

Ephesians 2:8-10 "Saving Grace"***

Proposition: In Ephesians 2:8-10, we discover that God's saving grace involves three components.

I. Saving grace involves a people (8a).

A. Here is what we were (1-3).

1. We used to be dead.
2. We used to be deluded.
3. We used to be doomed.

B. Here is what God did (4-7).

1. God made us alive in Christ (4-5).
2. God raised us up in Christ (6a).
3. God seated us in Christ (6b).
4. God will display His grace through us in Christ (7).

II. Saving grace involves a procedure (8b-9).

A. Here's how saving grace operates.

1. It's appropriated by faith.
2. It's the gift of God.

B. Here's how saving grace does not operate.

1. It's not something we initiate.
2. It's not something we accomplish.
3. It's not something for which we can take credit.

III. Saving grace involves a purpose (10).

A. God saved us from His wrath.

B. God saved us to do good works.

Implications: As we ponder God's saving grace...

1. No one is beyond the reach of grace.
2. No one is beyond the need of grace.

Imagine being lost, hopelessly lost. You've fallen into a deep, dark pit, so deep that you can't climb your way out, and so dark that you don't even know there is a way out.

All you know is that you're stranded at the bottom. You have no food supplies, no clean water, and no contact with anyone outside the pit.

What's worse, you're stuck in the filthy mire at the bottom. You feel yourself sinking, sinking, sinking. And you can't escape the fact that time is running out.

Sound like a science fiction, horror movie? It's actually a true story. It's your story and mine.

The Bible says that we enter this world in that very condition. As descendants of Adam, we are fallen creatures. We're stuck in the mire of sin. We are in bondage at the bottom of a pit called depravity, and there's nothing we can do to escape.

Time is running out, and we are lost, absolutely *lost*.

Beloved, that may not be a pleasant picture to ponder, but it's the gospel truth. It's the plain truth about the condition of every person as they enter this world. They are *lost*.

"Is there hope for lost people?" you ask. The answer is, "Yes, indeed!" But there's only *one* way out of the pit. What is it? You'll find the answer in Ephesians 2. It's called God's *saving grace*.

This morning it's my privilege to continue our series, "Amazed by Grace," by turning to perhaps the most important text on the subject to be found in the Bible. It's also the most *familiar* text on grace—which raises the potential response, "Oh, *that* text. I've already heard that before."

It's unfortunate that we brush by familiar texts or stay away from them. The fact is, there's no way we can fathom the depths of God's saving grace. But Ephesians 2:8-10 can help us.

At this very moment you may be lost at the bottom of the pit, and if so, Ephesians 2:8-10 will show you how you can be set free. On the other hand, you may be a Christian, with the pit in your past. But you, too, need Ephesians 2:8-10 so that you may never forget the One responsible for your rescue.

It's so easy to forget. Far too many Christians have lost the wonder of God's saving grace.

Just what is *saving grace*? In Ephesians 2:8-10, we discover that God's saving grace involves three components.

I. Saving grace involves a people (8a).

"For it is by grace *you* have been saved." Who was saved? The text says, "*You* have been." Who is the *you* referring to?

The author of Ephesians is the apostle Paul. He wrote this letter to Christians living in the city of Ephesus, a place in what's now modern Turkey where he had personally ministered for about three years (Acts 19:10).

You have been saved, he told them. Saving grace is something that Christians have experienced. Paul's readers had been saved. They were in Christ. Many of you can relate. You, too, have been saved.

But saved from what? And how? To answer those questions we must explore the previous context. It's there that Paul describes in great detail the condition of the people affected by saving grace.

A. Here is what we were (1-3). There were three things true of us...

1. *We used to be dead*. Verse 1 states, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins." Not disabled, but *dead*. Not sick, but *dead*.

What does "dead" mean? Dead indicates the inability to respond. I have a good illustration of this every time a family pet dies.

A few years ago, a cat by the name of Panther died. After he died, he looked the same. He still had fur, and his whiskers and tail were in place. But he was dead. He was unable to respond.

Paul here is referring to spiritual death. He says we are dead in our transgressions and sins. That's how we enter this world. Dead. Unable to respond to God and uninterested in doing so.

