



Ephesians

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For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is the gift of God*, Ephesians 2:8

In verse 2:5, Paul parenthetically stated, “by grace you have been saved.” After that, he explained what the resulting actions of that salvation were. Now he returns to that same parenthetical thought to further define what being saved by grace means.

He begins with “For” in order to show that all of the things which resulted from that salvation are connected to this act of grace. In other words, the entire deal is of grace; none is merited. We “were dead in trespasses” but “He made us alive together with Christ” in an act of grace. He raised us up by an act of grace. He made us sit in the heavenlies with Christ by an act of grace.

He continues on with “by grace you have been saved.” It is a repeat of the parenthesis of verse 5. The words “you have been” are in the present indicative active. An indicative serves as a sign or indication of something. In this case, it serves to mean, “ye were saved at first, and continue in a state of salvation” (Charles Ellicott). It is a done deal; salvation is eternal, and it has been “through faith.”

Here he moves from the effect of verse 5 (being saved by grace) to the cause of that occurrence (by faith). The “grace” comes from God while the “faith” came forth from the object of the grace, meaning the man. The faith is the cause of the action, the grace is the effect of the exercise of that faith. Further, “grace” has the article in the Greek,

thus it is “the grace.” It is not just any grace, but “the grace of God” which is bestowed upon the believer in Christ and His work.

Next, to demonstrate that “the grace” is truly “grace,” he says, “and that not of yourselves.” One cannot merit grace. The exercise of faith cannot be said to be a work or deed of merit. Instead, it is a logical, necessary choice which one must make in order to be saved. If we want to continue to live, we must breathe. It is not a work, it is a necessary requirement of sustaining life.

When we do what is necessary in order to live, the salvation is bestowed upon us; “*it is the gift of God.*” A gift is something which costs nothing. It is free and it is without strings attached. Further, a gift is a gift. It is not something that can later be taken back based on another action. If it could be, then it was not a gift from the start. Again as before, logic dictates that salvation must be an eternal decree of God. When faith is exercised, the person is sealed with the Holy Spirit. They are saved and they will keep being saved; once and forever. Therefore, “that” and “the gift of God” are synonymous; the second merely explains the first.

To understand the verse more fully, it needs to be noted that both “grace” and “faith” are in the feminine, but the word “that” is in the neuter. Therefore, “that” is not speaking of only “grace” or “faith.” Instead it is speaking of the entire process of salvation by grace which is through faith. Thus “faith” cannot be considered a work. Here is how the verse looks –

For by grace (feminine) you have been saved through faith (feminine), and that (neuter) not of yourselves; it is the gift of God...

The importance of this is seen in in refutation of the doctrine of those who claim that man is “regenerated in order to believe,” and that man does not possess free-will. The argument is ridiculous on the surface, but this is what is taught by some. Instead, the faith is exercised, and the result is being saved by grace, the very thing Paul has been speaking about since verse 5.

The Pulpit Commentary correctly states the nature of the faith –

“It is not that faith is accepted by God in place of works, but because faith indicates that attitude of men towards Christ in which it pleases God to save them, transferring to him all their guilt, imputing to them all his merit.”

Finally, there is an emphasis on the word “gift.” Using an article, the Greek says “of God it is the gift.” The salvation of God is the gift of God based on a mere act of faith by the man. If the faith were a part of the gift, then it wouldn’t really be a gift in the truest sense. At best it could be considered a forced gift, but even that is a contradictory thought.

Life application: Precision of thought is required in order to keep from being duped into bad theology. Please take time to read more commentaries on this verse and then make a logical conclusion based on the best evidence provided.

...not of works, lest anyone should boast. Ephesians 2:9

In the Old Testament, the focus for the people of Israel was to be the glory of God. This is seen consistently from the very beginning, all the way through the time of the law. The people were to glory in the Lord, and in Him alone –

“Thus says the Lord:

‘Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom,

Let not the mighty *man* glory in his might,

Nor let the rich *man* glory in his riches;

²⁴ But let him who glories glory in this,

That he understands and knows Me,

That I *am* the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth.

