

## By Grace, Not by Works

*Ephesians*

By Don Green

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**Bible Text:** Ephesians 2:8-9

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### **Truth Community Church**

4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road

Cincinnati, OH 45255

**Website:** [truthcommunitychurch.org](http://truthcommunitychurch.org)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm](http://www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm)

I'm grateful this morning, very much so, for the opportunity to open today's passage before you. It's a familiar passage to you in one sense, perhaps not in another sense. It's always challenging to preach a familiar passage, one which you know that your audience, most of them, could recite by heart, and the ever present temptation, not only for the preacher, but also for you in the audience, is to assume that you already know this text, and that further study is merely an exercise in going through the motions. I venture to say that that's not the case today as we turn to Ephesians chapter 2:8-9. I'm very confident that the Lord has great blessing for us in the hour that is ahead as we look at this text with careful attention. Let me read it as we begin. Ephesians 2:8-9.

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.

And next week, we will look at verse ten in our time together. This passage, verses eight and nine, stand as the capstone, as the grand finale climax of Paul's monumental prayer which began all the way back in the middle of Ephesians chapter 1 regarding God's power and grace. We've seen throughout the course of the past many weeks that in chapter 1:3-14, Paul is praising God for the wonder of His grace. He says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." And then he just proceeds to give theological content and grounds for his praise. We've been chosen. We've been adopted. We've been redeemed. We've been sealed with the Spirit. God is at work with His counsel and all things that ever happens, and we are a part of that blessing, we're a part of His eternal purpose in Christ and he is going to display His glories to us.

In verse 15-16, you can turn over there with me, Ephesians chapter 1. In light of that praise, Paul begins to pray for His readers, and he says in verse 15, "For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, I do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers." And from that point all the way to the end of this passage that we are looking at this morning, Paul is praying. He is praying for his readers. He's not merely writing a theological discourse in some abstract way. He's not delivering a lecture. He's not, in a

sense, he's not even preaching a sermon. He is praying. He is praying to lay hold of the power of God to do something in the lives of the people that he's writing to, writing to these true Christians. And now here we come two thousand years later, and we are standing, we are receiving this Word of God in Ephesians, we are receiving it in the same posture that they did. We have the same spiritual need that they did. We are faced with the same temptation, and the same weakness of mind, and the weakness of heart, and weakness of spirit that they did.

Paul understood all of those aspects about the human condition and said, "Christians, I am praying for you that you would understand something that is of immense importance." And so, he goes on, and you say, "Well, what is he praying then?" He says in verse 17, "I am praying that the Father of glory will give you a Spirit of wisdom." Verse 18, he gives the specific content of his prayer. "I pray that the eyes of your heart would be enlightened. I'm praying that God would open your understanding in a way that goes beyond your human ability. I'm praying that God would supernaturally expand your capacity to grasp these unseen spiritual realities that frame the entire nature of your spiritual existence." This is a magnificent prayer written by the apostle that the Lord Jesus Christ uniquely appointed to write to the gentiles and to preach to the gentiles.

You say, "Well, what's he praying? This must be pretty important!" Well, he's not praying for their health. He's not praying for their earthly prosperity. He's not praying that God would help them through the struggles of the day. It's far more transcendent than that. And even by the nature of Paul's prayers, beloved, we see where the mind of a Christian should go. We see the realm in which our thoughts should be occupied. We see the things that should animate our affections, the things that drive our passions, the things that concern us and occupy us. And we see as Paul prays that it has nothing to do whatsoever with the things that we are ordinarily finding ourselves thinking about, worrying about, and talking about. And so what we see here is Paul praying that God would lift us out of that and into the realm of thought, and thinking, and concern that matters, and the realm of understanding that will drive all of life for us. Paul is praying that his readers and, by extension, we would understand what is at work in the fact that we are Christians, and that we would grasp something of the height, and depth, and the breadth, and the length, and the magnitude of the nobility of what it means to be a believer in Jesus Christ.

This is so much more than how can God help me get through the day? How can God help me have a better marriage? And the stuff that tends to occupy people in other places that call themselves Christian. We look at this and we see, "Okay, here is where the meat, the heart, of it all is." And here is what Paul prays. He says, "I am praying," verse 18, "that the eyes of your heart would be enlightened, so that," verse 19, "you would know what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." He says, "You are a Christian, because God exercised great power on your life, not because of anything that you did. God acted from His own initiative in order to do something for you and to you that would transform you." He says, "I'm praying that you would understand something

of the surpassing greatness of that power." And what he does is, he goes on, and he says, "Let me tell you what this power is like."

