

Saved By Grace Through Faith p2

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Bible Text: Ephesians 2:8-9
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Take your Bible and go to Ephesians 2. God's love for you and God's love for all of us if we are his children is so deep and so strong that he will indeed take you on the painful pilgrimage of weaning us off of temporal worldly pleasures because he loves us too deeply to allow us to rob ourselves of his pleasures and that's part of the pilgrimage and that's part of the journey.

Ephesians, we have been looking at the wonders and the glories of grace and we come to Ephesians 2:8-9 and we've already talked about this at some length and I'll finish it up tonight but let's read it together in Ephesians 2:8-9. He says,

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.

Now, when you find that from your heart you are learning to love and treasure Christ and the great wisdom of the Father in the plan of salvation to save your wretched soul, that's faith. Nothing in the natural realm does that. That's faith but where did that faith come from? When you find that the Scriptures, reading the Scriptures, studying the Scriptures, hearing the Bible taught or preached, warms your heart and illumines your understanding and you are drawn to it, that's faith. Where did that faith come from? Is it something you ate? Was it something you decided to do last week that turned a switch on in your heart when you find that from your heart, you find a love for other Christians, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ? Now, I'm not talking about a religious organization maybe called Methodist or Presbyterian or Baptist or whatever, I mean a love for other truly regenerate, redeemed Christians, there is just something deep there and you are attracted to them. That's faith. Where did that come from? Well, the apostle makes it very clear, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." And that's where we come to in our outline this morning as we are talking about this salvation by grace through faith and that is I. was it was the gift of God, II. is faith is the assurance of salvation. So often we think, "Well, I believe that faith saves me, now I'm looking for assurance." No, you're upside down. Faith is the assurance of salvation. That is, the possession of faith is the assurance that God has saved you and he has placed his Spirit in you for those new desires, those new affections would not be there had God not changed you and made you one of his own. That faith is the assurance you are God's.

Let me give you two simple points. Let me organize it this way, first of all: the presence of faith. The presence of faith. There is a blind man. This man has been blind from birth. He has never been able to see anything but he has two beautiful lovely little girls and he visits a renowned surgeon who discovered a type of surgery that could restore his eyesight. I say restore it, give him eyesight, he never had it to restore. And not just even fair eyesight but good, normal, natural eyesight. The surgeon agreed to perform the surgery on this man free of charge and he even went out and bought two beautiful dresses to put on those little girls so that when he took the bandages off he would see those beautiful girls in those new dresses. The surgery was performed. The day came when the eyes were completely healed. The surgeon had the little girls in the room, beautiful little dresses on, and the surgeon took the bandages off of his eyes and his eyes receiving light produced the image that was before him and for the first time he could see and he saw those beautiful little girls. Now, this was not his work, it was all the work of the surgeon. His seeing was the natural product of the surgeon's work and his seeing was the assurance that the surgeon had performed the work successfully. When you begin to see and love Christ, when you begin to grasp and love and enjoy the Scriptures, when you have a heart of love for the Christians, that's not something of faith that you perform to be saved, that's the presence of faith that assures you the work has been done. It's an assurance of salvation. Jesus is indeed the great Physician who causes this great work of salvation to be performed in your heart.

Let's say your heart stopped beating, your lungs stopped breathing, and someone comes along and they graciously and passionately give you artificial resuscitation. You come back. When you take your first breath, that's faith and that's what God does to us. We are completely dead. He performs a work on us, a spiritual work. It's outside of the five senses, it's outside of the realms of the natural physical universe but that first breath, spiritually speaking, is the breath of faith. Faith is the evidence that you are one of God's saved ones. He resuscitated you. John 15:26, he said, "When the Spirit comes, He will bear witness of Me," and all that is about him. So when the Spirit lives within you, there is this bearing witness that Christ is the only way of salvation; that the word of God is true; that the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is the most important entity on earth, and that love and devotion to those things, and other things of course, is the witness that God's Spirit is bearing in you.

Here's a verse that is a good cross-reference here, 1 John 5:10, "The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony," or you could say the witness, "in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar." In other words, the Spirit is bearing witness that Christ is the truth and Christ is the way of salvation. If you deny that, you're calling the Holy Spirit a liar because he's saying Jesus is the only way to be saved. But to the first phrase of that verse, "The one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself," the point being the witness inside of you, the Spirit inside of you that causes you to look to Christ, that enables you to place faith in Christ, assures you that you are one who belongs to God. Faith is indeed the assurance of salvation.