For in these I delight,” says the Lord.”” Jeremiah 9:23, 24

So important to the Lord is this precept that He further stated the following through Isaiah –

I *am* the Lord, that *is* My name;

And My glory I will not give to another... Isaiah 42:8

Paul directly equates our salvation with this same precept. Verse 9 is given to explain the words of verse 8 –

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

There can be no boasting before the Lord in that which He alone has accomplished. This brings in the obvious, and often argued, point concerning the exercising of faith. Is free-will a work? Does the free-will choice of calling on Christ bring us to a point where we can boast before Him? This was dealt with in verse 8, and the answer is no. In fact, it is just the opposite. We are already in the sea, we are already without hope, the waters already surround us. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves.

However, God provides a way out. Is it wrong to choose that avenue? Or should we ignorantly say, I will deprive God of His glory if I reach out my hand and receive His salvation? There is no other hand, there is no other salvation. If God asks us to receive His offer, it is not a work to do so. But in this same sea are all others of the human race. They would rather stay in the depravity of sin and so choose to not respond to the offer. Their refusal is no more a work than our acceptance. Only God will receive the glory for the salvation or the just condemnation.

This line of thought is reflected beautifully the 115th Psalm. Take time to read that psalm today and to contemplate what the writer is telling us. The Lord chose Israel, but Israel had to respond, individually, as to whether they would comply with the Lord's directives or not. The Lord has chosen a church, and each of us has a choice to do the same –

“Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us,
But to Your name give glory,
Because of Your mercy,
Because of Your truth.
² Why should the Gentiles say,
‘So where *is* their God?’” Psalm 115:1, 2

In Romans 3:27, 28 Paul makes a clear and concise distinction between “faith” and “deeds of the law.” Faith is not reckoned as a deed. It is reckoned as a response to Christ's work. To teach others that they do not need to receive Jesus Christ is to simply lead them to hell on that great day of judgment.

Life application: Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. This way, others can hear and respond.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10

From the thought of being saved by grace and not of works, thus excluding any boasting on our part, Paul notes that we are His (meaning God's) workmanship. The word “His” is

emphatic, showing that it is solely a work of God. He has created us, He has redeemed us, and He has orchestrated His plan, which includes us. All of this was done apart from our participation. The Greek reads, “Of Him, indeed, we are workmanship.”

The word translated as “workmanship” is *poiema*. It is found only here and in Romans 1:20. There, it refers to that which God has made in the physical creation. The word means just that: “a thing made, a work, workmanship.” In this we can see that our works are excluded in the process of salvation. Instead, it is the work of God which saves. This word *poiema*, eventually came down to us in the form of “poem.” This doesn’t mean that we are “God’s poem,” but just as a poem is formed by a poet, so we are formed into that which God designs. We are the work of His intelligence, having been formed by His hands.

We, His work, have been “created in Christ Jesus.” Jesus is the means by which God has accomplished this. It is through faith in His work that we become a part of this “new creation.” Paul speaks specifically of us as a new creation, or new creatures, several times in his letters, such as in 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15, and again in verse 15 of Ephesians 2. God did the work, through Christ, for the purpose of accomplishing our own “good works.”

This then reiterates the thought of verses 8 & 9. Our works are not that which come before, but rather they are the consequence of what God has done. In our receiving of Christ, we are sealed with the Spirit as a guarantee of our salvation, but it is with the expectation of accomplishing good works.

This brings in an obvious question, however – “What works?” What is it that we are expected to do? Are we to help little old ladies cross the road? Don’t the unregenerate do this also? What works are required in order for us to fulfill this plan of God that we have been created for? In short, the answer is that whatever we do by faith which is good and acceptable after salvation is a good work, counted for righteousness.

