

Hope Christian Church
Todd Cravens
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Sermon Series: *The Book of Ephesians*

Pentecost Sunday



Saving Grace that Works

The Immeasurable Riches of His Grace

(Ephesians 2:1-10 ESV)

¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh,

carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ 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. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Introduction

This morning we will focus on the last three verses of this paragraph, verses 8-10. In these three verses, Paul returns to the truth he first mentioned in verse five. He explains more fully here, in verses eight through ten, what he parenthetically mentioned there. The aim of these three verses is to destroy any confidence in your ability to save yourself and to establish all confidence in Jesus' ability to save you.

In order to fully understand what God through Paul intends to teach us about our salvation, we must read this in the full context in which it is written. Reading this text in this way will keep us from misunderstanding what is being taught and it will keep us from wasting time by becoming embroiled in unnecessary controversy.

In verses 1-3, Paul explains the incredibly desperate situation in which the whole of humanity finds itself. He notes we are **spiritually dead, hopelessly enslaved, and naturally condemned**. In our natural condition we are dead toward God because of our trespasses and sins. This spiritual deadness renders us incapable of obedience to God's commands and results in an innate hostility¹ towards God and every form of his holiness. This deadness is not localized to a few persons. No. It affects the whole of humanity. The whole of mankind is affected but this disease of deadness (v.3).

As a result, all people are **hopelessly enslaved** to a lifestyle of rebellion which runs its course throughout the whole world. This deadly disease is deceptive and blinding. Everywhere people think that they are living freely but in fact they are *controlled by their own sinful passions and desires*. And Satan stands behind this deception and rebellion, while the world is completely unaware of this fact. He wickedly instigates and entices people to give in to these sinful rebellious desires by whispering in our ears that this is truly what we want, when in fact it is these very desires which lead us deeper into slavery to our own sinful desires and into deeper slavery into doing his evil will.²

¹ Rom 8:7.

² 2 Tim 2:26.

This lifestyle of rebellion, in which the whole of humanity is enslaved, is one to which God is naturally opposed and thus we are all **naturally condemned**. The natural position of humanity is not one of spiritual neutrality, but of fixed condemnation.³ In our natural spiritual deadness we are incapable of doing righteousness, but we are not incapable of doing evil. Therefore the phrase which most fittingly describes humanity is “children of wrath,” as opposed to “children of righteousness.” We are by nature children of the devil, not children of God.⁴

These things, which stand against us—and some have summarized as the world, the flesh, and the devil—leave us entombed in a situation out of which we cannot extract ourselves. There is sin, evil and spiritual deadness within our own souls, there is sin and evil in the air which we breathe, and then there is a powerful spiritual enemy, Satan, who stands against us to keep us in our spiritually dead condition. These powerful opponents render us completely helpless to save ourselves and in an incredibly desperate situation.

But God enters in at this point and changes everything through Jesus.

He changes everything, not because of anything in us, but because of everything in him. He saves us, not because of who we are but because of who he is. This is **the** point Paul is making. *Salvation is decisively dependent upon the gracious action of God through Jesus.*

God is rich in mercy and great in love. In his richness and greatness he decided to show us love rather than leave us in our intractable state of spiritual deadness. He would have been perfectly just to leave us there for that is the place we wanted to be. And there is nothing which obligates God to save those who have been justly condemned. But God is rich in mercy and he is great in love and decided to show us his mercy and reveal the vast expanse of his love, and he loved us even when we were dead in our sins.

There was nothing lovely within us, yet within him is mercy, grace and love. He is so filled with love toward us that he chose to demonstrated his love.

Ephesians 2:5 (ESV)

He made us alive together with Christ—for by grace you have been saved.

Being made alive to God is an act of grace performed by God. “**He** made us alive...” Being saved is an act of grace, not obligation. “*For by **grace** you have been saved.*” Salvation is an act of God and it is completely an act of grace. Grace is receiving what you are not entitled to receive. If anyone in this room is saved, it is because God has chosen to save you by making you alive to him and his goodness and his holiness. God owes salvation to no one. Yet he is so

³ Jn 3:18, 36.

⁴ Jn 8:44.

filled with love and grace that he will give salvation to anyone who will cry out to him to be saved.⁵

And how is one saved? Paul answers this in verse 8.

Ephesians 2:8 (ESV)

⁸ *For by grace you have been saved **through faith**.*

Being saved happens by grace, *through faith*. Because God is gracious, he saves us and he saves us **through faith**. All we have to do to be saved is believe in Jesus.

Paul was once asked this very question by his jailer.

