

By Grace, Not by Works

Building a Christian Mind

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Bible Verse: Ephesians 2:8-9
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Well, we come this morning to Ephesians 2, and I invite you to turn there with me for the text that we will have today. It is a very familiar text, at least it should be. Everyone should know Ephesians 2:8, and 9 and have it deeply embedded in their heart. Ephesians 2:8, and 9 we read,

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.

Now it is always a challenge to study a familiar passage, one that's familiar to yourself and one that is familiar to your audience, because we all have an assumption that we already know everything that it means and it's easy to think we're just going through familiar material, but what I want to encourage you today is to approach this time earnestly and not with a sense of going through the motions, but with a sense to see what the Lord has deeply said in his word. This passage that we're looking at today comes after Paul has made a monumental prayer about the nature of God's power and God's grace.

Look at Ephesians 1 in verse 16. Paul has blessed God for the grace that he has shown to the church in salvation and now in verse 16, he transitions to a time of thanksgiving as he thanks God for the church at Ephesus and others who would receive that circular letter in the first century. He says, "I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers," and he goes on to say, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might." So understand that as you come to Ephesians 2, Paul is saying these things after he has engaged in a great spirit of prayer, a spirit of prayer informed by gratitude and a spirit of intercession, you might say, for those who are reading and asking God to work in their hearts by the greatness of his power to help them understand the fullness of what true salvation has brought to them. And so God's power is on display, God's grace is on display before you ever get to chapter 2, and then you see this, Paul speaking of this power in verses 5 and 6 of chapter 2, for example. He says,

"even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved--and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." God has done something magnificent in the hearts of the redeemed. He has brought them out of death and slavery to sin and Satan, imparted new life to them, the same life and by the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead, that brought Christ out of the tomb and to new life, it is that power that has worked in the hearts of the redeemed. As we've been saying many times, and this bears constant repetition, Biblical salvation is not a matter of conforming ourselves to standards of human morality. It's not a matter of self-effort and self-improvement because we cannot improve ourselves, we cannot redeem ourselves, and make ourselves fit for God. We are fallen, we are lost, and we are condemned and from a state of spiritual deadness, there is nothing that we can do to climb Jacob's ladder and enter into heaven. We don't have any power like that at all. We're miserably and hopelessly lost and so the testimony of Scripture is that salvation is not a matter of what we do to earn God's acceptance, it's what God has done to bring us to new life, to bring us to Christ, and to bring us into his family so that all of the glory goes to God.

Now with that said, beloved, true salvation requires a mighty act of God, a mighty act of the unilateral strength and power of God, a mighty act of the unilateral kindness of God, because we have and had no ability to save ourselves. Let me remind you of the first three verses because they help set the context for our text to come, verses 8 and 9. Verses 8 and 9 are coming at the end of what Paul said in verses 1 through 3 when he says, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 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--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." The unsaved are spiritually dead, captive to Satan and under the wrath of God. And perhaps it bears emphasizing this morning, I'm going to emphasize it whether it bears the emphasis or not, it is important for us to remember and to recognize that being born into a Christian family does not exempt you from this spiritual state. We're all born into this state of corruption and spiritual death. We all need to be born again. You young people that have been born into homes with Christian parents, you need to be born again as well. You must put your faith in Christ. You cannot go to heaven on the wings of your parents' faith. And so every one of us need to recognize the state into which we are born. Every one of us need to be born again if we are to see the kingdom of God.

And so that's the context that Paul is speaking about and yet, he goes on and he says there in verse 4, he says, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ," here it is, note the phrase here, "by grace you have been saved." By grace you were saved, by the power of God, by the favor of God you were saved, and having seen that phrase stated there in verse 5, Paul repeats it again in the text that we come to in verse 8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith." It is by grace that God made you alive in Christ. It is by grace that God raised us up with Christ. It is by grace that God has seated us in the heavenly places in Christ. It is by grace that God brought the gospel

to us. It is by grace that God keeps us throughout the whole of our life and the sanctifying process. It will be by grace that he receives us into heaven. Grace, grace, grace, God's grace, all being on display here.

