

Grace is the Root, Our Works are the Fruit

DARRELL DELANEY

I once heard a mentor say: You cannot outwork death; and it struck me because that is exactly where Paul starts in Ephesians 2...not sick, dead. Then come the two words that change everything: *But God*. In this episode of *Groundwork*, we follow that movement from rescue to response; from grace that raises us to the good works God already planned for us. We see how salvation can be entirely God's gift while still calling us into a life that looks like Jesus. If you have ever wondered where your effort fits in a grace-filled life, this conversation is for you. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we are in episode two of our series of saved by grace, and then the conversation of works; and in the first episode, we traced God's mercy all the way from Abraham in Genesis all the way to Jesus. It showed how salvation begins and ends with God's initiative, because God chose, God promised, and in the end, Jesus fulfilled what we never could.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is all about covenant, as we said. The covenant made with Abraham, and then the new covenant in Jesus' blood that we saw come to full fruition in the New Testament; and so, now...we spent a lot of time in the Old Testament in the first program. We are going to be in the New Testament here mostly; and we are going to start with Ephesians 2:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, let's just spend a little time with this passage; it is a beautiful thing that Paul makes clear. He starts with the diagnosis that most of us wouldn't say about ourselves. We might say that we were a little sick; we might have a few issues; but he literally calls us dead in our transgressions.

I was thinking about a time when I was in a season of burnout and I was trying to fix my own soul with more effort, doing longer hours and extra projects; and I told myself that if I worked harder, I would, you know, loosen the knot in my chest and I would be able to continue and function fine, but it was definitely not working; and grace began the part in my heart where my work couldn't do...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

And it was very powerful to see.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; I think I mentioned this before on *Groundwork*, but I remember my high school religion teacher used the illustration of a dog. He said, you know, if your dog is sick and is on the other side of the living room, you can call the dog, you know, you can whistle: come on, come on, come on, you know, and maybe the dog is sick, but he can get up and he will limp his way to you. If the dog is dead on the other side of the room, I mean, you are going to call all day long and he is not going to move. Dead is dead. There's an undertaker and author whom I know. He said, you know, I run a funeral home. I am here to tell you, the dead cannot do anything for themselves. You have to do everything for them. If they are going to move, you are going to move them. We were that dead in our transgressions, Paul says.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, and I am so glad it doesn't stay there, because verse 4 turns the whole passage: but God who is rich in mercy; that is the hinge of the gospel, and that is where God moves toward us, who are unworthy, with mercy, and he makes the dead alive. I am so glad that salvation is not about me grabbing God's hand, but it is about him taking hold of me and breathing life in me, when there is no life there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and you are right; I like how you put it: The hinge of the gospel. I mean, John Calvin once said that the doctrine of justification is the hinge of the whole Reformation; that we are justified by grace alone, through faith alone. Nothing we did. You know, we didn't even grab God's hand. God had to do it all because we were dead, and he breathes new life into us; even when we were dead, Paul says. He says it twice in that passage in Ephesians 2.

So, that at once protects us from pride on the one side and despair on the other. We cannot be proud; we cannot boast, Paul says; we didn't do it. But we cannot despair over our sins because God has done it; and so, he has got us; he's got this thing.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, it's a beautiful thing, because in verse 8 it says we are saved by grace through faith...that is the gift. It is a root; and then in verse 10 it says that we are created in Christ Jesus to do good works; so, there is the fruit. So, we are rescued, and then we respond. So, we are adopted into the family, and then we get the family life, because we don't get into the family by doing extra chores. We are welcomed into the family as a gift; and then the Spirit shows us where the family resemblance is, where we start serving out of gratitude for what God has done for us. So, when I begin to surrender my pace to the Lord, and I begin to see his beautiful heart reviving me inside. That was really powerful because this new life that he gave me produced new patterns in me, and I remembered that when I injured my knee and I had to recover.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Root and fruit. You nailed it a second ago, Darrell, and said we do sometimes get those two mixed up, right? Because the root of grace is kind of invisible. You cannot see grace, but you can see fruit. You can see the works that we do, and so sometimes without meaning to, we start to think: Oh, God must love me because I am so good. Look at all that I do; I am more moral than my neighbors, no wonder God likes... No, no. The root is grace, what you do is fruit. It is what God is, as Ephesians 2 just said: What God has prepared for you to do. God prepared them. You did not even prepare your own works; God did that. So again, this could really help us to keep things straight in terms of the place of works in our lives; it steadies anxious hearts; it sets up our whole life of being like Jesus.

