

## “SAVED BY GRACE”

There is not a more thrilling part of God’s Word than the one we are going to study today. One of the most oft quoted passages of the New Testament is found in **Ephesians 2:8-10**.

**“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”**

Well, thank God for that passage! I’ve done a lot of things in my life that have disappointed and even angered God, and you have, too.

**Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God...”**

Every last one of us needed something that we, ourselves, could not provide. Every one of us owed a debt that we did not have the means to pay back. If it were left up to us, we’d have nowhere to turn and nothing of which to boast and no hope to claim. We would be doomed eternally!

But God changed all of that, and He did it for one reason: He loves us and He smiled upon us even though we didn’t deserve it in the least. Grace is, by definition, *the unmerited favor of God*, and it provided something that we desperately needed, instead of what we all deserved. Grace is greatly misunderstood today because the justice and holiness of God is also misunderstood. Some people today behave as though grace gives them a “blank check” to allow them to do as they please with no fear of condemnation. But that can’t be, because of what Paul says in **Romans 6:1-2**:

**“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid...”**

Others believe that, since we’re saved by grace, God requires nothing on the part of the sinner in order to be saved. Baptism, for example, isn’t necessary because we’re saved by grace, they tell us. But is that really true? And, if so, what did Jesus mean when He said this:

**Matthew 7:21 “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”**

Does grace preclude obedience to the gospel? Well, before I say anything else today, I want to make it abundantly clear that I believe that we are saved by the grace of a loving God. I can’t believe the scriptures and then deny a fact so plainly stated within them, nor would I want to deny such a wonderful truth! I would be a very frightened man when I thought about the judgment day, if I didn’t believe in the grace and the mercy of God. No passage of scripture is any plainer than Paul’s affirmative in our text passage:

**Ephesians 2:8 “For by grace are ye saved through faith...”**

The question today is: What is grace? What does it mean to be ‘saved by grace?’

Grace is favor or kindness shown without regard for the worth or merit of the one who receives it, and in spite of what that person deserves. To state it more simply, it is the undeserved favor of God. Grace is one of the key attributes of God.

**Exodus 34:6 “...The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth...”**

God is still ALL of those things, despite a very sinful human race. Man may look at himself in the mirror and like what he sees, but God doesn't look at it that way. He may be a moral, law-abiding, kind, compassionate person. He may be very pious and devoted to his religion. But Isaiah reminds us of our status:

**Isaiah 64:6-7 “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee...”**

The apostle Paul sums it up in this next passage, Romans 7, where he personifies himself under the law of Moses trying to be justified by perfectly keeping its commandments and ceremonies, and he found himself hopelessly frustrated that, even though he would try with all of his might, sin still kept him in bondage to condemnation. That's what the entire chapter is about. This is his conclusion:

**Romans 7:24 “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? “**

Paul realized that the strength to be saved wasn't within himself. So he says, in **verse 25**:

**“I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord...”**

In other words, Christ provided what Paul himself could not produce by his own strength or goodness. So, that's what grace is. It is God's willingness to forgive our debt of sin and save us from its penalty, even though we deserve to perish. Now, you can't buy or earn the grace of God. The Bible says that it is a gift (**Ephesians 2:8**).

But, if we're saved by grace, doesn't that mean that the gospel comes with no strings attached? That I'm saved before, and independent of, any act of obedience to the gospel? Wouldn't salvation by grace mean that baptism, for example, is irrelevant to salvation? Wouldn't baptism be *a work*, and Paul says that we're not saved by works, “lest any man should boast” (**Ephesians 2:9**)? Yet, the Bible commands—not suggests-- that the sinner be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Just as plain as Paul was in **Ephesians 2:8** saying that we are saved by grace, Peter was just as plain when he said both of the following:

**Acts 2:38 “...Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.”**

**I Peter 3:21 “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us...”**

Are these Bible teachings at variance with each other? Does one void out the other? By saying that baptism is a requirement for salvation, wouldn't that make the grace of God unnecessary? The confusion doesn't come from a misunderstanding of what grace is, but rather, not understanding what baptism and obedience are.

