

How God Saves

Ephesians 2:8-10

I love the mountains. It is so good to be back in Colorado after living so many years in the flatlands. I love to climb to the top of a mountain where I can see for miles in every direction. I find a great joy in arriving at the top and marveling at the vista, fellowship with God in a glorious natural cathedral.

As we look back on Ephesians 2, it is as though the apostle Paul has climbed with us from a deep valley to the top of a mountain. We've gone from spiritual death to spiritual life, from bondage to freedom, from darkness to light, from God's wrath to God's glory, quite literally from hell to heaven!

In today's passage it is as though we have reached the top of the mountain of salvation, caught our breath, and Paul gestures to the glorious scenery before us and says, **"Let me tell you why you are here. It is by grace that you have been saved..."**

Today's passage is one of the most important and most memorized sections of Scripture. It ranks right up there with John 3:16 and Genesis 1:1. It is the heart of the gospel. It is the message of Christ in a nutshell.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God

9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

In this passage of Scripture, we will look back down the mountain we have climbed and learn more about our salvation. This week we will see from verses 8 and 9 *how we were saved* and next time we will see from verse 10 *why we are saved*.

I. How We are Saved (vv.8-9).

In these two verses we have several key words that help us to understand salvation. Listen to verses 8-9 again and see if you can pick out those key words:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. Let's see what Paul says about how we are saved by looking more closely at these five key words. Pay attention here because I am going to take them a little out of order.

1. What it Means to be Saved.

V.8 says **"By grace you have been saved..."** Just what does it mean to be **"saved"**? We often hear that word in Christian circles. The word **"saved"** means "to be rescued or delivered from danger or harm." If someone is pulled from a burning building, we say they were **"saved."** If someone is brought back to life after their heart stopped beating, we say they've been **"saved."**

If I were an unbeliever, I would ask the question, **"Saved from what?"** What is the danger or harm that people need saved from?

That's what Paul has described so vividly in verses 1-3 here in Ephesians 2. To be "**saved**" is to be rescued or delivered from the greatest danger or harm facing humanity: **Sin and all its consequences**. Before God saved us we were "**dead in trespasses and sins.**" Spiritual Death was our condition and sin was the cause. To be spiritually dead is to be separated from the life of God. Down in verse 12 Paul describes lost people as "**having no hope and without God in the world.**"

-- Ezekiel 18:20 says, "**The soul who sins shall die...**"

-- In John 8:24, Jesus said, "**Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.**"

-- Romans 6:23 says, "**For the wages of sin is death...**"

-- James 1:15 says, "**Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.**"

Jesus came to save us from SIN and all its consequences. In Matthew 1:21 the angel told Joseph to name Mary's child Jesus, "**for He will save His people from their sins.**" John the Baptist saw Jesus and proclaimed, "**Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**" (John 1:29).

People need to be saved from sin and from the spiritual death that comes from sin. The good news is that God did not leave us dead in sins, according to verse 4 He made us alive with Christ. 1 John 5:11-12 says, "**God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.**"

We are also saved from Spiritual Bondage: We already saw in this chapter that sin is enslaving. Paul says in verses 2-3 that we were dominated by the world, by the devil and by our own flesh. In John 8:33 Jesus said, "**Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.**"

Before God saved us we thought we were free, but in reality we were in bondage to sin. There are many people today who think that they are throwing off the shackles of those fundamentalist Christians, who think they're throwing off the shackles of this oppressive, authoritarian, Christian religion. They think they're doing just what they want to do. But the person who is in that position is actually enslaved to his own desire. He's not free. He may think he's free, but he's actually enslaved to his own desires, his own flesh. He's dominated by the world and by the devil.

But again the good news is that Jesus came to save us. He came set us free from bondage to sin. Jesus said, "**Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed,**" (John 8:36). Paul says that when God saved us He not only made us alive with Christ, dealing with our spiritual death, but He also "**raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,**" (2:6), thus giving us freedom and authority over the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Finally we are also saved from the wrath of God. V.3 says that before we came to Christ we "**were by nature the children of wrath just as the others,**" that is, we deserved the just judgment, anger, and wrath of God. Colossians 3:6 says that, "...**wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience,**." Jn.3:36 says of each unbeliever, "**the wrath of God abides on him.**" What is the "**wrath of God?**" It is God's righteous judgment against sin. Several chapters of the book of Revelation describe the judgments that come upon the unbelieving world at the pouring out of "the wrath of God," and "the wrath of the Lamb."