The term "transgressions" ["trespasses" in the KJV; *paraptoma* in the Greek] literally means "a slip or a fall." It carries the idea of going the wrong direction or taking the wrong road. That's what was true of us. We were in a fallen state, and from the moment of birth our feet took us in the wrong direction.

We were also dead in our "sins." The Greek term *hamartia* is a hunter's word. It means "to miss the mark." When a hunter takes his bow, aims, and shoots at a target, yet misses, that's a *hamartia*. That's what sin is.

Sin is our failure to hit God's target.

A lot of people have a narrow idea about sin. They view sin merely as doing bad things (like adultery or lying or murder). But that's only part of it. God defines sin in terms of what we *fail to do*. Because we are dead, we fail to hit the mark. We fail to fulfill the purpose for which He created mankind, that is, to live for His glory.

You may be thinking, "Hey, I'm not a bad sinner. I'm a good parent. I'm a good worker on the job. I try to be a good citizen." But wait. You've missed something. You may be a better parent or worker or citizen than the next guy. That's commendable. But the issue isn't merely what you have done. It's what you have *failed to do*.

The Bible says you haven't met God's standard. None of us have. Indeed, none of us can, and the reason is because of our condition. We are *dead*.

Notice carefully. Paul does not say we *will* die, but rather we *were* dead. That was the state in which we entered the world as human beings. And if that's true, know this. Our fundamental need in that condition is not for better education, or a better environment, or better economics, though all that is fine in its place. What do *dead* men need? To be made alive!

So remember that. We who are saved used to be *dead*.

2. *We used to be deluded*. Verse 2, "In which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient."

That's interesting. In verse 1 Paul says we were dead, but in verse 2 he informs us that we were also "living." The Greek term *peripateo* means "to walk." Ponder that. How do dead men walk? In a sense, we were like spiritual zombies, walking corpses. We may have looked okay on the outside, but not where it counts, on the inside.

And how were we walking? We were under the influence of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air. That is, we were deluded by Satan.

Where is Satan today? If you think he's sitting on a hot, sulfurous rock in the center of the earth, think again. He's the ruler of the air. He's walking about seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet 5:8).

Why is our world in such a mess today? Why are morals decaying? Why is God's Word so blatantly disobeyed? It's because Satan has an agenda. He blinds people and deludes them to accomplish his anti-God agenda.

You may be thinking, "Wait a minute! You're wrong on this count. Satan doesn't control me. I don't do séances, or even believe in black magic. In fact, I don't steal, lie, or cheat. I do a lot of good for people, even in this church."

Listen carefully. If that's what you think, you are deceived. Satan is playing with you like a cat with a mouse. He's allowing you to do enough good to be self-righteous. He's more than willing to allow you to think you are good. Do you know why? So you'll fail to see your desperate need for Jesus Christ.

And if you have been saved, remember this. We used to be dead, deluded, and...

3. *We used to be doomed*. Verse 3, "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath."

Notice Paul's shift in pronouns, from "you" to "we" and "us." To underscore the universal nature of man's

dilemma, Paul says this was true of *us*, indeed, *all of us*.

What was true? We used to live to gratify the "cravings" of our sinful nature. We were held captive by the "desires" and "thoughts" of the flesh. In other words, we lived *feeling* oriented lives. We did what we *felt like doing* instead of what we were created to do.

And worst of all, we were under God's "wrath." We were not only dead and deluded, but *doomed*. We were in the pit and there was no way out. That's what we were, but praise God...

B. Here is what God did (4-7). Perhaps the two most beautiful words in the Bible are the first two words of verse 4—*But God*.

God saw us in our helpless state and took action. In fact, Paul mentions four actions taken by our merciful God in our behalf. You'll notice that in each of the actions Christ is mentioned. What God did for us was made possible because of what Christ did.

1. *God made us alive in Christ (4-5)*. "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved."

What did God do? He made us alive. Why? It's not because He looked down in the pit and said, "There's a good one. I'll pick him." No. Remember, none of us hit the target. We all were dead in sin.