(Acts 16:29-31 ESV)

²⁹ *And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."*

Faith is believing in Jesus. It is a settled trust, a confirmed confidence in Jesus' ability to get you into heaven, to give you life, and bring you to God. When deep within our souls we become convinced that there is nothing, absolutely nothing we can do to save ourselves and we become equally convinced that Jesus is absolutely able to save us, and in that moment we cry out to him to save us, *that is the faith through which God makes us alive together with Christ. Saving faith is complete trust in Jesus and complete distrust in self.* It is faith that unites us to Jesus and is the means by which God credits to us both his righteousness and his atoning death.

This is entirely the gracious work of God. Salvation is effective only because God has chosen to graciously give to us that which we do not deserve.

This is the Paul's main point. He has stated it positively, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith,*" but he goes on in order to make this abundantly clear, he also states it negatively.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith.*



And this is not of your own doing; it is the gift of God,

⁹ *not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*



⁵ Jn 6:37; Rom 10:13.

This Is Not of Your Own Doing; It is the Gift of God

"This is not of your own doing, it is the gift of God." We do not save ourselves. We cannot save ourselves. Salvation is a gift of God. The 'this' that is *"not of your own doing"* refers to both the grace and the faith through which salvation comes. The grace at work in your life and the faith to trust in Jesus, are both gifts given to us by God. Salvation is the gift of God, both the grace which purchased it and the faith which unites us with Christ. It is all the gift of God. Recall what Jesus said.

(John 6:44 ESV)

⁴⁴ *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.*

(John 6:65 ESV)

⁶⁵ *And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."*

Salvation is not a reward that God gives to worthy people, because that would *"be of your own doing."* Salvation is a gift that God gives to unworthy people who trust in Jesus. Salvation is not awarded to people because of anything they *do*. Salvation is a **gift**. It is not a wage or a reward. No one earns salvation. God does not save someone based upon anything that could be said to be *"of your own doing."*

A gift is given to a person because the giver has decided to be gracious, not because the person has worked really hard and deserves it. No one deserves a gift. You may deserve wages, but no one ever deserves a gift. A gift is a blessing you receive because of the cheerful generosity and love that flows from the heart of the giver. *Salvation is not of your own doing; it is the gift of God.*

Not As a Result of Works

Paul restates this truth again in a negative statement. Salvation is received by grace, **"not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."** Salvation is not given out based upon a certain number of good deeds. Salvation does not come **as a result** of good works. No one is saved as a *result* of giving a box of canned goods to the food pantry every year. No one is saved as a *result* of being nice to mean people. No one is saved as a *result* of habitually letting the first car opposite you in traffic go first when the light turns green. No one is saved as a *result* of donating lots of money to charities. No one is saved as a *result* of giving away lots of money to the church. No one is saved as a *result* of any particular good deed. If we were, then we would have something about which we could boast.

If you catch yourself thinking God will let me into heaven because I volunteered for 15 years at the local elementary school, or because I donated \$1.5 million to State University or because you developed a cure for cancer, or because you were a Big Brother or Big Sister, then you are

basing the eternal destiny of your soul upon smoke which cannot support you. If you think God should let you into heaven because of any good deed or deeds which you have ever done, or the combination of all of your cumulative good deeds over the span of your lifetime, then you are basing your eternal hope upon something God does consider in deciding whom he will save. *Salvation does not come as a result of anything we do, but as a result of everything God has done for us through Jesus.*

So That No One May Boast

There will be no boasting in heaven about what we have done. No one will stand before God and say, "You should let me into heaven because of all the amazingly kind, wonderful and generous deeds I did. I went to church every Sunday, donated blood once every other month (I would have donated more often, but they didn't allow it), smiled at frowny people, tipped 20%, I often gave up my seat to old women on the train, gave money to missionaries, churches, and the Jimmy Fund, adopted a rescue dog, allowed my to niece to live with me for several months (when I really didn't want to), frequently told people they looked pretty (even when they didn't, just to make them feel good about themselves), was consistently a nice person, made people laugh, and in general made the world a better place for my having been in it."

No one will boast before the LORD. No one.

No one earns salvation. No one will receive salvation because of one or many good deeds they have done. No one is saved because of anything he or she has done. If we were we would have something to boast about.

We are saved not as a result of what we have done, but as a result of what *Jesus* has done. We are not saved as a result of *our* good deeds. We are saved as a result of *his* good deeds. We are not saved as a result of our good deeds because we can never do enough of them. The only good deeds which are acceptable to God is 100%. Anything less than perfect obedience to God's law, is undeserving of salvation.

