8-12-18

Ephesians 2:8-10

We have here, once again, the essence of the Gospel. We are saved, it is all by God’s doing and we are His. He has things for us to do. There are beautiful words in these lines that should take ahold of our hearts: Saved, grace, faith, workmanship. All these are through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. God has determined to sum up all things in Him and we see that taking place here. All the good things God has for us He brings about through Jesus and anything we do is acceptable to God only when done through Jesus.

Let’s start with the word “saved” or salvation. Salvation means more than being forgiven, although it certainly means that. More than forgiven, we are cleansed; cleansed from guilt and from the stain that sin leaves on our souls. These are entirely removed so that when God looks upon us, we are entirely pure. We are cleansed by Christ and when God looks at us, He looks at us through Christ and sees His purity. We are brought back into fellowship with God, which is what He created us for in the first place.

Salvation frees us from those horrible things that describe those outside of Christ recounted in the first three verses of this chapter. We are no longer dead in sin and trespass. We are no longer enslaved to the lusts of the flesh, the longings of the world, or the directives of satan. We are no longer children of wrath.

Salvation is a new life, a whole new existence in Christ. We are made alive. Our spirits have been resurrected in Jesus. We have been joined to Him; He lives in us and we have our being in Him. We are dead to the world, but raised up with Christ. And with Christ, we are seated in the heavenlies. At this moment, because we are joined to Christ, we are with Him where He is. Such is the power of God; Such is the greatness of His power that He is able to do these things; Such is the love of God that He is willing to do these things for us.

For us, to say that we are saved, to say that we have salvation, means that we have joined ourselves to Jesus. It is more than some simple prayer or “inviting Jesus into your heart”. It is submission to Christ, to having Him rule your life and gratefully accept whatever He brings your way. Now, I say these things as if we did them because from our point of view it seems this way. But as we’ve discussed before and will discuss further, it is all of God.

This brings us to the word “grace”. I think we all have a pretty good handle on this. Grace is “unmerited favor” or “undeserved favor”. God has shown us favor, and we don’t deserve it. Look at who we are: we follow satan, chase after things of the world, and tend to do what we want, regardless of God’s desires. There is another description of us that Paul quotes in Romans 3:

“There is none righteous, not even one;
There is none who understands,
There is none who seeks for God;
All have turned aside, together they have become useless;
There is none who does good,
There is not even one.”
“Their throat is an open grave,
With their tongues they keep deceiving,”
“The poison of asps is under their lips”;
“Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness”;
“Their feet are swift to shed blood,
Destruction and misery are in their paths,
And the path of peace they have not known.”
“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Truly dwell on what a human-being is and how he treats God and we should really be confused as to why God offered salvation to us. Consider Paul’s statement in Romans 5:10.

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

While this verse offers great comfort and encouragement to us, look at what we actually were: enemies. We were actually enemies of God Himself. To be an enemy involves more than a passing dislike; it involves hatred and contempt. Such was our relationship to God, and still He offers us salvation. This is grace. This is an incomprehensible grace and displays the love of God. To consider these things is truly humbling and awe-inspiring.

This is the grace that brings about our salvation and it is bound entirely to faith. In Hebrews 11:1 we are told:

Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Faith is not some blind hope; it is not the stuff of fairy tales or wishful thinking. Faith is an assurance, faith is a belief in something true but not encountered directly or physically. Detractors tell us that our faith has no basis in reality and is unfounded. But they cannot understand; they are dead. Faith is very real and is based in reality. It comes from God. You can’t get more real than that. Notice in verse 8 that we are told that faith is a gift of God. It is given to us by Him.

It is important to look at the word order here “By grace you have been saved through faith”. We, as Christians, have been saved. God has saved us. The reason is His grace. If not for the favor that He has shown us, we would not be saved. The vehicle of the grace, or the way it is applied to us, is through faith. So, we are saved, that is by the grace of God, and we receive that grace through faith.

There are two ways to consider faith in this sentence, both of which apply. One way is to consider it as being Jesus’ faith or faithfulness. We are saved because of Jesus and what He did; and all He did was in complete faith in, and faithfulness to, God the Father. The perfect faithfulness of Jesus made His sacrifice acceptable to God and that sacrifice was applied to us. Jesus’ sacrifice was also according to God’s will in order to save us. Thus, the way God’s grace came to us was by faith; Jesus’. And it is all the gift of God.

The other way to consider this faith is that it is our faith. The faith we have in Jesus to accept Him as our Saviour and to believe in His power to save. This is faith that we must have; it is necessary for us to be saved. But again, see where it comes from: it is the gift of God. Paul made it very clear by saying that the faith is “not of yourselves”. We are so destitute that God even has to give us the faith we need to accept the salvation He offers: Again, grace; absolutely undeserved love and kindness. How deeply we should hang our heads in shame before the Father; yet, how highly we can lift our faces in thanksgiving to the One who saves us.

In addition to our salvation not being of ourselves, in verse 9 Paul tells us that it isn’t the result of works either. This goes along with grace because we have done nothing deserving of being saved. Trying to gain heaven or God’s favor by works is folly. We are used to thinking in terms of earning our way and that is the way things work in the world (usually). We must earn our living, respect, privileges or whatever else we work for. Additionally, we are used to doing something good to make up for something we have done wrong. If we do most things right, the world considers us to be good. It is our human nature to apply these things to God.

