

Saved By Grace Through Faith

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Bible Text: Ephesians 2:8-9
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Let's go to Ephesians 2 tonight. Ephesians 2. When I first preached this particular sermon, well, preaching through Ephesians itself, I don't know how to accurately term what was happening in Baptist churches and evangelical Christianity, but there was something of a true Reformation going on of reevaluating our doctrine and quite particularly reevaluating methodologies in the church; techniques we had been using for decades began to be exposed for what they were, human techniques instead of God really doing things in men's lives. And God let us have something of a voice in that and still has to this day. I just looked up before I came over, in one website that publishes sermons has this sermon I preached has been downloaded over 24,000 times and I know it has been downloaded a lot on other formats also, not because of the message but because of the truth within the message that is so needed. So as we're reviewing and reminding ourselves of where we stand, this particular message and the things I tried to bring out in it, is really foundational to a critical turning point in the life of Grace Life Church. We were already pretty much turned but this was just putting the crown on the gem of reforming this church, I guess you could say.

Ephesians 2, a sermon entitled "Saved By Grace Through Faith." Ephesians 2:8-9,

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

What a powerful powerful text. I think one of the things about being here at Grace Life Church is I think, and I don't mean this as a slam to you, I don't mean this as a condemnation, but I believe a lot of you are Gospel and grace hardened, and I don't mean that you're depraved and you're beyond help. I don't mean that, I mean I think we hit these truths so weightily and they ought to be, that you can kind of, "Oh, grace and it's wonderful and God loves us and we're depraved sinners," and you just kind of say, "We've heard that a thousand times." And you need to fight that. Here's what I mean: you need to keep fighting for joy in these truths. Do you hear what I'm saying? You need to keep fighting for joy in them; that they don't become happenstance; they don't become just status quo. Strive and pray, "Lord, let me grasp anew the wonders and a new aspect, deeper truths of the glories that I am saved by grace through faith."

I. in our outline and we'll for sure make this a two-parter. I'm not going to keep you long, especially when the choir starts their long rehearsals on Sunday. That's not next Sunday, is it? When does that start? Pam, do you know? Next Sunday afternoon. Okay. We'll try to be very mindful. I know those of you who sing in the choir, the great majority of you are doing other stuff too in the church family and there is a lot on you and I don't think we accomplish anything by me trying to prove a point and keeping you long on Sunday night. So I'll try, I will genuinely try to remember to give you a little 10, 15 minutes back, all right?

I don't think you can appreciate how what we said in this message and others certainly, others with bigger better voices than mine, but what was being said, how it shook up a lot of folks to the core of their being ministerially speaking. I mean, it was their bread and butter. We really unapologetically purposed to expose the foundations much of modern evangelism was built upon and rip those foundations off, rip them away so that modern evangelicalism was left sitting on nothing but salvation is by grace through faith.

I told you a couple of times lately about reading about a conference, a big big conference sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention on new techniques to get people baptized. I mean, folks, that's just pathetic beyond compare. I don't care who they are. I don't care if they are good folks and I do love and appreciate these folks. God help us that we have grown in the church where we unashamedly promote gimmicks and techniques to get people in the baptismal water. What people need to get in the baptismal water is the regeneration of the Spirit of God in their hearts. They need to be born again by the power of the Spirit. And really when you get down to it, the final thing is: do you believe in the Holy Spirit? Do you believe the Spirit of God still uses the Gospel of Jesus Christ to change men, women, boys and girls, senior adults, young adults, whoever, to change their lives? It's not men's creativity, cleverness and gimmicks, it is the Spirit of God, and if he doesn't do it, then I'm out of business. Let's lock this thing up and forget it as a joke. I'm not going to run around and look around and search around and go to conferences and seminars to find clever things and "techniques" to in effect manipulate people into the baptistery so that we can feel good about our numbers and our growth.

So we purposed to try to expose some things. Now, I want to be real balanced here and very careful because there are men that I love and respect who practice some of these things and I believe with all of my heart they never intended to get where it was. They went through a door and adopted techniques to help God save people. That sounds bad, doesn't it? Do you know why it sounds bad to help God save people? Because it is bad to try to help God save people. I mean, God saves people his way by his power, but I believe there are very good men that I respect who use to some degree some of these techniques and God did save people but not because of their techniques. So be careful just categorizing everybody under a broad tent of they were all worldly, they are all ungodly. I don't mean that and we used many of these techniques and approaches for many years and I'll be honest with you, I was converted at 19 and I did not grow up in church and so when I came into Baptist life, I was taught these things and I embraced them but I was always troubled by a lot of it. But I was ignorant. I didn't know and as I learned and grew, I had two things I always had to be very sure of before I came to you