In verses 19-23 he says, "This is the same power that's at work in you is the power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. It is resurrection power. It is something supernatural that no man can accomplish, that no man has the ability to do, and that no man can control." God did something of surpassing greatness to you when He saved you. Paul says, "I'm praying that you would understand that. That your thoughts about what it means to be a Christian would be elevated way beyond the things that normally men think about." And he says, "It's not just the power that raised Christ from the dead. The power that is at work in you is also the power that spiritually changed you." Your salvation required a mighty, a mighty act of unilateral strength and unilateral kindness from God, because you had no capacity to contribute to your own salvation.

That's what Paul is saying in the first three verses of chapter 2. Notice the word "and." We talked about that. We've practically preached a whole message on the word "and" a few weeks ago. Paul said, "This power raised Christ from the dead, and," then he's going on to say, "I want you to understand more. I'm praying that God would help you understand even more how great His power was, and the power had to be great, because you were dead in your trespasses and sins."

Look at verse 1 there of chapter 2. This is all leading up to our passage for this morning. "You were 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 the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." What's Paul saying there? We've studied it in the past. There's no need to review it, except to say this: remember, Paul is praying, and he is praying, "I want God to help you to understand this power that raised Christ from the dead and that raised you from spiritual death." And he says, "Don't minimize your understanding. Don't diminish your appreciation for what God did, because your situation was helpless, and it was hopeless. There was no hope for you in that prior condition. You were spiritually dead. You were lifeless. There was no spark of divinity in you. There were no motions toward God in you whatsoever." Paul said elsewhere in Romans 3, "There are none who seek for God, not even one." And so, if salvation was to come, it had to be, this is so important, if salvation was ever to come to anyone, it had to come from the initiative of God, because it never would have come from you or me. We would not have chosen to save ourselves. We would not have chosen to go into fellowship with a holy God, because we were unholy. We did not want that, and not only did we not want it, we were utterly completely incapable of doing anything about it.

And so, Paul says, "I'm praying that you would understand that you were spiritually dead, helplessly captive to evil powers, and righteously condemned by God in that position." Paul says, "The natural man doesn't get this, and so I'm asking God to do a work to communicate understanding to you through His Spirit that you otherwise would not have,

because this is so foundational to everything in the Christian life." So Paul's praying and as he is praying, he is praying in accordance with doctrinal truth.

And so what happened? In that condition, God made you alive in Christ. God raised you with Christ. God seated you in the heavenly places in Christ. That's what it says in verses 4-7, and what you need to see, beloved, is that all of those things for you to be made alive, for you to be raised up with Christ, for you to be seated spiritually with Him in the heavenly realm, that was all completely beyond your capacity to do. We must forever rid ourselves of our Arminian tendencies to think that God cooperated with us, and that we cooperated with God in order to bring about the final result of our salvation. We could not have done anything to contribute to bringing ourselves to life. God did it. Not us.

And why did He do this? He did it because He is gracious. He did it so that we might benefit from His kindness. He did it so that throughout the ages of eternity there might be a public, universal, as it were, display and manifestation of how pristinely good, and gracious, and holy, and righteous, and merciful the God of the universe is. And when you start to grasp something of the majesty of the character of God that's going to be on display throughout all of eternity, you realize by contrast, this is a tangent here, you realize by contrast how appalling the present state of the world is that curses His name, that rejects His Word, that mocks His people, that wants nothing to do with Jesus Christ. For this great of a goodness of God, for God to be this great, and this kind, and this wonderful, and this merciful, and for people to spit upon Him, and reject Him, and want nothing to do with His Gospel, nothing to do with His Word, shows how hopelessly corrupt the human race is. There is no excuse for the way that the world spurns its Creator.

But God is going to do something in eternity. Throughout the ages, He's saving people, displaying mercy, showing kindness, saving them, bringing them to Himself, adopting them into His family, and despite yours and my previous rejection and hostility toward Him, we are going to be in His presence forever enjoying the riches of His grace, having escaped the condemnation that was ours, and we are going to be in this position and this experience of unspeakable blessing that we had no claim on, that we did not deserve, and there we are, we are going to be enjoying the riches of undeserved grace forever, and all that's going to be captivating our thoughts at that time is, "How great, how good, how merciful is God. How great is His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. How much we love Him. How much we honor Him. How much we bow down and worship Him that all of this wonderful grace has been bestowed upon a wretch like me and like you."

