

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Saved By Grace Ephesians 2:8-10

Intro: As **ch2** opens, Paul lays out the great contrast that is true for every Christian. He aptly explains our wretched condition before we come to Christ and then reveals how God removes us from our hopeless situation and raises us up into heavenly places with Christ by virtue of us now being in Christ. As Paul brings this paragraph to a close, he goes on to explain the theological method by which salvation is introduced into the life of the believer. In doing so, he has inadvertently written one of the best known passages in the entire Bible (**8-9**). And why wouldn't it be seeing that it contains the greatest message any person could ever hear. This text is probably one of the most widely memorized passages, along with **Jn 3:16**. Theologically, our text says the same thing.

Our text today actually has three parts. The first part tells how it is that God saves us: "by grace." The second part speaks of the channel through which this grace of God comes to us: "through faith." The last part, which is a contrast, tells how God does not save us, and it explains why: It is "not by works, so that no one can boast."

8-9 – It seems that Paul can't speak of this glorious work God does (**4-7**) without reminding us that it's a gift of grace, given to the undeserving. Now, Paul clearly states this theological truth but doesn't seem to feel the need to explain it to us. Of course, many a pastor, commentator and theological professors have gone to great lengths to dissect, define and describe the spiritual reality and theological ramifications of what's being said here but neither time nor patience will allow us a comprehensive look at these various opinions. To put it as plainly as possible; think of water flowing through a pipe. The water is the important part but it is communicated through the pipe. The pipe doesn't quench your thirst; the water does but the pipe brings the water to the place where you benefit from it.

But there are three parts to this text so let's look at them individually.

God saves us by grace. Instead of burdening you with a theological definition of grace I would rather tell you a story that illustrates exactly what

Paul is saying here. In the late 1800s, in the worst slum district of London, there was a social worker named Henry Moorehouse. One evening as he was walking along the street he saw a little girl come up out of a basement store carrying a pitcher of milk. She was taking it home. But when she was a few yards from Moorehouse she suddenly slipped and fell and dropped the pitcher which fell on the sidewalk and broke. The milk ran into the gutter, and the little girl began to cry inconsolably. Moorehouse quickly checked to see if she was hurt. He helped her to her feet, saying, "Don't cry, little girl." But there was no stopping her tears.

She kept repeating, "My mommy'll whip me; my mommy'll whip me." Moorehouse said, "No, your mother won't whip you. I'll see to that. Look, it's not broken in many pieces." He stooped down, picking up the pieces and began to work as if he were putting the pitcher back together. The little girl stopped crying; she had hope. She came from a family in which pitchers had been mended before. Maybe this stranger could repair the damage. She watched as Moorehouse fitted several of the pieces together until, working too roughly, he knocked it apart again. Once again she started crying and Moorehouse had to repeat, "Don't cry. I promise you that your mother won't whip you." Once more they began piecing it together, this time getting it all back except for the handle. Moorehouse gave it to the little girl, and she tried to attach it. But, naturally, all she did was knock it down again. This time there was no stopping her tears. She would not even look at the broken pieces lying on the sidewalk.

Finally Moorehouse picked the little girl up, carried her down the street to a shop that sold crockery, and bought her a new pitcher. Then he carried her back to where she had bought the milk and had the new pitcher filled. He asked her where she lived and then carried her to the house, set her down on the step, and placed the full pitcher of milk in her hands. Then he opened the door for her. As she went inside, he asked one more question, "Now, do you think your mother will whip you?" He was rewarded for his trouble by a bright smile as she said to him, "Oh, no, sir, because it's a lot better pitcher than we had before."

This is a wonderful illustration of the grace of God in salvation. The Bible teaches that humans were created in the image of God. But when our first parents sinned by disobeying God's righteous law, that image was broken beyond repair. This doesn't mean that there's no value at all to human

nature. Even a broken pitcher is not without value. Archaeologists use pieces of broken pottery to date civilizations uncovered by their digs. Some artists used broken bits of pottery to create beautiful mosaics. Broken pottery isn't worthless. But it *is* worthless so far as carrying milk is concerned. In the same way, human nature in its broken state is useless for pleasing God or earning heaven. [Rom 3:10-12](#) says, "There is none righteous, no, no one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside, they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good; no not one."

Still, people keep trying to please God by their character. Like Moorehouse in his 1st attempts to help the girl, they keep trying to put the pieces of their broken righteousness back together. They can't achieve God's perfect standard of righteousness, but they see parts of their character that are good (from their perspective) and they try to work with those. The result is a patchwork of shards, which God condemns.

Here's where the grace of God comes in. Jesus Christ came to this world, which was weeping in its failure and sin, and He became the means by which an utterly hopeless situation was transformed. No where does the Bible indicate that Jesus ever tried to patch up fallen human nature. He didn't come to assist us or reform us. He came to re-create us. He said, You must be born again ([Jn 3:7](#)). Instead of trying to piece together the broken pieces of our fallen nature, Jesus gives us a new nature: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" ([2 Cor 5:17](#)). And to paraphrase the words of the little girl, "It's a lot better nature than we had before." It is nothing less than the nature of the holy and eternal God within His people.