Apart from Christ, the greatest and most noble deeds are counted as filthy rags. It is only through being “in Christ” that a deed is made acceptable before God. The very same deeds as the unregenerate are made acceptable; they are sanctified, by being “in Christ” as long as they are deeds of faith. This is further explained in Hebrews 11, using one example after another, by showing us that it is faith which pleases God.

This further explains the very difficult and often misunderstood passage in James 2, especially James 2:24 which says that “man is justified by works, and not by faith only.”

It is deeds of faith which justify us, not deeds in and of themselves. Any deed not of faith is not acceptable for credit. Therefore, it is ultimately faith which justifies the man.

This is then reflected in the final words of the verse. We have been “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” These words again show us the synergistic relationship between God’s work in Christ and our faith. In Philippians 3:12, 13, Paul will say –

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.”

We are told in both passages that it is God who works, and yet we are expected to work. In God’s plan, there is His predestination of the matter, and yet man’s free-will is also highlighted. That free-will is man’s faith, both for salvation, and for deeds which follow salvation. Faith is never considered a work, but rather a necessary part of the process. God prepares the salvation; man receives the salvation by faith. God prepares the workmanship; man walks according to God’s preparation. On both sides of the process, there is a synergism which is evident. It is that faith is a necessary requirement of pleasing God.

Life application: What more could we give to God than to live holy lives of faith? Heaven is not the purpose of our salvation; holiness is. And one cannot be holy without exercising faith in that which God has revealed – both for us, and for us to do.

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—
Ephesians 2:11

Paul gathers up the lesson of the previous verses into a summary thought with the word “therefore.” He is asking the Ephesians to reflect on what he has said and to consider their new status and position in Christ. Early in chapter 1, he said this to them –

“...that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.

¹¹ In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,

¹² that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

¹³ In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” Ephesians 1:10-14

He said in those verses that God had gathered together “all things in Christ.” He explained this as those things “both which are heaven and which are on earth.” He then noted that even they, the Ephesian Gentiles, had believed and they “were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.”

Now, in order to show the magnitude of what this means to them in particular, he asks them to “remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh,” were now to be considered in a different light. They were without Christ, and they were not included in the overall redemptive plans of God concerning the nation of Israel. Circumcision was Israel’s mark of inclusion into this body, and it was that which marked them out as separate from the rest of the people groups of the world.

At that time, they were “called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision. In this, he uses the abstract for the concrete – “Uncircumcision” for “uncircumcised,” and “Circumcision” for “circumcised.” However, he adds in a note of irony. It was the Circumcision who “called” the uncircumcised the “Uncircumcision.” It was a note of contempt. They looked down on those who were not a part of them as a cruel master might look down upon his dirty slave. The irony is that Paul gives back the term “called” to the Circumcision. In other words, “They are the ‘so-called’ Circumcision, but that term is now just as derogatory as ‘Uncircumcision’ once was.”

The reason for this is that it was “made in the flesh by hands.” He will explain the irony in the verses ahead, demonstrating that the external sign no longer meant anything at all. It is a thought which is comparable to many other verses in his letters, such as Romans 2:25 & 4:12; 1 Corinthians 7:19; Galatians 5:6 & 6:15; and Colossians 3:11. As far as the references in Galatians, they simply explain the thought which permeates most of the epistle.

Paul’s words are so clear and concise concerning this issue, that it is more than a wonder how people can still find some type of elevated distinction in being circumcised in the flesh, but it happens every day. If one is “in Christ,” then circumcision of the flesh is nullified as a marker of distinction.

Life application: Where is your hope? Is it in a mark of the flesh? If so, then Christ's marks of the cross mean nothing to you. Is it in an observance of the law such as not eating pork? Then Christ's fulfillment of the law means nothing to you. His words, "It is finished" are abrogated by your futile attempt to do what He has already done. Trust in Christ, rest in Christ, and be reconciled to God through Christ. Put your useless deeds of the flesh away!