That's what Paul's praying that we would understand. And look at verse 7 there. Which is where we ended up last time a couple of weeks ago. God did all of this, "so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." This world won't receive it. This world rejects it. God will bring this world to an end and usher in an age where it will be received, and it will be honored as is only fitting for His glorious name. That's what's coming.

Now, here we are. Here you and I are as Christians, and we're in the position, and we're on the receiving end of that kind of grace. We're now positioned with new life, a new creation in Christ, and that's what awaits us in heaven. Now, Paul here, as we move into our passage here this morning in verses 8 and 9. This is so wonderful to see it in context, isn't it? To see where all of this comes together and what Paul's greater point is. This is not really an evangelistic verse, although it's fine to use it in evangelism. Paul is making a statement to Christians here in verses 8 and 9. For us to understand about what it is, and what the conclusions are that we are to draw about it. And here's the way that I want you to think about it, forget everything else that is going on in your life for these moments. I realize a lot of sorrow, and difficulty, and uncertainty await almost everyone in this room. We can set that aside for this hour and just contemplate ourselves in the presence of God. We can set those things aside and just say, "Where am I, and what does it mean that I stand in this position before God?" Just contemplate yourself alone, as it were, with God, shutting everything else out, and saying, "How did I ever get to this wonderful position?" And contemplate that. And for those few of you who are not believers in here, here is what you are missing and here is what you need to hear for the redemption of your own soul. There is a great contrast in this passage. It is clear. It is vibrant. It is echoed again and again and again. There is so much compressed into these two verses that as we unfold them, the cumulative impact of every phrase that is said is going to leave us humbled, grateful, and ready to obey the God who called us. There is a great contrast between God's grace and your works that are in these two verses and it's designed to produce in you a culminating effect that you would boast in Christ and not in yourself.

And so we're going to structure this message on a contrast, a two part contrast. First of all, you can just title this point in your notes if you're taking notes: saved by grace. Saved by grace. And we'll unpack that. So with everything that Paul has prayed, verses 15 through chapter 2:7, and all of the riches that are there, he's now bringing it to a conclusion. He's bringing it to a focal point. He's wanting to direct your attention with laser-like intensity. Here's what you're supposed to get out of everything that I've been saying. Look at verse 8. "For." "For." "For by grace you have been saved." The word "for" here is a connection. It is a bridge between everything that He has said leading up to this point in the preceding verses with what He is now immediately about to say. And here is what is so crucial for you to understand: what immediately follows this word "for" is the focal point of everything. The whole point of everything that Paul has been saying, he is now going to summarize in one great concise climax. He's drawing your attention, "This is what you are supposed to take away from everything that I've been saying, and everything that I've been praying. Get this point clear in your mind, because it changes everything about the nature of the Christian life. For. I pray for you, and I pray for you. For. Why have I prayed like I've prayed? It's for this reason." Here's what he wants us to see. Paul says, "Mark it, park it, right here."

So what comes next? "For by grace." That theme, beloved, is the whole point. I realize that some of you have been trained to take this verse and show people the importance of faith in calling them to a saving knowledge of Christ. Faith is not the point of this passage. The point of this passage is grace. It is what God has done in unmerited favor toward those who deserved His condemnation. This passage is about what God has done.

Grace is an expression of the activity, and the attitude, and the motions of God, not the motions of man. And so with everything that we have seen leading up to this, Paul is saying, "It's by grace. This is what you are supposed to see. For by grace. By what God has done, not by what you have done."

You and I, when we understand the flow of Ephesians, you're supposed to humble yourself completely before the great truth that it is God's unmerited favor toward you that explains why you are saved today. It is not of anything that you did. It is all a result of the mighty power and the mighty grace of God. The summary point here, if you are a Christian here today, what the biblical take away for you is in the providential leading of God to bring us to this moment at this text, is for you to step back, as it were, silence your heart, and in the hallowed chambers of your heart, understand and bow before the wonderful, unspeakable truth that God showed kindness to you when you deserved His judgment. That is why you are a Christian today. Simplifying it all down and bringing it all to this one point: it is by grace that you have been saved. God showed mercy to you when you deserved the complete opposite. That is very humbling. It makes us realize that God truly does get all of the glory. This is not about me. It's not about you. It is about Christ and His Father being good to unworthy sinners like us.

