

Saved: God's Plan of Salvation

Week 8: Saved by Grace Through a Living Faith -- Ephesians 2:1–10

Paul wants us to feel how far we have come, so he begins at the bottom. “And you were dead,” he says, “in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.” Not sick. Not struggling. Dead. A corpse cannot improve itself, cannot earn a rescue, cannot lift a finger to repay a debt. That is the picture Paul paints of every one of us before grace found us. We were walking through life spiritually lifeless, following the crowd, following our cravings, and we did not even know we were in a grave. If the story stopped there, it would be the saddest story ever told.

But the story does not stop there, because of two of the greatest words in all of Scripture: “But God.” “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.” Everything hinges on those two words. We did not climb out of the grave; God reached in and pulled us out. He did not wait for us to clean ourselves up. While we were dead, while we had nothing to offer and no way to earn it, He loved us and made us alive. And lest we miss it, Paul says it twice: “by grace you have been saved.” Grace, grace, grace. From first to last, salvation is the gift of a merciful God.

This is the passage people reach for when they want to say we are saved by “faith alone” and that nothing we do matters at all. And they are half right, gloriously right, about grace. We can never earn salvation. We cannot boast. The works Paul shuts the door on, the works of merit, the law-keeping we might wave in God's face to demand a wage, can save no one. But read to the end of the paragraph and watch where Paul lands. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” The same grace that saves us apart from our works saves us for a life of them. Grace is not the enemy of obedience; it is the engine of it.

So this week we hold together two truths that the world keeps trying to tear apart. Salvation is entirely a gift, never a wage. And the faith that receives the gift is a living faith, the kind that turns from sin, confesses Christ, is buried with Him in baptism, and rises to walk in the good works God prepared. This is not faith plus merit, and it is not faith all alone. It is grace received through an obedient, living faith. Read these ten verses slowly. Start in the grave, and let “But God” lift you out.

Group Discussion: Paul says we are saved “by grace... through faith,” and that this is “not your own doing... not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (vv. 8–9). Why is it so important that no one can boast about their salvation, and what would be lost if we could earn even a small part of it ourselves?

Personal Reflection: Be honest about your own heart. Do you tend to feel that God accepts you more on your good days and less on your bad ones, as though grace had to be re-earned each

morning? Where is that hidden scoreboard still running in you, and what would it mean this week to rest fully in grace?

Read Ephesians 2:1–10

Study Questions

1. Paul says we were “dead in the trespasses and sins” in which we once walked (vv. 1–2). What does it mean that we were spiritually “dead,” and how does this picture of our condition apart from Christ deepen our understanding of why salvation must be a gift of God’s grace?
2. Paul describes a former way of life, “following the course of this world” and “the passions of our flesh” (vv. 2–3). Even as a Christian, where do you still feel the pull of that old way, simply going along with the world or following your cravings? What does honesty here reveal about your ongoing need for grace?
3. The whole passage turns on two words in verse 4: “But God.” What is the great reversal Paul describes, and what does it tell us that God acted in mercy and love “even when we were dead in our trespasses,” before we had done anything to deserve it?
4. It is one thing to believe in grace as a doctrine and another to live as a person who has actually received mercy. Where in your life do you find it hardest to believe that God loved you “even when” you were at your worst, and how would receiving that mercy change you?
5. Paul says, “by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (vv. 8–9). What are the “works” that Paul says cannot save us, and why does ruling them out protect both the glory of God and the security of the believer?
6. Pride loves to find something to boast about, even in religion. In what subtle ways are you tempted to take credit for your standing with God, whether through religious performance, moral effort, or comparing yourself to others? What would it look like to lay that boasting down?
7. After insisting we are not saved by works, Paul immediately says, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (v. 10). How can Paul deny that works save us and in the very next breath say we were created for good works? What is the right relationship between grace and the works that follow?
8. Paul says God prepared good works “beforehand” for you to walk in. What are some of the specific good works, the acts of love, service, and obedience, that you sense God has placed in front of you in this season? Where have you been hesitating to walk in them?
9. This passage is the one most often used to teach that we are saved by “faith alone,” apart from any obedient response, and to argue that repentance, confession, and baptism cannot be part of salvation because they would be “works.” Yet Paul never uses the words “faith alone” here, and he ends by insisting we are created for good works. How does this passage actually hold grace and obedient faith together, so that the “works” that cannot save are

works of merit and boasting, while the faith that saves is a living faith that receives the free gift God's appointed way, through turning from sin, confessing Christ, and being baptized into Him?

10. Look back over the whole passage, from the grave of verse 1 to the good works of verse 10. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through this truth. Where is He calling you to rest more deeply in grace, and where is He calling you to walk more faithfully in the works He prepared for you?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Titus 3:3–8, saved by His mercy through the washing of regeneration, then devoted to good works; Romans 4:1–8, Abraham not justified by works but credited righteous through faith; James 2:14–24, faith completed by works and not by faith alone; Galatians 5:6, faith working through love; Philippians 2:12–13, work out your salvation, for God works in you.