To be "**saved**" is to be rescued or delivered from God's judgment for sin. And again it is Jesus that has saved us from the wrath of God. Romans 5:9 says, "**Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.**" 1 Thess.1:10 tell us about "**Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.**"

Jesus is the only way to be saved. He is the only one who saves from sin and its deadly consequences. Jesus said, " **"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me,"** (Jn.14:6). He said in John 10:9, "**I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved.**" There are not many doors, only one--only one way to be saved.

I remember seeing the film *Titanic*. One of the most moving scenes in this picture is when the great ship finally sinks and we see hundreds of people floating about in life jackets in the icy waters. In reality, many of those people died—some 1500 of them. Some died of hypothermia after only a few minutes. Stronger more physically fit people lived perhaps an hour before freezing to death. The truth is everyone in that icy water died. The only ones who lived through that terrible tragedy were those who were in the lifeboats. The lifeboat was their only means of salvation from certain physical death. Jesus is our only means of salvation from certain eternal death.

2. We are *not* Saved by our Works.

We are taking this out of order, but I want to first clarify what will not save us.

V.8 testifies that we are saved "**not of yourselves [ourselves] it is the gift of God.**" V.9 says that our salvation is "**not of works.**"

So many people have the idea that God has a set of eternal scales on which He balances our good works and our evil deeds. When we go to church, give to charity, or help someone in need that goes on the "good" side. When we lie, cheat or steal that goes on the "bad" side. In the end if the good outweighs the bad we go to heaven. What a LIE!

Nothing could be farther from the truth. If that were true, no one could ever be saved because just one evil work completely outweighs our good works. Isa.64:6 says, "**But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousness are like filthy rags.**" Rom.3:10 says, "**There is none righteous, no, not one.**"

God's law demands perfection. The only way we could be saved by our "**works**" is if we were perfect. Paul makes it clear in Romans 11:6 that salvation by grace is absolutely incompatible with salvation by works. There he says, "**And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.**" In other words, grace and works are mutually exclusive. It's either by grace, or it's by works—it cannot be by both.

Another reason our salvation cannot be "**of works**" is because we cannot add to what Christ has already done. He paid the price for our salvation on the cross.

V.9 says that we cannot be saved "**of works lest anyone should boast.**" If we could be saved on our own, if our works could merit salvation, we could take pride in ourselves.

Imagine three people in an airplane crashed in the ocean five hundred miles from land. One is an Olympic swimmer, another is an average swimmer and the last can barely tread water. The Olympian says, "**Follow me, we'll swim to shore.**" After about 2 minutes the non-swimmer goes under. About an hour later the average swimmer gives up. However, the champion swimmer churns on for 25 hours and covers 50 miles. Terrific! Now he has only 450 miles to go. If he didn't slow down, he could swim to land in 19 days. How many of you think he will make it?

He would have a greater chance of saving himself than any man ever has of earning his own salvation by "**works.**" God saves us—we don't save ourselves.

That brings us to the third key word which is really the first in 8:

C. We are Saved by Grace.

Notice that the identical phrase "**by grace you have been saved**" is used in both v.5 and v.8. Anytime you see words or phrases that are repeated in a short passage it indicates their importance.

The word "**grace**" means "the undeserved favor of God." Grace means we receive blessings from God we do not deserve. Grace means we receive salvation instead of damnation; God's favor instead of His displeasure; He brings us in instead of casting us out; He gives us life instead of death; love instead of hate; blessings instead of cursings; pardon instead of judgment; peace instead of pain; joy instead of sorrow; and heaven instead of hell.

Grace means that God saves us simply because He wants to. We can't earn it. We don't deserve it. It's all of God. In His sovereignty, He chooses to save us.

