

## Saved By Grace & Faith

Ephesians 2:8-9

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

In our last study of this epistle, we looked at the fact that "In times past (we) walked according to the course of the world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience."

We looked at the fact that our sin problem dates back to the Garden of Eden, where our first parents, Adam and Eve, were disobedient to the will and word of God. Because of the "curse" that God placed on His creation, every man, woman, and child that have ever been born in the flesh, has been born a sinner. Therefore, Romans 3:23 tells us every person stands guilty before God, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

The guilt of sin is a dreaded reality, but because of human pride, we like to think that we are towering on the cleft of perfection, but the real truth is the matter is found in John 3:3, where Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Realizing one's *need* for salvation, and then *being saved* according to God's plan of salvation are two entirely different situations, and demand our closest attention.

Look once more at the text before us, "For by grace are you saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God not of works, lest any man should boast." It would seem that the Bible makes it very clear that we are saved "by grace...through faith," but for some reason mankind has had problems understanding the simplicity of being born again.

As long as men have known that there was a God, they have sought to *do something* to save them!

**They have tried *selfaffliction*.** Down through the ages men have sought to deliver themselves from *spiritual death* by the torture of our *physical bodies*.

**I am reminded of the Hindus as they seek to rid themselves of their sin by physical torture.** Some of them will hold their hands up toward heaven so long that they become so rigid that they cannot lower them. **Some of them will lie on beds of nails and spikes.** Others will fast so long until they starve themselves to death.

Martin Luther recalls when he was a monk, how he would show his dedication and penance by whipping himself with a whip.

I could go on and on, but human and suffering does not offer salvation.

**Another way men have proposed to rid themselves of the guilt of sin is through *human sacrifices*.** In reading the Old Testament, we find in 2 Kings 23, Ahaz, king of Judah, made his son "pass through the fire of Moloch." **In other words, he offered his son to the heathen god, Moloch!** **In 2 Chronicles 28 we are told about the Valley of Hinnom, where people who sought to save themselves from the wrath of their god, would throw their children into the burning fires of their heathen god.**

**Later, history records how the Aztec Indians of Mexico would offer the sacrifice of a human heart still pulsing and human blood still warm to satisfy the needs of their gods.** History also tells us how women offered their children to the crocodiles in the Ganges River, seeking to save their eternal souls from the gods.

I could go on and on, but human sacrifice does not offer redemption.

There are others who hope to save themselves by doing good works. They seek to live by the "Golden Rule" or the Ten Commandments. They hope to find favor with God, and will quickly remark, "I'm as good as they are" when speaking of the people of the church. How we need to realize that in the sight of God our own righteousness is as "filthy rags."

I guess the greatest of all attempts by mankind to solve his sin problem is through organized religion. Religion offers the sinner baptism, organization, and ceremony, but it doesn't offer him salvation.

The alternative for a man saving himself is that God alone can save us. This is the theological thrust and impact of this marvelous sentence written by the Apostle Paul, "God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God." The Bible offers us the plan of salvation that has the approval of God, and that plan hinges around "grace" and "faith."

The Greek word for "grace" is a word of beauty. It is a word that the Greeks admired. It refers to that indescribable something that causes one to love someone, to be attracted to someone. In some instances the Greeks would use it to refer to that burst of generosity that would bestow a lavish gift, unmerited, without any thought of reward or a returned favor, on a loved one. The Christians took the word as beautiful as it already was, and exalted it. They dedicated it to the love and mercy of Christ Jesus. They used it in so many ways. A "charisma" is a gift of God's grace, a charismatic gift.

The Greek word "Charis" originally referred to a gift. Then it referred to the forgiveness of a debt. A man could not pay another, and in grace, in "charis," the owner forgave the debtor. Finally, it came to mean the mercy of God in forgiving us and saving us.

This is how God does it. All of us were perishing like falling, autumn leaves, but God in His goodness and mercy lifted us up and saved us. He did it. According to God's blessed revelation, He is not like a tideless sea: blissful, holy, undisturbed, separate, and apart. Rather, according to the revelation of this Holy Book, God is like a living stream of mercy, love, grace, and affection.