Now the point that Paul is emphasizing, as we continue on and as we approach verses 8 and 9, is for us to understand that all of those things, every one of them, every aspect of our salvation was beyond our capacity to achieve on our own. We did not have power to bring this about in our own life or by our own strength, and it reminded me this week of a passage in Deuteronomy that would be easy to overlook in this context. I want you to turn back in the Old Testament to Deuteronomy 9 and to just see a bit of a parallel in what the Lord said to the children of Israel after he had brought them out of Egypt, that he had brought them through the wilderness wanderings, and they were about to enter into the Promised Land. God makes it clear and establishes to them who it is that did what in order to bring about this nation that was about to enter into the Promised Land and there are parallels to us. Now I speak as to Christians here in what I'm about to say. These are things that we need to refresh our own hearts on here this morning, things that we need to remind ourselves of and to clear away any sense of pride or entitlement because that's so easy for that to creep in. Pride and entitlement, we need to divest ourselves of all of that and this passage in Deuteronomy 9 will give us a right perspective to enter into the rest of our consideration of Ephesians 2.

In Deuteronomy 9:4, God says through Moses to the children of Israel, "Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you," thrust them out referring to the nations they were going to dispossess in the land, "Do not say in your heart, 'It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you." God says, "It's not because you were so righteous that I am bringing you into the land. I'm judging these nations and being gracious to you along the way."

He goes on and he says in verse 5, "Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." Verse 6, "Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people." And they had shown that for 40 years in the wilderness. Notice how frequently, how repetitively the Lord says don't think that this is about your righteousness. He says it there in verse 4. He says, "Don't say it is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess the land." Verse 5, "Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess the land." Verse 6, "The LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people." You see, the pride of man is so endemic and so wrapped around every aspect of his being that we are prone to think that way. We're prone to think that something in us caused God to distinguish us from others that he left unsaved. We're prone to think good things about ourselves and we just have to turn away from that kind of wrong thinking.

And we're going to see that not by your righteousness, we're going to see that emphasized in the text that's in front of us here today. God saves, listen beloved, just to give a most basic statement about the nature of salvation, God saves men and women, boys and girls, according to his purpose, according to his timetable, because it pleases him and not for the sake of anything that he sees within us because all that is within us is death and Satan and judgment, using parallels to the first three verses of Ephesians 2. And so there's nothing in us that would attract a holy God to be good to us. We must understand that. You know, this is all part of our broad series of building a Christian mind and to have a Christian mind is to be divested of that sense of pride and entitlement, and that is really fundamental to living the Christian life, is to realize that all that we receive is something that is given to us by grace, that there's not anything about us that entitles us to blessing, that entitles us to long life. If God gives those things to us, it's by his kindness, not according to anything that we have done. And so God saves for his own purpose. He saves to display the riches of his grace now and through eternity so that we would know his blessing and ascribe glory to his holy name, and that we would be a people set apart to honor him, to bless his name, to glorify Christ, to serve him in response to his grace, not as those who have been paid something that we deserved, "for the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord," Romans 6:23.

So as we come to verses 8 and 9, we're going to see a great contrast between the grace of God and our works and the point of this is going to be clear, the goal of this is so that you would boast in Christ and not about yourself, that you would give glory to Christ and not think highly of yourself. And we can kind of do this in two sections here today. The first section, saved by Grace, and the second section, parallel, not saved by works. Saved by grace, not saved by works, that's where we're going here this morning. Let's look at, with all of that introduction, let's look at verses 8 and 9 once again. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." When you take time to go through this passage, as we're going to do, it's going to be striking how repetitive Paul is. He is saying the same thing over and over in about five or six different ways in that short phrase. He's making the same point, it's by grace, not by your works, that you are saved. That's the principle that he's trying to inculcate into us.

And so look at the opening word there in verse 8. It's the word "For. For by grace you have been saved," and that word "for" is connecting what was said earlier in the chapter with what he's about to say in these next two verses. For in light of the fact that we were dead in sin, dominated by the devil, doomed to suffer the wrath of God, in light of the fact that we were like that, and then God, according to the riches of his kindness, made us alive together in Christ, raised us up with Christ, and seated us in the heavenly places, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ, in light of all of that, he says, "For." Remember all of that, remember those prior seven verses in what I'm about to say, is the sense of the grammar here, "For it is by grace that you have been saved." That theme is the whole point, that it is by grace, grace, the undeserved favor of God shown upon people who deserve judgment instead. We all deserve judgment, dead in sin, dominated by the devil, doomed to suffer the wrath of God. That was our righteous due. That was what we had earned with our lives. That's

what we were by nature. And instead of that, instead of giving us that dark verdict of condemnation, God has graciously brought a banquet of grace to the prisoner, opened the prison and door, said, "Feast and go free and serve me as you do." That is by grace. He has shown kindness to us when we deserve judgment instead.

