

Main Idea: In Ephesians 2:8-10, we discover that God’s saving grace involves three things.

- I. 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. 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. A purpose (10)
 - A. God saved us from His wrath.
 - B. God saved us to do good works.

An important take-away: Two things to always keep in mind...

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

Veterans Day—special prayer

Scripture Reading: John 3:1-16

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.

There you are, stranded at the bottom. 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 haunting reality 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 and 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*.

Dear friends, this is not a pleasant scenario to ponder, but it’s the truth the Bible presents about the condition of every person who enters this world. We are all *lost*.

“Is there no hope?” you ask.

The biblical answer is, “There is a way out, just *one* way out of the pit.” What is it? We’ll find the answer as we open our Bibles to Ephesians 2.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous message on this passage, see the “Amazed By Grace” series in 2001 at WBC.

This morning it's my privilege to continue our series, "Amazing Grace," by turning to perhaps the most important grace-text in the Bible. It's also possibly the most *familiar* text on grace, for good reason.

This is the text that shows you how to get out of the pit. It's like being stranded on an island and finding a cellphone that connects you to a rescue team. This is a breath-taking text, a hope-giving text.

If you are lost this morning at the bottom of the pit, Ephesians 2:8-10 will show you how you can be set free. If you have been set free, if you are a Christian, this is how it happened, and why.

It's so easy to forget. It's so easy to lose the wonder of God's amazing grace. According to Ephesians 2:8-10, God's saving grace involves three things.

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." To whom is the *you* referring?

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 only Christians have experienced. Paul's readers had. They had been *saved* and were now in Christ. If you're in Christ today, you too have been saved.

But saved from what? And how? To answer those important questions let's go back to the previous context where Paul describes in great detail the condition of the beneficiaries of saving grace.

A. Here is what we were (1-3). Prior to being saved, three things true of us...

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

What does "dead" mean? If you family pets, you know. We've had dogs and cats and hamsters and fish and crabs and birds, and every one of them gave us the opportunity to talk with our girls about what dead means.

Several years ago, a cat by the name of Panther showed up. A stray, but pretty affectionate, and he'd come and go. Then one day he died. There he was. He looked the same. He still had fur, and his whiskers and tail were in place. But he was dead.

Dead meant he was unresponsive, but more than that. He was totally unable to respond.

As for you, says Paul, you were unresponsive and totally unable to respond in your transgressions and sins. He is referring to spiritual death. This is how we entered this world. Spiritually dead. Unable to respond to the God who gave us our physical life, and indeed 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 we entered this world our feet started taking 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 and fame.

Our inclination is to think, "But wait. I've made some improvements. I try to be a good parent, and I'm a good worker on the job, and I voted last week."

But hold on. We've missed something. I may be a better parent or worker or citizen than the next guy, and society is a better place because of it. But there's something else I need to face. Not just what I have done, but what I have *failed to do*.

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

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, so is this. We need more than a better education, or a better environment, or better economics, though all that is fine in its place. What does a *dead* person need? Something he or she cannot produce, nor can any other person. If the dead person is to function, he or she must be made alive.

We need to remember this, dear friends. We who are saved used to be *dead*. But there's more to the problem.

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? It's as if we were spiritual zombies, walking corpses. We may have looked decent on the outside, but something was dreadfully wrong on the inside.

Notice how were we walking. We were under the influence of the cosmos, this world system, and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air. That is, we were deluded. We were duped by a system and a satanic ruler of that system.

Where is Satan today? If you think he's sitting on a 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 the shape that it's in today? It's because Satan has an agenda. He blinds people and deludes them to accomplish his anti-God agenda.

Someone might say, "Wait a minute! I don't agree. I don't do séances and black magic. And I don't steal, lie, or cheat either. I live a good life. Satan doesn't control me."

Listen carefully. Satan, the master-deceiver, is toying with this person like a cat with a mouse. He's more than willing to allow the good person to build the solid case that he is good. Do you know why? Because that person will never see his desperate need for a Savior.

There's something else we need to remember. 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*, Jews and Gentiles, 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*, and those feelings took us astray from what we were created to do.

And worst of all, we were under God's "wrath." "The wrath of God is being revealed against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth," says Romans 1:18. 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 did something about it. 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 the dead live again. 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.

See the connection? Who else was once dead, yet conquered death? Who else experienced resurrection? Jesus Christ did.

Don't miss this. How can God give life to those once dead in sin? It's through the meritorious work of His Son. He made us alive and He did so *in Christ*. Then He raised us up, again doing so *in Christ*. But there's more.

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

Making us alive speaks of renewal. Raising us up speaks of resurrection. Seating us in Christ speaks of *royalty*. Why is that? Think of where Christ is 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."

So right now Christ is seated on his throne in heaven. And if we're connected to Him, 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."

Amazing! God transferred us from the pit to the palace, doing so on the basis of our connection to Christ. And notice the tense of the verb. God *seated* us with Him. Not, He *will* seat us, but He already has! Past tense. In the mind of God it's already happened. When Christ sat down in heaven, so did we. That's where God sees us now.

Ponder this reversal. We used to be dead (1), but God made us alive (5). We used to be deluded (2), but God raised us up to new life (6). And we used to be doomed (3), but God elevated us to a position of royalty (6).

