

Text: Ephesians 2:1-10

Title: Salvation Solely by the Grace of God

Theme: Since God has made us alive and exalted us with Christ by Grace, we can respond by bearing the fruit of salvation - good works in order to give glory to Him.

INTRODUCTION

Brothers and sisters in the Lord, many of us who have been attending church for a while know that the only way that man can be saved is by grace through faith, and not by any human merit. But the question is: was it an idea that was made up by the Reformers in order to counter the Roman Catholic? We know that salvation by grace through faith was one of the major emphases of the Reformers, since they were trying to counter the Roman Catholic understanding of believers were saved by faith and works. So, where did this idea come from?

Well, we know that the Reformers did not create this in order to make a new line of theology, it is because they only brought us back to what the Bible teaches concerning the salvation of man. In fact, Salvation by grace has been taught throughout the Bible, and there is not clearer text than what in front of us today. Here in Ephesians 2, the Apostle Paul explained to the believers in Ephesus why they needed to be saved, how they can be saved, and the purpose of their salvation. And we are going to consider the text in three sections:

1. **You were dead in sin (vv.1-3)**
2. **He gave you deliverance through Christ (vv.4-7)**
3. **Your response (Don't boast, do good works) (vv.8-10)**

I. **You were dead in sin (vv.1-3)**

Let us first consider the context.

The book of Ephesians was written to the Christians who resided in Ephesus, mainly Gentiles. We know that first century Ephesus was the richest city in the Roman Empire and it had a huge population. Luke in the book of Acts tells us that Paul brought the Gospel to Ephesus and some of the Ephesians were converted. But while the Gospel was being preached, there were also huge oppositions to the Gospel in Ephesus, mainly because Ephesus was a pagan city (home to the goddess Diana, Acts 19). In light of that, we can therefore imagine that the believers in Ephesus needed encouragement! And that was why Paul wrote the letter of Ephesians, in order to remind the Ephesians to see their place in God's plan of redemption through His Beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In chapter one, Paul reminded the Ephesians of the spiritual blessings that they inherited in Christ, and he prayed that the believers in Ephesus might know the greatness of God's power towards them. And this is where we pick up. Paul reminded the Ephesians who they were before they knew Christ, and Paul in chapter 2, began by saying that they were "dead". What does that mean?

Well, Paul here was not telling the Ephesians that they were physically dead, but Paul was saying that they were dead in their trespasses and sins. The word "dead" was only used figuratively. **What Paul was saying here was that the Ephesians were totally lost and were under the dominion of death.** In other words, **Paul was telling the Ephesians that they were spiritually dead.** They were completely cut off from God and were aliens to God because they have rejected God and rebelled against God!

But where did this spiritual deadness come from? This of course must be traced back to the Fall! When Adam, as our first federal head, violated the command of God and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 3! As a result, sin was passed down to us, just as the Lord's day 3 of Heidelberg Catechism tells us, that our depraved nature came "from the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise, for there our nature became so corrupt that we are all conceived and born in sin." You see, this was a result from the Fall. We are all by nature aliens to God, it is because of the fall of Adam, we therefore all inherited from him sin and death!

More than that, Paul also told the Ephesians that they used to follow the course of the world. He was telling them that before the Ephesians knew Christ, they used to walk in ways that were alien to God, and that their attitudes and habits were being conformed to the ways of the society. But more importantly, Paul said that they also used to follow the prince of the power of the air. What was Paul referring to? Paul was saying that they used to be enslaved by the Devil! In the New Testament, particularly in the Gospels, the Devil was often referred to as "the ruler of the demons" (Matthew 9:34) and "the prince of the world" (John 12:31). You see, this was a result of the Fall as well, the Heidelberg Catechism reminds us, that "God created man good and, in his image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness, so that he might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love him, and live with him in eternal blessedness to praise and glorify him." But, you see, instead of glorifying God, man conformed their lives and actions to the will and pleasure of Satan, and was enslaved by him. Instead of serving God, glorifying Him; man chose to disobey God, and served the Devil.

This is serious stuff, but Paul was not finished, and worse was to follow. He not only told the Ephesians they were dead in sin and were enslaved by the devil, but they were by nature children of wrath! This is a more serious issue! What Paul was saying is that they were children subject to the wrath of God, who deserve nothing but the death. This is saying that they were completely hopeless, not only dead and enslaved sin, but children devoted to destruction. Remember Romans 8:31 famously talks about how "if God is for us, who can be against us?", it brings sweet comfort to our weary soul. But here, Paul was telling us that the wrath of God is against the Ephesians!

Their inheritance as children of wrath is the burning wrath of God, which brings them nothing but eternal death. This is why Paul told the Ephesians that they needed to be saved, it is because they were not only dead in sin, but God was angry against them!

