

Jason Upchurch - Ephesians 2:8-10- By Grace Through Faith For Good Works

This morning we come to one of the most well-known passages in the entire Bible. This and John 3:16 and maybe the Lord's Prayer are arguably the most well known passages for most Christians.

And rightly so. These passages are not more inspired than other passages. The Bible teaches that every passage in all of Scripture is breathed out by God. But I think we all realize that there are passages that summarize the faith in such a way that is simple for us to understand and lays down truth in such a clear way that we can't ignore it. And that's what we have here.

These verses are the bedrock of our salvation because they articulate the Bible's clear teaching that salvation from God's wrath is all a gift from God himself. The Christian faith is that God saves us from his own wrath. And that that salvation is not something that we earn - as though we could earn it. No, salvation is all by simply trusting in God's grace.

Big Picture: Salvation is by grace through faith for good works.

Now, before we unpack verses 8-10 I want to give us a quick feel for where we are in this passage because I think last week I really missed the emphasis that Paul is making and I want to show you that.

Have you ever been talking to foreigners and they pronounce a word really weird? They put the emphasis on the wrong syllable? When I was a teenager we were talking to a super nice elderly lady who happened to be British. Her husband was a doctor and they were very well off. She was showing us around her amazing house and then she showed us the garage. And my friend and I looked at each other like the what? The garage. Well we were laughing at her pronunciation and at the end of the tour she said well I hope you liked the tour, even the garage - like she had gravel in her mouth.

Anyway, sometimes we put the emphasis on the wrong thing. Let me show you what I think Paul is doing here. In Vss. 1-3 Paul says we're dead. Spiritually dead - and he describes that. That's who we were.

And the contrast - and I think I missed this emphasis - is that in **Vss. 4-7** God made us alive. **Read 4-6**

Now I know we talked about all those things. But I think the real point Paul is making is that you were dead and God made us alive. He raised us like he raised Jesus. And seated us like he seated Jesus. Everything that was done to Jesus was done to us.

Now, all that flowed from his character, but the exclamation point is that were dead and God made us alive.

What does that have to do with **Vss. 8-10**? Well I think in **Vss. 8-10** Paul tells **How** God made us alive and what we're supposed to do now that we've been raised.

1) So let's talk about the **how** God raised us from the dead.

You ever have a project and you get stuck and you have to go on YouTube to figure Out how to do it? I had to change out a gasket on the engine in my truck this week. I had no idea how to do that - and some mild mannered mechanic showed me it was pretty simple: 5 hose clamps and 2 bolts and a 50 parts. I knew what needed to happen, I just didn't know how.

And the how is incredibly important. Here Paul is telling us how God raised us from the dead.

Paul's talking about salvation here. And he tells us not only how God raised us from the dead but also how God didn't raise us from the dead. He says salvation is by grace - he says that twice actually. But he also tells us it's not a result of works. That's the how.

So we say that salvation is by grace alone. That word alone is super important. Many people believe we are saved by grace. But they believe grace plus works. Grace plus my contribution. Grace plus my church attendance or tithing. Grace plus baptism, grace plus being a good person.

The Bible says salvation is all of grace alone. There is zero that we contribute to our salvation at all. The only thing we contributed to our salvation was the sin that made it necessary.

And this is a core truth of Christianity. This truth is what we have to stand on. This is a truth that quite literally you need to be willing to die for. It's that important.

There are a lot of areas in Christianity where we can have some disagreements. Do we baptize babies or only believers? What form of church government do we have? Should women wear head coverings? End times views, Bible versions, so on. We can discuss those things with Christian friends and it's an in-family discussion. It's inside baseball.

But there are issues that we cannot budge on. Issues that Jude say us we are to contend for. And the reason we contend for them is because to deny these things is to deny either deny God himself or to deny his saving work.

So we stand firm on the virgin birth of Jesus and the sinlessness of Jesus and the deity of Jesus. We stand firm on the death and resurrection of Jesus to pay for our sins. We are solid on the doctrine of the Trinity, the Bible being the Word of God. These are primary doctrines of the Christian faith. Salvation by grace alone through faith alone is in this category.

