

THE BELIEVER'S CONVERSION (PART II): THE WORK OF GOD'S GRACE – SALVATION EPHESIANS 02:08–10

Introduction

This passage is one of the great evangelistic summaries of the Bible. As F.F. Bruce points out, this passage is the watchword for reformation theology: “By grace alone, through faith alone, to God alone be the glory” (*sola gratia, sola fida, soli deo gloria*) (F.F. Bruce. *The Epistle to the Ephesians*. Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1961, p. 51.) If a man wants to be saved, these verses tell him how to be saved. Salvation is the work of God, of God's grace and of God's grace alone. It is not of man, not to any degree whatsoever.

=> Salvation is a free gift of God. It is by grace alone that man is saved. Man can do nothing whatsoever to save himself. He cannot earn, win or merit salvation. All man can do is accept the fact that God says He will save him, accept as true the free offer of salvation (Rom. 11:6).

=> Salvation is received by faith (Rom. 3:27; 4:2, 5; 1 Cor. 1:31). Man must believe just what God says and accept His Word, accept His free offer of salvation. And when he accepts the fact that God says He will save him, God takes him and creates him into a “new person”, “a new self”, “the new man”, or “a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:24; 1 Pet. 1:23; 2 Pet. 1:4).

I. You are saved (vv. 8-9).

II. You are God's workmanship (v. 10).

I. *Ephesians 02:08–09 Salvation is God's Grace*

You are saved by God and by God alone. This is the major stress of this passage.

1. You are saved by God's grace. Grace means the favour and kindness of God, but there is a uniqueness about God's favour and kindness. His favour and kindness are given *despite the fact that it is undeserved and unmerited*. God has done a thing unheard of among men: God has given His grace to men...

- despite their cursing Him
 - despite their rebelling against Him
 - despite their denial of Him
 - despite their half-hearted commitment to Him
 - despite their worship of religion instead of Him
 - despite their false worship
 - despite their transgressions
 - despite their rejecting Him
 - despite their hostility toward Him
 - despite their neglect of Him
 - despite their idolatrous worship
 - despite their sins
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Grace is giving, but it is giving to people who do not deserve the gift. What is the gift that God has given? Jesus Christ. God has given His Son, Jesus Christ, to save men. He did not have to give His Son. God could have wiped man from the face of the earth. Man deserved it, but this is God's grace. God is full of mercy and love and kindness — by His very nature He is full of these glorious qualities. Therefore, God was *bound* to shower His grace upon man. God was bound to send His Son to save man.

God is not off someplace in the distance, far removed from man, disinterested and unconcerned with man's sufferings and death. God is gracious, full of mercy, love and kindness for man; therefore, He has reached out through His Son Jesus Christ to help man. How?

=> By giving His Son to die *for man*. When Jesus Christ hung upon the cross, He was *taking our sins* upon Himself and bearing the punishment for our sins. We had committed high treason against God: rejected and rebelled against Him. The penalty for high treason is death; we are condemned to die. But Christ took our penalty and condemnation upon Himself. He died for us — in our place, in our stead, as our substitute. This is what Scripture means when it says that Christ died *for us*.

Rom 5:6 *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.*

Rom 5:8 *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Rom 5:10 *For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!*

Note that the people for whom Christ died did not deserve His sacrificial love. They were men who were...

- “powerless” (Rom. 5:6)
- “ungodly” (Rom. 5:6)
- “sinners” (Rom. 5:8)
- “enemies” (Rom. 5:10)

This is the grace of God — God's grace that showered itself upon sinful men who were lost and condemned — God's grace that gave the greatest gift possible to men — the gift of His Son to save the world. (See *Salvation*, Eph. 2:6; *Justification*, Gal. 2:15-16; *Faith vs. Works*, Gal. 2:16; Gal. 2:19-21.)

Rom 3:24 *And are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

2 Cor 8:9 *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*

Eph 1:7 *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.*

Eph 2:4-5 *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.*

2. You are saved through faith. What does it mean to be saved through faith? Simply this: Jesus Christ died *for us*. He bore our sin and punishment upon the cross. When we believe, really believe, that Jesus Christ died for us, God does a wonderful thing. God takes our faith and counts it as the death of Jesus Christ *for us*. That is, when we honour God's dear Son by believing in Him so much that we give all we are and have to Him. God takes the death of Jesus Christ and applies it to us.

