



A Post Tenebras Lux Study on Ephesians...

There I Have Told You Again...

Ephesians 2:8-10

^{NIV} **Ephesians 2:8**...For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--

We are continuing along this morning looking at the third part of the first great section in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. We have already seen that the first section contains Paul's greeting while the second contains Paul's offer of praise to God for all He had accomplished on behalf of believers. Last week as we began to look into the third section, a section that runs from Ephesians 1:15 all the way to the end of the third chapter, we noticed that the section contains Paul's prayer for the enlightenment of the saints at Ephesus.

In that prayer Paul reminded the Ephesians of the glory of their salvation. This morning we are going to see that he continues that same theme in the next three verses. These three verses form by their very nature one of the most beloved selections in all of Scripture. Other than John 3:16, I cannot think of any passage that has been more memorized or quoted than Ephesians 2:8-9. That puts a heavy burden on any teacher to try to be instructive without just repeating the same things that his audience may have heard a thousand times over. That is why I take great comfort in a little story that Charles Spurgeon, the great reformed Baptist,

once told near the close of his life while preaching on this text. Permit me to read it to you.

Of all the things which I have spoken unto you these many years, this is the sum. Within the circle of these words my theology is contained, so far as it refers to the salvation of men. I rejoice also to remember that those of my family who were ministers of Christ before me preached this doctrine, and no other.

I am led to remember this by the fact that a somewhat singular circumstance, recorded in my memory, connects this text with myself and my grandfather. It is now long years ago. I was announced to preach in a certain country town in the Eastern Counties. It does not often happen to me to be late, for I feel that punctuality is one of those little virtues which may prevent great sins. But we have no control over railway delays, and breakdowns; and so it happened that I reached the appointed place considerably behind the time. Like sensible people, they had begun their worship, and had proceeded as far as the sermon. As I neared the chapel, I perceived that someone was in the pulpit preaching, and who should the preacher be but my dear and venerable grandfather!

He saw me as I came in at the front door and made my way up the aisle, and at once he said, "**Here comes my grandson! He may preach the gospel better than I can, but he cannot preach a better gospel; can you, Charles?**" As I made my way through the throng, I answered, "You can preach better than I can. Pray go on." But he would not agree to that. He insisted I take the sermon, and so I did, going on with the subject there and then, just where he left off. "**There,**" he said, "**I was preaching of 'For by grace are ye saved.' I have been setting forth the source and fountain-head of salvation; and I am now showing them the channel of it, through faith. Now you take it up, and go on.**"

I am so much at home with these glorious truths that I did not feel any difficulty in taking from my grandfather the thread of his discourse, and joining my thread to it, so as to continue without a break. Our agreement in the things of God made it easy for us to be joint-preachers of the same discourse. I went on with "through faith," and then I proceeded to the next point, "and that not of yourselves." Upon this I was explaining the weakness and inability of human nature, and the certainty that salvation could not be of ourselves, when I had my coat-tail pulled, and my beloved grandfather took his turn again. "**When Charles spoke of our depraved human nature,**" the good old man said, "**I decided I should speak for I**

know most about that, dear friends"; and so he took up the parable, and for the next five minutes set forth a solemn and humbling description of our lost estate, the depravity of our nature, and the spiritual death under which we were found. When he had said his say in a very gracious manner, the grandson was allowed to go on again, to the dear old man's great delight; for now and then I could hear him say, in a gentle tone, "**Good! Good!**" Once he even said, "**Tell them that again, Charles,**" and, of course, I did tell them that again. It was a happy exercise to me to take my share in bearing witness to truths of such vital importance, which are so deeply impressed upon my heart. So while announcing this text I seem to hear that dear voice, which has been so long lost to earth, saying to me, "**TELL THEM THAT AGAIN.**" I am not contradicting the testimony of forefathers who are now with God. If my grandfather could return to earth, he would find me where he left me, steadfast in the faith, and true to that form of doctrine which was once delivered to the saints.