Lessons:

1. First of all, did you notice that Paul did not use the word, “sick”, but he said that they were dead? This is important. What Paul was saying is that there was no spiritual health left in them. **That is why we are not partially depraved, but we are totally depraved (or radically corrupted)**! It is because we were completely hopeless and totally incapable to draw ourselves from our former spiritual condition! We were hopeless in our sins! You see, this is where the proper understanding of our sinful nature gives us greater joy in the Gospel! It is because we don’t undermine sin! The proper understanding of love must never be separated from sin!
2. **This is telling us that when we evangelize, we must not preach love apart from sin!** Notice how Paul spent three verses talking about our sinful nature before he got into the Gospel! This is the way to preach the Gospel, not to dance around the idea of happiness or that we need Jesus to make our lives better, but that **we need Jesus to save us from our sin!** **This is the primary reason for our salvation!** This is how we should preach! Tell people about their dangerous position, and then we tell them the Good news concerning the Gospel of Christ!
3. **This was your condition and mine!** No matter how much you would like to deny, we were born in sin and we deserve wrath. That was the reason we needed to be saved! It is because we were all dead in sin and subject to God’s holy wrath. We were not sick in our sins, but we were dead. There was nothing we could have done in order to rescue ourselves from our deadness in sin. Without the supernatural intervention, we would all perish!

So, how then can sinners be saved? Bring us to our second point.

II. He gave you deliverance through Christ (vv.4-7)

Paul spent three verses talking about the condition of the sinner outside of Christ, and here, Paul introduced the Good news by saying, “but God”. **This is significant! It is because Paul was telling the Ephesians that while they could do nothing, God did the impossible!** Yes, God was angry, His wrath kindled against sinners, but **He was rich in mercy!** What Paul was saying here was absolutely profound! **It is because God is Holy, yet He is rich in mercy.** Not only so, Paul also went on and told the Ephesians that God’s mercy was also accompanied by God’s love! Paul was telling the Ephesians that the great love of God was another motivation for the salvation of sinners. Paul was telling them that while they were still dead in their trespasses and sins, the Lord God, out of His mercy and rich love, came to sinners and made them alive with Christ! But how does that work?

Well, since all sinners were dead in trespasses and sins, there was no other way by which sinners could be saved than the way of the Lord! Remember in Genesis 3:15, right after Adam and Eve had eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God said to the serpent that, *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”* This was the message of the Gospel! It was offered immediately after the Fall! And the promise of course, was referring to the Lord Jesus Christ! This was the Gospel, it was the grace of God toward mankind! It is because the Covenant of works had been violated. The way to eternal life was blocked, and God placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way in order to guard the way to the tree of life. **You see, there was no other way for man to be saved but for God’s grace to intervene. That was why Jesus had to die in order to satisfy the wrath of God! This was how the Holiness of God was reconciled with the love and mercy of God! And this, was how the wrath of God was appeased.**

But okay, we see that the wrath of God was appeased through the death of Christ, but here Paul was saying that the Ephesians were made alive? **How were they made alive? Well, it was through nothing else but Jesus’s resurrection!** This is the main point of Paul! The Ephesians were once dead, absolutely dead. Hopeless in sins, but God has made them alive with Christ through His resurrection from the dead! And this is the key here, notice Paul used the proposition, “with”, sinners were made alive with Christ! **Paul here was pointing the Ephesians to the cause of their resurrection! It was through the union between Christ and His followers. He was telling them that they were raised because the victory had already been won in Christ!** When Jesus rose from the dead, believers who are in union with Him were also raised! This is grace! This is God’s grace, brothers and sisters, this is the full manifestation of God’s grace! **A dead man cannot raise himself from the dead, but through union with Christ, even a dead man, who is subject to the wrath of God can be raised!** It was not a work accomplished by any one of us, but it was the work of God. It was God Himself who supplied the necessary condition for us to be saved! So how can you say that you have contributed to your salvation? You contributed nothing.

And more than that, sinners had not only been raised from the dead with Jesus, Paul also said that God has seated the sinners with Him in the heavenly places in Christ! What does that mean? **What Paul was saying was that sinners not only shared with Christ in His resurrection, but also made to participate with Christ in His resurrection life, in His exaltation!** This is rich theology right here! This is something that is entirely eschatological in scope, but still carries a present reflection. **This means that God has not only made sinners into believers, but He has made sinners into saints!** What an encouragement to the Christians in Ephesus! Paul was telling them that they did not need to be afraid of the power of the earth, it is because they have been given new life. They had been transferred from the dominion of darkness into the dominion of the Lord Jesus through His exaltation. This reminded them that Jesus was the source of their confidence! Jesus was far above every level of powers that they had to face. This was the source of their hope! And ultimately, Paul said that what they have gone through served as a pronouncement of the extraordinary grace of God to other saints in all eternity, for the praise of His glory! There is a purpose even if they did not see it. For the encouragement for other believers. Others may also praise God for what He has done through them. How glorious!

