

# **God's Plan of Reconciliation**

**Saved by Grace Alone**

*Ephesians 2:8-9*

**Rev. Freddy Fritz**

May 14, 2017

# Saved by Grace Alone

## Scripture

We are currently in a series of sermons on Ephesians 2 that I am calling, “God’s Plan of Reconciliation.”

The theme of Ephesians 2:1-10 is God’s grace in saving sinners. In verses 1-3 Paul described the way we were before we received the amazing grace of God. In verse 4 Paul started to explain how God saves sinners. In verses 5-7 Paul listed some wonderful truths about our union with Christ. Then, in verses 8-9 Paul summarized how we are saved by grace alone.

Let’s read how we are saved by grace alone in Ephesians 2:8-9. For the sake of context, let’s begin reading in verse 1:

<sup>1</sup> And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – <sup>3</sup>among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> **For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,** <sup>9</sup> **not a result of works, so that no one may boast.** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

## Introduction

In her book, *Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith*, Anne Lamott describes grace as follows, “Grace means you’re in a different universe from where you had been stuck, when you had absolutely no way to get there on your own.”<sup>1</sup>

I like that description because it beautifully captures what the Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 2. Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus about God’s saving grace. He described the way we were before receiving God’s grace. We were hopeless and helpless, completely dead in our trespasses and sins. But God then intervened in a marvelous way and saved us. He united us with his Son and translated us, as it were, into a completely new realm – the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Lamott’s description captures God’s grace in our salvation: “Grace means you’re in a different universe from where you had been stuck, when you had absolutely no way to get there on your own.” In verses 8-9 the Apostle Paul described God’s grace in our salvation.

## Lesson

Ephesians 2:8-9 shows us that salvation is a gift of God.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. Salvation Is by Grace (2:8a)
2. Salvation Is Through Faith (2:8b)
3. Salvation Is Not by Works (2:9)

### I. **Salvation Is by Grace (2:8a)**

First, salvation is by grace.

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Lamott, *Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith* (New York, NY; Riverhead, 2006), 54-55.

Paul said in verse 8a, **“For by grace you have been saved....”** What is grace? Kent Hughes rightly says, “It is unmerited favor – the love of God going out toward the utterly undeserving.”<sup>2</sup> We are all utterly undeserving of God’s grace. We were all dead in the trespasses and sins in which we once walked. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. Paul’s overarching point is that grace is an absolutely free gift. That is why he said in the second half of verse 8, **“And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”** John Stott summarized verse 8 as follows, “By God’s grace you are people who have been saved through faith, and this whole event and experience is...God’s free gift to you.”<sup>3</sup>

Do you see that salvation is a completely free gift? We should never feel ourselves to be worthy of salvation. If we do, we don’t understand grace. Kent Hughes illustrates this truth with the following story:

A large prestigious church had three mission churches under its care. On the first Sunday of the New Year all the members of the mission churches came to the big city church for a combined Communion service. In those mission churches, which were located in the slums of the city, were some outstanding cases of conversions – thieves, burglars, and so on – but all knelt side by side at the Communion rail.

On one such occasion the pastor saw a former burglar kneeling beside a judge of the Supreme Court of England – the very judge who had sent him to jail where he had served

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<sup>2</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 75.

<sup>3</sup> John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 83.

seven years. After his release this burglar had been converted and become a Christian worker. Yet, as they knelt there, the judge and the former convict, neither one seemed to be aware of the other.

After the service, the judge was walking out with the pastor and said to him, “Did you notice who was kneeling beside me at the Communion rail this morning?” The pastor replied, “Yes, but I didn’t know that you noticed.” The two walked along in silence for a few more moments, and then the judge said, “What a miracle of grace.” The pastor nodded in agreement. “Yes, what a marvelous miracle of grace.” Then the judge said, “But to whom do you refer?” And the pastor said, “Why, to the conversion of that convict.” The judge said, “But I was not referring to him. I was thinking of myself.” The pastor, surprised, replied: “You were thinking of yourself? I don’t understand.” “Yes,” the judge replied, “it was natural for the burglar to receive God’s grace when he came out of jail. He had nothing but a history of crime behind him, and when he saw Jesus as his Savior he knew there was salvation and hope and joy for him. And he knew how much he needed that help.

