

## EPHESIANS 2:8-10 SOLA GRATIA

"When you find a turtle on top of a fence post, you know it didn't get there by itself. When you find a dead sinner, a rebel against God, alive and in love with God, gratefully trusting not to himself or herself but to Jesus Christ for peace with God, wanting and striving to do his will, you don't criticize his game, you are just surprised and delighted that he is playing at all; and you know good and well she didn't get to the top of this fence post by climbing it herself.

In this great text we have, in truth, the manifesto of the Protestant Reformation, perhaps the greatest, most consequential movement in human history since our Lord's ascension to heaven and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Reformation was nothing if it was not a rediscovery of the grace of God. All great revivals in Christian history have been rediscoveries of the grace of God, rediscoveries of salvation as God's free gift to undeserving sinners. Times without number this fact about salvation has been lost to the church, buried in indifference, in self-confidence, and in false teaching. In ways first subtle and then public and defiant salvation comes to be thought of instead as a cooperative effort between God and man with man playing the decisive role. This is what happened over and over again in the history of Israel. This is what had happened again in the time of the Lord Jesus himself. Jesus came teaching salvation by divine grace alone and the church murdered him for it. Such is the natural antipathy of the human heart to this message. It was this same view of salvation, based on human achievement and merit, that Paul had been raised in and had been taught in the Judaism of his day. It was this view he championed until he became a Christian himself. And it was this same beggarly view of salvation - that it is a reward for man's works, his religious devotions, his conformity to the requirements of the church - that had once again become the theology of the Christian Church in the age prior to the Reformation.

It was against this heresy that man is, in some significant part, his own savior - it was never put that way, of course, but that is the substance of all of these forms of the view that God makes salvation a possibility but man must make it an actuality by his own efforts - I say, it was against that heresy that the prophets of the OT protested, that Jesus himself protested, that the Apostle Paul came to protest, and that the Reformers protested following him. That this cycle so regularly repeats itself is proof positive that the natural theology of the human heart, the default theological position of the human heart is salvation by works, and that this tendency to self-confidence before God will always reassert itself unless held at bay by strong conviction founded on the clear and faithful preaching of the Word of God. Men love themselves - deeply! - and salvation by works is the form self-love takes in the theology of salvation.

## THE BASIS OF OUR SALVATION

### 1. BY GRACE V 8a

A. The Reformation and other great revivals rediscovered grace.

B. Christianity is solely the result of the grace of God

Eph 2:5

God declares He owes us nothing, so that salvation is not a reward

or recompense, but unmixed grace. (Calvin)

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At the time and ever since, the Roman Catholics and others have accused the grace oriented churches of a neurotic monomania or one-sidedness. *Sola fide*, by faith alone; *sola gratia*, by grace alone; *solus Christus*, Christ alone, *sola Scriptura*, by the Scripture alone! No, they said and still say, let's have balance. Let's be moderate. Surely faith is important, but let's not forget works. Surely the Bible is important, but let us not forget the traditions of the church. Surely grace is important - don't anyone think that we are minimizing grace - but let us not forget human effort. But this reply, seemingly so reasonable, utterly fails to do justice to the burden of Paul's ferocious polemic against any view of salvation that suspends it, to any degree, on human effort.

Benjamin Warfield.

"There is often a confusion between redemption itself, which is objective and takes place outside of us, with its subjective effects, which take place in us and are wrought in us gradually and in a definite order. Ideally all of Christ's children were saved before the foundation of the world, when they were set upon by God's love, and given by the Father to the Son to be saved by him. Objectively they were saved when Christ died for them on the tree, purchasing them to himself by his own precious blood. This salvation was made their personal possession in principle when they were regenerated by the Holy Spirit.... It was made over to them judicially on their believing in Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit thus given to them. But it is completed in them in its full effects only when at the Judgment Day they stand, sanctified souls, clothed in glorified bodies, before the throne of God, [fit] for the inheritance of the saints in light. Here, you perceive is a process." [Counterfeit Miracles, 176]

No wonder the world was turned upside down when Paul discovered that salvation was by grace alone and no wonder that it was turned upside down once again when Martin Luther discovered that salvation was by grace alone, and no wonder that untold multitudes of lives have been turned upside down by this one discovery, that salvation is of the Lord that we, and every Christian, are God's workmanship, people in whom God has created something new and living out of what was old and dead. It makes God exceedingly great in a human mind and heart. It makes his love surpassingly wonderful, his plan and purpose amazing and marvelous. It makes Christ supremely beautiful and the Holy Spirit precious beyond words. It makes the divine power over the dead and stony hearts of sinful men and women incomprehensibly and breathtakingly glorious.

C. Saved from what?

1. Spiritual death 1:1

2. Rebellion against God
3. Our own desires
4. Evil one
5. God

, we've been saved from God, from falling into the hands of God, from falling into the hands of an awesome and just God when we do not have a defense. When there is no defense attorney in the world who would take our case into that courtroom. So ultimately we've not simply been saved from our sin, saved out of rebellion and slavery, we've been saved from falling into the hands of God without a defense. We've been saved from God and from His just judgment. The Apostle Paul knows that if you don't understand that and if you don't believe that, nothing else he says is going to make sense

Ligon Duncan

## 2. THROUGH FAITH V 8b

A. What is faith? Faith is but the instrument through which it comes to us. It is the channel by which salvation comes to me.