Now, you might be one that says, "Well, wait a minute. I'm responsible for my own faith." Well, in a sense you can say that. I'm not saying that's categorically in error but notice again the context of where we're coming from. Remember chapter 2, verses 1 and 2, you being "dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in those," this is what we are, this is by nature who we were, "we all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind," and because that's who we are we "were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." So you're saying that's the kind of fallen wicked creature that you are but you somehow had the capacity to do the most wondrous and virtuous thing in the universe, trust and believe on Jesus Christ? That that somehow came out of you? No, it's in you because God placed it in you. The faith is the gift of God, by grace are you saved through faith, that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. So when one is a believing one, that faith reveals that the witness one, the witnessing of the Holy Spirit is in you and as he is in you, what he's bearing witness of is the truth of Christ and the truth of the ways of Christ as revealed in the holy Scriptures.

So what we look for and what you heard from the baptismal waters this morning was people who bore witness that, "This faith is now in me and that is the assurance of my salvation." Friend, don't trust anything but the witness borne within your heart by the Holy Spirit of God. So let me challenge you on this Sunday night: do you love the Scriptures? Now, I know what some of you are going to do, you're going to over analyze those things, "I don't love him like I ought to." Yes, but you're drawn back to them. I like what the old-timers would say when they would say there is at least the germ of a new love and devotion to Scriptures. Why are you here on Sunday night? Yes, you could be a lost, fallen, flesh-filled legalist who is just a Pharisee and checking off, "I go to church all the time." That's possible but if you're here and something in your heart says, "Yes, I want this and, yes, I need this and, yes, I'm drawn to this," that's the germ of the Spirit witnessing in your heart and that is the assurance of salvation. Why would you come out of all the other things the world offers for you to give your time and energy and efforts to to be a part of this collectivity called Grace Life Church and want to serve here and be devoted here and follow the Lord here and honor his name through the ministry of this local church? Only the Spirit of God can do that.

Now, sure it can be faked for a while, we know there are always going to be false professors, but over time if the Spirit hasn't done it, you will fall away. It will get old to you and you'll say, "Where is the new fad? Where is the neatest thing going on out there? I've got to find it. This is getting dull to me." But do you know what I found since I was converted at age 19 driving my car back to Middle Tennessee State University? I've never grown tired of the truth of God. I've never grown tired of the things of Christ. As a matter of fact, when I pull myself away for a while and I get off my workboots as far as studying the word of God and just put on my slippers and read lightly, there is something that wells up in me that says, "I've got to get back into the meat of the glories of the doctrines of grace."

Who did that? Who made me different like that? God did that and there is so much mystery in that. One of the most abominable things that we evangelicals have done in the last century, century and a half, is try to remove the mystery and get it down to a little formula that we can manipulate, a check off thing, a hoop jump thing. We talked about that a lot in the last message on this. But faith is the assurance of our salvation. The very presence that there is a faith in our lives that is Christ-ward and God-ward and loves the saints and loves the word is evidence that we are God's child. I wouldn't give you a plug nickel for every prayer you've ever prayed, for every aisle you walked down, for every ordinance you've performed or every sacrament you've attended to. It doesn't matter to me. I don't care about how ethically or morally you've cleaned up your life though that will be there if you're converted. That's not what I'm looking for. I'm looking for the witness of the Spirit in your heart.

Well, faith is the assurance of salvation, i.e. just the presence of faith. Let's talk for just a moment about what I call, you've heard this many times before, the amen of the Spirit. The amen of faith. Romans 8:16 tells us that the Spirit bears witness, the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. My newborn spirit when God changes me, there is gladly a communion, a bearing witness back and forth with the Holy Spirit of God. Now before that, there's a resistance, there's a pushing away. Now, you can be a very good Baptist and very religious and be completely foreign to God and fallen and unsaved. You can learn to do things in the flesh and counterfeit. Now, that's why at the great judgment the Lord Jesus is going to point out so many who are there who profess to know him but he says, "Depart from me, I never knew you." Some of them will say, "We performed miracles in your name." "Depart from me, I never knew you. You never had the witness of the Spirit in your life. You just learned to manipulate the things of religion and put on a counterfeiting cosmetic religious veneer in your life." But it is the Spirit of God that bears witness with my newborn spirit and he gives me an amen. When I hear the things of Christ, when I hear the doctrines of Christ, when I'm stretched out of my carnal propensities to make God's truth for my logic and the word of God stretches me out of those, I'm uncomfortable but something in me says, "Amen! That's truth!" When I'm convicted of sin and I am caused to deal with an attitude or a disposition or a jealousy or an envy or whatever it might be and I'm uncomfortable, something deep in me says, "Amen! That's the truth!" It's the amen of the Spirit of God living within us.