Lessons:

1. **Our salvation demonstrates to us the character of God!** Does that remind you of Psalm 103? “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” In the OT, though Israel was unfaithful, the Lord was still faithful to His covenant faithfulness and was generous with His grace. This is who we are as well, unfaithful, whoring after other idols, but he was merciful to us by giving us His Beloved Son!
2. **Our salvation is all of God’s work.** We contributed nothing in our salvation, even the faith in which we put in Christ was from God. The Princeton theologian Charles Hodge said, “God has made us Christians. Our faith is not from us. It is because of God that we are in Christ Jesus.”
3. Brothers and sisters in the Lord, this is saving grace! We were dead in trespasses and sins, and were children of wrath by nature, God was angry with us, but God had appeased His wrath by a lightning bolt from heaven; not in judgement but with His grace, and tender mercy! That is why our salvation is “Sola Gratia”. By grace alone. This should give you more motivation to rejoice!

III. Your response (Don't boast, do good works) (vv.8-10)

In the last few verses, Paul went on to describe the purpose of salvation. But before he did so, he once again turned the eyes of the Ephesians unto the rich grace of God. We can see here that Paul was stressing the divine initiative and activity of salvation, that Salvation was by grace alone. But Paul also added that they were saved by grace through faith. What Paul wanted to emphasize here was that salvation does not at all contain any human merit, faith was only the means by which believers receive what Christ had accomplished at the Cross. Salvation was entirely given by grace, received through faith. And in order to stress the grace of God even more, Paul further said that salvation was a gift of God, and that it could not be obtained by works. That is why Paul said that there is therefore no ground for anyone to boast! It is because God’s miraculous act of rescue from death, His wrath and slavery were all of grace.

And Paul laid out another reason why there was no ground for the Ephesians to boast. It is because believers were God’s workmanship, for good works! What does that mean? **To be God’s workmanship means that we are created by God as a new creation. It is God’s work from first to last, believers were created in Christ Jesus for good works.** Paul is saying that the good works that we do by no means give us any ground to boast. Good works are in fact the goal, the result of our salvation. In other words, they are not the cause of the basis for our salvation, but they are the fruit of our salvation!

Therefore, Paul tells the Ephesians that to do good works was the purpose of their salvation! You see, what a contrast Paul drew here! In verse 1-3, Paul told them that they were once dead in their trespasses and sins, and they used to walk following the course of the world, subjected under the slavery of Satan, they were once walking in the passions of their flesh and were subjected to the wrath of God! **But now, Paul was telling them, that they have been saved by the grace of God in Christ, they were no longer sons of disobedience, but they have become children of God by faith, and they could now walk in deeds that God had prepared beforehand, and bear the fruit of salvation!** And the first of our fruits must be to worship God! Because this is what we are created for, to sing His praises and to reflect His glory! And not only that, after we understood that we are saved by the immeasurable grace of God in Christ, does that not make you want to sing louder all the more?

Lessons:

1. **First of all, a true understanding of Grace, which is God’s unmerited favor will always provoke a life of gratitude and obedience.** Having seen the richness of God’s grace towards us, offering to us the free gift of salvation, it should stir within us gratitude and a love for him. It is because of that love that we respond with obedience.
2. **Let us boast of the great mercy of God!** Brothers and sisters, people who trust in their works think they can boast in them, but their boasting is futile. However, if we understand that salvation is not of ourselves but by grace, we can boast properly! Let us therefore, boast of the great mercy of God that was poured out on us when we least deserved it and give the Lord all the glory for their salvation. One theologian wrote, “In all that we do, the driving passion of the Christian must always be ‘Soli Deo Gloria’ To God alone be the glory” That is the purpose of our salvation! We do good works in order to bring all glory, honor and praises to the Lord God, who has saved us by offering to us His Beloved Son! What joy! What glory!

CONCLUSION

We see here in this text that our salvation is entirely initiated and accomplished in the Godhead. We all needed to be saved because we were all once dead in our trespasses and sins, and enslaved to the Devil. We all had fallen short of the glory of God and we lived in rebellion against Him! And because we were by nature the children of Adam, we were all subjected to hell and eternal condemnation. We also see that the way we could be saved was only through the mercy and love of God to us, which raised and exalted us with Christ so that we might be trophies of God’s grace toward those around us and to the Christians in the ages to come. And finally, we also see that the purpose of our salvation was to bear the fruit of salvation in order to bring glory to God.

Brothers and sisters in the Lord, the doctrine of salvation is crucial for us to grasp. Misunderstanding of the doctrine of salvation will have disastrous impact upon our understanding of the Gospel, and not only so, it may impact our understanding of how to live our Christian life. A false understanding may lead us to glory in our own righteousness as opposed to glorying in God’s redeeming grace! That is why this doctrine is so important to us!

Finally, are you rejoicing in the Gospel? The gift that was given to you completely by grace? Remember that I mentioned earlier that God had placed cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the tree of life. It signifies that there will be not eternal life unless there is a shedding of blood. And the wonderful truth is that God sent His Son to go through the flaming sword. Without the shedding of His blood, you and I would never be able to find the way to the tree of life. Let us in response therefore, bear the fruit of salvation in order to bring glory, honor, praises to God. May all that we do bear the mark of a believer so that those who are around us may see and rejoice, saying, “To God alone be the glory”. Amen. Let us pray.