DARRELL DELANEY

It's a beautiful thing that is mentioned there because, in verse 10, like I said, those works prepared in advance...you just mentioned that...that actually lifts a weight off of our hearts because we don't have to invent this heroic life to please our God. I mean, we walk into the word that God has already set before us. It is beautiful to see that work manifests itself in different ways. When it is quiet sometimes, it can look like a phone call to mend a misunderstanding with someone; or it could be a patient answer to a child who needs more time from you; but at other times it could look very public, like when you show up at work or you lead a team, when you do it in humility and not in just control. So, the comfort that God gives us...the grace that saves us...is also the grace that sends us in that same kindness. We will show others.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I like that. The fruit of our lives...the things that we do to say thank you to God, and to show that the grace did not just forgive us, it transformed us...made us different. We are going to get to that in a few minutes in this program...that can show up in all kinds of ways, as you just said. All the little acts of faithfulness we do just to take care of our kids, do the job, show up; yes, there are big, heroic things sometimes we do: major mission projects or, you know, something big, but it is all of it...it is all of it; and it is all rooted in the incomparable riches of God's grace, as Paul wrote there in Ephesians 2. We are God's handiwork; and that, I think, is indeed true; and again, that key phrase: *But God...*

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it is a beautiful thing. We see God's grace first and then we see God's grace in us and we see God's grace through us. In just a minute, we will look at other passages that tell us about the insight of what God is teaching. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we have been talking about the gift that grace is from God, of God, by God alone; and we are also understanding that grace is a conduit that comes through us to others who actually receive it. So, grace is not just a gift for us to keep. If you expand what it does for us, it actually teaches us how to live and it trains us how to live.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; just knowing that we are saved by grace alone does not mean that we just take it easy, you know; grace is not an easy chair...it is not a Barcalounger, right? It is a school. In Titus 2:11-14, here is what Paul writes to Titus: ¹¹For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹²It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

It teaches us to say "No" to sin.

DARRELL DELANEY

I love that you underlined that verse, because that is exactly what it does. It doesn't lower the bar; it changes our hearts as well. If you think about how training works in any craft, the music teacher does not just hand you a trophy on day one, that music teacher would tune your ear, shape your hands, give you daily practices so you know how to use the instrument that you are playing. Over time, you begin to hear and play what you couldn't do before, and that is exactly how God's grace does with us, Scott. Grace teaches us and tutors us in God's presence; and his Spirit coaches us and coaches our desires until the self-control, upright and godly

stuff starts coming out in our lives, where we felt powerless.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and for all of us, you know, to stick with an athletic metaphor, or the musical one, too, sometimes back in the day when Michael Jordan was the star player for the Chicago Bulls NBA basketball team, people would often say: He looks so free on the court. It just all comes so naturally to him. No, it didn't. He had practiced lay-ups for hours and hours; he had practiced free throws for hours and hours. There were untold hours behind his now looking so natural. Similarly with us, as you said. To be self-controlled and upright and godly, maybe it doesn't come naturally at first. The Spirit has to coach us; we have to practice; we keep practicing... we keep practicing... we keep practicing; and then maybe eventually it does come out naturally, you know, as it does for an athlete, or somebody who just seems so free, they can play that piano concerto without a single piece of music in front of them. Well, that was not how they were on day one. It comes naturally now because of all the practice.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, I was thinking about Steph Curry when you said that because he shoots all these three-pointers from all over the court, and he does it so effortlessly because he has been shooting a thousand of them a day. They call it *stephorthless* now because he is Steph Curry, but the point is that when you continue to work on these things, your spirit and your mind start to align with the Holy Spirit, and the work that he does. Now, let's talk about circumcision, because in the first episode you talked about circumcision and covenant in the Old Testament; and in the New Testament, this shows that the Spirit does the surgery within our hearts and not just outwardly on our bodies. Romans 2 talks about it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; Paul writes in Romans 2...and he is talking in Romans a lot, because he is writing mostly to Gentile audience in Rome, but there may be Jews there as well; but we recognize that the Gentiles are getting grafted into what began with the Hebrews...with the Jewish people...the Israelites. So, Paul writes in Romans 2:28: A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly; nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. ²⁹No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Now, if we think about this, there were some people who were very fanatic about Judaism and constantly following Paul around; and they were teaching this false teaching that these Gentiles had to become Jews and get outwardly circumcised in order to follow the law of Moses in order to be saved; and he is saying: No, it is not about that at all. It is about: 1) What God's grace has done; and 2) It is about the circumcision of the heart. So, God is renovating the interior of our hearts and not just stopping at the doorway of our hearts; and God is actually cutting away old loyalties so that we have new affections grow; and Paul names what that happens as an outcome in Galatians 5:6, where he says the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love; and that line helps us when we feel tugged between Paul and James, which we will talk more about in the next episode.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, we are going to look at that. There is a longstanding question about did Paul and James have the same view of salvation? That is going to be all of episode three. But right; the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. So, the faith comes to us, but then, as we said earlier in this program, grace does not just forgive you, it cleanses you; it transforms you; you are somebody new; and that is grace showing up in our lives.