But the ways of the world don’t apply to the ways of God. Because God is perfect, in order for us to have fellowship with Him, we must be perfect. Being good 60% of the time does not tip the balance in our favor; we must be perfect, which we are not. Also, that 60% good does not cancel out the 40% bad. Because God is just, all evil must be punished. That 40% must be punished. And because that 40% evil was against a perfect, eternal, infinite God, the punishment is eternal. That is why we had to have someone stand in for us. Jesus, who is also perfect, eternal, and infinite, became the propitiation for us. He accepted God’s punishment for our sins, that we may have eternal life.

Along with that, our good works, by themselves, are completely unacceptable to God. We are told in Isaiah 64:6,

And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment.

Outside of Christ, we can do nothing to please God, no matter how good or how self-sacrificing it is. This is because of a doctrine which claims “*the total depravity of man*”. This doesn’t mean that everything we do and everything we are is depraved. Remember that we are in God’s image and He called us good in His creation of us. It means that there is no part of our lives or being that isn’t touched by sin. Our personalities, our thoughts, the way we view life and others, our bodies have all been tainted by sin. Our very motive for doing good, outside of Christ, is stained by selfishness. Because our good or righteous deeds are always infected by sin, they are unacceptable to God.

Paul finished up verse 9 with what has become obvious, “no one may boast”. No one will ever enter heaven saying “*I got myself here*.” No one will ever even enter heaven saying “*There was something I did that helped get me here*.” While we are here on this earth, there is nothing that we do, even as Christians, that helps to get us into heaven. It is all of God, through Jesus Christ. Even the decision we made to believe in Christ came from the faith God gave us; no one may boast.

In spite of all this, the Christian may boast. He may boast of what God has done and who God is. He may boast of the work of Jesus Christ. This kind of boasting directs all the glory and honor to God and away from oneself. This kind of boasting is worship and witness; it is the spreading of the Gospel.

Verse 10 tells us that we are God’s workmanship and, as with everything else, created in Christ. Two important things here. Our dead spirits have been resurrected in Christ and, as Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:17,

if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature

Another way of translating that is to say “he is a new creation”. God is the creator God, when we are joined to Christ, God makes something new. Very powerful things are happening in the spiritual realm: resurrection and new creation. These are not just fanciful ideas floating around in our heads; they are reality. They are as real as anything we experience in our physical realm. One of the interesting things is that these happenings in the spiritual are going to be followed by the same things in the physical. One day we will be bodily resurrected and when that happens, our bodies will be a new creation. All through Christ.

God’s workmanship; God is working on us now and will continue to work on us throughout our lives. We call this sanctification; the gradual process of becoming more like our Saviour. Sometimes this is a painful process, but again, God’s word gives us encouragement. From Philippians 1:6,

*For I am* confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

We have here a wonderful statement that once God has started, He’s not going to stop. He will not leave us, He will not leave His work uncompleted. If God is working on us, we can be assured that we are His and He will not abandon us. This is why we are told to rejoice in persecution and to consider trials to be joy. It is the assurance that we are in Christ; and it won’t last long. God is working on us; won’t it be amazing to see what He makes out of us?

Next, we see that good works do play a part; an important part. God’s purpose in making us a new creation is so that we will perform good works. These good works will be in Christ Jesus; so these good works will be pleasing to God, useful for building His Kingdom, and according to His will. Back before creation, God decided on certain things for us to do. We all have some ministry; we all know the Gospel and are commanded to spread it. To fulfil God’s plans for us, we must be in Christ.

Also notice the word “walk”. It is important to realize that when we become this new creation, good works in Christ are now a way of life. This is what we do, this is how we live. This way of life is directly opposed to what we read at the beginning of this chapter:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked.

We are a new creation, we have a new walk; and the walk is in life instead of death.

Last week we talked about how our salvation brings glory to God. In fact, it is the most important reason for our salvation. All His being will be on display before every power and principality, before every created being; and all will bow to Him. This is shown in our verses today. Because no one will be able to boast about getting into heaven, it will be obvious that any who are there are there because of God. It will all be about His grace and power. Satan will not be able to point to a single person and say “*He achieved salvation by his own merit*.” No; it will all be God. The glory will be His.

Prayer

You are Almighty God and we have sinned against You. You gave us life and yet we turned against You. We rebelled, we chose evil, we ran from Your goodness. There is deep shame for all who turn from You and we all owned that shame at one time.

But LORD, You are gracious, You are kind, You are far above us. When we hated You, You loved us. When we were enemies, You made a way for peace between us. When we ran from You, You called to us and sought us out. We were covered with shame; but You covered us with the blood of Your only begotten Son.

Now, in spite of ourselves, and all because of Your grace, we can come before You without shame. We lift up our voices and hearts to You. We have been forever joined to Your Son, Jesus, and by Him we have become Your children. All by Your great grace. We look forward to the time when we can be before You in body and soul to worship You.

It is in Jesus’ name we pray

Amen