Now, in the Greek text, there is an article, the word "the" before the word "grace." It's not translated here in English, but it's an important aspect of understanding the text. When Paul says, "It's by the grace," what he's doing is he's referring to the grace that has previously been mentioned in the context. He's not injecting a new idea here. He says, "I'm simply referring to that which I have already been talking about." And you say, "Okay, well, where was grace previously discussed?" Well, all you have to do is go back a couple of three verses. In verse 5 it says, "God, when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." By undeserved favor upon you, you have been saved. When you were dead in your transgressions that is when God saved you. It was grace. When you were dead, it was a powerful exercise of grace in the past by which you have been brought into this present beautiful spiritual position. God did a gracious act in the past and made you alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. That grace is what he is talking about.

But then you say, "But that's not the only time grace was mentioned just before verse 8, is it?" And the wonder of this, I really believe that when you start to really grasp something of the essence of what Scripture says about these things, you almost start to tremble, because it is so holy. It is so magnificent. It is so otherworldly. Verse 7, Paul said, "By grace, by a powerful grace, you were made alive together with Christ." And in verse 7, "so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace." His grace saved me in the past, and He's got a whole lot more to display to me in the future. Unmerited. Undeserved. And so when Paul says in verse 8, "For by grace you have been saved," that word "grace," he's drawing upon what he had just said. He said, "By that grace, which I have just been speaking about, that grace that made you alive in Christ, at some point in your prior physical earthly life when you were converted, grace brought you to faith in Christ. Grace made you new. Grace made you alive. Grace made you a new creature. Grace forgave all your sins. That grace is what I'm talking about."

And he says in verse 7, he has that future forward looking emphasis to it, the grace that is going to extend throughout an endless eternity of the abundant goodness of God falling upon you wave after wave, drenching you in unspeakable glory. That's grace. That's kindness that we have no claim on. Grace saved us and made us alive in Christ. Grace is going to show us future glories yet to be told, yet to be seen by human eyes on this earth; our human eyes haven't seen it yet. And so, this grace, past and future, it's by that grace that you have been saved. A grace that is so magnificent and holy that you tremble in the face of it. You tremble in the wonder and the mercy of it. That grace is what saved you.

And so, beloved, here is the point. It's really so important for you to follow all of this. So you were supposed to be, as you come to verse 8, so captivated, so enamored with, so impressed with, the undeserved kindness and mercy and love of God on your life, you're so overwhelmed that in exchange for your captivity to evil, and that you're condemnation before Him, and your spiritual death, in exchange for all of that stuff that you were by nature, He's given you all of this in its place. And your knees buckle under the glory of it. That's really wonderful. And Paul says, "Yes, it is wonderful, and it's by that grace that you have been saved." So that by the time that you get to verse 8, the idea that you contributed anything to this present position has been completely expunged from your mind. The idea that you brought something to God, and He rewarded you with salvation in response to what you brought Him in your own strength, and your own power, and your own ingenuity, and your own devotion, that thought is so far foreign to the passage that you realize that it couldn't possibly be that. And so, you are done with yourself by the time that you get to verse 8. You have put yourself completely out of it, and you are just so wrapped up in the greatness and the glory of God that everything else falls out of your mind, and all that you can focus on is the glory, and the grace, and the goodness, and the greatness of God. That's what verse 8, that's the climax that verse 8 is bringing you to. Grace made you alive. Grace will be displayed through eternity. It's by that grace that you are saved. Wow.

Now, here in verse 8, look at the text with me again. When you take this word-by-word, phrase-by-phrase, you see how it all reinforces that same central point. Paul says, "For by grace you have been saved." What does it mean to be saved? Two things that I would say about this part of the passage. One is that the construction here, you have been saved, it's a construction that says your salvation was completed by a past act of God, and the results of that are continuing in your life to the present time. You stand in a condition of redemption. You stand in a condition of grace having been on the receiving end of God's favor. That's the position that you stand in, and you are in that position, Paul says, you stand there secure, established, in the righteousness of Christ, and in the grace of God. You are in that position because grace brought you there. You have been saved. You stand in this great position because of what came from God's grace.

Now, what have I been saved from? Well, look. If anyone that tries to diminish the horror of human sin, any teacher who would try to diminish to you the seriousness of the sin that you brought to conversion is doing you a great disservice. For one thing, they're lying to you when they diminish your sin, but they are also putting you in a position where, if you

have a shallow view of sin, I promise you, you will have a shallow view of grace. You only appreciate undeserved favor when you understand how much undeserved it was.

So you've been saved. What have you been saved from? Go back to those first three verses. You've been saved from spiritual death, chapter 2:1. There you were dead in your sins. Verse 2, there you were captive, enslaved by hostile evil powers, the world, your own flesh, the devil himself. You were in prison, in chains, locked, and the key thrown away, without hope. Paul will go on and say in verse 12, "You were without hope. You were without God. You were hurdling on a runaway train toward destruction in hell."