DARRELL DELANEY

It's a beautiful thing when we see that saving faith is alive and well and breathes love to us; and when we see that agape love show up in very costly and concrete ways, we are watching God's grace at work. Human pride cannot steal the credit of that.

I was thinking about a man in our congregation who followed Jesus for a long time, but he had a long grievance against another family member, and even though he could quote verses, but he just could not release that pain in his heart, or the debt of forgiveness that he felt they owed him. So, as we studied these two passages together, we just talked about in Ephesians 2 in the first segment and then now in Titus 2, we prayed and asked the Spirit to change his reflexes and weeks later he wrote a letter confessing his part and asking for forgiveness; and he did not do it to earn salvation, Scott, he did it because grace had been training him and teaching him what it meant to love, and that circumcision of the heart in real time.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Paul will write about this. He writes about this in 2 Corinthians 5:17. Why did that man do that? Why was he finally able to forgive? Because of this. Paul writes: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come; The old has gone, the new is here!

So, you know, new creation...it is not just an idea...it is not just a slogan; it is the Spirit's daily work, making us more and more and more like Jesus over time. We are participating now, even though we are still in the already and the not yet, right? Jesus has come, but he has not come back yet. So, we are kind of in-between, but we are already participating in that new creation right now.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; we are participating in that new creation right now; and it means that the Spirit's work is going to continue to make us like Jesus. In my homelife, that means slowing my voice down when my sons are testing my limits. It means in my schedule, I intentionally put a sabbath in, even though I have a lot of things that I think I need to do; because rest, at first, could feel inefficient to me, but over time, it became worship. When we let God be God in our sabbath while we rest, then that changes how we think and how we listen. It forms us; and then sometimes we can worry about how obedience could steal assurance, or at least, we are afraid of that, some of us. Scripture gives us both assurance and assignment, because Ephesians 2 anchors our confidence in God and Titus raises the zeal for good works; and Philippians 1:6 says: being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

I am really excited about the fact that God finishes everything that he starts.

SCOTT HOEZEE

God finishes what he starts. Be confident, Paul writes to the Philippians; be confident. We stumble; we worry about things sometimes; but be confident...be confident.

Well, in a moment, as we close out the program, we will take some practical takeaways for you to consider. So, stay tuned for that.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and as we come to the end of this episode, we wonder: How do grace and obedient works cooperate without collapsing into either legalism or laziness? Paul holds these two truths together so that our hearts don't pull them apart. In Philippians 2, he says, at verse 12: Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

And this is one of the verses that many people I know have confused what it means and how it works, but it is clear that we are not working out our own salvation here.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and he says: With fear and trembling, which makes it sound like, boy, are we supposed to live like we are not really sure if we are saved? No; I mean, Paul would not undo all those grand passages, including the Ephesians 2 one we looked at earlier in this program. It is by grace you have been saved. Or Romans 8: *Nothing* can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul is not undoing that here by saying: Well, I don't know...if you don't work it out...if you are not a little bit afraid...if you are not

trembling...shaking like a leaf. No; he is not trying to scare us, because look what he says next: Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you to will and act to fulfil his good purpose.

