

Ephesians 2:1-10
All of Grace
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I don't know if you have noticed this or not, but people tend not to like the photograph on their driver's license. If asked why, some will say, "Well, the picture doesn't do me justice." That is what some people say, but I don't think that is the real problem in most cases and certainly not in my case. As a general rule, the real problem is that the photograph on our driver's license actually does do us justice, and that is the very problem with it. The person taking our driver's license picture is usually not a trained photographer. He puts a person in front of his camera and takes his picture without much ado or effort. He quickly snaps a picture that captures a person's normal look.

When we go to a professional photographer, we are not paying to get a picture that does us justice, a picture that captures what we normally look like. We are paying to get a picture that treats us mercifully. We pay for a professional with a trained eye who knows how to position us so that the camera catches us at the most complementary angle. We pay for a professional with a trained eye who knows how to adjust the light to bring out the best in our coloring. We pay for a professional with a trained eye who, as a last resort, knows how to doctor the picture in order to hide our flaws. We pay for a professional with a trained eye who has the ability to produce a picture that doesn't do us justice but which treats us mercifully and makes us look our very best or even better than our very best.

Many people tend to think about God's judgment the way many think about pictures. Many people think all they need is for God to judge them with a judgment that is fair, with a judgment which does them justice. What they really need is for God to judge them with a judgment which will treat them mercifully.

This is basically what Paul is saying to us in our passage for today. Paul is addressing the saints at Ephesus and reminding them that when it comes to their being made right with God, what they require is not justice but mercy; not fairness but grace. Our salvation is all of grace, one hundred percent grace, pure, undiluted grace, total grace. We have done nothing to earn or to deserve or to merit the salvation that is ours in Christ Jesus.

Some people compare the offer of salvation to giving a person his own personal checking account. God has deposited in this account the infinite atoning worth of the suffering of Christ. When the gospel is preached to a person, God is offering that person a check made out to him, the value of that check being the person's eternal salvation. God gives the person the check, and all that person has to do is to endorse it with the signature of faith. Now this illustration is fine as far as it goes, but we need to remember something. When God lays down before a sinner the check of salvation and puts the pen of commitment in that sinner's hand and challenges that sinner to endorse the check of the gospel offer with the signature of faith, we need to remember this: the hand which now holds the pen is the lifeless, bony hand of a spiritual skeleton, and dead people can't endorse checks. When Paul says that before our salvation we were dead in trespasses and sins, he is using the most compelling

metaphor, the most powerful illustration possible for total spiritual inability.

The preaching of the gospel is the shining of divine light in a darkened world. Yet the brightest shining of the brightest light will not give sight to the blind. And dead people cannot see.

Beloved, salvation is all of grace. It is totally a gift from God. We are dependent upon God for our salvation from A to Z, from alpha to omega, from beginning to end.

Let's now examine more closely the teaching of Ephesians 2:8-10. First we will look at the words, "For by grace you have been saved." Now what does it mean to be saved? To be saved means to be rescued from a perilous situation. The lifeguard saves the little boy who has gotten his fingers stuck in the drain at the bottom of the swimming pool. The fireman saves the unconscious woman who is pinned in a wrecked car that is about to burst into flames. The surgeon saves the elderly man who had a cancer that was threatening to devour his body. Salvation means to be rescued or delivered from a dangerous situation. We were spiritually dead and heading toward eternal death. Jesus delivered us from that condition and Jesus rescued us from that destiny. We were in a dangerous situation, and Jesus saved us.

Paul says, "For by grace you have been saved." The verb translated "you have been saved" is in the passive voice. This salvation is not something we did. We did not save ourselves. We passively received this salvation or deliverance. This

salvation is something God did to us and for us. The verb translated "you have been saved" is in the perfect tense. This implies action completed in the past with continuing consequences and implications in the present.

Here is what happened. Here is how we were saved passively with a salvation which continues to have consequences and implications. God poured out upon us His Holy Spirit to apply to us the redemption accomplished by Jesus. The Holy Spirit came down upon us from above and immersed us into a permanent covenant union with the ascended, glorified Jesus. This is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The moment we were permanently immersed into covenant union with Jesus, we believed. The Holy Spirit worked faith in our hearts and united us to Christ. Faith is our conscience experience of this covenant union with Jesus. The moment we were immersed into this covenant union with Jesus, we were justified. The moment we were immersed into this covenant union with Jesus we were sanctified.