This activity within our hearts is the only true assurance of salvation. Assurance of salvation is not in the works of Jewish legalism. This is what Paul would have said to the Ephesians. To us today we would say the assurance of salvation is not in the systems of Roman Catholicism, it's not in checking off the works of the Church of Christ denomination, and it's not in some sort of system that evangelicals or Baptists have put together. The assurance of salvation is not, "Well, I prayed that prayer." The assurance of salvation is not, "I walked that aisle." The assurance of salvation is not, "I went to the front and took the pastor's hand." The assurance of salvation is not, "I filled out the decision card." But this bearing witness activity is the faith that has been given to us as a free gift at regeneration. That's where we put our confidence. Don't you dare go to the judgment bar of God and say, "Brother Jeff told me if I did this I would be saved." You

go to the judgment bar of God and say, "I plead in faith that the blood of Christ has cleansed me and I have no other hope. No other hope. It's not something I did, it's something that happened in my heart and my faith is in Christ."

So is there anything a truly saved person can claim or hold to that he or she did that made them saved? Well, no. Absolutely not. Absolutely nothing. That's why he concludes in verse 9, let's just read verse 8 again for the flow of the context, "For by grace you have been saved," that's past tense; you are now in the status of the saved, "you have now been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves," you can say, "it's all the gift of God." Verse 9, "not as a result of works," or your works or anything you've performed or merited, it's not a result of any of that. Why? "So that no one may boast." God says, "I have so totally and completely and absolutely saved you by my own means and my own power, there's not a trace of foundation of boasting in you." You can't boast about having performed anything. We are stripped of all boasting. That's hard for some people because some of you have accomplished a lot of stuff. You've achieved some significant things in the human realm but you've achieved nothing before God. There is no grounds for boasting when it's of grace and the grace and the faith that saves us is the free gift of God.

A couple of good cross-references here. Romans 4:2-3. Paul arguing is salvation by works or by the gifts of grace says, "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.'" Romans 3:26-27, "for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith." And this is something that might be one of the most important things I'll ever say and that is that we are saved not by faith, we are saved by the object of our faith. You've got to grasp that. We are not saved by faith, we are saved by the object of our faith. Faith is the channel but it is Christ who saves you. Quit analyzing your faith and adore Jesus. Quit dissecting your faith and think on him. Look to him. "Well, pastor, I did this, did I do that right?" I don't care about that. Look at Christ.

As I told you in my earlier sermon here, oh my goodness, on your deathbed if I happen to be there and I have been by many of them and you're able to talk, I don't want you to say, "Pastor, I did this. Pastor, I did that." I want you to say, "Pastor, I know him." And I'll say, "Amen. That's what I preached my guts out for for all those years that you might know him." I want to so absolutely unequivocally strip you bare of everything but Christ and him crucified. I don't want you to have one tiny relic of systematic structural things and performances and merits and activities and rites or rituals or sacraments or ordinances. Begone with the blasphemous nonsense! It is Christ! Christ who saves you! Isn't that wonderful? You don't have to wait for a Protestant evangelist or a Catholic priest or anyone else anywhere, anytime, anyplace. Christ is almighty to save. What an assurance. What a salvation. What a glory. What a goodness. My goodness.

We are not saved by faith, we are saved by the object of our faith. Someone may ask, "Well, did you pray this prayer this way? Did you really mean it?" "I don't know, but I

love Jesus and I'm trusting him to save me." "Well, did you walk to the front? Did you do this?" "I don't know, but I'm looking to Christ to save me." I really believe this, I believe that is why God in his providence let me grow up in a very secular and even agnostic home so I wouldn't have so much junk to unlearn to be a Gospel preacher. Some of you, you're still unpacking it. You walk out of here after I get through preaching thinking, "I know he's right but, boy, that's difficult. I just don't know. That's stretching me." It's really not difficult. It's really ABC Christianity; you're just having to dig out of a hole of error to get there. And I'm not saying I'm the end-all. I'm nothing. I'm weak, I think. I'm puny, I think. I'm not good. I really mean that. It's just that these things are so true and so foundational but they've been so radically neglected because people don't believe the Spirit of God will use the truth to build churches. They don't believe that. They'll give a kind of a head nod to this stuff and do all these other things to keep the flesh babies happy in the church. Well, I shouldn't chase that rabbit, I don't think.