The point is this: it is our faith that causes God to look upon us as having been in Christ when He died. It is our faith that causes God to credit us with salvation. (See *Salvation*, Eph. 2:6; *Justification*, Gal. 2:15-16; *Faith vs. Works*, Gal. 2:16; Gal. 2:19-21.)

Jesus Christ is God's gift to us. Salvation through Christ has been wrapped up as a gift and God hands it over to us. But note: a gift is not ours until we believe it is ours and we take and receive it. Suppose I hand you my Bible and say, "Here, this is yours. I give it to you as a gift. It is yours; take it." What is necessary for the Bible (the gift) to become yours? You have to believe it is yours and reach out and receive it. You could say, "No thank you..."

- I do not believe you.
- I deny its existence.
- I don't want it.
- I don't have the time to use it."

If this is your attitude, what happens to the gift? It never becomes yours. In my mind I gave it to you, but you never received it. You either did not believe it or did not want it.

This is what is meant by faith. If you believe, really believe that Jesus Christ died *for you*, you will reach out and receive the gift of God's grace.

John 3:16 *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

John 5:24 *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."*

John 20:31 *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Rom 10:9-10 *That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.*

3. You are not saved in and of yourselves. God is perfect, and to live in His presence, a person must be perfect. This is the great problem of man. Man is not perfect; therefore, he can never live in God's presence — not in and of himself. Even if man could be good enough and do enough good to become perfect (he cannot, but even if he could) he would not be acceptable to God. Why? Because he has already transgressed and become imperfect. He already stands imperfect, corruptible, aging, dying and decaying. If man is ever to be acceptable to God — if he is ever to be perfected and have his past wiped clean — it will not be by his own hands. He cannot save himself. Salvation is not of man.

2 Cor 10:12 We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.

Gal 6:3 If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

Titus 3:5 He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

Prov 20:6 Many a man claims to have unfailing love, but a faithful man who can find?

Prov 28:26 He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.

Prov 30:12 Those who are pure in their own eyes and yet are not cleansed of their filth.

Oba 1:3-4 "The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, 'Who can bring me down to the ground?' Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down," declares the LORD.

4. You are saved as a gift of God, not of works. There are at least seven reasons why salvation must be a free gift. (Note: some of these were stirred by thoughts from William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, P. 121f.)
- a. Man cannot make God owe him. Man cannot put God in debt for work performed. A man who works puts his employer in debt for his services (Rom. 4:4). God is completely independent. He cannot be put in debt to any man. God cannot be made to owe anything or to be obligated for anything. God does not save man because He is obligated to man or owes man, but because He loves and wills to save man.
 - b. Man cannot bring perfection to God. God is perfect, incorruptible and permanent. Man and everything about man is imperfect, corruptible, and decaying (see *Forgiveness*, Eph. 1:7). Man cannot offer and cannot give anything to God that will satisfy His perfection. Any offer or gift from an imperfect man to a perfect God is ever so short and inadequate. God accepts man's offer of himself not because man merits acceptance, but simply because God loves and wills to accept man.

- c. Man cannot make God forgive him. Man is the one who has done wrong, offended and hurt God. It is man who has broken off the friendship and relationship with God (Rom. 3:23; 8:6-8). Therefore, man is the one who is to apologize and ask forgiveness, and God is the One who is to have mercy and do the forgiving. If God chooses to have mercy, it comes from a heart of grace, not because man deserves it.
- d. Man cannot heal God's heart. Man's sin breaks the heart of God (Rom. 5:6, 8, 10). Therefore, man's offense is primarily against love; it is primarily against God's very nature of love, mercy and peace. Since man's main offense is breaking the heart of God, he can only cast himself upon the love of God, apologize and ask forgiveness, trust God to forgive. This is the glorious message of salvation. If man turns to God and asks forgiveness, God forgives and accepts man back into His glorious grace.
- e. Man cannot save himself (Eph. 2:8-9). No matter what law or work was chosen to be the channel for salvation, there would be some men who could never keep that particular law or perform that particular work. If salvation were by law and works, man could never be saved. There are always many who are totally unable to work and earn their way: the deformed, the poor, the sick, the weary, the underprivileged, the disadvantaged, the oppressed, and many, many others. However, the needy are always before God's keen eyes, and He counts them precious. Therefore, He has made provision for salvation by grace and by grace alone.
- f. Man cannot make God love him (Tit. 3:4-7). If salvation were by law and works, the love of God could never be known. God would be forced to save and bless us because He owes us, not because He loves us. Our works would forever require Him to pay our wages. He would not be free to do something for us freely simply because He loved us. We would never know what it is to be loved by God. We would know only what it is to be paid by God for work done.
- g. Man cannot set himself free and bring about liberty of conscience (see *Forgiveness*, Mt. 26:28). If we are saved by law and works, liberty and freedom of spirit and conscience would never be experienced. We constantly fail and come short. This eats and gnaws away at us. If God does not forgive us simply because He loves us, then what can remove the guilt and aggravation of failure from our hearts? The law? No, for the law only points out our failure, and once we have failed we have failed, and the gnawing away of conscience begins (see Rom. 3:21-22). The only way for the gnawing and guilt of conscience to be removed is for God to forgive us for failing and to convince us of His forgiveness. This He has done by grace — His grace.