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."

In a box in our basement there are some trophies. There is little intrinsic value in the plastic and wood that makes up a trophy. It's what the trophy represents that makes it valuable. Trophies signify accomplishments. They're reminders of past victories.

Did you know that God has trophies? We who have come to 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*."

Brothers and sisters in Christ, that's why God saved us. He didn't have to, and we certainly didn't deserve it. But by nature He is gracious and He loves to display His grace, and He will do so forever and ever.

Perhaps right now you're at the bottom of the pit thinking, "Surely, I am a hopeless cause. My life is such a mess. I don't see how God can save me."

No one deserves grace, dear friend. No one. In fact, that's what makes grace, *grace*. God extends it to the undeserving, and He does so through Christ. So call upon Him right now. Affirm, as did the hymn-writer...

*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.²*

So saving grace involves a people. "For it is by grace you have been saved." But how does it happen? This brings us to our second point.

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 crucial 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

² Paul Gerhardt, based on the poem ascribed to Bernard of Clairvaux

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 total trust (their *faith*) in Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice, 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.”

Many churches in our area believe just that. But at WBC we believe and proclaim that salvation is from the Lord in every part, including the very faith that we place in Christ. We joyfully affirm, as this text indicates, “And this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

What is not from us? What is God’s gift? Faith is. Indeed, 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.”³

Oh beloved, we must never rob God of the glory He deserves for what He alone accomplished by His grace. This is how saving grace operates. It’s appropriated by faith, and that too is 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.

³ Charles Spurgeon, *Grace*, p. 109.

God didn't save us on the basis of something we initiated. 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.

And what specifically did He do? What exactly is it that makes salvation happen? If it's not us, if it's not who we are or what we've done, what then 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 those who believe in Him. He lived a perfect life, then died the death that sinners deserve. Then 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 here's the amazing part. When He accomplished all that, He had a *people* in mind.

In eternity past, God chose to save a hopeless people who could not save themselves. And wonder of wonders, says Paul, He included *us*! And on what basis? Our worth? No. Our works? No. We have been saved on the basis of what Christ did. Indeed, when God saves a person, He does so on the basis of the person's connection with Christ and His 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).

By faith in His work we become the beneficiaries of His work.

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."⁴

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."⁵

⁴ Watchman Nee, p. 21,

⁵ Nee, p. 21.

You say, “Okay, I see that we are saved by faith alone. But doesn’t this lead to easy-believism? You know, pray a prayer, say you believe in Jesus, and then keep living however you want.”

A good question. We find the answer to the question in the next verse. 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. First...

A. God saved us from His wrath. That’s what verses 8-9 were all about. And we celebrate that. But don’t stop at verse 9. Keep going. Look at verse 10. God saved us *from* something, but also *to* something.

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 we have been saved, we will exhibit good works.

It’s inevitable. If we’re truly connected with Christ, then the life of Christ will be seen our lives. God saved us to do good works. In fact, He “ordained that we should walk in them,” as the KJV puts it.

Here’s an example of what it looks like. Our missionary Donna Messenger said this in an email she sent us on Thursday, “Recently I figured out that 25% of my support is coming from people over 75 and 80 years old. I thank the Lord for them and for their faithfulness to Him in their sacrificial giving for so many years. In the last few months of fundraising, the Lord has provided several new partners. One dear couple in their nineties decided to double their giving! They are not done yet!!”

So let’s ask ourselves a question, “If there evidence that Christ is living in me?” If we have been saved (verses 8-9), there will be good works (verse 10). Particular, prepared in advance for us, good works. God doesn’t make clones. When His Son becomes our Savior and enters our lives, He begins to reproduce Himself in and through us. For one 90 year old sister, it was doubling her monthly check to a missionary. What’s the evidence in our lives?

This is saving grace. It’s a package that 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.

It’s not that they didn’t talk about Jesus. They talked about Jesus a lot. But Jesus was looked to as an *example*, not a *Savior*. The message we heard, 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.*

My friend, that is not the gospel of saving grace, which is why we not only do not preach it at WBC, but we warn against it. The Bible makes it clear that no one goes to

heaven merely by believing in *God*—the demons believe and yet tremble. Nor by doing the kinds of things Jesus did.

To go to heaven, a person must be connected to Christ, specifically Christ as *Savior*. The person must receive Jesus Christ as Savior and put his or her total trust in 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 are not *in Christ*. They have never experienced the reality of God's *saving grace*.

May I be even more personal? It's possible that you are here in that very 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."

This is our message at WBC. We praise God that we have been saved by grace. We love grace. We love to sing about it, to memorize verses about it, to teach our kids about it, to model it in the way we treat each other, all by His grace.

When is the last time you've read a good book about grace? I recommend...

-*Transforming Grace*, Jerry Bridges

-*Disciplines of Grace*, Jerry Bridges

-*All of Grace*, Charles Spurgeon

-*Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, John Bunyan

An important take-away: Two things to always keep in mind...

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 rescue you out of the pit. Though you entered this room wearing grave-clothes, you can leave today wearing a garment of salvation, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

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. My 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 Himself today.