What Paul tells us here is that the way in which God raised us from the dead was all God's doing. We did nothing at all to contribute - there were no works we added to the equation.

It was all God's grace that saved us from all God's wrath.

It has been said that there are only 2 religions in the world. Only 2 religions that have ever existed. There is Christianity that is the true religion - and it's okay to call our faith a religion, the apostle James calls our faith a religion. But there's the Christian religion where we gain God's favor simply by faith in grace.

And then there is every other religion that has ever existed that is based - in some way - on works. It's based in some way on adding our contribution to please God.

So when you gel it all down, either God does all the work of salvation or he doesn't. Either God does all the work of salvation or we are adding something to the equation to tip the scales.

There's no in between. It's like asking someone if they're married. It's either a yes or a no. There's no "I'm 99.9% married" - no there's no such thing. It's like asking a woman if she's pregnant - which you should never ever do - but there's no 95% pregnant. It's yes or no.

Same with salvation. Either God does all the work in salvation or we contribute something to God. And the difference in answer is the difference between heaven and hell.

Because, listen, if a person believes that they contribute anything to their salvation, then salvation is no longer of grace, it's a job. And when you have a job you get paid. And your payment is not a gift, it's a contract.

But the message of Christianity has always been that salvation is a pure gift.

Rom. 3:23-24: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God - we know that - and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

You can't earn God's favor, you can't buy it, you can't inherit it through your parents. The only way God will redeem you is to simply trust that he poured out the wrath you deserve for your sins on his Son Jesus on the cross. And that the favor he shows you is the favor Jesus earned for you.

Some people will say “But that’s not fair!” No, it’s not. Salvation is not fair. Salvation is grace.

Now, let’s talk about the word salvation. We use that word a lot but sometimes it helps just to stop and talk about it for a minute. Paul says “by grace you have been saved.” **Read 8**

When we’re thinking about the spiritual reality of those who are Christians or not, we often use this word “saved” - I was saved when I was 14, you were saved when you were 35. Saved from what? Just using that word means that we were rescued from something.

Some of the best movies are stories about rescue from certain death and danger. That’s what it means to save something. You rescue it from danger.

Here, we were rescued from the wrath of God. Paul said just a few verses ago that we were children of wrath. What’s wrath? It’s the righteous anger - the good anger - from God toward rebellious sinners. God had his sight set on us for eternal damnation. Forever and ever.

And through Jesus we were rescued from that wrath.

You know there was a controversy several years ago over the last song we sang this morning: In Christ Alone. The song is amazing and one the best known songs the Gettys have put out. Several years back the PCUSA - a very liberal denomination of Presbyterians - wanted to include the song in a new hymn book. But they wanted to change the lyrics.

We sang: Til on the cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied. Remember that?

They wanted to change it to:

Til on the cross, as Jesus died, the love of God was magnified.

Now, let me ask you, on the cross was the love of God magnified? Yes. The Bible teaches that the height of God’s love was shown on the cross.

But why did they want to change it? Because they didn’t like the word wrath. They didn’t like the idea that God is righteously angry at sinners because of sin. So they asked permission to change the lyrics and Keith and Kristyn Getty said absolutely not. Why?

Because, you guys, the crux of our salvation - the very gospel - is that we were saved from the wrath God by God himself. That is the whole of the gospel. On the cross the wrath of God was satisfied. It was completely exhausted on Jesus in our place.

This is why as Christians God is no longer angry with us: there is no more anger to exhaust. the eternal nuclear explosion of the holy wrath of God was completely taken on by Jesus for you.

It was all God’s grace that saved us from all God’s wrath. **Turn to Rom 4.**

This is Paul talking about Abraham. A lot of the Jews in Paul’s day wanted to argue that Abraham was justified by works because he was circumcised. See, he cut off the foreskin and that’s how God saved him. Paul says, “no.” **Read 4:1-8**

So there are 2 ways to get something in life: it can be given to you freely or you can earn it by working for it. I guess you could steal it, but you can’t steal salvation. So when it comes to salvation either it’s a gift or it’s a wage. If we work for salvation, by definition it can’t be a gift.