But God took the initiative to make dead men live again. He made us alive even when we were dead. And He did so on the basis of what Christ did. More about that a little later.

2. *God raised us up in Christ (6a)*. The text states, "And God raised us up with Christ." That is, He resurrected us.

Answer this. Who else was once dead, yet conquered death? Who else experienced resurrection? Jesus Christ did.

Do you see the connection? How can God give life to those once dead in sin? It's through the meritorious work of His Son. First, God made us alive and He did so *in Christ*. Then He raised us up, again doing so *in Christ*. That's not all...

3. *God seated us in Christ (6b)*. Seated us where? "And God...seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus."

If making us alive speaks of renewal, and raising us up speaks of resurrection, seating us in Christ speaks of *royalty*. Why is that? Where is Christ right now? Hebrews 1:3 tells us, "After he had provided purification for sins, he *sat down* at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."

Right now, Christ is seated on his throne in heaven. But so are we. When God saved us He seated us in the heavenly realms in Christ. Romans 8:17 says that if we are children of God, then we are "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ."

Wow! God took us from the pit to the palace, and He did so on the basis of our association with Christ. And notice the tense of the verb—God *seated* us with Him. It's not, He *will* seat us but already has! Past tense. In the mind of God it's already happened. When Christ sat down, so did we.

Ponder this reversal. We used to be dead (1), but God made us alive. We used to be deluded (2), but God raised us up to new life. And we used to be doomed (3), but God elevated us to a position of royalty.

Yet there's more! It's something God will yet do...

4. *God will display His grace through us in Christ (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."

On the mantle over our wood burner there are trophies. Trophies signify accomplishments. They're reminders of past victories. There is little intrinsic value in the plastic and wood that make up the trophy. It's what the trophy represents that makes it valuable.

Did you know that God has trophies? We who know Christ are trophies of His grace. Why did God make us alive, raise us up, and seat us in Christ? It's so that in the ages of eternity to come He can put something on display.

But what? What does God want to display? The answer according to verse 7 is "the incomparable riches of His *grace*."

Fellow Christians, that's why God saved us. He didn't have to, and we certainly didn't deserve it. But by nature He is a gracious God, and He loves to display His grace.

Perhaps right now you're at the bottom of the pit, and you're thinking, "But my life is such a mess. Surely, I am a hopeless cause. How can God save me?" The answer is *saving grace*.

O sacred Head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down,

Now scornfully surrounded with thorns Thine only crown.

How pale Thou art with anguish, with sore abuse and scorn,

How does that visage languish which once was bright as morn.

What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered was all for sinners' gain;

Mine, mine was the transgression, but Thine the deadly pain.

Lo, here I fall, my Savior; 'Tis I deserve Thy place,

Look on me with Thy favor, assist me with Thy grace.

What language shall I borrow to thank Thee, dearest Friend,

For this, Thy dying sorrow, Thy pity without end?

O make me Thine forever, and should I fainting be,

Lord, let me never, never outlive my love to Thee.

No one deserves grace, dear friend. No one. In fact, that's what makes grace, *grace*. God extends it to the undeserving. And that's the first component of saving grace. Saving grace involves a people—"For it is by grace *you* have been saved."

But how does it happen? That brings us to the second component.

II. Saving grace involves a procedure (8b-9).

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." These are critical words, every one of them. There must be no misunderstanding about how we receive the benefits of saving grace.

Do we obtain saving grace by joining a church? Some believe so. Do we receive saving grace through baptism or communion or through other sacraments? Many believe so, but what does God's Word say? In verses 8-9 Paul gives careful attention to the procedure of saving grace.

A. Here's how saving grace operates. Notice two stipulations...

1. *It's appropriated by faith.* "For by grace are you saved *through faith*." Notice that God's saving work is accomplished by grace and appropriated by faith.

What does that mean? Paul elaborates in Romans 3:21-22, "But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes *through faith* in Jesus Christ to all who *believe*."

There's the answer. When a dead, deluded, and doomed sinner places his faith in Jesus Christ, God saves that person. God gives that person *righteousness*, that is, He brings that person into a right relationship with Himself.

