

Ephesians 2:8-9 Grace Alone 5/27/18

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

(Pastor prays)

This short little passage that I've just read you is the very heartbeat of the Gospel, a Gospel that by the 1500's had been overlaid by ritual and idolatry until a German monk named Martin Luther rediscovered the Bible and in 1517 sparked the Protestant Reformation that liberated the true Gospel from an incense-laden superstition. That movement coalesced around five defining markers that define what we believe today being Christian. They are called the five "solas": that we are saved by **Grace** alone, through **faith** alone in **Christ** alone revealed by **scripture** alone to the **glory of God** alone. Those five *solas* – or "only's" – form the bedrock of our beliefs and provide a foundation that we are able to build our lives upon, lives that are sturdy and trustworthy and storm-proof.

What you build your life on is important. The Psalmist asks the question in Psalm 11:3, "If foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" I would only say to that: "Ladies and Gentlemen, the foundations are destroyed. Every mainline denomination in America has become untethered to its Gospel roots. The Episcopalian church used to have a Gospel – now it is irretrievably gone.

Don't walk around believing that the walls of doctrine are not important. Look around at the churches that have abandoned the Gospel. Lutherans, Disciples of Christ, even the Methodist. They used to have a Gospel. More recently, the "carnival ride" churches that have Jesus as nothing more than a wizard that gives you what you want and helps you be a better you. Certainly, the Gospel of the Bible is so much more. We must be clear on *what* we believe and *why* we believe it and at the very bottom of that is the belief in salvation: How do I become a child of God?

And this little paragraph introduces us to God's sovereign, sanctifying, overwhelming grace. The church has always emphasized grace. When we say "grace," we mean that it is God's grace alone that saves us. The definition of Grace is the love of God going out to the utterly undeserving. This doctrine – the doctrine of grace— denies that human technologies, methods, manipulations or strategies can bring anyone to faith. We do all

the sinning and God does all the saving. Grace saves us from ourselves and from American folk religions that undermine the Gospel. Reminding us fully that:

The Only Gospel is the Gospel of Grace

Grace changes several things. I'll give you two.

Grace Changes Our View of Christianity

You feel that change in verse 8 when Paul says, *For by grace you have been saved*. This means you being a Christian is:

All Grace

Grace is not God giving great advice, solid help, wise counsel or a helping hand. Grace is God raising those who are dead in sin to life. Grace is not a pep talk or life coaching or great stories. And really, our issue is not us believing we need grace; most of us know we need grace. Everybody knows we need grace. It's the extent of the grace that's the issue. American Folk religion says: you do your part and God will do His. Or "the Lord helps those who help themselves," almost making it seem as if salvation is a team effort.

But according to the Bible, we need a grace that not only makes salvation *possible*, we need a grace that makes it *certain*. You see the issue is that we feel like we are owed and the Bible teaches that we are all born in sin and guilt with a corrupt nature and God owes us nothing except punishment for our many and willful sins. When God saves sinners, it is Him doing it in Christ by grace. Grace brings us to Christ. Grace releases us from bondage. Grace sets us free. Grace brings us life. Grace forgives our sins and renews our souls and it happens at the cross of Jesus. Grace means that salvation starts with God and not with man. He takes the initiatives, He makes the first move at all. When you, by grace, put your faith in the life, death on the cross and resurrection of Jesus, you are saved. It's grace and that grace does several things.

Grace Guarantees Security – You don't need to doubt your salvation.

Grace Obliterates Pride – How are you any better than anyone else?

Grace Destroys Legalism - We aren't keeping rules to gain God's favor. We are covered with the righteousness of Christ. We don't work *toward* salvation but *from* it.

Grace puts the determining factor for salvation in God's hands and not ours. Verse 8 says, *For by grace you have been saved*. Saved. Rescued. Reclaimed. Folded into the family of God. We are spared the penalty of sin. Romans 6 says the way of sin is death.

And because of God's grace at the cross, Jesus died our death. We don't get the wrath of God, Jesus did. We get *grace*. We are spared the power of sin. When we come to the cross the spell of sin is broken. The cross is our Emancipation Proclamation. Before Christ, we were enslaved to sin. Jesus breaks the chains of slavery and sin. I want you to see that the Gospel of Jesus is the radical offer of God's free grace found at the cross of Jesus. It's the *only* Gospel. The only Gospel is the Gospel of grace. Grace changes our view of Christianity and our view of ourselves.

Grace Changes Why

To see this, it's good to read the whole passage. Let's read verses 8-9. *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* See those three phrases right in the middle of the passage? Those three phrases make all the difference in the world and they are all 3 saying the same thing: This is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. It is not the result of works. This is reminding us that we are everything to God. If we go to heaven, it's nothing to do with us being able to somehow do enough good to outweigh all the bad. In fact, the Bible is very clear about our condition.

Ephesians 2:1 says that we are so dead in seeing that only God can make us alive.

2 Corinthians 4 we are so blind that only God could give us sight.

Psalms 51 says we are so simple that only God could forgive us.

Jeremiah 17: 9 says we are so bad that only God could make us good.

Luke 19: 10 says we were so lost that only God could find us.

Jeremiah 13: 23 says we are so helpless that only God could change us.

Accordingly, in Ephesians 2 verses 8 through 9, our Salvation is a gift of God not a result of works. The only time Paul uses the word "gift" is here. This "gift" refers to the whole concept of salvation. A gift is something that we don't have but something someone gave to us, and all we have to do is receive the gift that is salvation.

Salvation finds its origin in God, its basis grace, its power at the cross, and is received by means of faith. And Paul keeps pounding this. In verse 9 he says that salvation is not a result of works. Now this is essential to understanding salvation. If you don't believe this, you can't be a Christian. you can't be saved. If you believe you have to be baptized to be saved, that is a *work*, not *grace*. If you believe you have to go to Mass to be saved, that is a *work*. If you believe you have to take The Lord's Supper, that is *work* not *grace*. If you believe you have to be *nice* to go to church and not kick the cat to be saved, then you don't believe in the sovereign grace of God in salvation. Furthermore, you do

believe you can do something to give yourself a better chance to get into Heaven. That's American "folk religion," and it misses the Gospel completely. Some might say that faith is a work and I would argue it's *not* a work. Faith is a *response* to a work that is done in us by the Spirit and for us in Christ.

Paul tells us why God saves us in Christ like this. Let's read the whole passage again and find the punchline at the end. *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* So that no one may boast. We can't brag about our effort; We boast in God.

Paul says in Romans 5:11, more than that, we rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received reconciliation.

1 Corinthians 1: 31 says let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.

2 Corinthians 10: 17 it says let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.

Philippians 3: 3 says For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

We are saved by God's grace *alone* through faith *alone* in Christ *alone*. I want to close by talking about God's grace. God's grace is universal in its provision but not in its application. What I mean is that people aren't automatically saved because Christ died. Grace becomes personal when you put your trust in Christ alone, turn from sin and, by faith, turn to Christ.

Amazing Grace... how sweet the sound... that saved a wretch like me... at the cross of Christ.

(Pastor prays)