Mat 7:22-23 *“Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”*

Rom 3:20 *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.*

Gal 2:16 *Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.*

Eph 2:8-9 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Titus 3:4-5 *But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.*

5. The reason salvation is by grace and not by works is to prevent men from ever boasting. God is the Supreme and Majestic Being of the universe. He is the Creator of all that is in heaven and earth. God is the One who dwells in the ultimate of light and holiness and who deserves all the worship and glory of eternity. The honour and glory due His name are not to be shared with anyone. If man was saved by some effort of his own, he would be due some credit, some boast, some honour. This God cannot allow. His very nature forbids it. As God, He is the Supreme glory of the universe, and as the Supreme Being, He is to receive the supreme glory – that is, all glory and praise. His Supremacy – His being God – demands it.

Thought 1. How small we are and how glorious God is!

Rom 3:19 *Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced [from boasting] and the whole world held accountable to God.*

Rom 3:27 *Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith.*

II. ***Ephesians 02:10 Salvation: Man Created Anew in Christ Jesus***

You are God's *workmanship* (poiema). Note two points.

1. We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus. The believer experiences two creations, both a natural birth and a spiritual birth. The spiritual birth is the point of this verse. When a man believes in Jesus Christ, God *creates him in Christ*. What does this mean?
- => It means that God *quickens the spirit* of the believer and makes his spirit alive. Whereas the believer's spirit was dead to God, God creates it anew and makes it alive to God.

Eph 2:1 *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.*

Eph 2:5 *Made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.*

=> It means that God causes the believer to be *born again spiritually*.

John 3:3, 5, 6 *In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."*

1 Pet 1:23 *For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.*

1 John 5:1 *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well.*

=> It means that God actually places His *divine nature* into the heart of the believer.

2 Pet 1:4 *Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*

=> It means that God actually makes a *new creation* of the believer.

2 Cor 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

Gal 6:15 *Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.*

=> It means that God actually creates a *new person* out of the believer.

Eph 4:24 *And to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Col 3:10 *And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

=> It means that God *renews the believer* by the Holy Spirit.

Titus 3:5 *He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.*

2. We are created to do good works. God saves man *for good works* not by good works. F.F. Bruce points out that the believer is God's *workmanship* (poiema), God's work of art, God's masterpiece (*The Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 52). God fashions man and creates a masterpiece. God's workmanship is always a work of art. The believer does not create the beauty, the art that shows in the canvas of his life. The believer just shows that he is God's workmanship by the life he lives and displays. Works are an evidence of salvation. Those who walk in transgressions and sins (Eph. 2:1-2) show that they are not God's workmanship no matter what profession they make. God's people give ample evidence of the *power of a new life* which operates in them.

Note that God has *prepared in advance* for us to walk in good works. Doing good works is not an option for the believer; it is the very nature of the believer. If a man has been created in Christ — if God has truly worked in him — the man does good works. His very nature dictates it. He cannot do otherwise. He is not perfect, and he fails; but he keeps coming back to God and falling upon his knees, believing, asking forgiveness, and getting back up to go forth once again to do all the good he can. As stated, it is his nature. He is a new creation created to do good works. Therefore, he does them. Just like a tree, he bears the fruit of his nature.

Mat 5:16 *“In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”*

Col 1:10 *And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.*

1 Tim 6:18 *Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.*

Titus 2:7 *In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness.*

Titus 3:8 *This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.*

Heb 10:24 *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.*

James 2:17-18 *In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.*

1 Pet 2:12 *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*

1 John 1:7 *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. ■*