Let there be no misunderstanding. Saving grace is appropriated *by faith alone*. Not by the sacraments. Not by good deeds. Not by our feelings. It's by faith. The moment a person places their trust (their *faith*) in Jesus Christ and His atonement in their behalf, God saves that person. It's not a process, but an event that happens the moment a person *believes*.

At this point, a careful thinker will ask, "But a dead person can't do anything. How can he believe in Christ so as to be saved?" An excellent question! And it brings us to the second stipulation of saving grace.

2. *It's the gift of God.* "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God."

Where do we get the faith that appropriates saving grace? Some say, "That's our part in salvation. God's part was to provide a Savior, but our part is to believe in Him. So faith is something we come up with. It originates within us."

But wait. Is that what the text says? No, it doesn't. Notice again the explanation that follows, "And this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God."

What is not from us? What is God's gift? Faith is. In fact, the whole package is. Salvation is by grace through faith, and it's all a gift.

This is more there mere theological, hair-splitting. Charles Spurgeon explains, "I ask any saved man to look back upon his own conversion and explain how it came about. You turned to Christ and believed on His name; these were your own acts and deeds. But what caused you to turn that way? What sacred force was it that turned you from sin to righteousness? Do you attribute this singular renewal to the existence of a something better in you than has been yet discovered in your unconverted neighbor? No, you confess that you might have been what he now is if it had not been that there was a potent something that touched the spring of your will, enlightened your understanding, and guided you to the foot of the cross. Gratefully, we

confess the fact; it must be so. Salvation by grace, through faith, is not of ourselves. None of us would dream of taking any honor to ourselves from our conversion or from any gracious effect that has flowed from the first divine cause."

Oh beloved, we must never rob God of the glory He deserves for He alone accomplished by His grace. Here's how saving grace operates. It's appropriated by faith, and it's a gift that God gave to us. And lest we miss the significance of this truth, Paul quickly moves to the negative side of the procedure.

B. Here's how saving grace does not operate. Three things are *not* true of God's saving grace.

1. *It's not something we initiate.* Here the words again, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this *not from yourselves.*" Not from yourselves. God didn't save us from something we did. Salvation is not "out of us" as the Greek text renders it (*ex humon*).

2. *It's not something we accomplish.* "Not by ["of" in the KJV] works," verse 9 begins. God doesn't save a person because of some action or actions the person performs. It's not by works. If it were, grace would no longer be grace. But saving grace does not operate on the basis of human merit. If it did, we would always wonder, "Have we done *enough*? Does God still expect *more*?" Oh, the tyranny of a works-oriented salvation!

3. *It's not something for which we can take credit.* Paul wraps up verse 9 with the third negative, "So that no one can boast."

Do you like it when someone takes credit for work you've done? We have copyright laws to prevent that sort of thing. A moment ago I quoted from Charles Spurgeon and said so. Those were *his* words. He crafted them, not me, so I gave him credit.

Know this. God is not pleased when people take credit for something He did. Ephesians 2:8-9 is God's copyright symbol on the bottom of the page of our salvation.

But what exactly is it that makes salvation possible? If it's not who we are or what we've done, what is the basis of our salvation? According to Ephesians 2, it's what *Christ did*.

You see, what Christ achieved when He came to the earth He shares with us. He lived a perfect life, and then He died. But after that He came back to life, was raised from the dead, ascended to heaven to take His seat on His royal throne, and one day will return with great splendor.

That's what Christ did. But did you realize that when Christ accomplished all that, He had a *people* in mind? He did.

In eternity past, God chose to save sinful people in Christ, people who could not save themselves. And wonder of wonders, He included *us*! And on what basis? We have been saved on the basis of what Christ did. When God saves us, He gives us the benefits from Christ's work.

Look again at verses 5-7. We have been made alive together *with Christ* (5). We have been raised up *with Christ* and seated *in Christ* (6). And we will be the trophies of God's grace *in Christ* (7).

In his book *Sit, Walk, Stand*, Watchman Nee illustrates, "If I put a dollar bill between the pages of a magazine, and then burn the magazine, where is the dollar bill? It has gone the same way as the magazine—to ashes. Where the one goes the other goes, too. Their history has become one. But just as effectively, God has put us in Christ. What happened to Him happened to us."