God's grace is on the basis of Jesus' death on the cross. Even though God is merciful, because of His holiness and justice He cannot simply overlook our sin. Therefore, He poured out His wrath for our sin on His sinless Son on the cross. Jesus suffered, bled and died for our sin. He

took our place. 1 Pet.2:24 says Jesus "**Himself bore OUR SINS in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed.**"

Now in "**grace**" He offers us salvation. Pascal said, "**To make a man a saint, grace is absolutely necessary and whoever doubts it, does not know what a saint is or what a man is.**"

I love the old chorus that says,

He paid a debt He did not owe;
I owed a debt I could not pay;
I needed someone to wash my sins away.
And, now, I sing a brand new song,
"Amazing Grace" all day long.
Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay.

D. We are Saved through **Faith**.

Chuck Swindoll write about faith saying:

My favorite illustration of what it means to believe is the true story of Ann Seward, a resident of Portland, Oregon. She was asked to costar with high-wire artist Philippe Petit at the opening of the Portland Center for the Performing Arts. Intrigued by the opportunity, she responded, "I'd like to meet this man and see if I trust him." Her stage would be on an eighty-foot wire between the new theater building and the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall. On August 31, 1987, the ninety-one-pound Seward placed her life in the hands of the high-wire artist and was carried on his back while he performed high above the street. (from Chris Myers, "Chance Encounter Led to a Truly High Time," Oregonian, 3 September 1987) She said that her performance had a lesson for those who witnessed it. "I think that one of the most beautiful things about the performance was that it took a lot of trust—absolute trust—to do that," she said. "I think in the world that is a very profound issue....Here it is—I'm putting my life in someone else's hands and trusting ... him."

Many of those who witnessed the performance "believed" that Petit could successfully complete the performance with someone on his back. But their belief was merely intellectual and did not feature the absolute trust and total commitment exhibited by Ann Seward. She expressed her belief by placing her very life in the hands of the artist. This is the kind of "belief" referred to in the words of Paul, "**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved**" (Acts 16:31). This belief is not merely head knowledge; it is the response of a heart to the person of Christ saying, "*I trust Your redeeming work to deliver me from sin and carry me safely to heaven.*"

Faith is genuine trust. It begins with proper knowledge, it involves the emotions, but it comes back to the heart. Do you really, personally believe that Jesus died for your sins and accept that payment on your behalf?

Today, you have heard the word of God, so you have everything necessary to exercise that kind of faith. Rom.10:17 says, "**So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**"

John 1:12 says, "**But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.**"

E. We are Saved by the Gift of God.

Salvation is "**not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.**" Salvation is not in any sense God's response to anything in us. It is not something that we in any sense deserve or merit. We were sons of disobedience and by nature children of wrath. And yet in His grace, because of His great love, He gives us salvation.

It is a gift. A gift, of course, is a free and unconditional present. That is the only basis on which God offers salvation. The gift of God is salvation by grace and through faith. It is offered to all people everywhere. . The point of both of these verses is that our salvation is entirely dependant on God and not on us. We are saved purely and wholly "**by grace.**"

A gift has to be given and received. The Gift of God - During the Spanish-American War, Clara Barton was overseeing the work of the Red Cross in Cuba. One day Colonel Theodore Roosevelt came to her, wanted to buy food for his sick and wounded Rough Riders. But she refused to sell him any. Roosevelt was perplexed. His men needed the help and he was prepared to pay out of his own funds. When he asked someone why he could not buy the supplies, he was told, "Colonel, just ask for it!" A smile broke over Roosevelt's face. Now he understood--the provisions were not for sale. All he had to do was simply ask and they would be given freely.

H. A. Ironside told the story of a new convert who gave his testimony during a church service. With a smile on his face and joy in his heart, the man related how he had been delivered from a life of sin. He gave the Lord all the glory, saying nothing about any of his own merits or what he had done to deserve the blessings of redemption.

The person in charge, who was very legalistic, didn't fully appreciate the reality of salvation by grace through faith alone, apart from human works. So he responded to the young man's comments by saying, "You seem to indicate that God did everything when He saved you. Didn't you do your part before God did His?"

The new Christian jumped to his feet and said, "Oh yes, I did. For more than 30 years I ran away from God as fast as my sins could carry me. That was my part. But God took out after me and ran me down. That was His part."

I did the sinning, God did the saving. That's amazing grace.