It is not your faith that saves you, it is the object of your faith. Faith assures you that he has saved you but your faith is not a work that merits your salvation. Don't make your faith a work that merited salvation. That's idolatry and that's wrong. The Roman Catholic, in a figure of speech, has something to boast about. The Church of Christ, in a figure of speech, has something to boast about. At least that's what they think. They think, "We've done what is required. We performed what was asked so now God is in debt to us." That's where they are. And by the way, if you think praying your prayer saved you, then you're saying, "God is indebted to me. I did the thing. I did the deal. I performed the task. I walked to the front so God has got to save me. I did something." Then you're saying God is indebted to you. Banish the blasphemous thought. He's in debt to no man ever. He just humbles us in the dirt that he has so fully and sufficiently saved us and we can't even get ourselves lost again, he is so good at saving us and keeping us safe. Do you know why? Because if he loses one the Father gives him, he loses his reputation. He's not going to lose any of his children because he doesn't want to bear the reputation, "I couldn't get the job done." God's going to have a people to love and adore him in eternity forever and God has the exact people he's going to have there and Jesus is going to save them for the Father's glory and Jesus is not going to lose one because he said, "Of all the Father gives me, I lose not one." Jesus' reputation is on the line.

Those who are truly saved know that it's all of grace and it's all a free gift and there is no foundation anywhere of boasting before God. I've said this many times but you're not going to get to heaven one day and they're not going to say, "Praise Jesus, praise his love, praise his sovereign grace, praise his substitutionary atonement, praise him for being the guilt offering for your sin, praise him that he rose for your justification but praise you a little bit. You had the virtuous wonderful ability to believe on him and for that we'll give you a pat on the back. You get some praise too." That just is rottenness. There will be no boasting in heaven for anyone but Jesus Christ. Aren't you glad it's that way? Because if you had to get it, then you'd have to help keep it and you're not capable of either one.

Understanding this active abiding faith which may wane, may have higher moments or lower moments but it doesn't leave us alone, it doesn't let go of us, this is the assurance of salvation. This faith creates a lot of evidences and I have a sermon that I've entitled "If

you're going to die and then live, you must live before you die." That is, you must have received the imparting of new life in this life if you're going to expect to live for eternity later. And there are those evidences, none greater than a love and a trust and a devotion to Christ, and a love and trust and devotion to his word, and a love and a trust and devotion to his people. Those three are the foundations. There are others but those are foundations of evidences of this change in our hearts. So instead of believing that we have done the proper rituals or the proper works and therefore making God indebted to us, we identify these new faith affections, these new faith desires that now lives within us and we know we are saved by grace alone, and that we are completely and fully and wholly debtors to God, debtors to his love and debtors to his grace.

In closing, I bring up the name of Robert Robinson. You do know Robert Robinson? Well, perhaps you don't. He died in 1790. But you are indebted to him. When he was a teenager living in London, he mixed with a notorious gang of hoodlums, led a life of wickedness and rebellion. At the age of 17 he heard of a renowned preacher by the name of George Whitefield and Robert Robinson decided he would go and mock and scorn those deluded Methodists. Yet sitting there on that day under Whitefield's preaching, he came to faith in Jesus Christ and he was radically changed. Later he was called to preach and became the pastor of a rather large Baptist Church in Cambridge, England and despite his young age, Robinson became known as an able minister and a scholar. He wrote various theological books and several hymns and he did a lot of this at only 23 years of age. He wrote these words

"Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
Sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,
Mount of Thy redeeming love.

"Here I raise my Ebenezer;
Here by Thy great help I've come;
And I hope, by Thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home.

"Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger,
Interposed His precious blood;"

Here's the line

"O to grace how great a debtor."

That's it. "O to grace how great a debtor." Can you not just grasp, church, how wrong it is for us to analyze did we do it and not to focus on Jesus who did it? Are you with me, church? To be enamored with the rich unfathomable glories and wonders and loves and goodnesses of Jesus Christ.

"O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above."

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God," and just in case you don't get that, "not by works lest anyone," and we could amplify it, "should even think about boasting that they had a part in it." That's where Paul is coming from. Now, the challenge to you is: does the Spirit bear witness in your heart that you're one of his? If not, you must come to him. You must believe on him. You must call out to him. You must trust your whole life in eternity to him.

Let's stand together in prayer.