

WHY SALVATION HAS TO BE BY GRACE
Ephesians 2:1-10

Intro: The message of the Bible is a message of salvation. That fact is made clear by passage of Scripture after passage of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. It may be stated in different ways, but always the meaning is exactly the same. It is in the Bible that we learn that all people are sinners, and, because they are sinners, they are under the judgment of God. We are also taught in the Scriptures that God has taken the initiative in providing for man's salvation from sin. This He has done through the coming of His Son into the world. Christ came to die. And He did die--not because of anything wrong that He had done, but He died as a Substitute for sinners. He died to satisfy God's wrath. And this He did making it possible for God to be righteous in forgiving all who would believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The resurrection of Christ, a bodily resurrection, a physical resurrection, testified to at least two things:

- 1) That He had been, and continued to be, the very Son of God. Peter said when preaching on the Day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2 that "it was not possible that he should be holden of it." That is, it was not possible for Him to be held by sin because He was the Holy One of God. But He was raised from the dead for another reason:
- 2) As evidence that God was satisfied with what His Son had done, and that His work on the Cross had been accepted by God.

Thus, when we are told in the Word to preach Christ, or to preach the Word, this all amounts to the same thing: we are to preach this message about what Christ has done for the salvation of sinners.

And yet, in spite of the fact that this is presented over and over again in the Bible, people can read the Bible and yet not get this message. Even a lot of preachers use the Bible constantly, but never see this basic, oft-repeated, clearly presented message of the Scriptures.

The passage I have chosen for my text on this last Sunday of 1987 is one of those Gospel passages. Paul was actually writing, not for those who were strangers to the truth of God, but for those who knew the Gospel and who were trusting in the work of Christ for their salvation from sin. But that should not surprise us because every Christian has learned more about the Gospel after he was saved than he did before he was saved. And yet Paul wanted them to understand the Gospel more fully than they had before. And so he presented it in the simplest terms, just like he would if they had been hearing it for the first time.

Let me call your attention, first of all, to the last three verses of our text: verses 8-10. (Read.)

Probably most Christians can quote these verses, and I would also suggest that those who do know it probably never sat down to memorize them (especially vv. 8, 9), but have learned them by hearing them repeated by others, or read to them, over and over again.

One word that is especially important for us to notice in these verses is the word "grace." You not only have it in v. 8, but it is also in vv. 5 and 7. (Read.)

You will see it also in 1:6, 7.

It is very important that we understand the meaning of this word "grace." If we do not understand what "grace" is, then we do not understand what the Gospel is because the Gospel message, which is the message of salvation, the good news about salvation, was called by Paul in Acts 20:24, "the gospel of the grace of God."

So salvation is the good news for sinners about the grace of God. Or, to state it another way, it is the good news of what God has done by His grace to save sinners from their sins.

The Gospel is good news. But what does "grace" mean?

Well, Eph. 2:8, 9 gives us a good definition of "grace." It means that salvation is "not of ourselves." That is, it is not something which we deserve. And secondly Paul said that it is "not of works." That is, it is not something that we can earn. We do not deserve to be saved, and we cannot earn it even if we were to try.

So salvation is not a reward for going to church. It is not a reward for giving your money. It is not a reward for trying your best to do what you think would please God. It is not a reward for anything! IT IS A GIFT! Is this not what our verses tell us? It is a gift. Everything about salvation is a gift. It is a gift of the grace of God.

So, then, grace means that instead of giving me what I deserve, which would be judgment, God gives me through Christ what I could never deserve, nor can I earn it--AND THAT IS SALVATION.

But there is another idea in grace that we do not hear emphasized as often as we should. "Grace" also means strength. It is God strengthening us to do what we could not, and would not, otherwise do. And do you know what I am talking about?

The Bible does say that there is one thing that we need to do

in order to be saved--and that is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to put our trust in Him and what He did on the Cross, that God accepts that death as full payment for our sins, and that is our hope for peace with God, that is our hope for forgiveness, that is our hope for heaven.

But even for the ability to believe we are dependent upon the grace of God. Otherwise we would have something to boast about --right? And so even our faith is a gift from God. It comes as we hear the Word of God. Cf. Rom. 10:17. Heb. 12:2 says that Jesus Christ is "the author and finisher of our faith."

SO GRACE NOT ONLY MEANS THAT GOD GIVES ME WHAT I DO NOT DESERVE AND DOES NOT GIVE ME WHAT I DO DESERVE, BUT HE ENABLES ME TO BELIEVE IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST SO THAT I CAN BE SAVED. NO PERSON WILL EVER BELIEVE IN CHRIST, OR HAS EVER BELIEVED IN CHRIST, EXCEPT THROUGH THE GRACE OF GOD.

But now, in the time remaining, I want to show you WHY SALVATION HAS TO BE BY GRACE. All of us think that we are capable of doing anything that we need to do in order to please God. Most of us will be honest enough to admit that we know that we have not always pleased God, but we feel that we can start to please Him any time we decide that this is what we want to do it. But the person who feels that way does not understand how drastic the effects are upon his own being. And I am talking about the effects of sin.

But this is where the Word of God helps us. And I want you to look with me at verses 1-3 of our chapter in the hope that we can learn why salvation is something that we cannot deserve, and to which we can contribute nothing!

I. WHAT SIN HAS DONE TO AFFECT OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (Eph. 2:1).

Do you know what spiritual death is? Do you know what it means that people are "dead in trespasses and sins"?