So, even though we are working it out, it is still cooperating with God. It is like that Ephesians passage: We have to do good works, but God prepared them in advance for you to do. So, it is still all God, so we don't have to worry. This is not a passage meant to say: Hey, salvation is on you after all, so be a little afraid. No, no; he is just saying God is doing all this.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, we work out what God is working in. It is definitely cooperation, like you just said. I mean, think of sailing; we don't make the wind blow; God sends the wind, but we can raise the sail; we can set the rudder; we can trim the line; and those are not attempts to manufacture wind. They are actually getting us into a place to receive what is coming. So, this humble response is to the power we cannot produce; and in the life of faith, the spiritual practices that we do raise the sail so the Spirit's wind can move us, Scott; and that is how we get in cooperation with what God is doing.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and Paul needs to remind people of this there in Philippians and elsewhere, because sometimes...as we said earlier...sometimes we confuse the root of our salvation...grace...with the fruit of our salvation...good works...sometimes we mix those up and say: Well, it is the good works that attracted God's attention to me. No; no, no; don't mix those up. But also, you said earlier, we want to avoid two pitfalls. Legalism, which is the idea that, oh, yes, I am working for my salvation; and then the other one you mentioned was laziness; and that is something that we can hear about in Romans 6:1-4, where Paul writes...because obviously we think that there were some in the early Church who took Paul's strong message of grace alone as a way of saying: Well, then it doesn't matter what we do; so, let's just live it up. So, then Paul writes in Romans 6:

¹What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ²By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into (Christ) Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

So, I like it here in the Greek there is this verb mood called the *optative*. It doesn't exist in English, and it comes up a lot in secular Greek, but it rarely comes up in the New Testament. It is a very strong verb mood, and that is what he uses when he says: By no means... In Greek, that is *m? genoito*...

DARRELL DELANEY

m? genoito...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which is the optative; basically, it means: By no means...and in a sense: Are you nuts?! You want to keep sinning just to give God the chance to forgive you more? Are you nuts?! By no means!

So clearly, Paul is again saying: You died to that. That is what your baptism was; you drowned...your old self drowned...so you cannot now try to revive it; of course not!

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, never, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, never ever, ever do it. That is the emphatic point that he would say: You don't go back to that. You have been identified with the resurrected Christ, and now your life is new. So, the grace that you see in this verse, it freezes from sin's penalty and breaks sin's power. You just mentioned that our old self is drowned. We don't have to be stuck repeating yesterday; and we can truly live a new life.

In the next episode, we will talk about how James presses us to let that living faith show up in living works; and Paul is making clear that faith does not earn, but it embodies. So, the Spirit is the one who changes our hearts and our motives, and then we live a certain way.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we do need...I think we need rhythms in our lives...habits of thinking, habits of meditation, Darrell, to help us keep all this straight. Not to mix up the fruit of our salvation with the root that God is the fruit in the first place; not to go into, you know, using grace as a license to sin more: Hey, God likes to forgive, I will give him lots to do. No; no; no; you cannot do that. By no means, Paul says.

But Darrell, you have some ideas here: three practical steps. Things we can do every day...or most every day anyway...three things to keep us on track; and maybe you can go through some of your ideas on that.

DARRELL DELANEY

Okay, so this is kind of like the old idea of examen; so, in the morning, you call that your morning anchor, where you could read Ephesians 2:1-10 aloud; and pause at the words: But God; and thank the Lord that he moved first in our lives. As we do that, we can ask God: What is one prepared work that we could do for the day? That is how we set our morning.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then, two: We could maybe do a midday check. Maybe set that one-minute alarm before noon, and then maybe in that time, Darrell, you pray a verse from Titus 2, which we read earlier in the program: Lord, teach me to say no and lead me to what is good. And Darrell, that may be nothing heroic, but just do the next right thing that comes your way. The next time you have to make a decision, make the right one.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and then, at the end of the day, evening examen. When you look at Philippians 2:13, or you look at Psalm 139, that says show me and examine me; show me my wicked ways and lead me in the way everlasting. Name one place where you saw God at work...where you saw his grace at work...and where you saw one thing that you could probably adjust for the next day; and share it with a trusted friend or somebody you have accountability with so that they can pray for you and ask you how it is going.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so, it is all about comfort; it is all about hope; grace tutors us; the Spirit coaches us, as we have been saying; and when a church full of ordinary believers live that way, neighborhoods notice, families heal, cynicism loses its grip on us because we are now living a life shaped by Jesus; thanks be to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we examine the passage in James that so often leads to confusion with a seeming emphasis on works.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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