



“The Vine”

Growing Together in Christ

Newsletter for New Hope Christian Fellowship

Saved by Grace New Hope’s Theme for 2007



*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith –
and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – Eph 2:8*

From Pastor Dennis

Saved by Grace

Our New Hope theme for 2007 is "Saved by Grace" and our theme scripture is Ephesians 2:8-9 - 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. I think we will all be enriched this year by mining the depths of the treasure of God's grace. Many churches and many Christians misunderstanding this vital concept.

As we internalize grace and practice it with others in daily life, we will come to see that grace is a risk. When we give grace to someone, we give up control. Instead, we give or surrender them to God. As human beings we don't like to give up control. Throughout history, humans have tried to control other humans. Governments & churches have exercised excessive and oppressive control over people.

Ephesians was probably circulated to many churches and speaks to all churches throughout history. Its purpose? Paul explains that because all Christians are one family in Jesus; they should give his grace to each other. There is nothing any of us can do to get salvation; we can not earn it, inherit it or steal it. It is a free gift from God. Jesus freely came to die for each of us on the cross, so that we could receive free for-giveness for all our sins, and receive his free gift of eternal life. To receive the gift, we have to receive the Giver, Jesus, into our lives as Savior and Lord. His Spirit then changes us. We are his workmanship - his masterpiece. Ephesians is a book about walls and barriers coming down. It's about unity in the church. It's about brothers and sisters in the church family giving grace to one another and then going out to fill the world with grace.

This theme of grace comes at a good time. Our church has brought down the last wall and barrier, which until now, prevented women from being ordained into the ministry of Jesus. Why is grace so amazing? It's free, it's forever, it's from God, and it's for everyone. No one can earn special favor or special inheritance by being born male. Everyone can be born again in Christ and receive his grace and an eternal inheritance. Men and women are called to be heirs together "of the gracious gift of life" (1 Peter 3:7).

Don't miss the miracle and the glory of God's grace "Make every effort to live in peace

with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many." - Heb 12:14-15

May God shower you with the riches of his grace in 2007, & inspire you to lead a life of grace.

Jesus and Women

As I read the Gospel accounts of Jesus, I am struck by his interactions with women. At a time when Jewish rabbis were encouraged not to teach women or even speak to them, Jesus spoke to women, taught them and welcomed them to be his followers. The gospel narratives reveal several women who responded to Jesus' love and loyalty by never leaving his burial site, while the male disciples abandoned him. These women were first to arrive on the scene after the resurrection. Jesus chose women to be the first witnesses of the resurrection, at a time when they were not accepted as legal witnesses in court. Jesus was a friend to women. He valued and esteemed and honored them as much as men.

I encourage you to read the study papers, which led to our recent change in church policy, which now allows women to be ordained. This has been a "hot" topic for centuries. As human beings, our values and opinions are heavily influenced by our background, education and who we trust. See Jesus on Page 8

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The Vine *Growing Together in Christ*



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Salvation

Where Men and Women Are Equal

In the beginning when God created Adam and Eve, He placed them in the Garden of Eden where they could enjoy the beauty of His creation and live a life of perfect happiness. But He explicitly told them not to eat of the fruit of a



particular tree found in the midst of the garden. For, on the day that they ate of the forbidden fruit, they would surely die.

When Adam and Eve sinned by disobeying God,

they did not die on the day that they ate of the forbidden fruit. They were driven out of Paradise and lived on to have children. The consequence of their sin was spiritual death - separation from God.

Before Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, God was with them. He talked to them freely, telling them to have dominion over all of His creation; telling them to name every bird and animal; telling them to multiply and replenish the earth.

But after Adam and Eve sinned, they were cut off from God. They could no longer hear His voice. A wall was created between man and God. Man became separated from God.

Why were Adam and Eve punished severely when it was not totally their fault? It was Satan the devil who, in the form of a snake, tempted them to eat of the forbidden fruit.

Although Satan was partly to blame, Adam and Eve were also accountable for their actions because, when God created man in His Own Image, He created them with the freedom of the will, the freedom to make choices. Adam and Eve could have chosen to obey God rather than Satan, but they chose to obey Satan instead. That was how our first parents used their freedom. They chose to sin against God.

And so when Adam and Eve had children, the blood that these children inherited from their parents contained the stain of the original sin which was passed on from generation to

generation. Every human baby born into this world is contaminated with the stain of the original sin. It does not matter if he grows up to be a good boy by the world's standards, or if he grows up a delinquent and becomes a criminal. It does not matter if he gains worldly recognition as a philanthropist, always ready and willing to help people, or if he grows up to be the most selfish individual you have ever known. It does not matter if he is a learned person with several degrees after his name, or if he is just a poor, ignorant farmer. We are all the same in that we all possess human blood stained with the original sin, which we inherited from our first parents.