You guys who have a job. Is your paycheck a gift from your employer? No; it’s owed to you. You made a contract. And, if you were proud, you could boast about how much you make or the size of your paycheck. You work, you get paid.

That's how some people view salvation. We work, we get paid. Paul says no. That's not true with us, and that wasn't true with Abraham. Abraham believed God - he trusted in God - and that belief was credited to him as righteousness.

It's not a righteousness that he had. It's not even faith that he conjured up. It was a faith given to him by God and therefore he was blessed by God.

There's no way to earn salvation. It's impossible. The way we are saved is to actually get to a point where we know that we can't do it. And our only hope is to beg God for mercy.

Remember the Pharisee and the Tax Collector? The Pharisee went to the temple thinking he was awesome, better than all the other sinner scum. And the tax collector goes to the Temple and can't even look up to God because he knows he is a wretched sinner. And he simply begs God to forgive him. And Jesus says, this man went down from the Temple justified. Saved from the wrath of God because he believed in God.

Salvation from God's own wrath is all a gift. There's no wage. There's no earning. In the great irony, it's only realizing that we can't earn salvation that God blesses us with eternal life.

Back in Eph 2 we see that the how of salvation is grace alone. But is also through faith alone. **Read 8**

Let me ask you a fun question? Is it faith that saves us or grace that saves us? Are we saved by grace or are we saved by faith. Prepositions matter.

We are saved by grace. It is God's gracious work of executing Jesus for sins we committed and raising him 3 days later that saves us. How does faith play in to this?

Stay with me here: faith is the instrument of God's grace.

Let me give you an analogy: A house is burning down and you need to put out the fire. What's going to put out the fire? A hose or water?

Hoses don't put out fires. Water puts out fire. How does the water get to the fire? Through the hose. Fire is extinguished by water through hose.

We are saved from the fire of God's wrath in hell by grace flowing through faith. The grace of God in Christ flows to us through faith in Jesus.

I remember before I was a Christian reading the gospel of Matthew and I reading about Jesus. I had no idea who he was, just a good teacher and miracle worker who died and rose again. But how did his life and death connect to me? How does anything a guy did 2,000 years ago apply to me?

It's faith in Jesus. Trusting that he is who the Bible says he is: the perfect Son of God, who died and raised for the salvation of his people. Faith is how grace flows down to us.

Gal 2:16: We also have believed in Christ Jesus why? In order to be justified by faith in Christ.

Faith is the instrument - the hose if you will - through which God's saving benefits come.

Some people think "Well, that means that faith is our contribution. That's what we add to the equation." God does all the work, we chip in faith. I've had people say "we exercise faith in Jesus." I don't know about you, but exercise sounds a lot like work.

No, the grammar of the passage actually makes it clear. **Read 8-9**

When Paul says this is not your own doing, what's he talking about? Grammatically in the original he's talking about the whole thing: grace, faith, salvation from wrath - all of it. All of it. The whole work of salvation is not our own doing.

Two things that are really important here. That is summarized by Martin Luther: We are saved by faith alone, but that faith is not alone. What does that mean?

We saw that the opposite of grace is wage. If something is not a gift, it is earned. But the opposite of faith is works.

And so there's this constant battle in the NT against people who believe that there are some amount of works required to be saved. That's why Paul says, for by grace you have been saved, through faith, not a result of works.

So whatever else we can say about faith, it completely excludes any works. If you want a simple math problem it's:

faith + nothing = salvation

OR faith + anything = damnation

That's it. **Look at Phil 3:2** for a minute. The apostle Paul here basically says that the only way anyone can be saved is to take their absolute best works, their best spiritual resume, their most noble actions and count those as dung. Watch what he says about his own life. There are people who always want to add works to the equation, he says watch out for them. **Read 3:2-8a**

Did you follow his argument? Watch out for those who think you have to work for salvation, especially by being circumcised. And if anyone had the perfect resume of works for salvation, it was Paul. He could glory in his flesh, his works. Circumcised, A Jew, a Pharisee, zealous, blameless, from Hebrews parents and the noble tribe of Benjamin.

But all that gain he had he counted as skubulon. Rubbish or dung or feces. Spiritually speaking all his good works were excrement.

