

Salvation 101

Dave Farley | Ephesians 2:8-10

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1.8 billion Muslims worldwide believe that they will be saved if, and only if, they obey the five pillars of Islam.

1.2 billion Hindus believe that they will be saved from the vicious cycle of reincarnation if, and only if, they earn enough good karma.

506 million Buddhists believe that they will be saved (i.e., experience Nirvana) if and only if they understand the four noble truths and carefully follow the eight-fold path.

17 million Jews believe that they will be saved if, and only if, they rigorously adhere to the laws of the OT.

What do all these religions have in common? Hard work! You can only experience salvation if you work hard!!! If you don't work hard, or perform, you are in deep trouble.

Christianity is utterly different. This brings us to one of the most beloved passages in the whole Bible (Eph. 2:8-10).

In these verses the apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, proclaims that...

We are saved by grace, through faith, for good works!

But pastor, I already know this... but has it transformed every area of your life? If your answer is no, you need to think about it again.

Let's look at each phrase of this pregnant sentence...

First, we are saved by grace.

Ephesians 2:8 (ESV) — 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith.

What is grace?

Many people define grace as God's unmerited favor, or God's riches at Christ's expense. These definitions are somewhat helpful, but they don't capture the whole truth. What do I mean? These definitions don't do justice to the context of Ephesians 2.

Ephesians 2:1-10 reminds us, that God freely bestows his favor, not on righteous people, but on law breakers who deserve judgment. We must never forget who we were when God lavished us freely with blessings.

A better definition of Grace is God's favor freely given to those who deserve judgment.

Illustration:

Imagine walking down the sidewalk in downtown Spokane. You see a homeless guy. He reaches out his hand and says, “hey, can you spare five dollars”. You are feeling kind, so you give him ten dollars. He did not merit this money; therefore, it is unmerited favor. But it is not Ephesians 2 grace.

What exactly is grace? Let’s say that that the following week the same homeless guy breaks into your house and assaults your wife, assaults your kids, steals your valuables, and burns your house down. Then he drives off in your brand-new Tesla.

You refuse to press charges. Refusing to press charges is mercy, not grace. Instead of pressing charges rather than giving him ten dollars, you liquidate all your assets and drain all your bank accounts and gift him everything you own. That is grace.

Grace is undeserved favor given freely to those who deserve punishment. We did not deserve God’s favor. We were rebels, who wanted nothing to do with God. We broke his laws spurning his kindness. This is when he freely gave us his son. If you don’t believe this you will never be amazed by grace.

What is grace? God’s favor freely given to those who deserve judgment.

What does grace do? It saves!

Ephesians 2:8 (ESV) — 8 For by grace you have been saved

But saved from what?

God has saved us from all the things mentioned in Ephesians 2:1-3.

Ephesians 2:1–3 (ESV) — 1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins **2** 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— **3** 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.

God has saved us from enslavement to the world, the flesh, and the devil. More importantly Jesus has spared us from God’s wrath.

All of this comes to you, Christian, freely...

Ephesians 2:8 (ESV) — 8 For by grace you have been saved...

Application:

Salvation is all of grace...

Grace is a gift—gifts by definition can’t be earned.

Imagine going to a b-day party this afternoon. The birthday boy invites all of his friends. His friends are generous. They give him a new gaming system, a new bike, some new golf

clubs, and a new pair of Jordans. After all the gifts are given the birthday boy pulls out his wallet and says, “Ok, how much do I owe everyone?”

Salvation is free. God is gracious. This distinguishes Christianity from every other world religion.

Salvation is by grace, but how do we receive it? This brings us to the next phrase....

First, we are saved by grace

Second, we are saved through faith

Let me ask a few questions about faith....

What is faith?

Ephesians 2:8 (ESV) — 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith.

Our culture has many misconceptions about faith.

Faith is optimism...

Faith is believing without evidence...

Faith is mere intellectual assent to a body of facts...

None of these perspectives captures the essence of biblical faith.

True faith involves knowledge, agreement, and most importantly trust.

Illustration:

When I was 14, I went to a church camp called Adullum. It was essentially a Christian military (ish) boot camp for junior high kids. Yeah, it was weird... We camped for several days, in the middle of a national forest.

On the third morning we learned all about repelling. They explained how we were each going to walk backwards over the edge of a 200-foot cliff, with a harness wrapped around our waist and legs and a rope in our hands. On the three-mile march to the repelling sight, we were all very nervous but too afraid to admit it.

We had to trust our harness, the rope, and the person below us to survive.

That morning I gained knowledge about the mechanics of repelling...

I agreed that if I did everything, they told me to do, I would not die...