And it's all of grace. In that story the little girl didn't do anything to deserve Moorehouse's favor. She didn't pay for her new pitcher and milk. She didn't hire Moorehouse's services; she had nothing to hire him with. She didn't even prevail upon his sympathies because she was miserable or pathetic. Moorehouse did as he did solely because it pleased him to do it. He didn't even expect a reward from the girl's parents. Similarly, Jesus didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance ([Mt 9:13](#)). He died for us and saved us solely because of His good pleasure.

Ok, so we're saved by grace, we can't put the broken pieces of our fallen nature back together; we can't meet God's standard of perfection. If we're to be saved, it must come graciously from God in Jesus Christ. But it's still

very abstract and remote. How does a salvation as great and free as that become mine personally? Through faith!

What is faith? Let's displace some modern misconceptions by explaining what faith is not. Faith is in no way related to our subjective feelings. A person is not a Christian simply because they feel that they are. You can't wake up one morning and decide you're a Christian anymore than a man can wake up one morning and decide they are a woman. The closest he'll ever get is a distorted caricature of what a man thinks a woman is. Another worldly idea of faith is optimism. This type of faith is simply having a positive mental attitude as a result of which the thing believed in is supposed to happen. "If it's going to be, it's up to me." There's nothing wrong with having a positive mental attitude, but this is really just self-confidence, which is helpful in the business world but bankrupt in the spiritual world.

Against these distortions we must agree that real faith isn't based on a person's individual attitudes and feelings. This type of human defined faith is unstable. By contrast, biblical faith is reliable; for it is faith in the trustworthy God, who reveals Himself reliably. Biblical faith has 3 elements: knowledge, heart response, and commitment.

Knowledge - this must be 1st because it's impossible to believe in a thing unless we know what it is we're believing. In the biblical sense this knowledge is of the gospel, it's knowledge of the very things Paul's been writing about in Eph 2: that we are all naturally dead in trespasses and sins, that we're objects of God's just wrath, but that God has reached out to save us through the work of Jesus Christ—His dying for sin in our place. This is all of grace. Calvin said, "We shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit."

Heart response - Faith is not just intellectual assent to certain truths. It's also a response to such knowledge. It's the pouring into the heart what the mind has absorbed. The Word of God is not received by faith if it only swirls around in the top of the brain; it's only properly received when it takes root in the depths of the heart.

Commitment - The final element or, as Spurgeon says, trust. It means casting yourself upon Christ, resting on His promises and accepting His finished work on your behalf. It's saying to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20:28).

Marriage illustrates this perfectly. A good marriage is the culmination of an extended process of learning about someone, responding to them and then making a commitment. Courtship can be compared to faith's first element: knowledge. This is when you get to know each other, seeing whether the other person has the characteristics that will be good in the marriage. If the other person isn't of good character or can't be trusted, there'll be trouble later on. The second stage is like the second element in faith: the movement of the heart. This equates to falling in love, which is also an important step beyond mere knowledge. Finally, there's the point of verbalized commitment in the marriage ceremony. Here the couple promises to live together and love each other regardless of what their future circumstances might be. In the same way, we commit ourselves to Jesus Christ for this life and for eternity.

The last part of our text tells how God does not save sinners (9). This makes "faith" something other than a work; for although faith is a channel by which the grace of God comes to us, it's not a deserving action or attitude on our part.

We *don't* contribute to our salvation in any way, not even in so vital a matter as the faith by which Christ's work is received. If faith were a virtue, then we'd be able to boast in heaven. We'd be there because of the grace of God **plus** our faith while someone else would **not** be there because in their case faith was lacking. No, not even faith is a work. Nothing we can do, great or small, can get us into salvation. If we think there is, we're still trusting in ourselves and our own ability rather than Christ. Salvation is by grace alone. All we can do and must do is take the pitcher God puts in our hand and thank Him because it's a lot better than anything we ever had before. That's the only way a person becomes a Christian and thus passes out of death into life.

But, if salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone – does this mean that works no longer have any place in Christianity? Does this doctrine of justification by grace alone inevitably lead to bad conduct? Thankfully, Paul pauses long enough to clear up that question so it will

never give anyone any trouble or doubt ever again (10)!

I'm kidding, of course! This is where Roman Catholic and Protestant theology go their separate ways. In short, Catholic theology says: Faith plus works equal justification while Protestants theology says: Faith equals justification plus works. There is also a fringe theology that eliminates the necessity of works altogether, stating that a person can be saved and show no evidence of spiritual regeneration. This is patently ridiculous and must be rejected.

Paul's repetition of works in v9-10 is striking. His first mention of works (9) is negative. It says in no uncertain terms that we're not saved by anything we did or can do. It was all God's work of grace in us, so we have no reason to boast, no grounds for feeling a sense of accomplishment. This verse utterly repudiates the idea that works contribute in any measure to our justification. Grace and works are mutually exclusive possibilities. Either we're saved by God's grace alone or we're trying unsuccessfully to save ourselves by our own works. There are no other possibilities. But, no sooner has Paul rejected the role of works in justification than he immediately brings it in again, saying that God has created us precisely to do good works. This is stated in such strong language (10b) that we can accurately say that if there are no works, the individual is not justified. Paul is declaring the necessity of good works.