“But look at me. I was taught from earliest infancy to live as a gentleman; that my word was to be my bond; that I was to say my prayers, to go to church, take Communion and so on. I went through Oxford, took my degrees, was called to the bar and eventually became a judge. Pastor, it was God’s grace that drew me; it was God’s grace that opened my heart to receive it. I’m a greater miracle of his grace.”<sup>4</sup>

Whether we were churched or criminals, educated or uneducated, wealthy or poor, we were all dead in our trespasses and sins, and in desperate need of God’s grace.

John Newton was nurtured by a devoted Christian

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<sup>4</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, 76.

mother who dreamed that her only son would become a preacher. But she died when John was a child, and he followed his sea-captain father to a sailor's life. John didn't care for the discipline of the Royal Navy: he deserted ship, was flogged, and eventually was discharged.

He then headed for regions where he could "sin freely," and ended up on the western coast of Africa, working for a slave trader who mistreated him. Newton's life during that period bore the appearance of a modern Prodigal Son's: "a wretched-looking man toiling in a plantation of lemon trees in the Island of Plantains – clothes had become rags, no shelter and begging for unhealthy roots to allay his hunger." After more than a year of such treatment, he managed to escape from the island in 1747.

The following year his ship was battered by a severe storm. Newton had read *The Imitation of Christ*, and during the life-threatening voyage he was converted and became a Christian. Later, he wrote America's best-loved hymn, *Amazing Grace*, which captures God's grace to a sinner:

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.<sup>5</sup>

## II. Salvation is Through Faith (2:8b)

Second, salvation is through faith.

Someone may say, "Okay, I understand that I am dead in my trespasses and sins. I admit that I cannot meet God's standards of perfection. And I understand that salvation comes by

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<sup>5</sup> *Logos Hymnal*, 1st edition. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995).

God's grace alone. But how do I receive that grace?" The Apostle Paul said that salvation is through faith. He said in verse 8, "For by grace you have been saved **through faith.**"

There are many misconceptions about faith. Let me mention two. *First, faith that saves is not mere head knowledge.* Knowing about Jesus and the Bible and God and even salvation itself is not enough to save anyone. The Bible says that even the demons believe that God is one (James 2:19), but they are not saved.

*Second, faith that saves is not mere temporal faith.* That is, saving faith is not trusting God for temporary crises, such as financial, family, or physical needs. People sometimes bargain with God when they really need or want something from him, but that is not saving faith.

So, what is saving faith? *Saving faith is trusting in Christ alone for the gift of eternal life.* It means resting in Christ and what he has done to save you. Saving faith is to "believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved..." (Acts 16:31). Kent Hughes says:

A story which comes from the last century makes this clear. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century Jean Francois Gravalet, better known by his stage name, Blondin, was a world-famous acrobat. Born in France in 1824, Blondin became well-known while still a child. As he grew older, his skill and showmanship brought him fame throughout Europe and America. Once in London he played the violin on a tightrope 170 feet off the ground and then did a somersault wearing stilts. His most spectacular feats were the crossings of Niagara Falls on a tightrope 1,100 feet long and 160 feet above the water. On one occasion, he took a stove onto the tightrope and cooked an omelet above the roaring falls. On another occasion, he

pushed a wheelbarrow across while blindfolded. On still another he stood on his head on the precarious wire. That is why today in London there are Niagara and Blondin Avenues.

Once, in an unusual demonstration of skill, Blondin carried a man across Niagara Falls on his back. After putting his rider down, he turned to the large crowd and asked a man close by, "Do you believe I could do that with you?" "Of course," the man answered, "I've just seen you do it." "Hop on," said Blondin, "I'll carry you across." "Not on your life!" the man called back.<sup>6</sup>

Saving faith is entrusting yourself entirely to Jesus.

Frankly, I am not sure that I would have hopped on to Blondin's back. I am not sure that the rope would hold us. I am not sure that I would not let go and fall. And I am not sure that Blondin would not slip with *me* on his back! So, while I might believe that Blondin could carry a man across Niagara Falls, I am not sure that I would entrust myself entirely to Blondin.

But, entrusting myself to Jesus is a completely different matter. Jesus cannot slip and drop me. He said in John 6:39, "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day."