And verse 3, by very nature you were a child of wrath. In the righteousness of God, He righteously could have destroyed you in an expression of His judgment upon your sin. You were twisted. You were depraved. You were dead to God. You were alive to sin, and you followed your father, the devil, Jesus says in John 8, and you weren't even looking for God really. Maybe a God of your own making. Not this holy God who condemned you. No one looks for that God. And so when Paul says, "You've been saved by grace," what he's saying is that God has thoroughly, and effectively, and completely, and forever rescued you from spiritual death, rescued you from your captivity to the world, to the flesh, to the devil, and delivered you from the threat of His righteous wrath.

So when we say, "I'm saved," there is content to that. There is rich, meaningful content to that. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation; behold the old things have passed away; new things have come." And when we say that we've been saved, we're not talking about some superficial little thing, that Jesus has now become my best friend. Jesus is my buddy. No. No, we're saying that a holy, righteous God intervened in order to deliver us from ourselves and our sin. And not only brought us out of a position of judgment. He didn't just bring us out of judgment to a place of neutrality and set us off to the side. He brought us from judgment into blessing. He brought us from judgment into a conscious experience of His grace now and a hope of eternal blessing forever in the ages to come. When we say we've been saved, there is enormous content to what that means. It was really bad, and dangerous, and threatening. Now, it's really, really good, and it's secure, and there is peace, and hope, and reconciliation with the God who once condemned me. And Paul says, "Understand that it's by grace that you're in that position. It's because God exercised kindness toward you, not because you exercised righteousness toward Him. It's by grace that you stand in this glorious position today. And we feel together the pride of our human hearts just continually shrinking, don't we? And just saying, "Oh God, you're so great."

You know, when I study Ephesians 2, when I preach on it, when I read it, I don't even want to claim any credit for my salvation. I have no desire and interest in that at all. That is not appealing to me at all. And it shouldn't be for you either, because for us to claim anything that we brought out of death, and captivity, and condemnation, and say that we brought something out of that condition to bring us into that glory is to rob God of all of the glory that He so richly deserves. To claim credit is to seek pride where humility and gratitude should be there instead. It's by grace that you're in that position. God saved you at a past time in your life. In a moment in history, God regenerated you, worked in your

heart, and reconstituted you in a way so that you gladly came to Christ in response to the work that He had done. And now the effects of that, you sit here in your chair today basking in, living in, the wake of that, knowing that the wake and the current of salvation is leading you to eternal glory where God will display even more of His kindness for ages to come. It will be wonderful, and God did it, not us, not you, not me.

I'd like to preach on our hope, our future hope, and I realize that whatever I say about it doesn't begin to approximate how wonderful it will be. But even as I say the most, use the best of my limited capacity to extol how good it is going to be, I have every confidence that I am not telling you half of what it is going to be like. It is going to be so much greater than what we think, and that's what God has done for us. Today, if you are a Christian, you are spiritually safe. You are standing in grace today because God showed permanent grace to you in the past.

Now, how did it come to be yours? It was not through a work or ritual that you did. It wasn't because you were better than someone else. Look at verse 8 with me there. How was it that this was appropriated in your life? "For by grace you have been saved through faith." You merely received a work that was already completed on your behalf. And what made your heart bend toward it was the fact that God had done a prior work in your heart. God had made you alive in Christ. Regeneration precedes faith theologically if not temporally. You responded to Christ when you had rejected the Gospel many, many times prior, because God determined at that moment to do a work in your heart to bend your heart, and you willingly came. You received Christ, and you rested in Him for a complete salvation.

The word "faith" expresses a firm conviction that Christ is the Son of God who alone can save from sin. In faith we surrender to Christ as our only hope of salvation. We receive Him, and we rest in Him. We receive this eternal Son of God as our Savior, and we cease trying to do anything to earn God's favor, as if we bring merit that He will reward us for going forward. We rest in Christ understanding that His righteous life fulfilled the righteous demands of God's law on our behalf. We rest in His death and resurrection as the payment for our sins. As we will sing tonight, I believe, at our communion service at six o'clock in our Ohio building, when we sing "Jesus Paid It All" tonight at communion, we mean it, and we simply have received what He has already done by grace through faith.