We are saved by simply taking God at his word and when he said that everyone who trusts in sinless Jesus will have all of his righteousness credited to them (Rom 4:4, 16, 22-25).

If We Are Not Saved By Good Deeds, Then Why Do Them?

So if we are not saved by good deeds, then why do them? Does that mean we should kiss good deeds good bye? Since salvation never comes as a result of our good works, then should we just stop worrying about them? Should we keep all our money for ourselves, and stop letting the first car opposite us go first when the light turns green, stop tipping 20%, stop smiling at frowny people, stop going to church, stop supporting missionaries, churches, and the Jimmy Fund, and stop donating blood?

No. We should do all those things.

But we should not do them thinking they will earn us salvation, because they will not. We do them because we *are already saved* not in order to be saved. Good deeds are the result of salvation, not the foundation of salvation.

Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

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

The one doing the work is God himself. It is he who is at work in us making us into the unique persons he intends us to be. In salvation, it is not we who at work, but God. We are his workmanship.



The word translated 'workmanship,' is *poiema* (ποίημα). It means "that which is created by God."⁶ It refers to something new and unique that is brought into existence specifically by God.

What Paul is saying here is that when we put our faith in Jesus, God does something completely new and fresh in our lives. It is as if Creation is happening all over again. In Christ, we are made new. We are not at work creating our own salvation. God is at work saving us through faith in Jesus.

(Philippians 1:6 ESV)

⁶ *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*

Created In Christ for Good Works

The salvation at work in us, is not caused by us. If we are being saved, it is because God is at work within us. And in Christ, we were **created for good works**. From the beginning of God's plan, he intended that those whom he would save, should demonstrate that salvation by doing good works.

Doing good works is not a means of earning salvation, but of expressing it. We do good deeds not in order to *gain* God's favor, but because we already *have* God's favor. From before the beginning of creation, it has been part of God's great plan for this world that those whom he would save should **walk in good deeds**. This means that our lifestyles should be marked by good deeds.

⁶ Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 458.

So if you are a believer and you fail to do good works, then you are failing to do that for which God created you! You who are the children of God, you will experience God's good pleasure upon you when you do good works. In doing good works, you are living out one of the purposes of God for your life. Daily doing good works is God's will for your life.

Conclusion

A: You were once dead because of our sins, walking in evil deeds

B: Following the will of self and Satan

C: Children of wrath

D: By nature under condemnation

E: All our works led to death

F: BUT GOD

E: All God's work led to life

D: By new nature under grace

C: Children of grace

B: Following the will of God

A: You were made alive because of grace, walking in good deeds

Since salvation is completely an act of God's grace, no one should think that they are so wicked that they can't be saved. You are saved by grace through faith, not by doing good deeds.

Since salvation is completely an act of God's grace, no one should think that they are so worthy that they should be saved. We were dead in sins, but God loved us and made us alive.

Since salvation is completely an act of God's grace, don't ever do a good deed intending to earn God's favor by it. Instead, understand that the good deeds you do is actually God doing his work in and through you.

Ready For God To Do Something New?

Today is Pentecost Sunday, the day on which God poured out his Holy Spirit upon the believers in Jerusalem 50 days after Jesus' crucifixion and 10 days after his ascension into heaven. On that day Peter preached a sermon. At the end of that sermon, those listening realized that they had sinfully killed Jesus, the messiah, even though he was innocent. They were cut to the heart when they realized that it was their sinful error which brought about the death of the only one sent to save them.

We stand in the same predicament. It is our sins which have caused the death of an innocent man. It is our filthy wickedness which necessitated his painful death.

We those in Jerusalem understood that they had killed Christ, they asked, "What shall we do?"

We should ask the same question, "Because we know we are sinners, what shall we do?"

Peter answered this way,

(Acts 2:38-39 ESV)

³⁸ And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

Are you in need of salvation? Repent and ask God to pour out his Spirit in your heart.

Are you in need of renovation? Repent and ask God to pour out his Spirit in your heart.

Benediction

Tomorrow is Memorial Day, the day we remember those who have died in battle to keep us safe and free. Tomorrow as you remember them, remember also the One who died in battle against sin, the world, and the devil as he has set us free from the dominion of darkness and free from the eternal consequences of sin.

And now to him who is able to save you completely, deliver you from death, and pour out his Holy Spirit upon you, causing your life to be cleansed from sin, made new and fresh, and cause you to walk in the good deeds that were prepared for you from before the foundation of the world, to the only wise God through Jesus Christ our Lord and savior, to him be glory forever and ever, amen.