saying, "We've got to change some things." 1. I had to be very very sure that it was biblical, and that is not just Jeff Noblit's interpretation. God forbid you just get my interpretation. That doesn't matter. But looking at church history, I would find a great host of godly men from centuries before us who held the same view of what the Bible was teaching in those areas. So when we found a long line of trustworthy and godly men and pastors and theologians who said, "This is what the text teaches," then I would say, "If we're not believing it that way, we're wrong." Secondly, I would look at the techniques, not just the doctrines but the techniques and I found that really if you go past about 100 years or so in Baptist life and in evangelical life, you find – now listen to me – almost none, zero, of the modern techniques men used or parachurch groups and organizations use, to "get people saved."

So you ask yourself: now, how did we have these great awakenings, these fantastic revivals where hundreds of thousands and even millions of people were added to the churches and they didn't have these techniques that we all think have been around since the Apostle Paul? But they haven't been around since the Apostle Paul and that's what reading church history will do for you, it helps you examine, have we come up with a bunch of stuff that's really not sound? And here's the final analysis on this thing: Baptists and evangelicals in general have multiplied millions of people who have gone through the gimmicks and the motions who don't even give any slight appearance of having experienced the new birth. They do not give the slightest appearance of loving the Scriptures and loving Christ and loving his church, and yet they went through the clever creative gimmicks that men created and they have been told they've been genuinely converted, they have been told they've been saved from eternal loss and they are running around out there in the world living for the world, living like the world and loving the world, because some pastor, some evangelist said, "You did the deal." That's a phrase that was used a lot, "You did the deal." So I suppose some of you can but it's hard to appreciate how far our own congregation has come and how far many congregations have come to re-examine a lot of these things and stop counting baptismal numbers and start counting the people who look like disciples of Jesus Christ as true members of God's church.

Well, I. Faith is the gift of God. Faith is the gift of God, a long established and held doctrine by Baptists and evangelicals alike. "For by grace," he says in verse 8, "you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." The word "gift" the apostle employs here was just another common word from the common street Greek language of the day. It was used for giving a gift, either gifts from one person to another person, or a gift God would give to people.

So it's a gift but the question is: what's a gift? Well, the context is, "For by grace you are saved through faith; that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Is it grace that is the gift of God? Or is it faith that is the gift of God? And I think really the answer is neither specifically. The best understanding is that the whole of salvation is a gift from God and that includes the grace and the faith. As a matter of fact, how could it even be grace? If it's all of grace, then it's all a gift. You can't make it something else and keep holding to the doctrines of grace. It's all the gift of God.

Faith is the capacity to understand and feel and act on the message of Jesus Christ, and this capacity to understand, to feel and to respond to the message of Jesus Christ, is a gift God gives us when he gives us the new birth, and believing that both grace and faith is the gift of God, makes the point of the context because if you start as we did years ago, and as I'm doing again now to some degree, if you started chapter 1, verse 1, you are just awash in a mighty ocean of sovereign grace. You just can't even swim out of it. We are just drowning in it. So it would be kind of, well, it would be contextually inconsistent for Paul to all of a sudden jump and say, "Now the grace was a gift, but now you have to have the inherited virtue to believe that it's wise and good to believe on Jesus Christ." It's grace that you get the opportunity but you have to have some sort of inherent disposition superior to others whereby you were smart enough and wise enough to put your faith in Jesus Christ. It just smacks of error, doesn't it? It just smacks of pride and elitism. So it would really would rob the context of all that Paul has been saying and it really makes the passage flow perfectly and freely with all that he's taught so far to include and conclude all of salvation, grace and faith, is the gift of God.

Let's use some other texts to back this up to some degree. Acts 3:16, "And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know," and look at this, "and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all." So we ask ourselves: what does that phrase mean there, the faith which comes through him, that's through Christ? A. T. Robertson is the standardbearer for Greek scholarship in evangelical life for many many years and he says in this verse, "The phrase 'faith which comes through Him' means Jesus is the object of our faith and Jesus is the source of our faith." Did you get that? He's the one we place our faith in but he is the one who gives us the capacity to have faith to start with. He's the object and he's the source. Now, I didn't say that, A. T. Robertson said that.