**Colossians 2:12 "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."**

In other words, when we submit to being baptized into Christ, we are not placing our faith in ourselves or relying on our own strength. What is there in baptism that is meritorious anyway? Paul says it is through faith in the "*operation of God*," not faith in ourselves. In baptism, we are obediently trusting in Christ to save us from our sins. His blood is what washes our sins away—not the actual water. Yet Saul was told by Ananias in **Acts 22:16**,

**"And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."**

Really, it's pretty simple when you put it all together. In baptism, Ananias says we're "*calling on the name of the Lord*" to be saved. And we're allowing His blood to do its work, and to cleanse us from our past sins, in the obedience of baptism. Go back and look at our text again.

**Ephesians 2:8-10 "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."**

So, Paul doesn't have every kind of work in mind when he says that we are saved by grace, through faith, "*not of works, lest any man should boast...*" He's talking about the kind of works that give a man a reason to boast. He's talking about works of the Old Testament law, that law that was predicated upon man's ability to keep it, and if you would be righteous in the eyes of God, it was because you strictly kept the law. And if you failed, even in the minutest of things, the Bible concludes that you would become guilty of ALL of the law. Well, no man has ever been able to meet that standard. No man has ever been able to do that, except Jesus our Lord. HE lived up to the standard of the law in every respect, and because of that, HE is perfect and righteous. No other person, no man, can make such a claim. There is a vast difference in man trying to save himself, and a man submitting in faith to the teachings of Jesus.

Speaking of which, did you know that faith is called "*a work*" in the Bible? It is.

**John 6:28-29 "Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."**

So, Jesus there calls faith "*a work*." But Paul said in our text that we are saved "*by grace...through faith...not of works...*" So, evidently, SOME type of work is involved in our salvation, but not a work of merit, of which man can boast and claim credit for his own salvation. But the work of FAITH, that brings

the glory to God. Nearly anyone will acknowledge that faith is necessary to be saved, anyone except the Universalist.

**Hebrews 11:6 “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”**

But, is faith just a mental affirmation of what the Bible says? Do I have saving faith in Christ when I admit to myself that Jesus is the Son of God? If so, then the devil and all of his minions in Hell are saved, according to **James 2:19**:

**“Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.”**

No, the key is in the next verse:

**James 2:20 “But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?”**

You see, faith must be put into action before it is faith. I submit to you that the sinner puts his faith into action when he submits to the commandment of Christ and is baptized into Christ. Now, in baptism, he earns nothing. But he does demonstrate his faith in Jesus, and he meets Christ in this divinely appointed step, and Christ washes his sins away by His blood. Thus, Paul says in **Colossians 2:12**,

**“Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.”**

Now, let’s look at some examples of how grace works with obedience. I want you to see that they don’t collide—they cooperate. Let’s begin by considering the Ephesians, to whom Paul made this famous statement about salvation by grace.

Much of Paul’s writing was done to debunk the false teachings of Jewish legalists and pagan humanists. Both camps were trying to influence young and vulnerable Christians to reject the grace of God as the premise for salvation. Judaizers were rampant in the church, and they were telling those who were weak in the faith that they had to go back and keep the Law of Moses because it was only through that law that they would be just in the eyes of God. So, in addition to the New Covenant, they also had to keep the Old Law. Paul is refuting that, in no uncertain terms, in our text, telling them that they had been saved by grace through faith. But what did that mean?

Do you know that you can read about the salvation of the very people to whom Paul was writing? We can read about the salvation of the people who made up the church at Ephesus in the book of Acts.

**Acts 19:1-5 “And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John’s baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized**

**with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”**

So, the Ephesians were saved by grace, but they were also baptized. And Paul thought that baptism was important enough that he commanded them to submit to it. Not only that, but the RIGHT baptism. So, salvation by grace in no way eliminated the need or requirement for baptism.