God has decreed that the wages of sin is death. We are all sinners in the eyes of God, doomed to die, to perish. No matter what we do or no matter what we become, we are all the same, equal in the eyes of God, sinners all and condemned to die and eternally separated from God.

But God, in His great mercy and compassion for those who sinned against Him, wanted to save them from the very pronouncement that His own mouth had uttered. But being also a God of justice who cannot go against what He has decreed, He thought of a Plan whereby He would remove the stain of sin in human blood so that humanity would be free from condemnation. He would cover the sin-stained blood of the human race with His own divine blood that is holy and pure. He would create a new Adam through whom men would once again be reconciled to Him and be saved from death.

This He did when He sent His Only Begotten Son, into this world in the form of human flesh, to shed His Own Precious Blood to cleanse and purify mankind of his stain of sin and be saved from death.

And so, as in the beginning in the Garden of Eden, God is setting before us life and death, urging us to believe in the atoning sacrifice of His dear Son, that we may live and not die. All, without exception need to know this and make a choice.

Oh, would that everyone who hears the Gospel accept Jesus, God's Gift of Life to all men who believe!

- By Divina A. Castillo



We are all the same in that we all possess human blood stained with the original sin, which we inherited from our first parents.

Preaching The Gospel

Romans: Part Two - Condemnation

Jesus died to save us. We've heard this a million times, right? But, save us from what exactly? From a dull meaningless existence? From our addictions and self-destructive behaviors? Maybe He came to save us from loneliness by accepting us into His family. Or maybe there's a bigger picture we need to consider. Maybe we are being saved from something much worse.

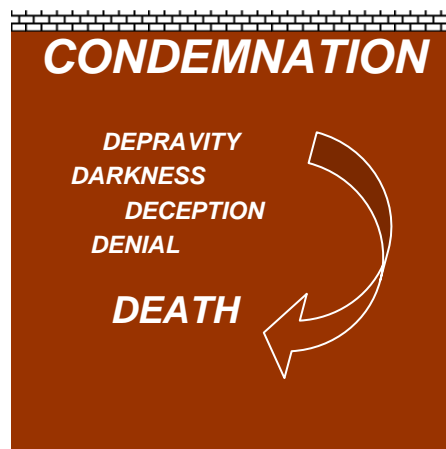
In the Romans 101 leaflet, the first term that is used to describe God's plan of salvation is - 'condemnation.' In simple terms, condemnation means punishment for something someone has done. There is always a reason for a person to be condemned.

Who is condemned and why?

Paul says in Romans 1, that pagans are condemned because they have some knowledge of God but do not glorify or thank Him. Furthermore, chapter 2 says Jews are condemned because, although they have the Law of Moses, they fail to keep it. The law is so strict that even one transgression in a person's lifetime is enough to condemn them. Therefore, since both pagans and Jews are guilty, then everyone is under condemnation (Romans 3).

But, wait - isn't God loving and kind? How can He really condemn anyone?

Romans 1:18 speaks of God's wrath. Wrath means anger, but God does not get angry in the same way that human beings get angry. Most of the time our anger is sinful because it flows from our selfishness, pride, or greed. But, it's different with God. His wrath (anger) is not sinful. He is justifiably angry with humanity because He created us for the purpose of glorifying Him. Unfortunately, we have all glorified other things, (like money, movie stars, technology, etc.) instead of giving glory to God. In effect, God has been robbed. He has been robbed of the glory to which He is entitled. Robbed by the very people who were created for the purpose of giving Him the honour that He is due. God has been wronged in a terrible way. Therefore, He is right to condemn all of humanity. A "just" God cannot ignore the situation. Humanity is guilty as charged and deserves whatever penalty God desires.



Some people may still object by saying, "God is love. He doesn't desire that any should perish." Does this mean God has to forgive people? Or that He has to save everyone? Let's consider an alternative. Suppose God can be loving and kind, but still retain the right to punish His enemies and defend His kingdom. Is the offence of human sin and unbelief such a minor issue that He is expected to shrug His shoulders and shake it off? Of course, God is love; there is no disputing that important point. However, is He not also just? Isn't He the one we trust to right the wrongs, punish the wicked, and free the oppressed? Love and justice are both characteristics of God, but they are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they exist side by side. God's justice requires that the wrongdoers be punished.

We would not respect a God who let evildoers get away with their crimes. But, His love causes Him to show mercy to those whom He chooses. That mercy is our only hope, because we are the evildoers.