Now, at this point, the pride of man looks for something to claim for His own. The pride of man in the face of the Gospel is like a cornered animal just looking for any place to strike, any place to escape, any place to assert itself. Paul doesn't allow for any of that here. Man, we are tempted to say, "My faith is why God saved me." But, beloved, you must understand this. You must understand this: God did not save you in response to your faith. God did not reward you with salvation because you came up with something in your own human ability and said, "Here it is, God." And He said, "Ah! That's what I've been waiting for. Here's all of the riches of my grace upon you. I'm glad that you brought that, because these other guys didn't." Paul extinguishes that possibility before it even gets started.

He has introduced the word "faith," but notice what he immediately says next. It is so important that we don't hurry through this and that we just assume things based on what we've been taught in the past. Paul says, "It was by grace you have been saved through faith, and," he says, "Don't stop there, because there is something else that needs to be joined together in your thinking about this concept of faith." "And." You see it, right? There's a conjunction. He's joining together again what he's about to say with what he had just said. This is not a time where Paul is congratulating Christians on their wisdom in bringing faith to God, and that they prompted God to save them with their human faith. That is so absolutely foreign to the context. It couldn't possibly be what it means. That idea that I cooperated with God, that God did His part, and I did my part with faith, and working together synergistically we came up with salvation. "Good job, God! And good job me."

No. That is not Christian salvation. That is a different religion, and Paul makes this point unmistakably clear. "And," he says, "that not of yourselves." I love this phrase! I mean, this is just really too cool! Paul says, "That not of yourselves." Now, I very rarely do this, but I want to give you just a little sliver of the Greek language here, because it is really important for you to understand what's being said here. Paul says, "That not of yourselves." Of yourselves. He uses a Greek preposition "ek." Ek. The preposition ek identifies the source from which something came, the origin of where something came from. Paul says, as soon as he says, "By grace you have been saved through faith," he says, "And, ek, that did not come from yourself. That did not originate with you. You did not contribute to this through your intelligence, your morality, or your spiritual strength. It was by grace." Remember that's the whole point of the passage. Paul has been praying for verses and almost chapters saying, "Oh, I pray to God that you would understand He saved you by His power and His grace. It's by grace that you have been saved through faith." And he says that he is so intensely concerned that you understand where it all came from that as soon as he says, "through faith," he says, "Understand that that aspect of salvation did not originate with you."

He says, "That not of yourselves." Look at verse 8 with me again. "And that not of yourselves." What is the antecedent of that? What "that"? What is "that"? In other words, what I'm saying is when he says, "That is not of yourselves," what's he referring back to? What is that word standing in place of? Some people would say, and let me say this, as you read it in the English text it is just a little bit ambiguous, isn't it? "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves." What's that? Can we nail that down exactly what he means by that? Because somehow the heart of the Gospel is right at the core of this. Well, just a little bit more grammar for you, grammar that you can rest your soul on. In the Greek language, the word "grace" and "faith," both of them are feminine. They are feminine nouns. Just grammatically feminine. It has nothing to do with gender. It is just a grammatical feminine noun, both of them are. The word "that" here is not feminine. It is neuter like our English word "it." There is he, she, and then there is "it", it neuter. And so this word "that" is designed to refer back to something that Paul has just been talking about, but it doesn't agree in gender with "faith." It doesn't agree in gender with "grace." So what is he saying here? "That not of yourselves." Well, what he is

referring to here is the whole entire operation of salvation. He's using this neuter word "that" to refer in general, as a whole, as a complete unit, to everything that he's been saying, including its individual components.

So, think about it this way: one phrase. "By grace you have been saved through faith, that grace through which you have been saved through faith that did not originate with you, not in any part." Salvation, beloved, get this straight. Drill deep and pour the concrete in your understanding and in your soul deep on this point: salvation was God's idea. Salvation was God's initiative. Salvation was God's gift. Salvation was God's work in your life for you, not your work for God. That's why you're saved. And Paul says, "That not of yourselves." He's saying, the entire operation of salvation, even the production of faith in your heart, came from God, not you. Think about it, beloved, it has to be that way. Even though men hate this, this is why men hate the Gospel, because it destroys their pride. Think about it though, think about it biblically: God chose you. We saw in Ephesians 1, God chose you before the foundation of the world, watch it, when you did not even exist to respond. God determined to bless you in eternity past before you even existed, before you had done anything good or bad. He set His loving affection upon you, and then He said, "Okay, now Genesis 1:1."