This wonderful passage that Spurgeon was making reference to starts with verse 8. Look at the verse.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 2:8**...For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--

The first thing I want you to notice is that verse 8 has four major words or components. They are the words: "**grace**", "**saved**", "**faith**" and a most unlikely theological term "**that**". What I want to do this morning is define each of those words or at very least show the connection between them. Then I want to show you how verses 9 and 10 connect to verse 8.

Having said that let's look first at the word "**grace**". First off, the Bible uses the word "**grace**" in several different ways. It is sometimes used to describe the natural beauty of a person or of their actions.

^{NIV} **1 Samuel 2:26**...And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the LORD and with men.

You can see that Samuel's progress was something that both men and God found attractive or favorable. At other times, "**grace**" is used to describe the ministry of a person like Paul:

^{NIV} **1 Corinthians 3:10**...By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds.

Here you see that Paul viewed his whole ministry as a gift of God. It has the idea of a stewardship or responsibility. At other times, it is used to describe the very essence of God's being. It is a description of His very nature.

^{NIV} **John 1:14**...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

But its most common use, by far, is to describe God's dealings with His people. You may have heard grace described as "**God's unmerited favor**" and certainly that is accurate. But I think "**grace**" can best be defined as God's kindness.

^{NIV} **Genesis 6:8**...But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

Noah found favor in God's sight or you could say God showed kindness toward him. It was the same sort of kindness that He showed the people of Israel over and over again. Listen to this passage from Ezra.

^{NIV} Ezra 9:8... "But now, for a brief moment, the LORD our God has been gracious in leaving us a remnant and giving us a firm place in his sanctuary, and so our God gives light to our eyes and a little relief in our bondage. ⁹ Though we are slaves, our God has not deserted us in our bondage. He has shown us kindness in the sight of the kings of Persia: He has granted us new life to rebuild the house of our God and repair its ruins, and he has given us a wall of protection in Judah and Jerusalem.

You can see, I think, how Ezra makes the connection between grace and God's lovingkindness and it is the same idea in the New Testament. It is the same idea in the book of Ephesians. Paul has already reminded the Ephesians of the wonderful kindness that God had displayed toward them and he has prayed that they will begin to realize the marvelous nature of that kindness.

^{NIV} Ephesians 1:7... In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

So, if I could summarize what we see in Ephesians 2:8 it would be something like this.

For, it is through God's kindness that we have been saved.

Of course, all of that fits well with what we have talked about the last couple of weeks. We saw how as Gentiles we were separated from God. We saw how we were without hope or God in the world. We saw how we were spiritually dead and how God made us alive in Christ. Even Ephesians 2:7, the verse that precedes the one we are looking at, makes the same point.

^{NIV} Ephesians 2:7... in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Now, we have spent the time that we have on the definition of grace because there was a time in the history of the church where grace was understood much differently. Just prior to the Reformation, there was a tendency in the Roman church to think of grace as a substance. Some Catholic theologians set forth the idea that at our baptism we are filled with, what I will call for want of a better word, a spiritual substance called **“grace”**. They believed that for a person to enter heaven they had to be filled with grace. That is why they made such a point in distinguishing venial sins and mortal sins. It was almost as if the human soul was a spiritual bathtub. When a person committed a venial sin, some of their grace drained out. If they committed a mortal sin, all of their grace drained out. When you understand the perception that they had of grace, you can even begin to understand why it was so important to develop the sacrament of penance or even the idea of purgatory. The sacrament of penance was developed to help wayward sinners recover their state of justification and the idea of purgatory was developed to aid those who died in a state of less than perfect justification achieve full justification.

Now, Paul poses a different kind of grace. It is a grace that translated into God’s kindness and it is a grace that results in the salvation of God’s people.

All of which brings us to the second phrase **“saved”** or more accurately **“have been saved”**. What we have already seen is that Paul’s definition of being saved includes forgiveness of sins but it also includes more than that. We have seen that it includes being predestined unto good works, being adopted in Christ as God’s own children, being redeemed from the power and penalty of sin, being included in the number of God’s possession or inheritance of people, and finally being sealed with the Spirit of God until the day God ultimately redeems us.