Now, this word grace, verse 8 there, "For by grace you've been saved through faith," if you read it in the original language, there's an article in front of the grace. You could read it, "For by the grace you have been saved." And that article that is not brought out in our English translation, it's an article that you could say it's an article of prior reference. The point of that little technical explanation is that the grace that he is speaking about in verse 8 is the grace that he's been talking about earlier in the passage. He's connecting the grace of verse 8 with what came before. And this is why that's so important, you can't just jump into verse 8 and explain salvation to someone. You can't just jump into verse 8 ignoring everything that went before and know what Paul is saying here and what Scripture means. The grace is tied to how dead we were in sin. The grace is tied to the magnificent power of God in making us alive together in Christ. It's that grace that he's now continuing to speak of. This grace has been already explained in the passage, and he's building on it, not introducing some kind of new theme that you can just ignore the context and understand what he means.

And so, let me point this out to you again. In verse 5, he says by grace you have been saved. God, because God is rich in mercy, great love, dead in your trespasses, he made us alive, all of that by grace, by undeserved favor from God. And then in verse 7, that's what he did in the past, and now grace is going to be the theme of what happens in the unfolding ages of eternity. Look at verse 7 when he says, "so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Grace in verse 5. Grace in verse 7. Now in verse 8 it's, "For by that grace that you've been saved through faith." That's the grammatical flow of things here and so, we're speaking today of an eternal theme. We're speaking today of the theme that will be the subject of our praise throughout all of eternity. As we gaze into the glorious resurrected face of Christ, as we enjoy the presence of heaven without sin, without a devil, without wicked people to diminish it, as we have been made perfect sharing in the glory of Christ, not his deity, not his essence, but somehow sharing in his glory, being home, being forgiven, being in the presence of the Shekinah glory of God, seeing the clear crystal gold streets of heaven, being with saints throughout all of the ages, singing praises, holy, holy, holy to the Lord God Almighty, glorifying Christ and thanking him for his redemption, as you read in verse 5, and believe me, beloved, or better yet, believe the word of God, the fullness of that is going to be incomprehensibly, infinitely magnificent and great beyond our ability to take it in, and certainly infinitely beyond our ability to discuss it in any meaningfully sufficient way as we stand here today. We're going to be in such a position of glory, such a position of blessing, again, language just fails me, but all of the fullness of the greatness of that and somehow as we take it in and we'll have eternity to just absorb more and more of it, somehow as we're absorbing more and more of it, we are never going to lose sight of the fact that we're enjoying that position, that place, that fellowship with God because of his grace, because God has been gracious and good and favorable to us when we didn't deserve it. That's what it says. Look at it there in verse 7.

God, as we're in this splendid, eternal state, God, as he reigns over that and blesses us in it, part of what he's going to be doing is showing to us how immeasurably rich his grace has been upon us, how immeasurably rich his kindness has been on us, and all of that focused on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. We're going to go through eternity celebrating the grace of God, praising him for the grace of God, and somehow that theme will be as fresh 10 million years into eternity as it is the first time we step into eternity. It's infinite. It's immeasurable. Look at it there. It's immeasurable riches of his grace. We're not going to be able to quantify it. It's just going to be too much. That magnificent grace is what Paul is speaking of here, that kind of kindness.