But I still had to walk backwards over that cliff and personally trust the rope, harness, and the person below me to save me.

This is saving faith.

This was not a blind leap of faith...

This was not faith without evidence...

This was personal trust in light of the evidence...

This is the only faith that saves....

Application:

Is this the type of faith that you possess?

What is faith? Next question...

How does faith save? Faith is the instrumental cause of salvation!

Ephesians 2:8 (ESV) — 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith.

Notice that Paul does not say that we are saved by faith. Oh no, we are not saved by faith, we are saved through faith. Faith does not save, Jesus saves, faith is merely the instrument that God uses to bring the benefits of Jesus Christ to us.

Illustration:

The medicine and the spoon

When you see a great sculpture, you don't say, "wow, what a chisel!!!"

When you see a great painting, you don't say, "wow what an amazing paint brush!"

Application:

Faith is important, we must have saving faith, but we are not saved by faith. We are saved through faith...

Why does this matter?

We agree that we are not saved by our works, but then many of us think that we are saved by the strength of our faith, which becomes a work.

Tim Keller often talks about the two types of people who walked through the Red Sea.

If we are saved by faith, we could boast in our faith.

What is faith?

How does faith save?

Where does faith come from? God!

Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV) — 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

To understand this verse, we must understand grammar...

One scholar writes,

“Greek pronouns agree in gender with the nouns to which they refer; however, the pronoun ‘this’ in ‘this not from yourselves’ is neuter, while the nouns ‘faith’ and ‘grace’ are both feminine in gender.” (Chapell, 87)

As a result, most scholars agree that the word “this” refers to both nouns (faith and grace).

This means that grace and faith are gifts from God.

Application:

But doesn't this make sense in light of Ephesians 2:1-3? They we learned that we were dead in our transgressions and sins. A dead person can't believe, since they are dead. God must regenerate our hearts and give us the gift of faith, which we then must exercise.

We see the same thing in Phil. 1:29 and Acts 18:27.

If you believe the gospel, it is because God gave you the gift of faith!!!

What is faith?

How does faith save?

Where does faith come from?

How does faith relate to works? They are opposites!

Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV) — 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9** not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Paul could have easily stopped at the end of verse 8... “And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God....” But he did not stop there. He wrote, “not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Why did he keep writing? Because he knows that we are tempted to combine faith and works, which leads to boasting.

Paul wants us to remember that we are not saved through faith plus...

Going to church...

Plus reading our Bibles...

Plus giving our money away...

Plus prayer...

Plus avoiding all that bad behavior (drunkenness, porn, cursing, etc...)

We are saved through faith, plus nothing!!!

Who resists this teaching the most? The biker, the hell's angel, the prostitute, the wall street wolf??? No, it is church people, because they are often more righteous than others...

We think that non-Christians need the gospel, not church people...

We admit that we are in trouble, yet we think we can contribute something.

Illustration:

It was a normal day on the San Francisco Bay bridge, until one car spun out of control during rush hour...

Several cars crashed into each other, one of the cars was hit so hard, that it was catapulted off the side of the bridge, fortunately one of the wheels got snagged in some of the bridge cables.

The car hung several hundred feet above the ocean water, suspended by some frayed bridge cabling...

If the car dropped the driver would surely die... Traffic was shut down for hours...

It took an elaborate and coordinated response to help this driver. Everybody was involved...

the police,
the fire department,
the transportation authorities,
search and rescue people repelled off the side of the bridge...
There were rescue boats in the water...
There were Helicopters flying around...
Even the military brought assets to bare on the situation...

It was a massive coordination of several agencies all doing their thing... to rescue one lady.

After several hours of hard and dangerous work, they finally pulled the woman out of the car and carefully placed her on a stretcher...

As they carried her to safety, the rescue workers heard her say,

"Leave me alone, leave me alone, I could have rescued myself..."

This is what some say to God? "Leave me alone God, I can rescue myself, I can do enough good things... I'm not really that bad... I guess you can help me a little bit, I need a few answered prayers, but I can do the rest myself, I'm pretty good."

Martin Luther writes,

"I myself have been preaching and cultivating (the message of grace)... for almost twenty years and still I feel the old clinging dirt of wanting to deal with God so that I may contribute something, so that he will have to give me his grace in exchange for my holiness. And still, I cannot get it into my head that I should surrender myself completely to sheer grace; yet (I know) that this is what I should and must do." (Martin Luther)

Application:

The reasons that many Americans go to church on Sunday is to save themselves. Maybe that is you this morning? We think we can earn enough righteousness to be made acceptable to God. Not realizing that our righteousness comes entirely from Christ.