Further, watch how all of this fits together in the immediate context. That's Ephesians 1. I didn't think about it that way until just now. God chose you before the foundation of the world when you did not even exist to respond, Ephesians chapter 1. Ephesians chapter 2, God made you alive in Christ when you had no capacity to respond. And so, before time began, God chose you where you couldn't respond, when you couldn't respond. To talk about you in eternity past is weird, because you weren't there. Now, in Ephesians 2, as he talks about your conversion in time, in the span of your human lifetime, God made you alive together with Christ. He did that when you, yes, you existed, but you had no capacity to respond. You were dead in transgressions. You were dominated by the devil, the world, and your own flesh, and you were doomed to suffer the wrath of God.

So where did human contribution that clenched the deal ever come from? Beloved, I'll tell you: it came from God working in your heart, not something that you did in your own power and so that even the faith that we bring to God to receive Christ is a gift from Him. It's all from God, not from you. He said it negatively, "It's not of yourselves." Look at verse 8. He said, "It's by grace that you have been saved through faith, that not of yourselves." Negative statement. Not out of you, not originating with you, not from you. I love this! Now, he says it positively. He's beating this thing up one side and down the other. He's making it utterly impossible for a sincere reader of His message to come away with anything other than giving glory to God. It's completely impossible. He's saying the same thing. He's emphasizing the same point in many different ways. There is one hub, but there are multiple spokes going out making the same point, rolling all in the same direction, all straight to the glory of God. He says, "That not of yourselves," and in the English text that we have in front of us this morning, he says, "not of yourselves. It is the gift of God."

Now, I'll never forget when I first saw that in the original language. It's so cool. If all the years of studying Greek were only for that one moment it would have been worth it all. The original text reads this way, "That not of yourselves, of God the gift," is how it reads. "Of God" is the emphasis. It's the next word. It came from God. He's emphasizing the same thing again. It is emphatic. It literally reads, "Of God," or "from God the gift." How many ways can he say it? Look at it now. "For by grace," this grace that we've been talking about in verses 5 and 7, "you have been saved, delivered, through faith and, watch it! I'm still talking here!" Now, I am talking as though Paul is speaking, okay? This isn't me being severe to you. This is Paul speaking. He says, "You've been saved by faith, and, I'm still talking here! I haven't finished my sentence yet! That did not originate from you. This whole thing did not originate from you. Of God it came from. Of God the gift. It came from God, and it was a gift, not something you earned as a wage." It just keeps going on, and on, and on. Paul is saying in this final clause, "the gift of God," yes, he is saying it as a gift, something that was given to you, that you didn't earn, but his emphasis is on where the gift came from. From God this gift came. Not from you, but from God came this gift. That's the idea. It puts you and God side-by-side, slaps you away and elevates God. A gift. A gift. Not something you earned. Not from you, but, by emphatic contrast, from God. I'm glad Paul made that so clear, aren't you?

Now that that's established, we can move on to something else. Praise God, we can move on to something else. It wasn't from me; it was from God. Verse 9. "Not as a result of works." Are you kidding me! He's making me the same point again! He's not done talking about it! This brings us to our second point. We said, "Saved by grace." Point number two: "Not saved by works." And if you want to ship that with a complaint to my homiletics professor in seminary, go right ahead. I don't care. I just want you to understand the text. Saved by grace, not saved by works. That's the contrast. Paul here in verse 9, he is saying the same thing again that he was just saying in verse 8. It's the preposition "ek" again. That's that preposition that reflects origin or source. He said, "Not of yourselves, of God the gift." Now, he says it again. He goes back to a negative statement, "Not as a result of works." Perfect parallel. Perfect parallel of statement that Paul makes here. Not of yourselves, not as a result of works. Works here is simply a reference to human effort, human achievement. Paul says, "You were saved by grace. That didn't originate with you. From God it came. It was a gift." And perhaps, beloved, we get a little bit of a measure of how difficult it is for this point to come home in our hearts. We are so wired to congratulate ourselves on what we do in life. We are so wired to boast and make ourselves look better than someone else. Competition is about that. "Victory over you. Me better than you. I vanquish you." We are so wired to think that way. I want you to follow me here and we import all of that into the spiritual life, and we have the audacity to carry that attitude over toward the God who saved us.

Now, don't underestimate what resides in your heart to try to take some kind of credit for your salvation. We're all, in one way or another, we have our pockets of pride, and we'll display it when the opportunity is right. Thinking in the biblical context here, knowing that this is such a big deal, Paul has been praying now for twenty-three, twenty-four verses, "Oh, I pray that you would understand this. I pray that God would open your eyes to see the power that saved you, the grace that saved you." And so this whole thing, this

whole passage in verses 8 and 9 are bathed in prayer. It is the culmination, it's the climax, of him praying. "God, do something that they can't do on their own." And then, in this condensed, concise climax, there's so much in His heart, there is so much that the Spirit is trying to communicate to the church of Jesus Christ, communicating, "This came from God, not from you," that he just says it, and he just steps over himself saying the same thing in so many different ways.