But, how can he insist on the necessity of good works? Clearly, good works are a good thing. A Christian will be happier doing good works than not doing them. You can even imply a certain obligation to do good works. But how can sound Protestant theology insist on the presence of good works as a necessary consequence and evidence of justification? How can we say that if works are not present, a person is not saved? The answer is that justification, while it accurately describes one important aspect of what it means to be saved, isn't the whole of salvation. God justifies, but that's not the only thing He does. He also regenerates. And there's no justification without regeneration, just as there is no regeneration without justification.

Regeneration is the theological term Jesus was referring to when he told Nicodemus, "You must be born again" (Jn 3:7). He's saying old Nic needed to have a new start as a result of the life of God being placed within him. It's what Paul's talking about in ch2, as he described how God made us alive with Christ when we were spiritually dead (5). It's what Paul's talking about

in our text, for he doesn't just say God commands us to do good works or even urges us to do them. Rather, he says God "created us in Christ Jesus to do good works," and that these were specifically "prepared in advance for us to do." Clearly, if a person has been created by God specifically to do good works, he will do those good works—even though they have nothing to do with how he was saved in the first place.

Sadly, as clear as Paul makes it here, this doctrine is probably one of the most neglected teachings in evangelical churches today. How else can you account for the resurgence of a heretical theology that has no place for works at all? What can we say about a teaching that presents justification divorced from sanctification and forgiveness that requires no corresponding change in life? What would Jesus think of such theology? Well, we don't have to guess! (Lk 9:23; Lk 6:46; Mt 5:20) As we can see from this last passage of Christ's sayings, it's not just a matter of our demonstrating a genuinely changed behavior and doing good works if we are truly justified. Our good works must also exceed the good works of others. After all, the believer's good works flow from the character of God within them.

Christ's statement in Mt 5:20 means if you call yourself a Christian and profess to be justified by faith alone and confess that you have nothing whatever to contribute to your own justification - unless you conduct yourselves in a way that is superior to the conduct of the very best people who are hoping to save themselves by their works, you won't enter God's kingdom. You're not Christians in the first place. This is the dichotomy of works in the Christian religion, on the one hand it preaches pure, unadulterated grace with no meritorious contribution from us whatever. On the other hand, and at the same time, it requires of us the loftiest conceivable conduct. We are justified by faith alone. But we're not justified by a faith that is alone. So, if you're really clinging to Jesus, you will be abounding in the works of the Lord and will be living out an exceptional pattern of behavior.

This all may sound confusing and even contradictory. But the problem disappears as soon as we realize that the good works Christians are called upon to do (must do) are the result of God's prior working in them. That's why Paul prefaces his demand for good works with the statement, For we are His workmanship. It's why, in a similar way in the very next book of the Bible, he says, Therefore, my beloved,...work out your salvation with fear

and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure ([Phil 2:12-13](#)).

In [v10](#) Paul calls this work of God a new creation, saying that we are . . . created in Christ Jesus for good works. Paul is contrasting between our new creation in Christ and our old creation in Adam. When God made Adam, He made him perfectly furnished to do all good works. But Adam fell and since that time, from God's perspective even the best of the good works of Adam and his posterity have been bad good works. But now God recreates those He's joining to Christ. He's bringing into existence something that didn't exist before and now has new and exciting possibilities. In this spiritual re-creation God gives us a new set of senses. Before, we saw with our eyes physically, but we were spiritually blind. Now we see with spiritual eyes, and everything seems new. Before, we were spiritually deaf. The word of God was spoken, but it made no sense to us. Or if it did, we resented that word and resisted it. Now we have been given ears to hear, and we hear and respond to Jesus' teaching. Before, our thinking was darkened. We called the good, bad; and bad, good. Spiritual things were foolishness to us. Now our thinking's been changed; we evaluate things differently, and our minds are being renewed day by day ([Rom 12:1-2](#)).

Before, our hearts were hard. We hated God; we didn't even care much for others. Now our hearts are softened. God appears altogether lovely, and what He loves we love. We love Him because He first loved us ([1 Jn 4:19](#)). Now we care about others just as Jesus did because our hearts have been remade. Science thrills us with the mechanical wonder that is the human body, the body that God created. But, there's another creation that surpasses even that of the human body. It's the re-creation of a person who before was spiritually dead, utterly incapable of doing any good thing that could satisfy God, but who now, as the result of God's working, is able to truly do good "good works".

People, in general, like to talk about God's love because, since it is unconditional, it won't impose upon them any responsibilities. What they fail to realize is that God's love is a transforming love. Yes, God's love will always meet us right where we're at but, when we receive this love, it will always insist on taking us where we should be going. The love of God that saves my soul will also change my life. The beautiful place God's love is bringing us to is: being active in good works. These are just as much a part

of God's predestined plan for our lives as anything else is. These good works are valid evidence that a person is walking as one of God's chosen.

Are good works present in your life? Are they growing? 😊