discuss how faith is the only appropriate response to grace. (10 minutes)

- Eph 2.4-10 is not an outlier, but a drumbeat of how to respond to God’s grace freely given
- Review Gen 15.1-6 on how Abraham responds to God and how God reacts: “And Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith.” (15.6 NLT)
- Follow up with Hab 2.4, Rom 1.16-17, Gal 3.6-7, and Heb 10.37-38 as reinforcing the crucial nature of faith in God’s gracious covenant fulfilled in Jesus
- Faith more than intellectual knowledge, but a living trust and commitment to Jesus as Lord
- Protestant Reformation highlights the significance of grace through faith through its “solas”: grace alone (*Sola Gratia*), faith alone (*Sola Fide*), Scripture alone (*Sola Scriptura*), Christ alone (*Solus Christus*), to God alone be glory (*Soli Deo Gloria*)

4. Discuss how we often struggle with grace and faith. (15 minutes)

- Typical human response to grace through faith: what’s the catch? How can this be?

- Most everything else in life on the basis of achievement, production, performance, success
- Younger generations struggle more with Christian teachings on Jesus, grace, faith, moral life
- Trends from “State of Theology” 2025 survey by Ligonier & Lifeway illustrative of where we are culturally (<https://thestateoftheology.com/>)
 - “Everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature.” **Total adults:** 24% *strongly agree*, 42% *somewhat agree*, 5% *not sure*, 15% *somewhat disagree*, 14% *strongly disagree*; **Self-identified evangelicals:** 28% *strongly agree*, 25% *somewhat agree*, 3% *not sure*, 17% *percent somewhat disagree*, 27% *strongly disagree*
 - “Everyone is born innocent in the eyes of God.” **Total adults:** 56% *strongly agree*, 18% *somewhat agree*, 8% *not sure*, 5% *somewhat disagree*, 13% *strongly disagree*; **Self-identified evangelicals:** 58% *strongly agree*, 6% *somewhat agree*, 5% *not sure*, 4% *somewhat disagree*, 27% *somewhat disagree*
 - “God counts a person as righteous not because of one’s works but only because one’s faith in Jesus Christ.” **Total adults:** 34% *strongly agree*, 22% *somewhat agree*, 12% *not sure*, 13% *somewhat disagree*, 19% *strongly disagree*; **Self-identified evangelicals:** 78% *strongly agree*, 11% *somewhat agree*, 3% *not sure*, 3% *somewhat disagree*, 5% *strongly disagree*
 - “Religious belief is not about objective truth.” **Total adults:** 20% *strongly agree*, 25% *somewhat agree*, 23% *not sure*, 16% *somewhat disagree*, 16% *strongly disagree*; **Self-identified evangelicals:** 19% *strongly agree*, 9% *somewhat agree*, 19% *not sure*, 12% *somewhat disagree*, 41% *strongly disagree*

5. Close with prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

- Review Ephesians 2.1-10 that we studied last time. How does it state the human condition in verses 1-3? How does it state God’s provision for the human condition in verses 4-10?
- The quote in the outline from the ECO Essential Tenets sums up the Presbyterian and Reformed perspective on human fallenness. Please share your responses to it. Agree? Disagree? Why?
- Define grace again. How does grace show up throughout the full Biblical story? Give two examples from the Old Testament and two examples from the New Testament.
- Define faith again. How does Biblical faith differ from just an intellectual knowledge of doctrine and history? From just religious rule-keeping? From just emotional displays of religious fervor?
- We live in a works-oriented world. So how do we communicate grace through faith to our neighbors?
- How have you seen God’s grace through faith working in your life? Please use specific examples.
- Discuss some of the current trends in American culture, as noted by the “The State of Theology” survey responses in the outline. How do we respond to them so we may better convey the good news of Jesus Christ?