

Handout Ephesians Lesson 2

The Greek word *charis* is a word Paul uses frequently in his letters. He has already used it six times in Ephesians 1:2, 6, 7; 2:5, 7, 8; 2:5, and 8 in the first lesson on chapters 1-2, and he will use it a total of twelve times in the letter (see Eph 3:2, 7, 8; 4:7, 29; 6:24). Paul uses *charis* to indicate a gift given freely and unearned, and it is most often employed to describe the way in which God offers the gift of salvation through Jesus the Son; we translate this word as “grace”:

The different ways the word “charis/grace” is used in the New Testament	
Jesus’ Incarnation was an act of grace.	John 1:14, 17; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Titus 2:11
Jesus’ self-sacrificial death was an act of grace—a gift of the Father.	Romans 8:32; 1 Corinthians 2:12; Ephesians 1:6ff; Hebrews 2:9
Through grace we are justified, receive salvation, and the right to eternal life without the works of the Law.	Romans 3:24; 4:4ff; Ephesians 2:5,8; Titus 3:7; Acts 15:11
It will be an act of grace when we receive everlasting glory.	1 Peter 1:13
Jesus’ Second Advent will be an act of grace.	2 Thessalonians 1:12

St. Paul wrote about salvation as a past event in Ephesians 2:5 and 8. However, do not misunderstand Paul’s statement to suggest that salvation is only a past event in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as some Christian denominations misunderstand salvation. In his letters Paul writes about salvation in the past, present and future as a process with many points of justification along each individual’s faith journey to the gates of Heaven and eternal union with the Most Holy Trinity. The following charts provide examples of Scripture passages which support the past, present, and future dimensions of salvation.

Past	Present	Future
Ephesians 2:5	1 Peter 1:8-9	Romans 13:11
Ephesians 2:8	1 Corinthians 1:18	1 Corinthians 3:15
	Philippians 2:12	1 Corinthians 5:5

Also see CCC # 588, 1256-57, 1277, 1739-42, 1889 on the three dimensions of salvation as taught by the Church.

In Ephesians 2:6-7 Paul writes that God’s divine plan includes what is new for the Gentiles:

1. They are co-heirs with the Jews in God’s plan of salvation.
2. They will receive same spiritual benefits promised to the Jews in previous covenants.
3. They are united with the Jews as full members in the Body of Christ that is the New Covenant Church.

The three parts of St. Paul’s prayer in 3:14-21:

- I. Introduction (verses 14-15)
- II. Petitions (verses 16-19)
- III. Doxology (verses 20-21)

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Part II: Paul's five petitions for the readers of his letter:

1. He prays that his readers might receive inner strength and power through the Holy Spirit (verse 16).
2. He prays that Christ will dwell in their hearts through faith and that they might be rooted and grounded in love (verse 17).
3. He prays that they might comprehend, in union with the Church, the glorious totality of Christ's authority in His work of salvation (verse 18).
4. He prays that they might know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge (verse 19a).
5. He prays that all the fullness of God will indwell them (verse 19b).

The third petition: *18 may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth ...*

Paul does not define exactly what he means by those dimensions but they seem to suggest what encompasses everything. Biblical scholars have suggested:

1. Paul is referring to the immensity of God's plan for man's salvation that he explained earlier in 3:3-10.
2. He is referring to the dimensions of God's unfathomable wisdom (wisdom is defined by physical dimensions in Job 11:5-9).
3. Some Fathers of the Church suggest the four dimensions refer to the four arms of the Cross that mark the direction of the four corners of the earth to which Christ's sacrifice brought the true understanding of mankind's salvation.

These three interpretations can be combined to suggest that Paul petitions the Lord that the mystery of His divine plan, which reflects His infinite wisdom, will be revealed to the reader and the other "holy ones" of the Church, the true knowledge of Christ's gift of salvation to the world from His throne of the Cross.

Ephesians 4:4-6 express one of Paul's most profound statements, summarizing our Christian faith in only a very few words, the focus of which is the theological basis of our unity—the Most Holy Trinity. It is the Trinity who is at work in the Church and who keeps it together in the "seven unities" of the Church: one Body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father.

Ephesians 4:9-10: *What does "he ascends" mean except that he also descended into the lower [regions or parts] of the earth? 10 The one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.* There are two interpretations of verse 9:

1. The verse refers to Jesus' Incarnation when He came down from Heaven to become man (Jn 1:14; 3:13), and returned to Heaven in His Ascension after His earthly mission was completed (Acts 1:7-11).
2. Several Fathers of the Church interpreted this verse as referring to Jesus descending from His tomb to Sheol, the abode of the dead, to preach the Gospel of salvation to the souls held captive there and to lead them out of "prison" and into Heaven (see 1 Pt 3:18-19, the Apostles' Creed, CCC 632-33). Afterward, Jesus arose from the dead on Easter Sunday, and forty days later He Ascended to the Father in Heaven (Acts 1:7-11).