

THE GRACE AWAKENING STUDY TWO

The Free Gift

Ephesians 2:1–13

In order for there to be a demonstration of grace, there must be an acknowledgment that I have nothing in myself to give back to God. I am dependent upon Christ to do for me what I cannot do for myself.

—Charles R. Swindoll

THE most dangerous heresy is that we can merit God’s favor through our efforts. On the surface, this lie appears valid. In our culture, we celebrate hard work and self-made success. We’re proud to wear on our sleeves the stripes of a strong work ethic. As the saying goes, “God helps those who help themselves,” right? So what’s the error?

Slinking in the shadows of the self-effort heresy is *self-worship*—boasting in our works rather than trusting God’s work on our behalf. Since God does all the work of our salvation through Christ, He should get all the glory.

The biblical account of the Tower of Babel illustrates how far people will go to take God’s glory from Him. According to the biblical account, the people schemed,

“Come, let’s build a great city for ourselves with a tower that reaches into the sky. This will make us famous and keep us from being scattered all over the world.” (Genesis 11:4)

The structure likely resembled an ancient Babylonian ziggurat—a cone-shaped tower with a spiral staircase leading to a zodiac-inscribed pinnacle designed to represent heaven. Note the emphasis on human effort, “Come, let’s build,” and self-glory, “This will make us famous.” *The Living Bible* identifies this tower as the idol it was: “a proud, eternal monument to themselves” (11:4 TLB). God stopped the blasphemous project by confusing the people’s languages and scattering them (11:5–9).



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

The Free Gift

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The heresy of human effort has tempted many people to erect towers of good works that come short of heaven. But to warn is not enough; we must also declare the truth we deny when we boast in our works, namely, God’s sufficiency expressed through His saving grace.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Through prayer, we open our hands to receive God’s truth from His Word like bread from heaven. Take a moment to pray for the following:

- Wisdom—the ability to see God’s view of our salvation
- Insight—the ability to grasp the true meaning of saving grace
- Understanding—the ability to put grace into practice

Among the ancient ziggurats in Mesopotamia lived a man named Abraham, an idol worshiper who would become the archetype of grace. In the world’s eyes, if ever there was a man who could have climbed his way to try to reach heaven, it was wealthy and respected Abraham. But as we’ll read in Romans 4:1–5, God saved Abraham not by his works but through his faith.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Read the following verses from the New Living Translation. As you read, highlight with your cursor or mark with a pen key words or phrases. Underline repeated words. Note contrasts by drawing a dotted line between the contrasting words (for example, *work* and *faith*), and draw a solid line between similar words (for example, *believed* and *faith*).



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Abraham was, humanly speaking, the founder of our Jewish nation. What did he discover about being made right with God? If his good deeds had made him acceptable to God, he would have had something to boast about. But that was not God's way. For the Scriptures tell us, "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." When people work, their wages are not a gift, but something they have earned. But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners. (Romans 4:1–5)



Observation: Defending Truth

Use your skills of observation to look closer at these verses and find the answers to the following questions.

God's Work . . . Not Human Effort

What truth did Abraham discover about being made right with God?

Notice the words that describe the heresy of effort-based salvation: *good deeds, boast, work, wages, and earned*. What words describe the truth of God's method of salvation?

We work hard, and on payday we receive our wages. How hard must we work to earn salvation? We can't work hard enough! —Chuck Swindoll



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Free Gift . . . Not Earned Wage

In our earthly economy, employers reward work by giving wages; however, in heaven's economy, God rewards faith with a gift. What is the substance of God's gift? In other words, what did God credit to Abraham in response to his faith?

Jesus paid the final payment for sin. He did the work, so we receive the gift of salvation free.
—Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Explaining Grace

When God forgives sinners, even though they don't deserve to be forgiven, He demonstrates grace. His means of extending His grace is *justification*. Commentator Donald Barnhouse explained justification using Abraham as an example.