Or as Isaiah says: All our "righteous deeds" were as filthy what? Rags.

Good works aren't an aid to salvation, they are diametrically opposed to it. Watch what he goes on to say **Read 8-11**

How does the righteousness of God flow to Paul? Through faith in Christ.

Rom 10:9-10: If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be what? Saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

What your believes, your mouth will speak.

John wrote his entire gospel so that: you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that you might work harder to have eternal life. Is that what he said? No.

He wrote so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name. **John 20:30-31**

It's through faith alone - alone - that God's blessing of salvation and eternal life come.

Turn to James 2. Martin Luther said that we are saved by faith alone, but that faith is not alone. What does that mean?

It means that the faith that saves us is a faith that desires to do the will of God. Works always follow faith. They don't cause faith, they certainly don't cause salvation. But true faith will always show itself by God-honoring works.

Paul and James are often said to be in contradiction. Paul says salvation is by faith alone. James says faith without works is dead. How do we reconcile this? We reconcile it like this: just because someone says they believe in Jesus doesn't mean they really believe. True saving faith will have good works follow. **Read 14-17**

So here's the situation: someone says they follow Jesus, they believe in Jesus, but they don't do the simplest good work of feeding another Christian. I'm not talking about the guy hooked on meth in downtown Spokane who is panhandling and won't get a job. I'm talking about another Christian in poverty who would take any job and work any situation if he could but for some reason can't eat. If you can't buy that guy a meal, your faith means nothing. **Read 18-19**

Here's what James is really getting at. There is a type of faith that does not save because it has no accompanying works. Demons believe in God. They have a type of faith. They even shudder at the thought of God - there's an emotional reaction to judgment.

But that faith doesn't save them. Why? Because there are no works. There are a lot of people who have demonic level faith. They say they believe in Jesus, even go to church, even give, maybe even read the Bible, maybe they're 5 point Calvinist cessationist amillennials with a bunch of kids. But they have no good works. Can that faith save them? No.

And the next part is loved by Catholics because James straight says: we are not saved by faith alone. But we have to understand what he means. He means we're not saved by a faith that has no works. **Read 20-26**

Abraham was justified by works after all! No. Abraham was justified by faith. How do we know it was genuine faith? How do we know Abraham wasn't just a fake? The works verified that the faith was real. That's why James says they completed the works.

Abraham's justification came when he believed God. How do we know he was justified? He did what God told him to do.

Luther's quote is so great because it captures this tension. We are saved by faith alone, but that faith is not alone.

True saving faith will always be accompanied by God honoring works. Alright, **look back at Eph 2.**

So the how of salvation is by grace alone through faith alone.

2) Here's the why. **Read 10**

When you set out to make something, usually you have a purpose. You have a specific goal in mind. I bought a book shelf a few years ago. I was't to store gallon jugs of milk on. It wasn't a climbing wall for the kids.

No I got it out of the box and put all the pieces together for a purpose. I got it to hold books.

Why did God save us? Why did God do all of this? When we were dead, why did God raise us and seat us? He had to do all the work - we contribute nothing. What was the purpose? See that little word at the beginning of 10? For.

Purpose. What's the purpose in 10? For good works. **Read 10**

Works didn't save us. They can't because before we were saved we didn't have any - we were dead. But he saved us for them that we should walk in them.

God wants a people who are wholly devoted to good works. In fact, all the good works that we'll ever do were prepared for us by God already. They were prepared beforehand. When was that? It was the same time when God chose us. Before the world began.

When God chose us in eternity past to save us and bless us with infinite blessing he also chose us to do good works. And walk in them.

In a sense he prepared a path for us of good works that we should walk in. And our whole life, every good work we've done was planned out by God.

Have you ever done a treasure hunt with kids. Where you give them a map of all these cool things they're going to do? For them it's exciting and an adventure where it seems like this magical quest. But you planned the whole thing out in advance. Along the way it's hard but also rewarding and good. But you've planned their path.

That's kind of how God has designed us. He saved us to eternal blessing through Jesus. Not of our own works. But he wants us to go work. He wants us to live out joyful obedience for him. To walk in the good works he's prepared for us.

And in doing so bring him glory.

Pray