And so, beloved, if we want to think rightly about God, want to think rightly about our salvation, we have to think about it from the perspective of that kind of grace in contrast with how much we didn't deserve it. It would be as if a, you know, a fabulously wealthy man said, "You know what I want to do? I'm just going to write your name on it to make you a joint owner of all of my accounts." But I don't deserve that. That's your wealth, not mine. "Precisely." I'm getting fabulous benefits for something that I have done nothing to deserve. I haven't even been kind to you, Mr. Rich Man. And he says, "Yeah, but that's what I want to do. Here, let me finish signing this off. Now you share in all of it with me." That's a very poor way of thinking about how much goodness God has poured upon us and so this is humbling, this is exhilarating and humbling at the same time. That's what Paul is talking about in verse 8 when he says it's for by grace that you have been saved through faith. It's by grace that you have been delivered from your prior condition and brought into this place of eternal blessing. The goodness, kindness, mercy, love of God alone explains why you're in this position now. God saved you in the past, and the effects of that salvation continue to this day as you stand here today, and it's going to continue on into all of eternity.

Now, what does it mean to be saved? What does it mean to be saved? Well, the idea is one of deliverance. You have been delivered from a place of danger. If you think about it in terms of a lifeguard going out and saving a drowning person, he delivered them from impending death. They were in a position where they were in danger and the lifeguard comes and saves them, brings them back to shore, and now they are safe. They were delivered from a danger which had threatened them. Well, that in a spiritual sense, you're delivered from spiritual death, slavery to sin, slavery to Satan, and the condemnation of God, and think about it, not just in that negative sense of what you've been delivered from, but what you've been delivered to. We talked about this on Tuesday evening from a different passage in Ephesians 1. You've been delivered from that place of imminent eternal peril and brought into a place where you're spiritually safe, where all of your sins are forgiven, where Satan no longer owns you, where the gaping jaws of hell can never reach to swallow you again. You're spiritually safe, standing in grace, having received credit for the perfect righteousness of Christ, having received the benefit of his shed blood, and a holy God looks on you as belonging to Christ and therefore accepts you completely despite everything about your prior life, everything about your prior sins. This is what it means to be saved, to be delivered from all of that guilt and condemnation and the spiritual bondage that we were in, now to be in a place of blessing and in the language

that we've been looking at, redeemed, purchased by Christ, and adopted into the family of God.

Now look, you know, and I've been saying this so much over the past several weeks, and I probably need to just stop saying it, but I'm conscious of this more and more, I do not have the vocabulary or the disposition to do justice to the greatness of the themes that we're seeing here today. This is tremendous. This is blessing beyond measure. These are riches of such a fabulous quality that they will never diminish or fade away throughout all of eternity. To once be like that, to once be on a track to join the rich man in Hades, of Abraham, "Send Lazarus, let him just give me a drop of water on my tongue. That's all I want, one drop of water on my tongue because I'm in agony in this flame!" And to know that that was our destination, that was where we were headed, and that we were pursuing that kind of death, and to realize that God, under no obligation to do so, intervened, saved us from that, and brought us into a place of blessing, safety, family, love, kindness, forgiveness, eternal life, go on and on with it all, that's what it means to be saved.

Now, how did that great wealth come to be yours? How is it that you entered into the family of God? How is it that you entered into this heavenly realm? Well, beloved, that's Paul's whole point here. How did it come to be yours? How was this grace imparted? It was not something that you did. It was not something that you were. It was not because you said, it certainly was not because you said enough Hail Mary's to get God to pay attention. It wasn't because you became a member of a church or gave money or anything like that. It wasn't anything that you did. There's nothing that you can take credit for here. What you brought to God was a soul that needed to be condemned. That's what you brought to God. And so it wasn't any self-reformation that you'd done, moral improvement that you had done, you hadn't made yourself better and then presented yourself to God as someone that he could accept, that he would want to have. The truth of the matter is, my friends, is that the people who try to make themselves better in order to have God accept them, it's almost counterintuitive, but those who are trying to make themselves better so that God will accept them are actually increasing their own condemnation because they are trying to achieve salvation by their own works rather than approaching it and receiving it on the terms that God has established. What God requires is Christ applied to your soul and if you don't approach him through Christ, you're approaching him through a false religion that only heightens and increases your judgment.