The main point I want to make here is that this is an act that occurred in the past that has a result in the present. The phrase **“have been saved”** is a perfect tense passive verb. I know it has been a while since some of us have studied any grammar so it might be helpful to review briefly the difference between the three ways past tense verbs can be portrayed. I used to explain it to my Greek students by using the verb **“to kiss”**. I knew by doing that I could keep their attention.

First, a simple past tense verb just declares that an action has occurred in the past. **“She kissed me.”** It doesn’t have anything to say about the duration of the kiss or even the result of the kiss. It just happened and it is over.

The imperfect tense is used to show continuous action in the past. **“We were kissing.”** It tells that the action was going on continuously in the past. It doesn’t have anything to say about when the action ended or what the result was. It focuses, however, on the continuous nature of the action in the past.

The perfect tense, the tense that is in use in our passage here, focuses on the fact that the action was completed in the past and that there is an abiding result in the present. **“I have been kissed.”** It may not quickly explain what the result in the present is but it is clear that there is one. In the case of **“I have been kissed”**, it may be that the result is that I still remember it or in my case it may be that the result is that I am now married. But you can see, I think, how the result is implicit to the tense of the verb.

Now with regard to our verse, we can see that there are several possibilities as to what the result could be.

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It may be that we have been saved in the past with the result that we are saved in the present. It may be that we have been saved in the past with the result that we will stay saved in the future. It may be that the result will be that we walk in good works. It may be a combination of those three things but there is a result.

The one other thing I think we should notice is that the verb is passive. **“We have been saved.”** Almost every language has the ability to distinguish between actions we do or participate in and actions which are done to us of which we are the passive recipients. This is the latter case. The action of saving us was done to us. It is not an action that we participate in other than as recipients. That is why the metaphor of **“having been dead and being made alive”** is so appropriate.

But the text speaks not only about God displaying His kindness and having saved us, it also tells us of the channel through which we receive this kindness of God. It is through faith.

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Now, there are two things that we must avoid. First, we must avoid attributing any meritorious virtue to faith; it is not a good work. We know that because we know that no man is saved by works. The problem is trying to find a way in which we can view faith as the channel through which we receive these blessings from God and still not view as a work of righteousness on our part.

Let me take a minute or two and explain the way in which the Reformers viewed faith. Calvin and other said faith consisted of three things: **“notitia”**, **“assensus”** and **“fiducia”**. Let me explain what they meant.

By **“notitia”** the Reformers meant that there were a certain amount of facts about the gospel that one must know. Those facts would include such things as the fact that Jesus was born, that He lived a sinless life, that He died a sacrificial death for sinners and that He ultimately rose from the dead.

But the Reformers said there was more. Not only must one know the facts, they must also believe the facts. They called this aspect of faith **“assensus”** and you can see why they thought it was important. To simply know the facts and not believe them reduces the Christian faith to mythology. There is probably not a one of us here that doesn't know Zeus was the king of the Greek gods. On the other hand, there is not a one of us here that believe in actuality that it was true. You see, I hope, the important distinction. That is one of the reasons why I have absolutely no patience with liberal theologians that say really stupid things like, **“It doesn't matter whether the resurrection really occurred. It doesn't matter whether Christ rose from the dead. The gospel is still true for me because it changed me.”** As a matter of fact, the Bible describes faith composed of the two elements that I have just described as being exactly the same as the faith of demons. James says:

^{NIV} **James 2:19**...You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-- and shudder.

That is why the Reformers placed great emphasis on the third aspect of faith which they called **“fiducia”**. **“Fiducia”** has the idea of trust. It means that we know the

facts, we believe the facts and we trust that the facts are true for us. One illustration will, I think, help get the point across.