We had two serious problems: our bad legal record before God and our bad heart condition. We are saved from both of these two serious problems by our saving union with Jesus Christ, a union which we experience as faith. Through our union with Jesus we are justified, and justification is the solution to our bad legal record. Through our union with Christ, we are sanctified, and sanctification is the solution to our bad heart condition.

Let's consider first justification, God's solution to our bad legal record. In justification, God gives us a new legal record before

His court of justice. Based on our covenant union with Jesus, God imputes or reckons to Jesus the guilt of our sins. Jesus paid the punishment for those sins through His suffering, suffering which He did not Himself deserve because He had never Himself sinned. Jesus paid the punishment for our sins as our finished sacrifice. Jesus then imputed or reckoned to us His own righteousness, His own record of perfect obedience. What we have here is a double legal imputation. Our guilt was imputed to Him and He suffered the punishment for it. His righteousness was imputed to us, and we enjoy the benefits of it. The result of this double imputation is that we have a perfect legal standing before a holy God.

Our first serious problem was our bad legal record. Justification delivered us from that. Our second serious problem was our bad heart condition. We had a morally bad heart. We were spiritually dead. Our heart was a calloused heart, a heart of stone. Our heart was inclined toward rebelling against God. This heart inclination toward sin saturated us, dominated us and characterized the life we were living. God delivered us from this through sanctification.

Just like justification, sanctification is rooted in our union with Jesus. We are in covenant union with Jesus, and so the power of Jesus' death delivers us from the power of sin. We are in covenant union with Jesus, and so the power of Jesus' resurrection gives us spiritual life and empowers us to obey God. Sin no longer dominates us or characterizes the life we are living. Our compelling heart inclination now is to obey God, to live to please God. Jesus has made us into a people zealous for good works.

We are both justified and sanctified by our covenant union with Jesus. Our justification and our sanctification are different parts of our salvation, but they complement each other and are consistent with each other. The God who chose to free us from our guilt and condemnation by justifying us also chose to free us from the enslaving power of sin by sanctifying us. In justification, God proclaims us righteous, and in sanctification, God delivers us from the prison of a life dominated by sin. These are different aspects of salvation, but they certainly fit well together. One aspect declares legal righteousness in the place of guilt, and the other aspect grants spiritual freedom in the place of a spiritual imprisonment, in the place of the bondage of a life dominated by sin. God delivered us from our bad legal record, and God delivered us from our bad heart condition. God saved us in both these senses, and He did so for by grace. This means that God gave us this double deliverance as an undeserved gift. God didn't examine us and our lives and see anything good in us to set us apart from others. We have absolutely no basis at all for boasting about our salvation as if we did anything to deserve it. It is all of grace and all of mercy.

I like the way the Apostle Paul illustrates this point in Romans chapter nine. There Paul says that God is making vessels of mercy and vessels of wrath. He is talking about clay cups made by a potter. God is making cups, and He is going to fill some with His mercy and others with His wrath. And the material which God uses to make both of these types of cup is the common lump of sinful humanity. We were a part of the common lump of sinful humanity. God has made us into cups to

be filled with His mercy to overflowing. He did not do this because we were better clay. He did this for us as an undeserved gift so we would have no basis for boasting and so He would receive all the glory and praise for our salvation.

Our first point is that we have been saved by grace. Our second point is that we have been saved through faith. Now what is faith? Faith in our response to the gospel message that Jesus saves sinners. We give mental assent to the truth of this message, and then we act upon the gospel message by trusting in Jesus alone to rescue us, to save us, to deliver us from our spiritual problems. We rest upon Jesus alone to make us right with God, to get us into heaven, and to deliver us from our sinful lifestyle. We look to Him alone for our salvation.

Faith by its very nature is an act which denies all merit in itself. Faith is the beggar's hand reaching out to God. It is not the working hand demanding wages nor the full hand offering payment. Faith is the empty hand pleading for mercy. Faith is our emptiness looking to the fullness of Christ. Faith is our weakness looking to the strength of Christ. Faith is our poverty looking to the riches of Christ's grace. This is the sense in which faith is the alone instrument of our salvation. Faith does not bring its fruits, which are repentance and new obedience, as partial payments for salvation or as reasons for acceptance. The hand of faith is the empty pleading hand asking for nothing but undeserved mercy.