And so how did this grace come to be yours? Look at it there in verse 8 with me again. "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith." Not because you were better than someone else. It was through faith. Let's put it this way, speaking to those of you that said, "This is new to me. My mind is popping. Light bulbs are going off in my mind on things that I had never understood before." Let me speak it as though to you. You say, "But I don't quite get it." You enter into salvation by receiving it by faith. You receive the Lord Jesus Christ in all of his crucified and resurrected glory, you receive him as your substitute righteousness and payment for sin. He paid it all. You paid nothing. You receive him and you rest in him for your complete status before God. It's through faith. Faith receives Christ. It rests in Christ for a complete salvation. You understand and you

confess from the depths of your heart, "God, I could not do anything to save myself. I cannot do anything to save myself. I must be on the receiving end of your kindness and mercy alone. And God, I confess, you have absolutely no reason to receive me. I'm appealing to you on the basis of your mercy, on the basis of Christ alone, not because I have anything to present to you. I'm guilty, condemned. And so I pray with the tax collector in Luke 18, God, be merciful to me, the sinner. Christ, show kindness to me because I have nothing to offer. I'm bankrupt. You have a feast, I don't have a ticket to enter and here I am, poor and desperate and hungry, and you with the riches of a banquet, would you let me in? Would you receive me? You promise that all who come to you, if anyone comes to you, you won't cast them out. On the basis of your promise, I come. On the basis of your death and resurrection, I come. Nothing of my own. I forsake any claim to my own righteousness. I forsake any claim to goodness. And I just ask you to be merciful to me, a sinner." That's the idea. You know, one of the lasting effects that that kind of conversion has on a person is it changes your arrogant dismissal and condescending attitudes toward others who've ruined their lives through their own sin. It softens your heart. I'm making an application here that should come later, but I want to make it now. It softens your heart. When your heart is broken by grace, you let all of that self-righteousness go, all of that condemnation of others go, and you realize, "I'm just a debtor to mercy. And that person needs mercy just like I did." And so it humbles us as we come in this way.

Now coming back to faith, you're saved by grace through faith. True faith, saving faith, has at its core a firm conviction that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God and that he alone is the Savior of the world, that he alone can save men from sin. There is an exclusivity that you recognize as you put your faith in Christ. You realize that Mohammad cannot save you, that Mary cannot save you, that speaking in tongues cannot save you. You realize that your own works cannot save you. You realize that only Christ, Christ and Christ alone is able to save any sinner from death, and yet Christ can save any sinner from death. You realize, you recognize that he is God in human flesh, that his work on the cross was for sinners like you, paying a debt that sinners could not pay, that God raised him from the dead. Scripture says if you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved. If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you'll be saved. There's a content to this faith.

Stated differently, you believe in the biblical Christ, not one that you've made up in your mind, not one that appears to you in a vision at the foot of your bed. Someone was mentioning to me recently, for years this has been going on, there's supposedly a great awakening among Muslims, and they're all seeing visions of Christ in their bed. None of that's true. That's not true salvation. Don't fall for that. True faith, saving faith, Scripture says very plainly faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. And Scripture equally says that Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light and people who are trusting in an experience like that, and worse yet, Christians who promote that as being an indication of true salvation, are perpetuating an even worse deception. It's bad enough to be an unsaved Muslim, it's multiplied times worse to think that you've been saved by a vision that is unrelated and disconnected from the word of God and what God

has revealed about the gospel in Scripture. Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of God. We are not to put our hope in visions that we've seen. Colossians 2 is very clear about that and so faith receives Christ and trusts alone in what he has done.

Now, we want to be really, really clear on what we're saying here. At this point, some especially new Christians, you might say, who haven't yet had the time for good instruction, fuller instruction from the word of God, might think that their faith is why God saved them. "I brought faith to God, and as a result of my faith, God saved me. God responded to my faith with salvation." That is exactly backwards. That is exactly the wrong way to think about it. God did not reward you with salvation because you brought faith to him. God saved you, and in part of that saving act, he enabled you to exercise faith in him. Paul extinguishes the idea that we bring faith to God and then God saves us. He extinguishes that possibility before it even gets started. Look at verse 8 with me again. Ephesians 2:8. I love this. This is really, you know, this is a wonderful text to see in the original language. Paul says, "For by grace you've been saved through faith." What does he immediately say next? Keeping in mind what I was saying, it's not us bringing faith and then God in response saves us. "It is by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing." This is not your own doing. Before we even have the opportunity to let a little bit of pride bubble up and say, "Well, at least it was my faith that saved me," no, Paul says, "This is not your own doing." And the construction here is really pointing to what the source is. It uses the Greek preposition ek, E-K, that shows what something came out of. It identifies the source from which something came and so Paul says right here in verse 8, faith did not find its source in you or in anything that you had done. Faith did not find its source in you or in anything that you'd done. It was not your intelligence. It was not your morality. It was not your spiritual strength. It was not your own doing.