Death does not mean that we cease to exist. It never means that. Physical death does not mean that we no longer exist. It means that we no longer live in this body. But we are alive, nevertheless. We are going to be alive in heaven, or alive in hell, all through eternity--whjch means forever!

People are born into this world spiritually dead, and among other things this means that we enter this life separated from God. We do not know Him, nor do we care to know Him. We do not recognize that we need Him, nor do we want Him. But more than that, our sins have made us enemies of God. There is a separation between us and God which we cannot do

anything about--and we do not want to do anything about it. Whenever you find a person getting anxious about his relationship with God, you can be sure that God is at work in his life because no man ever brings himself to that place.

We are in bondage to sin. We may give up some sins, but we can never get rid of all of our sins. In being separated from God we have become slaves to that which ultimately will lead to our final separation from God throughout eternity--unless God intervenes.

II. THE PLACE THAT THE DEVIL HAS IN PEOPLE'S LIVES (Eph. 2;2).

Salvation has to be a work of God's grace because sinners are held by Satan's power.

This does not mean that all people are worshippers of the Devil. But it does mean that they are under the Devil's control and power.

The Bible tells us that the Devil is "the god of this world." That does not mean that the Lord has nothing to do with this world. He is God, and He is sovereign in heaven about, and in earth beneath. But for His own purposes and for His own glory, as far as the world generally is concerned, things in this world are going the Devil's way.

Why do you think that crime is such a major problem today? Why do you think that people will destroy themselves with drugs after all that is being done to show them what it will do? Why do we continue to have such gross behavior of one person against another? Why do nations still go to war against each other, and why are we threatened with nuclear war? AND DON'T THINK FOR A MOMENT THAT ANY SUMMIT MEETING IS GOING TO PUT AN END TO THAT THREAT!

The answer to all of those questions is that God has a real Enemy in the person of the Devil, Satan, and he is frantically doing everything that he can to keep people in bondage to their sins, and to see that they are damned forever with himself in hell.

That is a major obstacle that every person faces when he thinks about the problems that stand in the way of his salvation.

But notice a third reason as to why the grace of God is absolutely necessary.

III. THE NATURE OF MAN (Eph. 2:3).

Look at what this verse says. All people are "by nature

the children of wrath, even as others"--or, even as the rest.

Do you understand why you sin? Because it is your nature to do so. I am going to be talking about that tonight in our evening service, but I must touch on it here in our text just now.

Salvation means that a change takes place within us. We are made different. That is how there can be a change in a person's attitude toward God, toward the people of God, toward the Bible, toward a holy life. But, you see, we are unable to do that for ourselves. That is something that only God can do. And that is why we are dependent upon His grace. We do not deserve such a thing. And, as I have pointed out, we cannot merit such a thing. God does it in every person's heart who is saved, and He does it by His grace.

Come back tonight and we will see more of what the Word says about that, but I must move on to complete what I want to say this morning.

Notice the change that takes place in v. 4. We seem to move out of darkness into light. Out of hopelessness into hope. And it is all introduced with the words, "But God . . ." It is God Who makes the difference. If God does not intervene in your life, you are going to go on in the same way. Things will go from bad to worse as far as your relationship to God is concerned.

But notice this other reason for the grace of God if we are to experience salvation.

IV. SALVATION MEANS BEING JOINED IN A LIVING WAY TO CHRIST (Eph. 2:4-7).

Can you do this?

You see, to be a Christian is not just a matter of knowing God, but it is a matter of knowing Christ, of being united with Him, of sharing in His death and in His resurrection.

Now there is a lot that I could say about this this morning, but I am going to resist the desire to do so. The people of God spend their entire Christian life learning what it means that they are united to Christ. It has an effect upon our lives every day that we live.

But for now, let it be seen that this is not something that we can do, nor is it anything that we want to do--until the God of grace and mercy begins to work in our lives.

There are many other things that I could say from our text today, but let me conclude with one more remark as to why salvation has to be by the grace of God.

This reason is different from the others that I have talked about. We have seen the effect that sin has had upon our lives--and that that requires grace in order to have our attitude toward God changed. We have seen the bondage that we are under, and that only God can set us free from Satan's power. We have seen that our sinful acts are produced by a sinful nature, and that it takes the grace of God to change us from what we are. We have also seen that we must be joined to Christ if we are to be saved. But now let me point out this final thing, and it is this:

V. WE MUST BE SAVED BY GRACE BECAUSE GOD WILL NOT SHARE HIS GLORY WITH ANY OF US (Eph. 2:9).

Grace means that we have nothing to do with our salvation. God does it all! If we had even a small part, if we could only take credit for our faith, or if we could earn only a part of our salvation, then we would have something to boast about--and you can be sure that we would!

But long ago the Lord said this:

I am the Lord: that is my name:

and my glory will I not give to another . . .

(Isa. 42:8a).

All of the glory for our salvation belongs to God; none of it belongs to us. It is all because of His grace, because He has had mercy upon us. God would be perfectly righteous to let us all go to hell because of our sins. But, thank God, He has intervened. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

In Eph. 1 where Paul was speaking of our salvation he mentioned three times that we are to be to the praise of His glory. See vv. 6, 12, 14.

See also Paul's words in Gal. 6:14.

Concl: Do you understand better now why salvation has to be of grace, ALL OF GRACE? That salvation requires not only that God be gracious to us, but that He Himself intervene in changing us, setting us from, and bringing us into a living fellowship with His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who died and rose again in order to save guilty, lost, hopeless and helpless sinners.

Make sure by the grace of God that Jesus Christ is your Saviour.