Even the faith we exercise when we come to Christ for salvation is a gift from God. I am not saying that coming to Christ in faith

is something that Jesus or the Holy Spirit does for us. We do the coming, we do the believing. Yet even this is a gift from God in the sense that God gave us the heart which was not only inclined toward coming to Christ in faith but even compelled to come to Christ in faith. Apart from this work of grace in our hearts, we were simply not inclined to do this. In fact, apart from this work of grace in our hearts, we were compelled not to come to Christ in faith. Our hearts loved their sinful ways too much, and we were unwilling to come to Christ to be delivered from them.

Ephesians 2:8 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." Some argue that our saving faith is not a part of this gift from God. They argue that faith is our own contribution to our salvation; God does His part and we do ours. They acknowledge that God does the heavy lifting in salvation. They acknowledge that God does the really difficult work which they cannot do, but they also claim that their little contribution, which is believing, is what turns the point in salvation and makes the difference between heaven and hell. This type of thinking treats salvation as if it is a bargain rather than a gift. We get so much more than we pay for, but we still make a payment, and that payment is our faith.

The problem with that type of thinking is that our passage says that our salvation is an unqualified gift and not merely a fantastic bargain.

Let's consider some verses which point to the teaching that even our moral ability to believe is a gift from God. There are many such passages, but because our time is limited, I will mention only one: John 6:65. Jesus said

65 ... "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."

As this passage tells us, even our coming to Christ in faith is in some basic sense a gift which God has given us.

Here we see the grace of God, the free gift of God. God brought the gospel to you. Then God put within your heart the spiritual life needed to respond in faith to that gospel message. God gave you a double gift. He gave you external light because you were in spiritual darkness. He gave you internal sight because you were spiritually blind.

Believing in Jesus is our responsibility. The ability to fulfill this responsibility is a gift from God. God poured out His Holy Spirit upon us to apply the redemption accomplished by Christ to us. The Holy Spirit immersed us into a permanent covenant union with Christ. Faith is our conscious experience of that covenant union. It is a gift from God.

We are saved by grace through faith unto good works. As our third and last point, we are going to consider salvation unto good works. We are not only saved from something but also saved unto something. We are saved from our bad legal record God and from our bad heart condition. We are saved unto good works.

I have already laid the groundwork for this third point by what I have already said about sanctification and about Jesus' saving us

from a bad heart condition. Jesus has delivered us from a heart dominated by a desire to rebel against God and against God's law. Jesus transformed our heart into a heart dominated by a desire to please God and to obey God's holy law. First, we experience definitive sanctification at the time of our conversion. This is a definitive breaking of the power of sin in our sinful hearts.

Then we experience throughout the rest of our lives progressive sanctification. Over time, we grow in grace, our faith is strengthened, and we more and more die unto sin and more and more live unto righteousness.

Then when we die at the end of this life, our soul is made perfect in holiness and we go to be with the Lord. We are freed from even the presence of sin in our hearts. We no longer have to struggle with indwelling sin. Temptations no longer have any appeal to us. And when Christ returns at the end of this age, our bodies will be freed from death, united to our souls and glorified; that is, elevated to a new, more spiritual level of physical, creaturely existence. That is glorification.

That is how we are saved unto good works: regeneration, definitive sanctification, progressive sanctification, and finally glorification. But what are good works? And how do they differ from the nice things done by those who do not know Christ? You know, Jesus said that even the wicked give good gifts to their children. They are able to do this because God restrains to some degree the sin inclination in everyone's heart. But in God's eyes, the good works which the wicked do are not good works. Here are the reasons: their inner moral rebellion touches and

pollutes everything they do. The wicked are not motivated by a love for God in anything they do. Their goal in what they do is never to glorify God or to promote God's kingdom. For these reasons, God does not accept the good works done by the wicked as truly good.

God does accept a Christian's good works as good even though these are also less than perfect. God accepts the Christian's good works as good for three reasons. One, a Christian's good works are works that at least in an outward sense conform to what God says is good in His moral law. Two, the indwelling sin which still taints a Christian's good works is not the dominant characteristic of a Christian's good works. In the Christian, sin still contaminates, but it no longer dominates.

The dominant characteristic of a Christian's good works is a desire to obey and please God. Three, Jesus washes not only our persons with His atoning blood but also our works. Jesus removes any moral pollution from our good works before He as our High Priest presents our works to God as an offering.

We are saved by grace through faith unto good works.

When we go to get our picture made, we don't want justice, we want mercy. Paul says, Sinner, you don't need justice and fairness; you need mercy and grace. So I challenge you today, humbly reach out your empty hands to Christ and ask for mercy. Trust Him alone for your salvation. Then you will be saved by grace through faith unto good works.