### III. Salvation is Not by Works (2:9)

And third, salvation is not by works.

Paul said in verse 9a that salvation is **"not a result of works."** Every religion and every philosophy in the world teaches that salvation is achieved by works. Kent Hughes tells about preacher who illustrated this view. He writes:

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<sup>6</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, 77–78.



I recall hearing an unbelieving preacher illustrate his philosophy by telling of a frog which fell into a large milk can. Try as it would, it could not get out. There was nothing to do but keep paddling, which it did until it churned a pad of butter and presto! saved itself by leaping from its self-made launching pad. Personally, if I fell into a pail of milk I would keep paddling as long as I could too, but I would not make that my philosophy of achieving eternal salvation.<sup>7</sup>

I often ask people a question to gauge their understanding of salvation. I ask, “Suppose you were to die today, and you were to stand before God, and he were to ask you, ‘Why should I let you into my heaven?’ What would you say?” How would you answer that question?

People answer as follows:

- “I am not perfect, but I try to do the best I can.”
- “I try to obey the Ten Commandments.”
- “I am a good person, and I am better than most.”
- “I go to church, I pray, I read my Bible.”
- “I love Jesus. I will do anything for him.”

All of these answers are works-righteousness, and not faith. Not one of them will get a single soul into heaven. Apart from the grace of God in our lives, we all pray to God like the Pharisee in Luke 18:11, “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.” We decide the sins for which we have no guilt. And we compare ourselves favorably to others.

The fact is that we are all dead in our trespasses and sins. All our works are like filthy rags in the sight of God, as Isaiah

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<sup>7</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, 74.

## God's Plan of Reconciliation

64:6 says in *The Living Bible*, “We are all infected and impure with sin. When we put on our prized robes of righteousness, we find they are but filthy rags. Like autumn leaves we fade, wither, and fall. And our sins, like the wind, sweep us away.”

It is only by God’s grace that any of us are given the gift of saving faith in Jesus Christ. Our works will never save us.

Paul gave us a reason why salvation is not by works. He said in verse 9b, “...so that no one may boast.” Can you imagine if salvation was achieved by our works? We would be going around heaven trying to outdo one another with the works that got us in to heaven. No. We will all agree with Horatio Bonar, who wrote these words:

Not what my hands have done  
Can save my guilty soul;  
Not what my toiling flesh has borne  
Can make my spirit whole.  
Not what I feel or do  
Can give me peace with God;  
Not all my prayers and sighs and tears  
Can bear my awful load.

Thy work alone, O Christ,  
Can ease this weight of sin;  
Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God,  
Can give me peace within.  
Thy love to me, O God,  
Not mine, O Lord to thee,  
Can rid me of this dark unrest  
And set my spirit free.

Thy grace alone, O God,  
To me can pardon speak;  
Thy pow’r alone, O Son of God,

Can this sore bondage break.  
No other work, save thine,  
No other blood will do;  
No strength, save that which is divine,  
Can bear me safely through.<sup>8</sup>

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed salvation by grace in Ephesians 2:8-9, let us thank God that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Let me ask several questions. *First, do you believe that salvation is by grace alone?* Do you see that salvation is a completely free gift? **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”**

*Second, do you believe that salvation is through faith alone?* Do you know the truths of the gospel? Do you agree that they are true? Do you believe that Jesus is who he said he is? Do you believe that he died for your sins? Do you believe that he was resurrected and lives today? Are you resting in Christ alone for your eternal salvation?

*And third, do you believe that salvation is not by works?* What would you say to God if he were to ask you, “Why should I let you into my heaven?” Are you trusting in your good deeds, good works, obedience to the Ten Commandments, church attendance, or anything like that? If you are, I must warn you that your trust is misplaced. Your works will never get you into heaven. But Jesus’ works will! “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved...” (Acts 16:31). Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> *Trinity Hymnal*, Revised Edition (Atlanta, GA; Great Commission Publications, 1990), 461.

# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church  
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can  
be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons).
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp).
3. [www.sermonaudio.com/source\\_detail.asp?sourceid=FreddyFritz](http://www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=FreddyFritz).

## Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

*Answers for Life!*

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: [Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org](mailto:Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

Web site: [www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org](http://www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org)