Philippians 1:29, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." So writing to the church at Philippi, he is wanting these Christians to understand something and it's almost like Paul says, "You know it's a," as a matter of fact, the word "granted" is the same root word as "grace." You've been given this divine favor you didn't earn, work for or merit, it wasn't in you, you didn't have this predisposed elite capacity to believe on Jesus that others don't have. You have been granted, it's been a grace to you, that you have believed on Jesus Christ. It's almost like he says, "But of course you know that." It's almost like Paul is saying, "That's been well established. You understand that truth but," he said, "I want you to understand something else: also God's gift and grace to you is that you get to suffer for his sake while living in this world." So it's a strong clear teaching that if you have believed on Christ, it came first as the gift of God; it was granted as a gift to you. I mean, it's clear, it's plain, it's simple.

2 Peter 1:1, "Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ." Now, when he says there in that phrase, "to those who have received a faith," that phrase can mean obtaining by divine will. It means a sovereign God gave you that capacity to believe on Jesus Christ and then what he's saying is it's the same kind as

we have received. In other words, there is not elitist Christians and lower down Christians. If you have believed on Jesus Christ, you've got the same grace producing or faith producing grace that the apostles got. He says, "We all got the same thing, received, that is because it's a gift from God." When you have a little boy or girl or a grandson or a granddaughter and you're praying for them, you're doing what you can, you've put them under strong biblical preaching and you've got them in a sound and solid church and you have shared the Gospel with them yourself, and then one day they come to faith in Christ, they may be eight years old or 15 or 21, I don't know what it may be, and they come to genuine saving faith in Christ, they don't get some kind of faith that is deficient and lower than yours. What Paul is saying, "If you get the free gift of saving faith, we all get the exact same kind." But the point is: how did you get it? You got it by the sovereign decree of the will of the divine one. It's a gift from God.

Now, let's go to Acts 13:48, or rather it will be on your screen, or I think it will be. "When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." There was the appointment by God and then there was faith, the belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. You can translate the word "appointed" as "designated." All who had been designated to eternal life believed. Now, it's very difficult to deny the clear implications of this text, that is, that believing faith is dependent upon one first being appointed unto eternal life. So another place where in the flow of systematic contextual teaching, if you've come to believe on Christ, God initiated the work that brought you to that place as a free gift from him.

1 Corinthians 1:26-31. He's writing to the church at Corinth and he says, "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble." He says, "Culturally speaking, look around at who God is saving and typically God is not choosing to save the high up muckety-mucks of the culture." Are you a millionaire? We've got millionaires here. Are you well-to-do? Are you a powerful person in your business or whatever? Then you ought to be really excited because God is not saving many of you guys. That's what the text is teaching. He's not saying many of those guys choose not to come to faith, that is not what Paul is saying. You can't make this text say that. He's saying God is not calling many of those kind of people. He does call some, amen? But he's not calling many of them to salvation because as the Corinthians were looking around, they thought, "Man, we're a ragtag bunch of misfits and castaways." And Paul's response to that was, "Well, that's just the kind of people God usually reaches out and saves. Those are the ones he calls to himself for salvation." A. T. Robertson, the Greek scholar again on this word "calling, for consider your calling, brethren," he says it means that your salvation is not based on your external condition but it is based on the one who has called you in his sovereign love. In other words, he doesn't say, "Consider how you believed on Jesus," no, he's letting God be the initiator and the worker here, "Consider his calling of you," is what he's saying.

Now let's go to the second word, not only does he use that word "calling," he uses verse 27, the word "chosen." "But God has chosen." Again, A. T. Robertson said this word simply means "to pick out." God has picked out "the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen," or picked out, "the weak things of the world to shame the

things," at least the world thinks, "are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has," picked out or, "chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are." Now why? He gives a reason for this in verse 29, "that no man may boast before God." He said, "God has saved you in such a way," – are you listening to your pastor this evening? You will never ever in time or eternity say, "Yes, Jesus did it all but I had a tiny tiny tiny bit of responsibility in getting myself saved." No, you did not. He said, "God has saved you in such a way to obliterate every notion of boasting. Every bit."

Verse 30, reemphasizes that principle again, "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus." By whose doing? By what you did? No, "by His doing you are in Christ, who became to us wisdom from God." He did something and all of a sudden I see Christ and his great salvation as the wisest thing I've ever considered. "Who became to us wisdom from God," and not only that, he has become my "righteousness, my sanctification, and he's my redemption, so that, just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.'" Now once again, and we could pick many many more scriptures but see the weightiness and the thoroughness of this in systematic theology, that God is the initiator and faith that saves came to you as a grace gift. Y'all remember Bill Stafford who used to preach for us off and on over the years. Bill Stafford used to preach a sermon and it was called "Your faith is really God's faith." I mean, it was God's faith and he gave it to you. You believed on Jesus because God gave you his faith. It didn't come out of you. It didn't come from you.