The day came when, in the accounting of God, ungodly Abraham was suddenly declared righteous. There was nothing in Abraham that caused the action; it began in God and went out to the man in sovereign grace. Upon a sinner the righteousness of God was placed. In the accounting the very righteousness of God was reckoned, credited, and imputed. The Lord God Himself, by an act of grace moved by His sovereign love, stooped to the record and blotted out everything that was against Abraham, and then wrote down on the record that He, God, counted, reckoned, credited, imputed this man Abraham to be perfect even at a moment when Abraham was ungodly in himself. That is justification.¹

How might you explain *justification* to someone?



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According to Romans 5:1, what did Paul say is the result of our justification?

Our Condition

Note below what the following passages say about our condition before being made right with God.

Romans 5:12–14	Ephesians 2:1–3, 12



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God's Solution

What is God's solution to our hopeless condition?

Romans 5:18–19	Ephesians 2:4–9

While we were in bondage to our sin and shackled to our ways, grace came to the rescue. Grace was the key that unlocked our prison door and set us free. How did Paul describe grace, according to Romans 5:20?

In his message, Chuck Swindoll summed up grace's amazing power.

- Where sin overflowed, grace flooded in.
- Where sin measurably increased, grace immeasurably increased.
- Where sin was finite, grace was infinite.
- Where sin was colossal, grace was super-colossal!



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Correlation: Case Study of Grace in Action

The thief on the cross is a classic example that God's grace is not based on human effort. Read the scene in Luke 23:39–43, and describe the events that occurred.

The thief couldn't have worked for his forgiveness even if he had tried. All he could do while he was hanging on that cross was believe. And in the final analysis, that's all we can do too. Like the thief on the cross, every human hangs under sentence of death, but there's hope in Christ!

By believing in Jesus we can have our sins forgiven and a secure home in heaven. Jesus made that promise to the thief on the cross, and He makes it to us as well. —Chuck Swindoll



Application: Offering Hope

Many sincere people try to construct their own salvation. Brick by brick, they assemble their good works, hoping their tower will reach heaven but never certain it will. Thankfully, our hope rests on the strong back of Christ who lived a righteous life, bore our sin, rose from the grave, and will carry us to heaven. How did Paul explain our hope in this passage?

Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many lusts and pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy, and we hated each other. But—When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. Because of his grace he made us right in his sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life. (Titus 3:3–7)

What hope do these verses offer you?



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In his message, Chuck Swindoll concluded with two principles worth remembering.

1. God doesn't merely pity you; He offers you kindness, mercy, and grace.
2. God not only will save you; He offers you His life.

How can you hold on to these truths in the coming days when you feel insecure?

Would you like to share these principles with someone who needs to hear them? Take this study on the road! Tell someone soon about God's amazing gift of salvation that can be theirs through faith in Christ.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for giving to me all that I need and even an amount more than I could ever earn on my own. Your “superabundant” grace is much more than I deserve, and yet You offered it to me, like Abraham, the moment I believed. May Your name be uplifted today, and may You receive all the glory for ever and ever. Amen!

ENDNOTE

1. Donald Grey Barnhouse, *God's Remedy; God's River*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 208.



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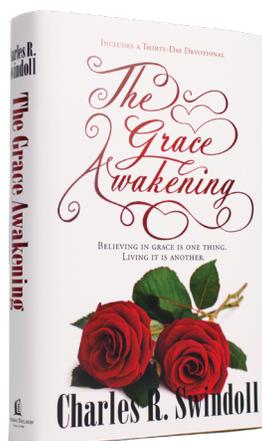
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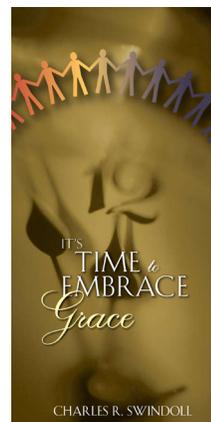
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For the 2019 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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