

SALVATION BY GRACE

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Ephesians 2:8-10.

Two words -- sin and salvation -- occupy a prominent place on the pages of God's Word. In the Old Testament is recorded the story of sin as it began in Eden and spread throughout the earth. In the New Testament is recorded the story of the coming of the Saviour to bring salvation.

Religious teachers have advanced different ideas as to how people are saved. Three are preached widely today. Some preach salvation by works alone, making man his own saviour and declaring Christ's death on the cross a useless sacrifice. Others teach salvation by grace and works, making salvation dependent upon the grace of God plus man's own efforts, thus giving him some credit for his salvation and rendering it impossible without his works. Still others of us believe what the Bible says and teach with Paul that salvation is by grace alone and apart from any human effort or merit, making the Lord responsible for our salvation. Our text makes it perfectly clear that salvation is by grace without any mixture of human works or effort on the part of the one being saved.

Human depravity makes salvation by grace absolutely necessary, if sinners are ever to be saved and have a place in God's kingdom. The human race is condemned because of sin, and if we are ever made free from its penalty it must be accomplished by the grace of God apart from merit or works. Titus 2:11 teaches us that "the grace of God bringeth salvation." There is no salvation apart from it. The only hope for lost sinners is in the grace of God. The meritorious death of Christ on the cross is the only ground for the disposal of sin and the removal of condemnation on account of sin. Salvation is provided because of man's depravity, and never withheld on account of it. On the cross of Calvary the Son of God did for us that which we sinners desperately needed to have done for us, and which we never could have done for ourselves, and which will never need to be done again. There He gave Himself in vicarious suffering to make salvation free to rich and poor alike.

God's Word deals with man as a sinner. There is no difference in the need of salvation because all have sinned. Sin has affected all of man's life -- tainted his affections, warped his intelligence and perverted his will.

I. The Provision Of Salvation.

As used in God's Word "salvation" means deliverance from the guilt, the penalty, the power, the love, the dominion and eventually the presence of sin. It is the greatest blessing that is offered to man.

Salvation originated in the great love and the matchless grace of God. As an expression of His love for every human being God sent His only begotten Son into the world to redeem and save. Christ came and died on Calvary's cross as a propitiation for our sins. "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Christ did not die for His own sins, for He did not have any. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Corinthians

5:21). "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures" (I Corinthians 15:3). "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead in sins, should live unto righteousness" (I Peter 2:24).

"The love that Jesus had for me,
To suffer on the cruel tree,
That I a ransomed soul might be,
Is more than tongue can tell.

The bitter sorrow that He bore,
And oh! the crown of thorns He wore,
That I might live forevermore,
Is more than tongue can tell."

II. The Plan Of Salvation.

I. It is by grace.

Salvation was purposed in the mind of God, prompted by the love of God and perfected by the Son of God. The plan of salvation as set forth in the Word of God is so simple and plain that even a child can understand it.

It is the desire of God that lost sinners be saved. "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel" (Ezekiel 33:11). "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour" (I Timothy 2:3). "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9).

Many attempt to achieve salvation through personal efforts and meritorious works in spite of the fact that God's Word repeatedly states that it is an impossibility. Salvation is never merited by human goodness. Man can never do anything to deserve it. No one will ever be able to present his efforts to God and receive eternal life in exchange. Salvation is "not of yourselves." Self can never save you. According to the scriptures, there is no salvation apart from God's grace. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11). "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace" (II Timothy 1:9). "By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Galatians 2:16). "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5). Salvation cannot be purchased by any acts of service because it is "not of works."

Salvation is entirely God's gift to us. We cannot save ourselves and we do not have anything of our own to offer for it. God's Word tells us that "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

"Naught have I gotten but what I received
Grace hath bestowed it since I have believed;
Boasting excluded, pride I abase;
I'm only a sinner saved by grace."

Salvation is not partly of grace and partly of works; it is all of grace and none of works. Man must accept it as a gift from God; otherwise, he will never receive it. This is illustrated in a statement by Dr. Alexander Maclaren, the great preacher of Edinburgh, Scotland. Not long before his death, he was visited by his associate, Mr. Gustart, who inquired, "What are you doing, brother?" Dr. Maclaren replied, "I'll tell you what I'm doing, brother: I am gathering all my prayers, all my sermons, all my good deeds, all my evil deeds; and I am going to throw them all overboard and swim to glory on the plank of free grace."

During this life we shall never understand the complete meaning of grace. However, we do know this, that God's grace is His boundless love freely expressed toward those who are entirely undeserving. Grace is God's unmerited love in action toward lost people, rescuing them from their fallen condition and giving them eternal life. Dr. J. H. Jowett said, "Grace is the energy of the divine affection rolling in plenteousness toward the shores of human need." Oh, what a wondrous plan that He loved us, suffered for us and died for us in order that we might be saved! Man's only hope of salvation is in the marvelous grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"In lovingkindness Jesus came
My soul in mercy to reclaim,
And from the depths of sin and shame
Through grace He lifted me."

2. It is through faith.

This salvation which has been provided by the grace of God is offered to men as a gift upon their acceptance of Christ as Saviour. It becomes ours through faith. Our obtaining this salvation does not depend upon our unworthiness or our worthiness, but upon our absolute trust in Christ.

Faith is simply the instrument or hand that takes the gift which God presents to us. It is the connection or channel through which the divine supply is brought to the human need. Men receive salvation directly and immediately upon the exercise of faith in Christ. In this experience of salvation God's part is "by grace" and man's part is "through faith." Some say that salvation is by grace, through faith, plus baptism, plus joining the church or plus something else. God's Word teaches that salvation is by grace through faith plus nothing.

III. The Purpose Of Salvation.

Our text states emphatically that we are God's workmanship. God is the Worker. The saved are His workmanship and His workers. God does His saving work through Christ. Nobody has ever been saved apart from Christ, and none will ever be. Salvation starts with God and is effected through Christ. Salvation is not the work of self, the work of men or the work of a church. It is the work of God. He saves us by making new creatures out of us through the atoning work of Christ.

God has not created us in Christ Jesus in order that we may talk about our good works, but in order that we may "walk in them." Verse ten contains an arresting statement about the purpose of salvation: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

Just as certainly as man is not saved by his works, he is saved in order that he may do good works. Men are to perform good works because they have been saved. Good works are the very end of our new creation. Good works are not the root or cause of salvation, but they are the fruit and result of salvation. As we plant trees in order that they may produce fruit, so our Lord expects all of us whom He has saved to perform good works for Him. Good works are the dividends or fruits which God gets from the salvation which He gives us. Are we habitually working at our God-ordained business as we should? If not, let us get busy at it immediately.