So we see very emphatically and repetitively that saving faith is God's gift, but also the Bible teaches very clearly your serving faith comes as a free gift. Once you are genuinely converted by faith, then you join together with believers in one of God's local churches and you begin serving in faith, trusting in faith. "I am to serve God's people in God's church and I am to serve them God's way according to the dictates of his word." That's all faith. Where do you get the capacity to humble yourself and yield to serving God God's way for God's purposes? That faith comes from God. As a matter of fact, salvation and the faith that saves you and the faith that you serve with, all is a humbling thing because it all comes from God.

A couple of verses on serving faith. Romans 12:3 in the context of spiritual gifts and spiritual gifts are given so that you might serve each other, and that's one of the great twistings and distortions of spiritual gifts is that spiritual gifts were somehow meant to bless you. Well, I'm not saying that they don't bless you, whatever gift you have, but spiritual gifts weren't given primarily for you, your spiritual gifts were given primarily for the person in the pew beside you. Your gift was given to you for the church's sake. I wasn't called to preach for me, I can study the word for me, I was called to preach for you. That gift is for you. Your gift of mercy and helps in administration and service or whatever it is, is so that you might bless the body of Christ. And how do you discipline yourself and commit yourself in the good and the bad, and the ups and the lows, and the exciting and the not exciting times to be faithful to God's church and serve? That faith to do that is a gift from God and Scripture bears out in other texts that you will know somebody is truly converted because they don't ultimately fall away. They don't get hot

and excited for a few months or a few years and serve God and then you can't find them anymore. Something keeps them. The God that saved them by faith keeps them going by faith. It doesn't mean you don't have seasons of struggle or difficulty but you don't completely fall away from God's church. The only way one can completely fall away from a healthy biblical church is if they have never known Christ to start with.

1 Corinthians 12:3, faith is listed as a spiritual gift. Some people, God just gives some in the church a special blessing of faith and they are kind of a motivator and encouragers to the rest of the body. I think it would be quite logical that God would give that to church elders, in particular the preaching elder. He would give maybe an extra gift so he can challenge and encourage others. "Let's keep going for the glory of God." But whether it's saving faith or serving faith, the Bible makes it very clear that these are gifts from God.

Now, that foundation being laid, let's do some application for where we've been in the church culture in recent years, and maybe to a good degree are still there. I mean, if they are putting out major conferences on new techniques to get baptisms, we're still in a bad bad place. And I will submit to you this ain't just a small thing, it's a huge thing. The ordinance of baptism is a holy ordinance. We're not to play with these things. We are not to treat them like some sort of sideshow carnival event in order to run people through the motions and feel good that we're doing God's work. It's like, "Poor old God. You mean God in heaven is so weak and impotent, old and feeble and senile that he needs the cleverness of men to help him do his work?" Do you believe in the Spirit? I certainly do.

But the proud flesh desires desperately to change true faith as the Bible teaches it; to distort it or you might say, to lower faith so that it is a capacity that dwells naturally in fallen men. Did you hear that? Men's proud – and by the way, pride is very very natural. Just have a child and get back with me. Pride, "Mine. I want. I will." That possessive, that controlling, that selfishness, that's all from that pride root that's common to all fallen sinners. Well, the pride root gets to considering religion and the pride root gets to understanding, well, it's this faith thing that saves, so the pride root wants to hold onto that, "Well, it's of me. I can do it. It comes out of me." It's natural in the capacity of fallen man and the theologians in this group, if you can call them theologians, would teach that man fell in the garden of Eden and Adam passed on this fallenness to all of his posterity, yet he failed but he didn't fall all the way. He at least has some virtue left whereby he out of his own natural inherited capacities can believe on Jesus Christ and be saved. Well, if that's true, then he's got something to boast about, he has something that came from him, that participated in his conversion.

Now, this is what separates the classical free-will Baptist denomination from our forefathers who became Southern Baptists. In the early part of the 19th century, there was a division among Baptist people and there were those who Baptists who didn't want to hold to the great doctrines of grace completely, they didn't want to hold to the absolute and total depravity of man, that man has no capacity naturally within himself to right himself and turn to God. So the free-will Baptist said, "No, we believe man has that capacity. We believe he's fallen but there is some good still there." But our forefathers said, "No, we hold to the absolute depravity of man and that fully and only salvation is by

grace through faith which is all the gift of God." So the free-will Baptists broke off and started their own denomination. Now, we're not saying that they don't love Jesus, we are not saying many of them are not converted and many of them are friends. I've got dear friends who are free-will Baptists but classically their denomination holds to that man didn't fall all the way when he fell. There was some goodness left.