The song says, "everybody loves somebody sometime." You may be as hard as nails, made out of cast iron. No one ever gets to you. But on the inside you are just as soft and tender as you can be, and you can fall in love. That is because you are like God. We are made in His image and God is a veritable stream of love, concern, and affection.

Because God is gracious, therefore sinners are welcome. Because God is abounding in infinite love, He forgives us. Because His mercy endures forever, we are not destroyed. Because He is all compassionate, therefore we are saved. Grace is in God. That is why Paul would say that our part in salvation is one of acceptance, of trust, of hope, of surrendered yieldedness. He will say it both positively and negatively, when he says, "God saved you by his grace when you believed" (that is the positive side); "and you can't take credit for this" (that is the negative side); "it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it." Salvation is something that God has done for us. It is in His mercy and love that we are delivered. But the apostle is careful to speak of its distribution to us. That is, how are we saved? The apostle says that God does it through the channel of faith.

There is a common denominator in every life: we live by trust, by belief, by faith. How do I know that the sun is going to rise in the morning? I have no way in the earth to prove that to you, but I believe it. How do I know that my money is safe in the bank? I could not prove it to you, but I believe it. How do I know the bridges are safe over which I drive my car? I never get out to examine one of those bridges before I drive my car over it. I take it by faith. I believe it is

safe. I do not get out and examine the posts, pillars, foundations, and beams up there when I come inside. I just take it by faith that the thing is not going to fall on me.

We live by faith. The food we eat, the roof above us, the bank in which we do business, the whole fabric of life is woven throughout with *faith* and *trust*.

There are three parts to saving faith. First, I must hear, I must listen. Paul wrote in Romans 10:17, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." That is why a man ought to preach the Bible when he is in the pulpit. Faith comes by hearing: hearing the Word of God. When a preacher stands up in the pulpit and expounds on economics or talks about politics and the current events of the day, the people can hear him forever and never be saved, never be convicted. They can hear the commentators on television talk about current events and read the newspapers about politics.

But "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." If a man will stand in the pulpit and preach this Book, someone will be saved. Maybe not all, but someone will be saved. Why? Because "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Saving faith begins with hearing.

Saving faith is also accepting. I hear it and I accept it as true. In other words, when I hear the testimony of the Bible, I must accept it as true. And when I accept it, then I have a foundation on which to build my faith. You see, as long as I do not hear the Word, or if Satan can keep me convinced that it is just some fable, then I have no foundation on which to build my faith.

When I believe the testimony of the Word of God, something happens deep in the innermost recesses of my soul. That "measure of faith" that God deposited in my life when I was conceived in my mother's womb begins to reach out and grasp on *to truth*. And when

that *truth* is received in my *mind*, my *heart* embraces God's amazing grace, and by faith I receive Jesus Christ as my personal Savior.

Now watch this - your heart is made like your hands. Your hands are made on purpose to receive, to take. Before your hands ever "hit a lick" of work, they reached out to you mother for life-giving support. And because it is the desire of God to bestow blessings, both spiritual and physical, on my life, and yours, God designed the soul to take, to receive. But because of that, if we do not have a proper understanding of giving and receiving we will become *selfish*. And when we become selfish we think every body owes us something. And when selfishness rules our life we become stagnant and something starts to die on the inside of us. That is why Jesus reminded us, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

The other part of saving faith is *committing yourself to it*. When the sower sows his seeds in the fields, he believes they will grow and bring a harvest to God. The mariner in the trackless sea trusts the stars and the mariner's compass. A man who is sick trusts the hands of the surgeon. The one riding in an airplane trusts the pilot.

This is the way we are saved we *trust Jesus for it*. We hear His Word, we accept His offer, and we give ourselves to it. That is it. When you do that, you are in. You have crossed the threshold. You have gone through the door. You are saved! "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."

In other words, the Scriptures teach us that salvation is totally and entirely of God, and is not based on human merit. Salvation is given to us as a free gift, when we place our faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ.