

## **Saved by Grace**

Eph. 2:8-10

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*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. – Eph 2:8-10, ESV*

Sometimes history needs to be properly summarized and interpreted so that we don't misunderstand its importance and implications. Here in verses 8-10 of Ephesians 2, the Apostle Paul is summarizing and explaining the spiritual history he gave the Ephesians in verses 1-7. He has given them a sweeping overview of their spiritual past, present and future. In the midst of the history, he interjected the central lesson of the history account in verse 5: "by grace you have been saved."

Now, he takes time in these three verses to repeat and expand upon this central lesson he interjected in verse 5.

### **I. Saved by Grace Through Faith**

Never underestimate the power of prepositions. Consider the following:

1. Take the bomb out of the house. vs. Take the bomb into the house.
2. Get that skunk away from me. vs. Get that skunk near me.
3. Put the baby far from the knives. vs. Put the baby next to knives.

In life and in our salvation, prepositions are very important. In Ephesians 2, Paul makes it very clear that our salvation is in Christ and is by grace through faith, not from us and not from works but from God. It is vital that we understand these.

We are saved in Christ, not in faith. This means that our salvation is located in, has its place in the person and work of Jesus Christ and nowhere else. Paul has used the phrase "in Christ Jesus" in verse 6, in verse 7 and again in verse 10, just to be clear.

We are saved by grace through faith.

#### **A. By Grace:**

By grace means that our salvation comes to us from God's undeserved favor and kindness. Paul says it is by grace that we have been saved. The form of the verb he uses which is translates as "have been

saved” indicates a past action with ongoing significance. Our salvation is a finished and accomplished work but it has lasting, ongoing implications for how we live our lives, which will be clear in verse 10.

To be saved is to be delivered from danger and kept secure. The danger we faced was made clear in the first three verses of the chapter – the spiritual death, oppressive bondage and impending judgment that all come from sin. From all of these dangers we have been rescued as God made us alive together with Christ.

We have been brought out of sin and misery and into Christ, our salvation.

God has done this by grace, by His divine, undeserved favor. It is His kindness and goodness alone which have led Him to save us.

### **B. Through Faith:**

The way we receive God’s grace is through the means of faith. Faith simply means believing and trusting. The Westminster Shorter Catechism uses the definition “receiving and resting in Christ alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel.”

Some Christians speak of faith as being some power by which we create something. They would have us believe that it is up to us to create our salvation and blessings real by speaking a word of faith which will have the power to shape reality. But this is an unbiblical and self-centered definition of faith that runs contrary to everything Paul is saying here.

It is vital that we remember and believe and remind ourselves that we are not saved by our faith. Faith is not the cause, source, foundation or motivation behind our salvation. We are saved by grace through faith, by God’s favor and kindness which we receive by trusting in Him.

This distorted view of faith is like those people who think they have money in their bank account as long as they have checks in their checkbook. Your checks do not create money in your bank account as you write them. You must first have money in the bank and then you can access it by writing a check. But you must also be given signing privileges on the account or your check will be rejected.

Faith writes the check to draw on the limitless riches of Christ’s righteousness, wisdom, power and forgiveness. But we are granted access to this account by grace. By grace, we are counted as “in Christ,” which grants us access to all the riches in Him, which we receive by faith.

## **II. The Gift That Excludes All Boasting**

All of this excludes any sense of boasting whatsoever. Having given us first the positive, “By grace you have been saved through faith,” Paul now gives us the negative: “And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” A more literal translation of the negative statement would be “And this is, not of yourselves, God’s gift, not of works lest anyone should boast.”

### **A. Gift of God**

The point of the negatives is to emphasize again that this is God’s gift. You don’t earn a gift and you can’t coerce God into giving it to you. It’s a gift.

But what exactly is a gift? Paul’s language seem vague. He says simply, “This is God’s gift.” So what does “this” refer to? It could refer to faith as a gift of God. It could refer to grace. Or it could be reflecting back on the verb, having been saved.

Without getting into too much grammatical detail, I think it’s best to see “this” as referring to the whole phrase, “For by grace you have been saved through faith.” In other words, our salvation is a gift of God.

Now this is not to say that faith is not a gift from God. It is. By referring back to the whole statement, “this” includes faith in the gift. Other Scriptures make that very clear. God is the one who gives faith. Romans 12:3 says that God assigns us a measure of faith. When the disciples felt their own lack of faith, they asked Jesus, “Lord, increase our faith!” Faith is given by God and can’t be found anywhere else.

Those who try to interpret this passage so that faith is not a gift from God but is instead our own contribution to salvation are running contrary to the whole point of the passage. To say, “God makes salvation available by grace, but you need to go get it by your faith,” is to deny that salvation is “not of yourselves, the gift of God.”

In fact, I would go so far as to say anyone who is looking at these verses and trying to figure out what part we contribute to salvation is looking for a way to steal glory from God and take credit for themselves and needs to repent. That is so blatantly contrary to everything Paul is saying here and how clearly and strongly he is saying it as to be an affront to the free grace of God.

1. You were dead, but God made you alive.
2. You were condemned but God saved you.
3. You were enslaved but God freed you.

He saved you by grace because He loves you.

Do you need to believe in order to be saved? Yes! The grace comes through faith. You must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved, but don't think that your faith is the basis of your salvation or even that your faith comes from you. Your faith is a gift from God and is the means by which you access and receive God's grace.

## **B. Not by Works**

To emphasize and clarify this, Paul says that salvation is not only “not of yourselves” but also “not of works, lest anyone should boast.” It's very important that Paul needs to say this negative thing about works before he can proceed and speak positively about works. We are created in Christ Jesus for good works. Good works are good and we shouldn't bad-mouth them. But our salvation is not from good works, not based on or arising out of any good works we do, even good works done in faith.