Secondly, not only did they feel that man had some capacity left to believe, they tend to then seek to make faith a tangible physical exercise or act. There is something we do that shows we have faith and when we do that thing and when we perform that work or that exercise, then that's where saving faith saves us. Now, of course the classic example for centuries and centuries is the doctrines of the Roman Catholic system. Akin to that would be the Episcopalian system of religion. Again, I love Catholic friends and I've got good friends who are and I think some of them have come to know Christ, but I'm talking about their church's established doctrine is based on a tangible work of faith whereby you are obtaining salvation. For example, we would call Roman Catholics and Episcopalians sacramentalists. By sacramentalists we mean that they teach the actions of partaking of the sacraments is the exercise of faith that saves you. Roman Catholics have the sacrament of baptism, the sacrament of communion, the sacrament of holy matrimony, the sacrament of confirmation, the sacrament of reconciliation and penance, the sacrament of anointing the sick, and the sacrament of the holy orders or ordination. So they hold over people, "You've got to stay in the church. You've got to be active in the administration by the priest in these sacraments, and when you do these rites and rituals, if you do them faithfully with the priests, then you can have a pretty good feeling that you're not going to spend long in purgatory." And in some cultures, there is a great manipulation on the people to give great amounts of money to the church so that they can get their loved ones prayed out and bought out of purgatory so they won't have to stay there very long.

The Church of Christ denomination practices in principle the same type of empty rituals. The Church of Christ would say, "When your faith leads you to baptism and to the Lord's supper and keeping good works, then that is a faith that saves you." It's kind of a twisting and a play on words because it's really not the faith they're emphasizing, it's the work they are emphasizing. I mean, really and, boy, they hate for you to say this but in principle the Church of Christ and the Catholics are just alike. They teach different sacraments but the reality is sacraments. Rituals are works by which we are saved. I remember having a dear Church of Christ friend when I was in college, came to church here with me, and I believe he loved the Lord and he knew the Lord and he said, "Well, our church would teach that in baptismal regeneration, in the sense that when you are baptized in the right church, that is, then that is the point of faith that you're saved. If your faith doesn't get you into baptism, then it's not faith that saves." So your justification hinges on doing the work, the action, the exercise of believers' baptism.

Thirdly, evangelicals and Baptists have now proven that they are very prone to fall into the same grievous error of turning faith into an exercise or a work therefore in reality in evangelical and Baptist life, we've turned saving faith into a sacrament, something we do. Some practices seem very prone to foster and promote this error and some of these things

should be downright denounced as heresy. And you can really trace the beginnings of this back to Charles Finney, and I forget the man's name but there was a Baptist contemporary of Charles Finney that, I think they called it the new order. I'll have to check that. I didn't do any historical research for this sermon tonight. But in this new order, they came up with an idea whereby they were sure they could get more people saved and sure enough, when they employed these new techniques, the numbers went up astronomically. Do you know what the new technique was? Walking to the front because nobody had ever done it before that. It's about 125-150 years old. People didn't do it. I guess all those people before that didn't go to heaven which to you and I today is absurd. And again, I think they were good men who had good motives and they were not wanting to lead us astray, they were wanting to see people converted but once you start – look – once you add to the Scripture, it just never stops; then more and more foolish, superstitious, ridiculous stuff begins to be added.

There is a particular phrase that I never hear it anymore but in my early ministry and in my early years as a Christian I heard it a lot when I would witness to somebody, when I would ask somebody, maybe in the church, "Do you know you are converted, do you know you are saved?" And they would say, "I did that." Have you heard that? "Well, I did that. Well, preacher, I did that." What they meant, they were somewhere and some evangelist or some pastor said, "Do this," and they did that. Some preacher said, "Raise your hand," and they did that. "Walk over here," and they did that. "Pray this prayer," and they did that. To which I would respond, "But did God do anything?" You can do a ton of religious stuff in a meeting and not be born again. But that phrase, "I did that," and I want to say, "You did what?" Because once you start down that funnel, it's hard to get back up to the truth.