It's impossible for people to save themselves.

This is the bottom line. No one can escape condemnation through his or her own efforts. It cannot be done through meticulous law keeping,

adherence to moral standards, or good deeds done for others. There is no scale that weighs our good works against our bad ones in such a way that if we do enough good things we can make up for the bad. If that were possible, then there was no need for Jesus to suffer and die. There is only one way to come out from under God's wrath. This one hope will be discussed in the next issue of *the Vine*. - By Dr. Sandy Blank

Condemnation: Up Close and Personal

I was sitting in church on November 20, 2005, when I read Romans 5:13 "Before the law was given, sin was in the world". The words hit me like a ton of bricks as the saying goes! For the first time in my life, I became aware of the fact that sin existed before the Mosaic law was given. Sin was more than breaking a commandment. It was at its core, unbelief. This means that our old way of explaining sin as "transgression of the law" was an incomplete definition. I realized that man is born in sin and participates in sin throughout his life. The Romans chart helped me to clarify the

See Condemnation Page 5

God's Sustenance

A Satisfied Soul

When most people travel, they usually remember famous landmarks as the highlights of their trip. They take pictures, make scrapbooks and regale their friends and relatives with stories of what they saw and did. My son is different. The highlights of trips for him are the meals. He can describe each course of each dinner with pinpoint accuracy. He really enjoys fine food.

You can probably recall some of your more memorable meals. Perhaps you enjoyed a particularly fine steak or fresh fish. It might have been an ethnic dish, filled with unusual flavors and exotic ingredients. Or perhaps your most memorable meal satisfied because of its simplicity, like the homemade soup and bread we once enjoyed in a Scottish pub.

Can you recall how you felt after that wonderful meal - the feeling of being full, satisfied, content and thankful? Hold that thought as you read the following verse from Psalm 63: "My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you" (verse 5, NIV).

David was in the desert when he wrote this, and I'm sure he would have loved a feast of real food. But apparently his mind wasn't on food, but on something - someone - better. To him, the presence and love of God was just as satisfying as a sumptuous banquet. Charles Spurgeon in *The Treasury of David* wrote: "There is in the love of God a richness, a sumptuousness, a fullness of soul filling joy, comparable to the richest food with which the body can be nourished."

As I pondered why David used the analogy of a meal to picture how satisfied God makes us feel, I realized food is the one thing everyone on earth needs and can relate to. If one has clothing, but is hungry, one is not content. If one has shelter, cars, money, friends - anything one can desire - but is hungry, none of it means much. Except for those who have no food, most people know the satisfied feeling of eating a good meal.

Food is central to all the celebrations of life - births, graduations, weddings and anything



else we can find to celebrate. We even eat at funerals. The occasion of Jesus' first miracle was a three-day wedding feast. When the Prodigal son returned home, his father ordered a lavish meal.

Revelation 19:9 says: "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!"

God wants us to think of him when we have enjoyed "the richest of foods." Our stomachs stay full for only a short time, and then we are hungry again. But if we fill up with God and his goodness, our souls will be satisfied forever. Feast on his word, dine at his table, enjoy the riches of his kindness and mercy and praise him for his bounty. Then with singing lips, let your mouth praise God who satisfies us as with the richest of foods! - *By Tammy Tkach*

Condemnation from Page 4

idea that this state of sinfulness is called 'condemnation' in the bible. All humanity is born into and exists in this condition.

It's only when God brings someone to faith in Jesus that a person can escape the condemnation. We know from other verses in chapter 3 of Romans that all have sinned, and it is only through faith in Jesus that we are pronounced righteous by God. This understanding has had a profound effect on my life in the past year. I no longer have to carry the false sense of guilt that goes with believing that law keeping makes you righteous. This understanding helped me to have a much bigger view of God and it gave me a much more personal understanding of Jesus. - *Al Baroody*

Points to Ponder

- The task ahead of us is never as great as the Power behind us.
- God loves everyone, but probably prefers "fruits of the spirit" over "religious nuts!"
- God grades on the cross, not the curve.
- Don't wait for 6 strong men to take you to church.
- Be ye fishers of men. You catch them - He'll clean them.
- A lot of church members who are singing "Standing on the Promises" are just sitting on the premises.