Back in 1830 George Wilson was convicted of robbing the U.S. Mail and was sentenced to be hanged. President Andrew Jackson issued a pardon for Wilson, but he refused to accept it. The matter went to Chief Justice Marshall, who concluded that Wilson would have to be executed. "**A pardon is a slip of paper,**" wrote Marshall, "**the value of which is determined by the acceptance of the person to be pardoned. If it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson must be hanged.**" For some, the pardon comes too late. For others, the pardon is not accepted. (Prokope, V. 11, #5)

You see Mr. Wilson knew he had been pardoned, he believed he had been pardoned, but he refused to accept the pardon as something to be applied to him. As a result, he was hanged.

We need to know the facts of the gospel. We need to believe that the facts of the gospel are true and we need to trust that they are true for us. That is one of the reasons that I have so much difficulty with some of the teaching and preaching that is going on in modern Christianity that is denuded of theological content. We are not saved by trust alone, we are saved by trusting in the gospel, the real gospel, and that should compel us to know what the gospel is. That is one of the reasons I like the following quote by J. Gresham Machen.

What good does it do to me to tell me that the type of religion presented in the Bible is a very fine type of religion and that the thing for me to do is just to start practicing that type of religion now?...I will tell you, my friend. It does me not one tiniest little bit of good...What I need first of all is not exhortation, but a gospel, not directions for saving myself but knowledge of how God has saved me. Have you any good news? That is the question that I ask of you. I know your exhortations

will not help me. But if anything has been done to save me, will you not tell me the facts?

And that brings us finally to the little word **“that”**.

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You see there is quite an argument about what the **“that”** refers back to. Does it refer to **“grace”**, to **“saved”** or to **“faith.”** Because our time is so limited, I want to give you the boiled down version of the debate. Some scholars including men like Theodore Beza, Charles Hodge and even R.C. Sproul say that it refers to **“faith”**. They would translate Ephesians 2:8 like this:

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Certainly that interpretation is a possibility. There are indeed places in the New Testament where the text actually says that. For example:

^{NIV} **Acts 13:48**...When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

Or even:

^{NIV} **Acts 18:27**...When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed.

Or even:

^{NIV} **Philippians 1:29**...For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,

Others like Stott and Calvin say that **“that”** refers back to the whole of our salvation. They would translate the verse like this:

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I think that makes the most sense. You see in Greek **“grace”** is a masculine noun. **“Faith”** is a feminine noun and **“that”** is a neuter noun. If **“that”** were pointing to **“grace”** or **“faith”** it would probably be the same gender as the noun it explains. That means that it is more likely that **“that”** points to the verb **“have been saved”** which has no gender. I know you hate to hear me say it again but I think Calvin was probably right. The whole of our salvation is the result of God’s gracious kindness exercised toward us in the saving work of Christ.

And that seems to fit perfectly with what Paul says next. He tells the Ephesians that there is a reason that salvation is the gift of God.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 2:9**...not by works, so that no one can boast.

We can’t brag about our salvation being the result of our own good works or any of our good works. It is solely based on the gracious work of God and if that hasn’t already become clear Paul repeats the thought in verse 10.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 2:10**...For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

You see our salvation can't be of our good works or we would have something to brag about. Rather we are God's workmanship; really we are, and I love the underlying Greek word here, His masterpiece. We were saved by grace through a believing trust in His work of redemption not because of anything we had done but rather because of His kindness. So we have nothing to boast about because our salvation is His work and we are His special work created in Christ Jesus to live consistent lives of godliness.

So, if I could sum up what we have discussed thus far, it would be this.

- (1) We were dead in trespasses and sin, unable to save ourselves or even come to come to God.
- (2) God sent Christ into the world to redeem us from our sins. He was born, lived a perfect life of holiness and was crucified bearing our sins.
- (3) God has provided this salvation to all those who will throw Himself upon the mercy of Christ. Those are the facts. Do you believe them. You can't work yourself into His favor. You must trust what He has already accomplished on your behalf.

Having said that, I can finally pray with Paul that God will enlighten the eyes of your hearts to this wonderful glorious truth and I can say with the magnificent Spurgeon, with whom through my own wretchedness I have so little in common, there I have told you again.

Let's pray.