You know why he says it so many times? You know why he's been pleading with God to help us understand? You know why? It's because you don't want to believe it. You want to congratulate yourself. You want some kind of credit for your ultimate fate. You want to be the captain. You want to distinguish yourself. "Yeah, I'm saved by grace, but I was better than him. I understood. I took the step that others wouldn't. God, I brought my faith to you." Did that really just come out of my mouth? Even to mock it? Even to refute it? You see, you have to step back and let the magnitude of what Paul is doing here, here is an apostle of Jesus Christ appointed uniquely for this purpose, and he says, "I want you to understand this. In fact, I'm praying that you would understand this. I'm praying that God would exercise His power toward you, because this is something that you won't grasp in your own human effort. You're too proud to want to acknowledge this on your own, and so I'm asking God to help you, and I'm praying, and I'm praying that you would see power and kindness originating with God as the reason that you stand in grace now and that you did not contribute to that."

Look at verse 8 with me again. "By grace you have been saved through faith, that's not of yourselves. It's the gift of God, not as the result of works," not as a result of religious ritual, not as a result of your human ingenuity. The saving act, including faith, was a gift from God. It did not originate with you. It was not a result of your works. Follow me here. It was God's plan. It was God's power. It was God's grace. It was God's gift. Paul has beaten this horse to death. Why such emphasis? Look at the end of verse 9, "So that no one may boast." Grace rightly understood, makes boasting impossible. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we enjoy our privileged status as a result of the good grace of God, and God alone. And God will not allow the Apostle Paul in his prayer and in his intense concise, compressed, explosive language, will not allow, the Spirit of God who lives within us will not allow our pride to diminish the glory of God in our salvation. We are saved by grace, not by our works and even the desire to come to God came as a result of His prior work in our hearts. And why is it like that? So that in the ages to come, there would be no human boasting. There would be no poison of human pride to sully the utter display of perfect grace, kindness, love, and mercy. And the Spirit of God through the Word of God says, "Grasp that now. It did not originate with you."

If you are here today as a Christian, you are on the receiving end of immeasurable kindness from a good and gracious God upon whom you had no claim. Your back was turned to Him, was not looking at Him, and, as it were, He came and placed His hand on the back of your shoulder and said, "You come to me." That's why you're saved. The grace of God. The goodness of God to the glory of God. And so we see our Savior, and we love Him completely.

And let me just say this one final word. I understand, Christian, that your present sorrows and challenges are real, and difficult, and burdensome. I asked you an hour ago, an hour and ten minutes ago, I don't know, to set it aside, and I believe that you did. As we step back into life, as it were, life today, we do so from the perspective that God has undertaken kindness toward us of immeasurable, infinite value. God has loved us. God has displayed goodness to us. And even now, even today with where you're occupied with earthly things, understand that God is not going to stop. He has not stopped being good to you. He will not stop being good to you. This is just stuff along the current that is taking us into the perfection of eternal life. View today from this great context: God chose me. God saved me. There is more grace to come. He did this because of who He is, not because of who I am. In that I rest. In that I rejoice. In that I go forth.

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we do honor and worship You. We gladly acknowledge that salvation was Your plan, Your power, Your grace, Your gift. In no way, shape, or form, Father, did it originate with us. This came from You. And therefore, You get all the glory, and, as Your people, we rejoice to acknowledge that, to declare it, to affirm it, to proclaim it to everyone who will listen.*

*Father, I have a special word of prayer to offer to You on behalf of those who are here today who don't know Christ. Father, I pray that You would open their eyes, move in their hearts, that they might see Christ as the eternal Son of God who came to earth to save sinners like them. That they would see, and understand, and appreciate, and bow before the One who offered His life on a cross to shed His blood as a sacrifice, to turn away Your wrath so that they might be reconciled to You. Father, I pray that you would make Christ lovely in their eyes today for the first time. I pray that they would so see the magnificence of this that they would leave behind the pride of their heart and the sins that they have loved until now to embrace this wonderful Savior that we proclaim, the Lord Jesus Christ who saves men, not according to our works, but according to Your eternal purpose. Father, bring them into the family of God now, today. Lord, we rejoice in our salvation that we don't want to leave anyone behind that we know and love. And so Father, do a work in their hearts so that they would join this chorus which sings with joy by grace, not by works. O God, from You, not from me. In the name of our lovely Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*

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