The gospel is the good news that Jesus did it all.

Why is this so hard for us to remember?

Because we work for everything else in life...

When we work hard, we get good grades.
When we work hard, we make more money.
When we work hard, we get better at sports.
When we work hard, we can lose the weight.
When we work hard, we might get that promotion...

Naturally, we think when we work hard, God will save us!!!

Or we think, God saved me by grace, but I need to make sure that I stayed save by my good works.

In these moments we must remember the words of the apostle Paul.

Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV) — 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9** not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

We are saved by grace alone through faith alone, plus nothing...

If we are saved by grace through faith, why do anything??? Why not keep on sinning... God forgives right? This brings us to the last phrase...

*We are saved by grace
We are saved through faith*

Third, we are saved for works

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

Let's look at this verse phrase by phrase...

"For we are his workmanship,"

The Greek word for workmanship is the word poi-ema. Some want to translate this as poem. As in, we are God's poem... but this is not broad enough. The same word was used to describe all kinds of art. Therefore, it is best to translate this as we are God's work of art or God's masterpiece (F.F. Bruce).

This is astonishing! In one sense, of all creation radiates the glory of God (mountains, oceans, lakes, beaches, trees, and sunsets), but only Christians are called God's work of art or God's masterpiece.

But... keep in mind, that when people look at the famous statue of David in Florence, they don't say, "Wow David was amazing," instead they say, "wow, Michelangelo was an amazing." In a similar sense... we are not amazing, it is God's work in us that is amazing.

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,”

What is the point? We were recreated/saved by Jesus Christ for a very specific purpose. We were recreated/saved for good works. Why? All that God does he does for his glory. He saved us to display his glory to a lost and dying world through our good works.

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

These last two phrases are amazing. Before we were born, before time began, God chose to save us (Ephesians 1:3-6) and then God prepared good works for us to walk in.

This means that in eternity past, God specifically prepared good works for you to walk in this week.

What might those good works be?

An act of generosity?

A kind word?

An act of service?

An act of mercy?

A prayer for a friend?

An excellence report at the office that saves your company a bunch of money.

Shoveling the neighbor's snow?

Making a siblings bed?

Etc???

Illustration:

Martin Luther is one of my historical heroes. His output was voluminous.

In the last 23 years of his life; Luther married, fathered six children, intervened in a massive peasant's war, translated the OT, preached a couple of thousand sermons, created a whole new approach to Christian worship, wrote catechisms, settled political squabbles, wrote scores of influential treatises, counseled hundreds of pastors, trained hundreds of pastors, taught at the university, oversaw a fledgling denomination, and composed hundreds of hymns, we still sing today. And this just scratches the surface...

Worship services and texts for one week

- a. Sunday, 5am – Pauline epistles.
- b. Sunday, 9am- The gospels
- c. Sunday afternoon- the Catechism
- d. Monday and Tuesday- the Catechism
- e. Wednesday- the gospel of Mathew
- f. Thursday and Friday- the epistles
- g. Saturday- the gospel of John

Why did Luther work so hard? Was it because he was trying to earn salvation? No, he worked hard because he knew that he was saved by grace alone through faith alone. As a result, he loved God, and he demonstrated his love for God through his works.

People use to say to John Bunyan, author of the Pilgrims progress, "Bunyan, if you keep assuring people that God loves them, forgives, and justifies them freely by his grace, they will do whatever they want. They will sin boldly." Bunyan said, "No, no, no, if I can convince people that God loves them, they will do whatever God wants."

Application:

Good works are never the grounds of our salvation, yet good works are the evidence that our faith is saving faith.

Conclusion:

We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, for good works....

Imagine this scenario with me.

An airplane flies over the South Atlantic and crashes a thousand miles from any coast. It ends up floating on the surface of the water. In the plane there are three individuals: Michael Phelps (an Olympic gold medalist), an average swimmer, and someone who can't swim at all. Michael Phelps calls out, "Follow me and you will survive!" and he takes off, slicing through the water, heading for the tip of South America a thousand miles away. The other two jump after him.

In about thirty seconds the non-swimmer sinks below the surface and drowns.

It takes about thirty minutes for the average swimmer to lose steam and drown.

But Michael Phelps churns away for twenty-five hours, covering an impressive fifty miles. Terrific! Only 950 more miles and 19 days to go! Obviously, he will never make it. (K. Hughes)

Even the best swimmer in the world can't swim long enough or far enough to save himself. It is impossible.

Even the most righteous person can never do enough to save himself or herself. Fortunately, we are not saved by our works. We are saved by grace, through faith, for good works (never because of our good works).

Let's pray...