This is where many have been led astray. Some have even been confused by the Bible itself, specifically in James 2, where James writes about faith and works in a way that seems to contradict Paul:

*What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? <sup>17</sup> So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

*<sup>18</sup> But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. <sup>19</sup> You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!<sup>20</sup> Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? <sup>21</sup> Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; <sup>23</sup> and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. <sup>25</sup> And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? <sup>26</sup> For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.*

James is not contradicting Paul at all, even if it seems like that on the surface. In fact, if you look more closely, you'll see that Paul and James are saying the same thing, just in different ways. James is warning against and dead, empty, fruitless faith. Demons believe there is one God, but do demons have faith, the gift of saving faith Paul describes here in Ephesians 2? No! They have knowledge and a profession that does not bear the fruit of a changed life.

James is not teaching justification by works but justification by a faith that works. It is a living, vital, life-changing, work-producing faith that God gives. Saving faith seeks to do the works of God, always. But those works themselves, while they are the fruit of faith, do not save us. Our salvation leads to them but does not come from them. As I said, never underestimate the power of prepositions.

### **III. New Creation in Christ**

In verse 10, Paul transitions us from telling us about how we were saved to telling us who we are as God's saved people. *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

#### **A. God's Handiwork**

We are his workmanship. The Greek word, *poiema*, refers to the handiwork of a master craftsman. This is not industrial factory assembly line production, but the loving, skilled work of an artist. In fact, as you can hear in the word, *poiema*, it could also be used of a great literary work.

This word, *poiema*, is also used of God's creation in Romans 1:20, and is used several times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, to refer to God's creation. We are a new creation, the handiwork of God, just like the original creation.

#### **B. Created in Christ Jesus**

Paul continues this creation language with the next phrase, "created in Christ Jesus." While "*poiema*" is a noun used of God's creation, "created" here is the verb used for God's creation activity.

The use of creation language here in verse 10 is striking and can help us see that the whole of Ephesians 2:1-10 is a kind of creation narrative. In the first three verses, we have the spiritual equivalent of what Genesis 1:2 describes as the state of the world when it was "formless and void and darkness was over the face of the deep." Like the earth before God spoke, our lives were formless, empty and dark.

Then, verses 4-7 describe the creative power of God in making us alive and in uniting us to Christ and in raising us to the heavens. God, in salvation, brings light into our darkness, grace to fill our emptiness and life in place of our death.

This isn't the only place where Paul uses creation language to describe the work of salvation. In 2 Corinthians 4:6, Paul says, "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

This new creation is a creation that takes place in Christ Jesus, which is exactly what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” Jesus inaugurated the new creation in His own resurrection from the dead, when He became the firstborn from the dead, the firstfruits of the new creation.

### **C. To Do Good Works**

And what is our purpose as new creation in Christ Jesus? What are we created in Christ Jesus for?

*“created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*

So our salvation is not from works, but it is for works.

Jesus said to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, *““You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”* –Matthew 5:14-16 (ESV)

We are called and created to do good works. The relationship between being saved by grace and doing good works is something Paul also clarified in Titus 2:11-14: *“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”*

It is only when the grace of God comes to us that we learn to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions. It is only when Christ redeems us that we are freed from lawlessness and become truly zealous for good works. It is only when Christ makes us the light of the world and makes us a city on a hill that our works will shine in a way that brings glory to our Father in heaven.

We must get the order right, but we must also have a complete picture: grace, redemption, light and then works of righteousness and holiness done by faith for the glory of God.

Before we are saved, any attempts at obedience to the law are really lawless. The law was given to show us how to glorify and enjoy God in our lives, but before salvation, any attempt at obedience is a self-interested, calculated negotiation with God. We think, “Okay, God, I’ll do this if you give me that.” That’s not God-glorifying at all.

But redemption changes everything. When the threat of the law is removed, when God’s love is poured out in abundance, when grace brings light and life to hearts that were dead and dark, everything changes.

What are the good works we do, that we walk in?

Last week, we talked about trespasses and sins and we saw that trespasses are those things we do which break God's law, sins of commission, and sins are those things we fail to do, the standard we fall short of, sins of omission.

Well, good works have a negative and a positive aspect, too. Paul speaks of things we "put off" that God forbids – We come by grace to hate those things that God hates and to desire to be rid of them. Paul then speaks of things we "put on" – We come to love the good things God has for us to do and we desire to do them. We grow in this progressively over time and we never reach perfection in this life. The life of a newborn looks different from the life of a mature man, which is why the Bible uses this kind of language to talk about spiritual maturity, too.

We'll get into these areas of good works in more detail when we get to chapters 4-6 in the spring. For now, it is enough to see that salvation is by grace through faith, the gift of God, not of ourselves, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His master handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

John Newton's good friend, William Cowper, wrote a poem called "Love Constrained to Obedience," which explores how God's grace changes the nature of our good works of obedience.

Listen to these wonderful words:

No strength of nature can suffice  
To serve the Lord aright:  
And what she has she misapplies,  
For want of clearer light.

How long beneath the law I lay  
In bondage and distress;  
I toll'd the precept to obey,  
But toil'd without success.

Then, to abstain from outward sin  
Was more than I could do;  
Now, if I feel its power within,  
I feel I hate it too.

Then all my servile works were done  
A righteousness to raise;

Now, freely chosen in the Son,  
I freely choose His ways.

“What shall I do,” was then the word,  
“That I may worthier grow?”  
“What shall I render to the Lord?”  
Is my inquiry now.

To see the law by Christ fulfilled  
And hear His pardoning voice,  
Changes a slave into a child,  
And duty into choice.