You know, Paul says that the Corinthians were also saved by grace.

**II Corinthians 6:1 “We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.”**

The book of Acts also tells us how the Corinthians were saved when Paul first preached to them in the house of Justus.

**Acts 18:8 “And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.”**

So, baptism on the part of the believers at Corinth didn't negate the grace of God. Neither does it today, when a sinner, in penitent faith, is baptized into Christ.

You probably know the story of Noah and the great flood pretty well. God looked down at this old sinned world and He had enough. Man was as sinful as sinful can be, and it was a vile and evil place because man had so polluted the earth with his sin, and God had reached His limit. He decided that He would destroy the world with a great flood. Nothing would survive this massive deluge of water. He would scrub the earth clean of its wickedness and start over. I suppose that God could've recreated man after the waters receded, but that wasn't His plan. There was one man out of the whole world that God had mercy on.

**Genesis 6:8 “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.”**

That is significant. Noah found grace! It wasn't that Noah was so high and mighty and perfect that God owed him something. God looked down on Noah and decided to show grace to him. God would save Noah and use his family to replenish the new earth. So, God spoke to Noah one day, telling him that He was going to destroy the world with a flood, and He told Noah to build an ark for the saving of he and his house. That ark was to be built according to the plans that God gave him. The writer of Hebrews memorialized the faith of Noah in **Hebrews 11:7** as follows:

**“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.”**

Now, Noah was saved from the antediluvian world because of God's grace. There's no question about that! It was predicated upon God's grace. But let's suppose that Noah had NOT done what God told him

to do. Suppose that Noah had said, "God doesn't need a boat to save me." Or, "God's all-powerful. Why doesn't He build the ark Himself?" Oh, he didn't dare! The Bible says that Noah was "*moved with fear*" and he did exactly what God had said to do. And that ark carried him and his family through the flood to salvation. Think about it this way: Noah couldn't turn around and brag about what he had done. He couldn't pound his chest and claim that he had singlehandedly saved the human race from extinction. He wouldn't have known anything about a flood, and certainly wouldn't have known what to do to save his family, were it not for the grace of God.

Friends, that's how it is with OUR salvation. We were doomed to eternal death with no way of saving ourselves, but God's grace provided a plan for our redemption. It was by grace that God sent His only Son, walking down the starry stairway of Heaven to be slain on that bloody hill of Calvary. He didn't have to do that, and we certainly didn't deserve it. He came as the friend of sinners, and He died for our redemption while we were yet His enemies! He died for the screaming mob at the foot of His cross who were reveling in His suffering, and only one word can describe that: *grace*. Grace beyond our comprehension, grace beyond our ability to show, grace that only God could have towards His beloved, yet fallen creation.

**Romans 5:15 "But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many."**

It was by grace that God gave us His wonderful plan in the form of the gospel, so that we could be saved. Paul speaks of the dispensation of the grace of God in **Ephesians 3:3-4** like this:

**"How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)"**

Now, all of that is by grace, and it is only by grace.

**Titus 2:11 "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men."**

Now here's the catch: *not all men are saved*. Jesus said that not all men would be saved, and in fact most men will be lost. Why? If salvation is by grace, and the grace of God has appeared to all men, shouldn't everybody be saved? Well, we know that won't be the case.

**Matthew 7:14 "Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."**

Why won't all men be saved, when God has provided His grace for all men? The answer is found in **Hebrews 5:8-9**, where Paul, speaking of Jesus, said the following:

**"Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;"**

Do you see what Paul is saying? God, by His grace, has given man a plan, a pathway to salvation. Christ is the author of salvation, but man has to accept it, and Paul places a condition upon receiving it by saying that Christ is ***“the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.”*** Have you obeyed the Lord today? Have you rendered obedience to the gospel in baptism, for the remission of your past sins? I hope you’ll do that this very day, without any further delay.