

**Ephesians 2: 8 and 9; “Salvation is the Gift of God”, Message # 13 in a series entitled –
“The Exceeding Greatness of His Power”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on January 28th, 2024, in the Morning Worship Service.**

In this message I want you to consider with me the power and glory of this great salvation that we have received from God, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not of our works. It is the gift of God, our text tells us. It is something that none of us could have obtained on our own, or attained to, without God’s having shown us the great and loving mercy of giving it to us as a gift. And so, 1st of all, I want to explain to you what it means for a person to be saved by grace.

And then, 2nd – I want to explain to you what it means for a person to be saved through faith, and not by their own works. It is my hope that our Lord will give each of us such great insight into these precious truths that we will want to share them with the unsaved people around us. Perhaps we will even explain them to Christians who have not Biblically and correctly understood the concept of God’s grace.

1st of all – What does it mean for a person to be saved by grace?

Most of us have heard the answer that is commonly given to the question – What is grace? Grace is God’s favor. This is certainly true, that grace is God’s favor. But what is favor? Well, favor is God’s accepting us, and looking upon us in love, based upon the finished work of His dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ’s finished work of redemption includes His having perfectly obeyed God’s holy law, and His then going to cross and dying there for our sins. Those who hear the gospel and believe will be saved. We believe in the Lord Jesus, and we are justified. We are declared righteous in God’s sight.

We are saved by believing in what Christ has done on our behalf. We believe that the Father will forgive us all of our sins for Christ’s sake. He will impute Christ’s righteousness to our legal standing in His sight. Thus we are accepted in the Beloved. But grace is even more than our being accepted by God. It is our being given life. If we believe in Jesus we are made a New Creation, or a New Creature, in His sight. This takes place through the working of the Holy Spirit in the New Birth. The person who believes is given the power to become God’s child through the Father’s calling them and the Spirit’s regenerating them.

Verse 1 of this same chapter tells us – “And you He made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins”.... Although many Christians claim to understand what grace is, I would suggest to you that many of them may have a deficient view of this subject. This is because of their belief in the supposed free will of man. Even many Christians do not believe that before they were saved, they were slaves to sin, and dead in trespasses and sins. They do not believe that they were unable to make their decision for Christ except God gave them the ability (the power) to do so. They believe that they came to Christ on their own. God had provided the way of salvation through Christ’s finished work, and they chose to respond to it, and believed in Him.

It was as simple as that in their mind. But I want to remind you of what it says over in John chapter 1, verses 10-13. Speaking of the Lord Jesus, John says – “That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.” “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.” “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.” “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Well, this is pretty plain is it not. People are not born of the will of the flesh or the will of man, but of God.

But what happens in the mind of those persons who believe in free will in relation to salvation? I believe that they must either ignore or modify the meaning of these plain statements. They somehow believe that they did have the free will to choose Christ, on their own. They believe that it was by their own power that they decided whether they needed Christ, or that they would have Him to save them. It was their choice to receive Christ. They were convinced that they had broken God’s law, and that they were a guilty sinner who needed a Savior. So when they first heard this verse, in their mind they

believed that they were saved by their own reception of Christ, and this resulted in their being born again.

They do not believe that the apostle was saying that they did not have the power to make this decision. Because that would make salvation rest upon God's will and His decision, rather than their own. And so when they first heard about God's sovereignty in salvation, as these verses so clearly portray it, they could not accept it. It was not as though they did not believe these verses. They simply believed that they needed to be interpreted differently from what they plainly say.

As they thought about these verses, they rejected God's sovereignty, but they asserted and affirmed their own responsibility to believe. No doubt it is right, to assert and affirm man's responsibility to repent and believe in the gospel. They should hold to that, they knew. But they thought that it was not right; that somehow it would not be fair to all people, if God did not somehow choose all people to eternal life. Therefore, God's sovereignty in salvation would have to be rejected or modified.

That was the logical and loving conclusion they thought. To do anything else would make God out to be someone who shows partiality to some, and who doesn't show favor to others. To them it all seemed wrong. And so, even though they do believe that it took grace to save them, they came to believe that it did not take God's enabling grace to save them. He merely showed them favor in a general sense. That is, in the same sense in which He shows favor to all men in the gospel.

But I want you to turn with me over to John 8: 31-37. "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.'" "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." "They answered Him, 'We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone.'" "How can You say, 'You will be made free?'" "Jesus answered them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.'" "And a slave does not abide in the house forever.'" "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.'" "I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you."

Now, these are amazing verses are they not? Jesus is speaking to those Jews who had believed Him. But they needed to be instructed further, He knew, in order to confirm the fact that they really had been set free from sin, or perhaps not. In this conversation Jesus showed them that they really had not believed in His word at all, even though they thought that they had. What was the problem? It was that they did not believe that they were in their nature, in bondage to sin. They thought that they had the free will to choose. But yet they would not believe in Christ's word to them, telling them that they were slaves to sin.

Now we need to understand that it certainly is true that all men are, by nature, free to make the decisions that they would like to make, in every case. But it is not true that by nature they see themselves as so lost, that God needs to give them the power to believe and to be saved. That is where the problem lies. Sometimes even a Christian will think to themselves – If I was not in my own nature free to make this decision for Christ, apart from God's enabling grace, then it was not right for God to command me to repent or to believe in Him.

I do believe in God's grace as His having shown me His favor, they think. And I do believe that justification is by faith, they say. But I am not a puppet on a string. I am not that deceived, or that helpless, that I could not choose Christ on my own after I heard the gospel. This sounds very reasonable doesn't it. But according to our text, it is not true that men will somehow freely choose to be saved from their sins on their own, by their own free will, without God's intervention in their life.