New Hope Page

Hear the Bible in a Year



The New Year is a great time to get a fresh start. For instance, if you want to read the Bible in a year, what better time is there to start than now? However, if you're like me, making time to read the Bible consistently, day in &

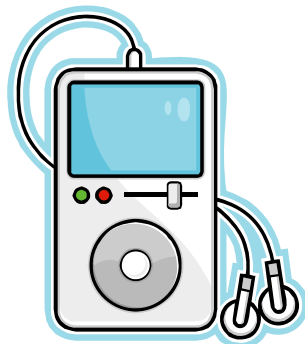
day out for an entire year, is really, really difficult. What to do? Well, instead of reading the Bible every day, why not have the Bible read to you? There are scores of great websites run by dedicated Christians who read a passage of Scripture every day, then make it available to all! I have listened to several of these programs in the last 6 months, and here are 2 of my favorites:

www.dailyaudiobible.com - Read by Brian Hardin, a Christian record producer. Each week he reads from a different translation. At the end of each reading a prayer is offered. No commentary, but an inspirational, uplifting style.

www.bibleonradio.com - Read by Tom Dooley and aired daily on radio in the Dallas/Ft Worth area. Each reading includes short but valuable background before the passage is read. Daily readings are divided into 2 segments - one for the Old Testament, one for the New Testament and Psalms.

All you have to do is just go to the website & listen. Each program is only about 20 minutes - a small investment in time to get to know God's Word through your computer. You can start listening anytime, and as long as you listen for a year, you'll hear the entire Bible. One thing I really like is that both these programs are also offered as podcasts, which allow you to listen without going to the website, and, with an MP3 player, to listen to them literally anytime, anywhere! If you're not familiar with podcasts and MP3 players, in the future we'll discuss how how easy and inexpensive this option is. Until then, happy hearing!

- Robert Meade



Life Part 1

Long you live
And high you'll fly
And smiles you'll give
And tears you'll cry
And all you touch and all
you see is
All your life will ever be.
- Irma Longoria



Life Part 2

When you're born you cry.
And everyone around you smiles.
Now live your life that when you die
Everyone else cries.
-Submitted by Gerda Bludeau
Translated from the German Plain Truth

The Lord Never Beyond Our Reach

About a month or so ago, an elderly lady sitting across from me on the bus was handing out little notes to some of the passengers, and handed me one, which was hand written in paragraph form, I assume by her. It seemed to have a lyrical, poetic beauty, so I put it into stanzas, according to how it seemed to flow, and is printed below.

- Al Doshna

Never Beyond Our Reach

The Lord and Father is never beyond our reach.
No one ever came to the Lord and father,
And found that they were not there,
And no burdens were too heavy,
To be lightened by a prayer.

No problems were too great,
And no sorrows that we cannot bear,
And is softened by a prayer,
And by love and grace.

No trials and tribulations
Are beyond what we can bear.
If we share them
With the Lord and Father in prayer.

And come to them
In our darkest hour of need,
Or any other time.

They're always there.
They're always waiting.
- Author Unknown



Trust

Do You Trust God?

Do you trust God? To a group of believers that question seems rather obvious, doesn't it? I'm sure all of you would answer a resounding -- "Yes, of course I trust God! I'm a Christian. Why do you even ask?"

But, unfortunately, when we say, "I trust God," the word "trust" can mean different things to different people. As Christians we tend to trust God from a more academic or intellectual viewpoint. We trust that God is the creator of the universe. We trust in God's goodness and righteousness. We trust that God called Abraham, the "father of the faithful." We trust that God delivered Israel through the Red Sea. We trust that Jesus was indeed the Son of God who walked this earth, that he took our sins upon himself and died on the cross for us. That He was resurrected and is our high priest sitting at the right hand of the Father and reconciled us to the Father. We trust that Jesus will grant us eternal life.

But then there's a deeper more intimate level of trust we must have in God. It's a more exacting trust. It's a more demanding trust. We need to be able to trust that God is working in our individual lives and that he can transform us into the new person that he wants us to be. We need to intimately trust God that he can protect us and deliver us from any and all obstacles that we face. We need to intimately trust God that he has our best interests at heart even though everything in our lives doesn't go smoothly or how we expect it to go.

Far too often we trust that God has performed hundreds of miracles recorded in the Bible. And yet on a more intimate level, we still have doubts that God can work a miracle in our very own lives.

Far too many of us confess to God, in the depths of our despair, that we're hopeless pitiful creatures that can't change. When we struggle with our same sins and weaknesses over and over again, we tell God, "I just can't help myself. That's the way I've been and that's the way I'll always be."



Or we might say to God, "You know my track record, Lord. If there are a dozen ways to fail, I've found them all. So please don't waste your time with me. I'm hopeless."

Do any of these thoughts sound familiar? But you know, God's Word tells us that we don't need to have these kinds of thoughts any longer - not if we really trust God with the very depth of our hearts.