It is grace alone, and if we bring nothing but our faith, which strips us of any merit, it means salvation is not from us.

B. Faith does not save

Faith brings a man empty to God, that he may be filled of God's blessings

C. Faith as a gift

2 Pet 1:1, Phillipians 1:29, Acts 3:16

D. Sola Fide

E. Is salvation a reward because we have faith? Does faith cause our salvation?

## 3. DIVINE GIFT V 8c

The controversy—What does (that) refer to? Is it grace, faith or salvation? What is the gift?

What exactly is the "gift (v. 8) of God?" Arminians have often appealed to a point of Greek grammar that they believe makes it impossible for "faith" to be the "gift" to which Paul refers. The word faith, they argue, is feminine in gender, whereas the pronoun translated that (and that not of yourselves) is neuter. Had Paul intended to describe faith as the gift he would have used the feminine form of the pronoun. To what, then, does the word that refer? What is the 'gift of God'?

Some point to the "grace (v. 8)" by which we have been saved. But the word "grace," like "faith" is also feminine in gender. Therefore, if 'that which is not of ourselves' cannot refer to "faith," far less can it refer to "grace," which has the added liability of being even farther removed in the sentence from the pronoun "that.". So what is Paul saying? What is the antecedent of "that?" Clearly the "'gift of God" is salvation in its totality, a salvation that flows out of God's grace and becomes ours through faith. From beginning to end, from its inception to its consummation, salvation is a gift of God to his elect. Consequently, that faith by which we come into experiential possession of what God in grace has provided is as much a gift as any and every other aspect of salvation. One can no more deny that faith is wrapped up in God's gift to us than

he can deny it of God's grace. All is of God! Salvation is of the Lord!

There has been, as you may know, a long debate concerning the antecedent of "this" in the phrase, "and this not from yourselves..." Many have held that it refers to the nearest noun, viz. "faith." Even this faith is not from yourselves, it too is God's gift. Others have held that the "this" refers to the entire previous clause, "by grace you have been saved through faith" and this, that is, this salvation by grace through faith, is not from yourselves. It is a smallish point unless one tries to maintain, as some have, that what Paul means is that the grace comes from God but the faith comes from us. In any reasonable reading of Paul's words the faith is included in the "this" and in any understanding of Paul's words he is taking the origin of even our faith in Christ out of our hands and putting it into God's hands. We owe to God the entirety of our salvation, both its provision by God and Christ and its appropriation by ourselves.

v.

#### 4. NOT OF WORKS, THEREFORE, NO BOASTING v 9

All boasting is eliminated in salvation

God alone is the author of salvation.

Rom 3:20, Gal 2:16

Rom 3:27, 4:5, 1 Cor 1:31

v.9 What was just said positively, is now said negatively. It is all by grace or, in other words, it is not by our achievement. "Works" here, in a letter mostly to Gentiles and without any of the polemics against judaizers that we find in Galatians or Romans, means simply human effort or human achievement. From beginning to end it is God's doing, not ours. That is why the gospel excludes boasting: there is nothing of ours in it that we can make the basis for self-congratulations. As William Temple put it, "The only thing of my very own that I can contribute to my redemption is the sin from which I need to be redeemed." [Nature, Man, and God, 401]

#### 5. GOD'S WORKMANSHIP V 10

A. We were not self- created

2 Cor 5:17, Phil 1:6, 2:12-13

v.10 There is one more argument in support of the proposition that salvation is God's gift to us from first to last. We are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus, and being his creation, we were created to do good works. In other words, the good works are the result of our salvation not its cause. No one exists until he is created. He does not act before he is. Creation makes possible his acting. But God is the creator of the believer, he creates a believer out of an unbeliever in the same way he created life out of nothing at the beginning. God saved us to be good, he did not save us because we were good or even partly good or even a little bit good. We were, he has already emphatically said, "dead in transgressions and sins." We had nothing to offer and wouldn't have offered it if we had!

B. Works are the purpose, not the cause

For all the good works which we possess are the fruit of regeneration.

Works are a part of grace.

Titus 3:8

### C. Works were preordained by God

Before we were born, the good works were prepared by God. In our own strength we are not able to lead a holy life but only so far as we are formed and adapted by the hand of God. Now if the grace of God came before our performances, all ground of boasting is taken away. God owes us nothing for the good works were drawn out of His treasures in which long before were laid up.

What remains now for free will, if all the good works which proceed from us are acknowledged to have been the gifts of the Spirit of God? He does not say we are assisted by God. He does not say that the will is prepared and then is left to run on its own strength. He does not say the power of choosing aright is bestowed upon us and that we are afterwards left to make our own choice. Such is the idle talk in which those persons who do their utmost to undervalue the grace of God are accustomed to indulge. (Calvin)

AND CAN IT BE---Charles Wesley

“Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature’s night.”

[What’s he talking about? Being dead in trespasses and sins. And what does he say? ‘And then I freed myself...’ Nope! That’s not what he says. What does he say? “Thine eye...” Who’s he talking to? God.]

“Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light.  
My chains fell off, my heart was free!  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.”