That's the procedure of saving grace. God takes a sinner and places him in Christ. Again, the words of

Watchman Nee are helpful, "Our deliverance from sin is based, not on what we can do, nor even on what God is going to do for us, but on what he has already done for us in Christ."

You say, "But how can I know if I've truly experienced saving grace?" The answer brings us to the final component of saving grace mentioned in our text. Saving grace involves a people, a procedure, and thirdly...

III. Saving grace involves a purpose (10).

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Verse 10 begins, "For." That indicates a connection to verses 8-9. Saving grace is not a license to sin. It's just the opposite. It's a tremendous incentive for holy living.

Why? The first word of the Greek text is, *His*. "*His* [God's] workmanship we are." What did God have in mind when He saved us? There are two sides to salvation. Unfortunately, we often talk about the first, but neglect the second...

A. God saved us from His wrath. That's what verses 8-9 were all about. But don't miss verse 10. Yes, God saved us *from* something, but also *to* something. What?

B. God saved us to do good works. We are "created in Christ Jesus to do good works." Good works are not optional. Granted, good works don't merit salvation, but they are the result of it. If you have been saved, you will exhibit good works.

It's inevitable. The life of Christ will flow through your life if you know Him. God saved us to do good works. In fact, He "ordained that we should walk in them," as the KJV puts it.

Ask yourself this question, "Has my life changed? Is it obvious that Christ is living in me?" If we have been saved (verses 8-9), there will be good works (verse 10).

So there are the three components of saving grace. Saving grace involves a people, a procedure, and a purpose.

I spent the first ten years of my life in a "church" that did not teach Ephesians 2:8-10. I suppose they had it on some doctrinal statement somewhere, but they did not *teach* it.

Don't get the idea they didn't talk about Jesus. They talked about Jesus a lot. But Jesus was seen more as an *example* than as a *Savior*. The problem was not so much what was said, as with what was *not* said.

You could summarize the message we were taught as follows (and it's being repeated to this day in countless "churches" all over the world): *Believe in God, do good towards your fellow man like Jesus did, and then when you die you'll go to heaven.*

Listen. That is not the gospel of saving grace. No one is saved merely by believing in *God*—the demons believe and yet tremble.

What's necessary? We must be identified with Christ. We must believe in Jesus Christ and His saving work on the Cross.

I fear there are many people who think they're okay, who call themselves "Christians," and who are convinced they're going to heaven, yet they're still in the state Paul described in Ephesians 2:1. They're still *dead* in their sins.

And why are they dead? Because they do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They are not *in Christ*. They have never experienced God's *saving grace*.

My heart aches to say it, but it's possible that you may be here in that condition. The Bible is full of examples of people who were religious, yet lost. *Judas* spent three years with Jesus, performed miracles, preached sermons, and fooled everyone—except Jesus.

Phygelus and Hermogenes were religious church-goers, but were lost (2 Tim 1:15). And thirty years after Paul wrote Ephesians, the apostle John wrote another epistle to the church in the same area. Of some he said this (1 John 2:18-19), "Dear children, this is the last hour, and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come...They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us."

We need to grasp grace and be grasped by grace. The implications are eternal.

Implications: As we ponder God's saving grace...

There are two things we must never forget...

1. *No one is beyond the reach of grace*. No matter who you are or what you have done, Christ can save you. If you will call upon the Lord today, He will give you the faith to believe in His Son and pick you up out of the pit. You came into this room dead in your sins, wearing grave-clothes, but you can leave today wearing grace-clothes.

It's true. No one is beyond the *reach* of grace. But there's something else we must never forget...

2. *No one is beyond the need of grace*. Perhaps you came into this room comfortable in your own goodness. Oh, friend, listen to God's Word. Your goodness is like a filthy garment to God (Isa 64:6). Throw it off, and receive the righteous wardrobe of Jesus today. For just as certain as no one is beyond the *reach* of grace, no one is beyond the *need* of grace.

Praise God for His saving grace today.