We experienced here at Grace Life Church in the early years, one evangelist after another evangelist would come and they would find a faulty or deficient aspect of what we were calling salvation, then they would put a new twist on it and say, "Well, did you believe this or did you know that or did you do it this way?" And so a whole bunch of us would walk down to the front again during that meeting and add that little nuance to the whole package of works salvation, and so we just kept baptizing these people over and over again. It troubled my heart. I knew things were not right. I'm ashamed, I'm embarrassed, I'm sorry that I led you to do that, but all I can do is repent and ask for forgiveness and grow and mature as all of us are. And what it was, it was just one continuing evolution, if you will, of sacramentalism in Baptist life. Like a new priest came to town and said, "Oh yes, you've got to take the Mass, but now when you take the Mass, you have to do this first and you've got to do that and you've got to do that, and then you really can know that you're getting saved." And Baptist preachers or evangelists would come and say, "Yeah, if you'll do this, yeah, but you didn't do this. Yeah, but you didn't quite say it this way, but you didn't understand it that way." And many of us very sincerely were like dogs chasing our tails, "Well, how do I know if I'm saved?"

"I did that." First of all, if you did anything to get saved, you're not saved. "I prayed that prayer. I went to the pastor. I walked down the aisle. I came to the altar." Can I stop there for just a moment? And I know good sincere people use that phrase and I am, again, not

slamming you for this but, brothers and sisters, we have no altar in this church. There has been no true altar since Jesus died on Calvary's altar. Now listen to me, and the Bible writers said, "Once for all, he paid our redemption price on that altar 2,000 years ago on a hill outside of Calvary." The altar came from Catholic heresy. They have altars in every one of their buildings because you've got to come down there and receive the sacrifice of the Mass whereby Jesus dies for you all over again. Friends, Jesus died once and for all, the Scripture says. The just for the unjust. We do not have an altar. Never will. Never could. Now, in a sense, you can turn that pew into an altar, you can turn that bathroom out there into an altar, you can turn your car seat into an altar, you can go out in the woods behind a tree and make it an altar because grace is free and wherever a man will humble himself and repent and place his faith in Christ, Christ will save him. He is not bound to the dictates of the organizations of man-made religion and the priestcraft of the heresies coming out of Roman Catholicism. And we must not make our Baptist experience just a mild form of Roman Catholicism, as if somehow if you're in this church building and you come to these steps you get more saved than if you just believed on Jesus anywhere else. Can I get an amen this evening? Do you understand what I'm talking about? Do you understand how that can sincerely be taught by good men but how prone to perversion and misuse it became?

Folks, listen to your pastor: millions of people are trusting that they walked to the front of a building instead of coming to Jesus by faith, and that's why in the entire New Testament you see not the tiniest trace of a structured or organized technique to get men saved. It's not there. It's not there. Our Baptist forefathers had no concept of doing any of these things. Church history existed for 1,800 years without doing these things and a whole lot of people got saved and went to heaven. Every time you try to help God out with extra-biblical methods, you ruin God's work.

"I prayed that prayer. I walked to the front. I walked down the aisle. I came to the altar. I went to the mourner's bench. I went to the inquirer's room. I filled out the card. I did that." Then we further muddy the poor soul's heart, mind and understanding by asking them, "Well, did you mean it? Did you mean it?" If you meant, "Well, I walked down the aisle to get saved," it doesn't matter how much you meant it. If you meant, "I'm trusting that I repeated a prayer, that was my sacramental work. I'm trusting in that prayer," then even if you meant that I really believe in the prayer, you're not saved. It's belief in Christ that saves, not belief in the work that men have invented to try to help you get saved. All this is making saving faith into a work. It's making it into a worthless sacramentalism and sacramentalism in evangelical or in Baptist clothing is still just as wrong and just as deadly.

Ephesians 2:8 and 9 clearly and plainly states: you are saved by grace through faith and that not of yourselves. It's the gift of God. As you've heard me say before, it is not your prayer that saves you, it is Christ that saves you. Now certainly the moment saving faith arises in your heart, you pray, you confess your sins, you ask Christ to come into your life or you may say 1,001 things to Christ. I was in my car driving back to college and nobody ever told me to ask Jesus to come into my heart so I didn't ask him. I had never heard it. I didn't go to church. How could I have gotten saved? Because God saves his

children, not the church and not techniques. Now, the church is his primary means and preaching the Gospel is his primary means but not the techniques and the additives that we add on. They just cloud the picture for people.

"That not of yourselves." Did you pray that prayer? Did you mean it? All of these things and one builds upon the other until people are walking around with a system of steps in their mind and they keep reminding, "Did I check them off? Did I check them all off? Did I get them all checked off?" Instead of glorying in the glories of the full and free salvation offered by Jesus Christ.