And so, we must understand, further, that a person will always be deceived about this truth unless God shows them otherwise, and reveals it to them. I am speaking about Christians now, as well as those who have never savingly believed in Christ. These verses are saying that unless God gives saving, enlightening, and illumining grace through His word, bringing it to that person's attention in convincing power, that salvation is by grace, and not of themselves, they will always, according to their own nature and thinking, reject that line of reasoning, and hope that they can prove it to themselves and others. The reason is – That they do not want God to be that sovereign. And so they will go about to modify the plain statements of the Biblical text in order to fit their own reasoning.

This is a very dangerous business, as you can see from the end of John chapter 8. Some of the same Jews who had believed in Christ were picking up stones to stone Him because they could not receive His word telling them that they needed to believe in Him, and the words that He spoke which told them of their total depravity. He was telling them that they were not able to come to the truth and be saved by their own supposed wisdom and power.

I pray that each person who considers themselves a Christian will receive the words of the scriptures, just as they are written, and that they will not try to impose upon them. Free will in the unconverted person is a slave to its own understanding of things. Look with me over at Proverbs chapter 3, verses 1-6. “My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you.” “Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man.” “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” “Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil.” “It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones.”

Now, here is the right way to approach God’s holy word. It is to receive God’s word just as it is written, and not try to impose your own understanding upon it. Bind it around your neck and write it on the tablet of your heart, and you will find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man. Don’t lean on your own understanding to understand the correct interpretation of the Scriptures. But acknowledge that you need God’s grace, His enablement, to understand it correctly, and to submit to it, once you understand it.

This is how to be a healthy and strong Christian, spiritually speaking. It comes by asking God to guide you into all the truth of His word. Your own fleshly strength of mind, and the use of your own fleshly logic, can lead you astray, if you only look at what you might think is righteous and correct, in relation to God’s way of salvation. Realize that God’s ways are not your ways, and His thoughts are not your thoughts. And abandon your own way of looking at things, for His.

2nd – What does it mean for a person to be saved through faith, and not by their own works?

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” It is so important to see this truth; that grace is not merited by any person except Christ. Salvation is always received as a gift from God, through faith. Faith is the means whereby the believer receives the gift. It is not the source of the reason for the giving of the gift. God conveys the gift of salvation to a sinner through their faith. Faith is the instrument to receive the gift which God offers in the gospel.

Faith in and of itself does not contribute anything to merit salvation. Faith does not compel God to give us the gift. Rather, the gift of salvation is freely bestowed upon the unworthy sinner who places their faith in Christ. When a person believes in Christ, they are justified by faith. God’s declarative act of justification takes place when the sinner first puts their trust in Christ, and what He has done on their behalf. And thus a sinful person is saved at that very moment, because salvation is a gift. They are saved by being given the gift of eternal life, right at that point in time when they first believe.

Turn over with me to John, chapter 5, verses 20 and 21. The Lord Jesus says – “For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.” “For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will.” And now look at verse 24 – “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in Him who sent Me has eternal life, and will not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” So a sinner only needs to believe in the word of the Lord Jesus; to believe in the fact that the Father sent Him to do the good work of redemption so that salvation could be given to them as a gift, in order to be saved. Rather than their thinking that they should try to earn it somehow by their works, which would be impossible for them to do. Instead, they are told that they only need to believe. And so the Son then gives life, it says, to whom He will. This is an astonishing thing that we should marvel over; that salvation is the gift of God. This gift of salvation is conveyed freely by His grace.

Look at Romans 3, verses 21-28. “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.” “For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” “Where is boasting then?” “It is excluded.” “By what law?” “Of works?” “No, but by the law of faith.” “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”

So, what it means for you to be saved through faith, is that you have trusted in Christ and in His finished work alone for your salvation. You will not boast in anything that you have done to please God. Or in anything that you have done to try to keep His commandments in relation to your being saved. If you are boasting of something that you have done for God, in order to be saved, what does it mean? It means that you have not understood on what basis God saves you, or any other sinner for that matter. For the One who has done all of the good and righteous works, the One who has suffered and died on the cross as a propitiation for your sins, is Christ the Lord.

You cannot, with the best of your efforts keep God’s law. You cannot, with the most awful of voluntary sufferings, pay the punishment due to your sins. But Christ has fully satisfied all of the righteousness of God. He has suffered the punishment due our sins. And He has fully satisfied the wrath of God, when He stood in the place of judgment which we as sinners deserved. When Christ went to the cross, He went there so that that the wrath which abided on you, would be removed from you when you believed in Him. You believed that the wrath of God was borne by Christ when He suffered and died, so it would not have to be borne by you forever in hell.

Look also at Romans 4, verses 1-8. “What then shall we say that Abraham our Father has found according to the flesh?” “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 accounted to him for righteousness.” “Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.” “But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.”

So when the question is posed – What has Abraham our Father found, according to the flesh? What do these words mean? The words, “according to the flesh” are referring to those things which Abraham would have done as good works, to try to please God, by which he would have then merited his being shown favor by God. And God would then deal with him in mercy and grace to give him eternal life. But it says here that he found nothing related to his own works. All he found was according to the faith that he exercised in the promise of Christ. He believed in God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness.

He did not work, but he believed in Him who justifies the ungodly. His faith was accounted for righteousness. That is, in the place of his doing anything by works to please God, he rather trusted in the promise of Christ. And he was saved by grace through faith. The same is true for each one of us in relation to salvation. We believe in what Christ has done for us. We believe that His righteous obedience to God’s holy law was perfect, and we trust in that. We believe that His sufferings at the cross purchased every aspect of our salvation; both in terms of our being justified, and in terms of being sanctified. I will open this truth up more to you in the next study.