The "this" here, what's he referring to? What's the antecedent of "this"? Could it be that the grace was not of your own doing? Could it be that the faith was not of your own doing? Well, all of that's included and again, I'm just using some technical grammar here that is kind of important to understand the fullness of what you have here. Grace in the original language, a feminine noun. Faith in the original language, a feminine noun. "This," not feminine. It's a neuter reference. It's a neuter word there and at first it might seem a little bit ambiguous. "This" is in the neuter gender like the English word "it." It does not have male or female, it's just it, you know. It's something, you know, that's what it is. And so "this" is not referring to faith or to grace because the grammar doesn't match. The grammar doesn't fit. And this is all kind of technical, but the main point is simple, all right? If you've gotten through what I just said, you're able to stay right with me now. When Paul says, "this is not your own doing," this is the million dollar point in the whole message here today, beloved. It's good for us to step back and realize what it is that we're saying. When Paul says, "this is not of your own doing," he's saying that the entire operation of salvation, including faith, comes from God, not you. The entire operation of making you alive in Christ, raising you up with him, seating you in the heavenly places, the future that we have in eternity and the grace and the faith that saved you, all of that, all of that entire thing Paul looks at as one great big unit of grace from God and says all of that and its individual pieces came to you by grace. It was nothing that you did.

God chose you before the foundation of the world, before you were there to do anything. Think about it this way. I like to think about it chronologically. Before time began, God chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world. Obviously, you had nothing to do with that. You didn't even exist for him to participate in that in any way. Step into time, 2,000 years ago, when the Lord Jesus Christ offered himself up on the cross, you did not exist to contribute or to participate in that great act of redemption. When the Holy Spirit, Father choosing you, Son redeeming you, when the Holy Spirit applied the work of salvation to you, you were not alive to cooperate in the act, the Spirit imparted new life to you in the act of regeneration. And on and on it goes. He made you alive in Christ when you were not able to respond. Beloved, here's the whole point, here's the whole point: all of that is from God, not from anything that you did.

He says it negatively. Look at this in verse 8. Let your eyes focus on verse 8 now. This is really one of the most magnificent passages in all of Scripture, just with its clarity and how he says the same thing over and over again. He says it negatively. He says it positively. He just said it negatively. "This is not your own doing. This whole colossal unit of salvation from election to glory, not of your own doing." That's what he's saying. And then he goes on to say, now he says it positively. Look at it there in verse 8, "it is the gift of God." This is not of your own doing. It is the gift of God. We forsake any claim to credit. We give all of the glory to God because he did something as a gift.

And again, in the original language, there's just all these little nuances that are sometimes edifying to bring out. In the original language, going off the ESV here, it says, "this is not your own doing," what comes next in the Greek text, "of God, the gift." Of God, the gift. Paul makes an emphasis and puts the fact that it comes from God as the very next thing that he says. "This is not of your own doing. Of God, the gift," is the sense of it. He's emphasizing where the gift came from, not from you, but by emphatic contrast, it's from God. It's by grace you've been saved, that not of yourselves, not your own doing, the gift of God. Up and down, one side or the other. If this was a prize fight between two championship boxers, they'd stop the fight and say, "We've established who's superior here. Stop the fight, there's no need to say anything else."

Paul has made the point so clear and so, you know, we're at the end of verse 8, "For by grace you've been saved through faith. This is not of your own doing. It is a gift of God." Now we can move on, right? It wasn't from me. It wasn't from you. It was from God. I get it. Saved by grace. Totally, totally understand there's nothing left to discuss. Can we move on now? Well, we come to our second point: not saved by works. Not saved by works. Look at verse 9. Remember what Paul has said, by grace, not your own doing, of God the gift, all of this after, you know, connected to what he's been saying in the earlier parts of chapter 2. I mean, this point, if ever a point has been established, Paul has made his point through verse 8. And then you read verse 9, "not a result of works so that no one may boast." Are you kidding me? He's making the same point all over again. He's saying it again. He had just said that salvation came from God. He had just said it's not of your own doing and now he's saying it again, "not as a result of works." In other words, not as a result of human effort, not of something that we have done.