Romans 4:4, "Now to the one who works," the work of praying a prayer, the work of coming to a priest, the work of coming to an altar, the work of walking down front, whatever work you were told to do to "get saved." "Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due." In other words, if in any capacity you're saying, "Well, I did this and so God has promised to save me," then God is in debt to you. That's what that verse is saying. You're implying, "Well, God owes me a debt. I did my part, he's got to do his." I used to have a dear friend in the ministry, he would use the phrase, "Did you do the deal? Did you do the deal?" My friend, I'm going to tell you, it's not a deal. It's not a deal. It's done. You just received it as a free gift. It's all of him and none of us.

Now, it is mysterious and I think that's the thing that our flesh hates. That's the thing that men that are control freaks, men that want to make it happen, and men that want to build something big, they've got to get their hands on it. Well, here's what God is saying, "You do what I told you to do and get your hands off of it and let the mystery be there." We dare not try to remove the mystery so that we bring down this glorious saving power of God down to something that we can grasp and we can possess in our simple, limited, very finite understanding. In fact, Jesus didn't even slightly try to remove the mystery. You know where I'm going, don't you? John 3. Nicodemus comes to Jesus and says, "I want eternal life." And Jesus said, "Well, kneel down right here and pray this prayer." Jesus said, "Well, walk over here to the magic spot. If you walk down to the magic spot you get saved." Poor Jesus, he had come to none of our soul winners training courses. He said, "Nicodemus, if you want to be saved, you've got to be born again. You've got to be born of the Spirit of God," in effect he says. And Nicodemus, a brilliant man of his day said, "I've got to go back into my mother's womb?" He said, "No, we're talking about being born of the Spirit."

And Jesus said, "Nicodemus, as a matter of fact it's like the wind." And to this day men can't understand or predict the wind. Have you ever thought about it? What is wind? What is that stuff? Now, if you're a bow hunter like I am, the wind direction is everything because deer can smell very very good. And all these brilliant scientists give us these little weather apps and they tell you what direction the wind is going to be every hour. Never right. Never never right. I'm sitting there, the deer walks out 30 yards in front of me, starts stomping and snorting and blowing and runs off. Why? It smelled me. Because we don't know anything about the wind, it's a mystery. We can kind of know some general stuff and Jesus said, "So is every one who is born of the Spirit."

And that's where we need to stop right there. Not stop in my message, though I'm about through, but stop in what we do to get them converted. Urge them to come to Jesus. Tell them to come to Jesus. Tell them to pray. Tell them to call on the Lord. Tell them to trust in him but don't tell them, "If you do this, then you are saved." That's not biblical. Say, "If you have saving faith, you are saved and the Bible shows us how to examine ourselves to see based on a biblical definition that regeneration or the new birth has actually happened in your heart. And we'll work on that together and open the Bible and you can tell me from what the Bible says if that's what you're experiencing. But I'm not going to give you anything other than the Scriptures." Folks, I'm responsible for your eternal soul. I'm not giving you some Jeff Noblit gimmick to make the church look better and the numbers look better. I want you in heaven. I want you to know Christ has saved you based on the definitive description of what saving faith looks like from the word of God.

So Jesus didn't remove the mystery and neither do we. I have no idea when I preach whether this one over here, this one over here, this one over here, which one might come to Christ. It's a mystery. I have no idea. But I do know this, I am instructed to urge, plead, beg, pray for, command, exhort you to believe on Jesus Christ, and if you have, then the Bible says the power of God has come into your heart. You say, "Well, they've got to do something." Brothers, if the power of God has come into your heart, you'll do something. You mean Jesus saves you and he comes in and gives you such weak weak weak weak power that if we don't just some kind of manipulative, coercive technique, gimmick to get you to do something, you're not saved? The power of God comes into you, you're not just...I'm not worried about you walking down the aisle, I want you to walk for Jesus for the next 50 years. Walking an aisle in a church where everybody loves you and want you to walk down the aisle is nothing. We've learned we can get people to walk down aisles, it's getting people to love Jesus from their hearts that we can't do because only God can do that, amen?

It's a mystery. You know, it's amazing, do you know how many Baptist leaders would really hate what I just preached? And then lo and behold, the presidents of all the Southern Baptist Seminaries, maybe barring one, hold to these same doctrines today. The overwhelming majority of the professors now in the graduate schools of theology that come into the Southern Baptist Convention now hold to these doctrines but they weren't holding to them when we first started teaching and preaching. Not that they learned it from me, they learned it from the same place everybody does: the book and history where men held tenaciously to these truths.