Jesus came to reveal the true nature of our heavenly Father. Jesus' fellow countrymen were shocked how Jesus talked about God. They viewed God as all-powerful yet distant and to be feared. But, Jesus revealed God as our Father who is loving and intimate with all of us.

Jesus in the "Sermon on the Mount" taught us about God's extreme concern about his creation especially us as humans - Matt. 6:25-34. Jesus said the Father takes care of the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. He then went on to ask, "Are you not much more valuable than they?" (Matt. 6:26).

We must learn that our value, our self-worth is not dependent upon how perfect we think we are or how many mistakes we do or don't make. Rather our value comes from God who loves us. We need to remember that he is the one who called us to himself.

Isaiah was inspired to write about the future time of our redemption. "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summed you by name; you are mine" (Isa. 43:1).

The apostle John later wrote these encouraging words in one of his letters to the NT churches, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1).

God has given us the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. God saved us not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. (Titus 3:4-6) The Holy Spirit imparts new life into us. We need to allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives to bring about Godly changes. Christians are brand new people from the inside out. The Holy Spirit transforms us slowly but surely. We need to understand that we're not the same anymore, once we've received the gift of the Holy Spirit and have Jesus living inside us.

See Trust on Page 8

Women from Page 2

It took time for each of us to understand and accept the dramatic doctrinal changes our denomination made twelve years ago. We had to study God's Word with an open mind, and a willingness to be taught new things. We had to admit that we were wrong and re-train our conscience on certain issues. We had to get rid of old prejudices.

Prejudice and fear do influence our opinions. In Victorian times, scientists argued that women's brains were too small to be fully human. On the intelligence scale researchers recommended classifying human females with gorillas.

It may be helpful for you to read some quotes from additional respected sources that I and many other Christian pastors use, addressing the ordination of women. First from the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, written before U.S. women got the vote - Eerdman's, 1915: "The opening decades of the 20th century are witnessing a movement among women that is one of the most remarkable phenomena in the history of mankind. It is worldwide and spontaneous, and aims at nothing less than woman's universal education and enfranchisement. This new ideal, taking its rise in the teaching of Jesus regarding the value of the human soul, is permeating every layer of society and all races and religions..."

"The freedom wherewith Christ did set us free includes women's complete liberation to equality of opportunity with man. In mental endowment, in practical ability, in all the higher ministries of life and even in statecraft, she has proved herself the equal of man. Christianity always tends to place woman side by side with man in all the great achievements of education, art, literature, the humanities, social service and missions. The entire movement of modern society toward her perfect enfranchisement is the distinct and inevitable product of the teaching of Jesus... The result of this latest evolution of Christianity will not only be a new womanhood for the race but, through her enlightenment, culture and spiritual leadership, a new humanity."

And from The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, Baker Books, published seventy years later in 1984: "It is widely recognized that when Paul said, 'The women should keep silent in the churches' (I Corinthians 14:34), he could not have been addressing the issue of church leadership.

*There is neither
Jew nor Greek,
slave nor free,
male nor female,
for you are all
one in Christ
Jesus.*

He must therefore have been addressing some local problem involving women who were interrupting congregational worship with distracting questions. When he writes, "I permit no women to teach or to have authority over men" (1 Timothy 2:12), it may have had local or even temporary significance. When weighted against the rest of the New Testament, it is not found to be regular Pauline practice... It will be important not to curtail the ministry of women which God has clearly blessed, on the basis of a passage which we simply do not understand too well."

"The New Testament affirms the equality of men and women and gives ample precedent for placing women in leadership positions. There seems to be no biblical basis for the common church practice of placing both men and women in leadership positions but reserving ordination and pay only for the men. Consequently many Christian denominations are ordaining women. In these denominations women participate in the same areas of ministry as their male counterparts and they are paid equally."

Jesus came to free the captives and released the oppressed. I believe that part of his mission was to elevate women back to the status that God originally created for them, before Adam and Eve sinned in Genesis 3. Both men and women were created equally in the image of God. Paul reinforces that truth in Galatians 3:28 - There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. - *By Dennis Pelley*

Trust from Page 7

We are NOT reformed, rehabilitated or re-educated, but rather we are re-created into a new creation. 2 Cor. 5:17 tells us, "If anyone is in Christ, he/she is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come."

When we put our heart-felt trust in God and allow the Holy Spirit to lead us and guide us, we are not merely turning over a new leaf, we are actually beginning to live a NEW LIFE.

If we lack trusting God on an intimate level, if we lack trusting God that he loves us, is concerned about us and is transforming us into the likeness of his Son, then we need to ask him, in deep-felt prayer, to give us the faith to be able to trust him with a deep abiding faith.

- *By Larry Omasta*