Paul goes to extraordinary lengths, which is another way to say that God by the Holy Spirit has gone to extraordinary lengths to make sure that we do not miss this point. The fact that he emphasizes it so many times, in so many ways, in such a condensed context, shows us how critical this is to understand. Christian friend, brother, and sister in Christ, you are saved by grace and not by anything that you have done, God's undeserved favor when you really deserved judgment, and the whole unit of salvation, including the capacity to respond in repentance and faith, it was all a gift from God. Paul makes the same point speaking about repentance in 2 Timothy 2:24 to 26, that God may grant them repentance. And so it did not originate with you or me. It was not a result of our works. Salvation was God's plan, God's power, God's grace, God's gift.

Now, why do you think Paul would beat this horse to death in such a manner? You know, I use the analogy of the prize fight, "Stop the fight, this is over." Not that I watch boxing and I certainly don't watch MMA, just in case anyone's wondering. Sometimes analogies just pop into my mind. This is over. This has been established. Why such emphasis? Look at the end of verse 9, "so that no one may boast." So that no one may boast. Would you have a Christian mind, beloved, after we've been trying to build one for the past 12 months? Would you have a Christian mind? The Christian mind operates on the principle that there is nothing good in me. There is nothing about me to boast in. My salvation came from God, and I boast in nothing about myself. Grace makes boasting impossible. We enjoy this privileged status as a result of the good grace of God and of God alone, his grace, his glory, his goodness, his greatness. His greatness, his goodness, his grace, his glory. His goodness is great. His greatness is good. His grace is glorious so that we yield to him, not simply our obedience, but all of our affection and all of the glory. "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy name be the glory." That is the way a Christian mind operates. That is the way a Christian mind thinks about salvation. We repent of our pride, we repudiate it, and every time that it tries to bubble back up, we reject it once again. We are thoroughly committed never to let our pride diminish the eternal glory of God.

Look over at Romans 3. Romans 3. This is a big point of emphasis in Scripture. Saved by grace, not saved by works, with the outcome that we don't boast. That we do not boast. Romans 3. Just pick it up quickly in verse 26. Paul in this chapter has been speaking about justification by faith alone. In verse 26, "It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." Verse 27, "Then what becomes of our boasting?" What becomes of our pride? What becomes of me being a little bit better than the other guy? What becomes of me taking a little bit of credit for my salvation, 1% as opposed to 99? What becomes of all of that? What becomes of our boasting? Look at it, beloved, verse 27, "what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded." It is ruled out because this was God's doing, not ours. And in Galatians 6, you don't need to turn there, but in verse 14, Paul comes back to this theme of boasting again, "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

Beloved, what is your hope of reconciliation with God? What is your hope of going to heaven and not to hell? What is your self-perception and self-declaration in the presence

of a holy God? The Christian says, "It was not because of my righteousness. Not because of my righteousness. Not because of my righteousness." Deuteronomy 9, three times. "I agree with what God said. It was not by my works. It was not my own doing. I agree with what God said. It was by grace. It was of God the gift. It was not of my works. I agree with what God said." Beloved, what this passage has done is it has brought us to examine what is the basis of your hope in the deepest part of your heart. If the deepest part of your heart hopes in Christ and in Christ alone, then you are safe, you are secure, and God has done a marvelous work in you that can never be taken away. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. You're safe and secure no matter what. But if there's something in you that rises up against this, that argues against it, "Well, I don't like to think of myself as having been dead in sin. I've never been enslaved by Satan. I'm someone, you know, I'm a little bit better than the next guy." Look, I say it in love, you need to reconsider whether you've been born again at all because it's by grace you've been saved and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works that no one should boast.

Let's pray together.

Father, may you take your word and apply it with great wisdom and precision to each and every heart. Thank you for the gift of salvation that was of your doing, not of ours, that is to your glory, not ours. Salvation speaks to your grace, your kindness, your mercy, your goodness, your patience and it says nothing to congratulate us for anything good in us. And so, Lord, we gladly agree with your word. We repudiate pride. We repudiate boasting. and we give all of the glory to Jesus Christ alone. In your name we pray, amen.

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