Do you remember the story of Major D. W. Whittle? I told you before about Mr. Whittle. He was a Civil War veteran. He went off to fight for the Union and his mom was a godly devout lady and in his own testimony he said, "I left with her weeping about my soul and she gave me a New Testament and I kept it in my coat pocket." He said, "I was knocked out in battle and when I woke up from being knocked out, my arm was cut off and I was laying there in the medic clinic," or wherever he was, "and I wanted something to read so I began to read the New Testament." He said, "I read and read and read and it became

real clear to me about a man's sin and a man's need of a Savior, and it became real clear to me that Christ was the only way a man could be forgiven, a man could be saved."

One night he said, "I was laying there and I had been reading the Bible and a nurse came over, a male nurse came over and said, 'Please help me. There is a 17-year-old boy over here and he's dying and he's crying out in tears, "Somebody help me find God! Somebody help me know forgiveness! I know. I used to go to church with my parents but I went off into the war. I have drank, I have been with women, I have gambled. I am an evil man.'"" Crying, and the nurse said to Mr. Whittle, "Can you please go help him?" He said, "I can't help him. I'm a sinner too. I don't know how to help him." And the nurse said, "Well, I've watched you read the Bible and you've never said a curse word while you are in here like all the other men who have been in our clinics and I thought you were a Christian." He said, "No, I've just been reading the Bible my mom gave me."

But he thought, "I need to go and talk to the boy." So Mr. Whittle goes over to the boy's deathbed and the boy asked him, he said, "Would you tell me about forgiveness? I need to know that God will forgive me." And Whittle said, "I fell to my knees right there. Instead of witnessing to him, I cried out to God as a sinner and asked Christ to save me and forgive me." He said, "When I got up from praying, I knew the joy that only the Spirit of God can give a man because it was in my heart." And he said, "The little boy had died." He said, "But there seemed to be a blessed peace in his countenance and I just hope and trust that he too was crying out with me to believe on Jesus Christ."

He became a preacher of some note after he recovered, and he wrote these words,

"I know not why God's wondrous grace
To me He hath made known,
Nor why, unworthy, Christ in love
Redeemed me for His own.

"I know not how this saving faith
To me He did impart,
Nor how believing in His Word
Wrought peace within my heart.

"I know not how the Spirit moves,
Convincing men of sin,
Revealing Jesus through the Word,
Creating faith in Him.

"But 'I know Whom I have believed,
And am persuaded that He is able
To keep that which I've committed
Unto Him against that day.'"

That's a great song of the sovereignty of God in saving men's souls and Baptists sing it all the time and it would stand right up until now the truth that song is about. They ought to take it out of their hymnal if they're not going to preach the truth about it. He said, "We don't know how it works but we know" – listen how he says this "I know not why God's wondrous grace to me He hath made known." I don't know why he picked me out and gave me the grace and favor he did. "Nor why, unworthy, Christ in love would redeem me for His own. I know not how this saving faith to me He did impart." Folks, that's sovereign grace. Every Arminian Baptist in America sings that. Do you know why? Because if you go back to this error, men just believe those truths. It was much much more common.

Well, that's all I've got to say. That's part 1 of "Saved By Grace Through Faith." Now my question to you is: are you? Are you? You say, "Pastor, you've tried to jerk the props out from under me. I don't have anything to stand on." And I'm thrilled about it. I want to leave you desperately dependent on Jesus Christ. I want to leave you wholly and radically clinging only to a bloody cross and the one who expired there for your sins. Mama's faith, daddy's faith, techniques, motions, guidance, instructions at the end of evangelism crusades, I want to rip every bit of that out and I want to leave you shipwrecked on God and stranded on omnipotence. Spurgeon said one day at the end of his sermon, he said, "You'd love for me to give you something to do. Your flesh would love it. If I told you to go and do this, go stick your finger in your left ear and stand on one foot," he said, "you'd love it. You want to do something whereby you feel like, I did that, but I'm going to leave you with Christ." But I promise you, I promise you, whoever believes in him will not be disappointed. You'll say, "I am a wretch. I have no hope in me. I cannot convert my soul. I cannot save me but, Christ, I look to you and you alone." If I visit you on your deathbed, you want to know how to break your pastor's heart? Say, "I did that." Here's what I want you to say, "Pastor, I know him. I know him. I know him and he is faithful to save me and keep me safe and to take me to the other side." And then your pastor's heart will rejoice.

Let's pray together.