

Ephesians

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[0 : 00] So if for just a moment we look at our old sheet, if you have it, because the beginning of the verse of chapter 2 and verse 8 is one that probably a great many have committed to memory.

And if you have it, I would certainly recommend it because it is a verse that is so jam-packed with truth regarding salvation, what it is and what it isn't, and how it is obtained and how it isn't, that every believer really ought to commit it to memory.

For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is important to know that grace and faith go together, but they are not synonymous.

They are not terms that are interchangeable. Grace is that which provides the basis or the platform for our salvation. Grace that is extended comes through our Lord Jesus Christ, and when we hear the message of grace, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, that is when it becomes important for faith to kick in.

Because what faith is, is the human individual response to what God has done in Christ on the basis of grace.

[1 : 30] So, grace is the platform or the basis, and I realize that that's energized by love, the John 3.16 passage.

It is God's love and grace that are coupled together that provide this incredible benefit for humanity through the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ.

And now, what God is asking us to do is respond to that message. When we hear the message, Christ died for your sin, the response then is, so what?

What are you supposed to do about that? And when you respond to that, you do so with your will, with your volition, your belief.

You respond to it with an act of admission, an act of confession, whereby you acknowledge your own need.

[2 : 34] Paul said, if anyone calls upon the name of the Lord, you shall be saved. Well, the only reason anyone calls is because they have become aware of a need.

If you're not aware of a need, you will not call. And, fellas, this is precisely why so many people, so many people, maybe even the majority of our population, remain unbelievers.

Because they have never come to a place where they have recognized a felt need within themselves that they cannot meet. And many who do suspect a need like that, or sense a need like that, want to do something on their own to meet it.

And, by the way, that's where the drugs comes in, and the alcohol, and the sex, and the acquisition of money, and wealth, and all the rest of it.

It is a frantic search for happiness, a frantic search for fulfillment. And people are prone to look everywhere and anywhere except to the one place that can provide it.

[3 : 47] And that comes out of a sense felt need. And when we come to that need, we understand it, and we recognize that there's nothing we can do to fill that need.

And Augustine said, Thou hast made us for Thyself, O God, and we cannot rest until we rest in thee. And that God has created in every human being a God-shaped vacuum.

And only God can fill that vacuum. That doesn't keep people from trying to fill it with everything else, but it is all to no avail. Only when we come to Christ out of that sense of felt need, then we are saved.

Then we are delivered. Then we are rescued. Then we are filled. Then we are sated with the person of Christ. And we are, like Paul wrote to the Colossians, and you are complete in Him.

That is priceless. That is priceless. So, grace is the basis, and faith is... Think of it this way, guys. Grace is what God has already done in the person of Jesus Christ.

[5 : 05] And how does that grace get to you? How is it applied to you? It is not applied through sacraments. It is not applied through joining something.

It is applied through the pipeline of faith. Faith is the way that we appropriate the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

And we do that with an act of our will. It is a purposeful, deliberate, intentional, volitional commitment of ourselves to Jesus Christ for who He is and what He did for us as our substitute. That is all wrapped up in this by grace through faith. And that nod of yourselves needs a little bit of elaboration because actually He is not talking about faith as some would interpret this. And I know there are a lot of good people who see it that way. And they believe that faith is not your responsibility.

[6 : 14] They believe that it is God's responsibility. And if God doesn't give you faith, you're not going to believe. This links in, of course, with the Calvinism that we've talked about a little bit in the past, which at one time I embraced a number of years ago as a younger man.

But that nod of yourselves is not talking about faith. He's not saying that faith is nod of yourselves. What this word refers back to in the Greek is the word saved or salvation.

It is this saved, this salvation that is not of yourselves. That is of God. And it is a gift. That's what he goes on to explain in this verse.

And we'll just have to turn to our new sheet now. And you'll notice that it's marked 2A at the top left hand. That it is not of your own doing.

It is the gift of God. And it's important to note here that it is not the faith here that is the gift of God. It is the salvation that is the gift of God.

[7 : 21] Not of works. So you get the impression that Paul is, through the Spirit of God who inspired this, he is doling out this truth in a way that cannot be misunderstood.

He says it in a positive way. It is by grace that you are saved through faith and that not of yourselves. And he's saying it in a negative way.

If you don't get it the first time around, maybe you'll get it this time. I've given you the positive punch. Now here comes the negative punch. It is the gift of God, not of works.

Just in case anybody is mistaken there and they want to couple works with faith, he makes it clear by saying, no, no, it is not of works.

Works has nothing to do with it at all. Someone said, are we saved by faith and works?

[8 : 24] Are we saved by faith or works? And it's kind of like two oars in a boat. One is marked faith and one is marked works.

And if all you do is pull on one oar, you go around in a circle. But you need both oars. And we are not saved by faith and works.

We are saved by faith that works. And this is what he's going to go on and talk about when he says, we are saved unto good works.

That means we are saved. And in that salvation, we are placed in a position where for the first time in our life, we are able to do what God calls good works.

And that makes all the difference as opposed to what man calls it. Not of works. And he said, it is not due to obedience to law. It has not been earned.

[9 : 30] It is not the result of what anyone can do. Not from any action of yours. Not because of works. Not as a result of works. Excuse me.

Lest any man should boast. And I'll tell you what. You can be absolutely certain that in our fallen nature, we will automatically look for bragging rights anywhere we can find them.

We just love to puff out our chest and say, look what I did. Give me credit. Recognize me.

Acknowledge me. Look at what I did.

God ought to really be glad I'm on his side. This is all puffed up flesh that is talking. And the apostle makes it very clear that God will have no boasting at all.

I've often said, I've often said when people get to heaven, nobody is strutting around and saying, I got here because I did thus and so.

[10 : 33] And I gave this money. And I built this building. And I funded this chariot. And I served on this committee for all these years. And that's how I got here. There won't be any of that nonsense in heaven.

Everybody's just going to have one song to sing. And that is, I am here because of him. He paid my way.

He is my entree into heaven. And apart from him, I have nothing. I've often used the illustration in talking to people about, and you've heard this before, that if you were to die today and stand before your maker, and he asked you, why should I let you come into my heaven?

What would you tell him? That's a good conversational question. Cause people to think. I encourage you to use it anytime and every time you have an opportunity.

Anytime you're talking about the uncertainty of today, the difficulty that is taking place in the world, the instability that is created anywhere and everywhere.

[11 : 38] It's a good question to ask somebody. You ever thought about the real mess the world is in? And that sometime, eventually, all of this stuff is going to come to an end. And people are going to meet their maker.

You ever thought about that? And tell them this. You know, I've given that some thought. And it's a pretty sobering thing to think of. Because we all know that we are mortal beings.

And the time may well come for you and for me. Stand before our maker and he'll say, why should I let you come into my heaven? What would you tell him?

You would be surprised how that can energize people to think along spiritual lines that they perhaps are not accustomed to thinking about at all. And this is where salvation begins.

It begins with people thinking about things that are important. And if the Almighty were to ask that question of most people, they would give all of these bragging answers.

[12 : 35] Well, I've always been a pretty good person. I've always tried to do the right thing. I've never really murdered anybody. And I've done this. And on and on and on it goes.

But there's only one right answer. And that is, you should let me into your heaven. Because Jesus Christ paid the price for my entrance. And that's all I've got.

And if that isn't good enough, then I'm sunk. But that is good enough. Because Jesus Christ and his righteousness is the coin of the realm.

Yeah, we in Alabama took an evangelism class. And that was one of the questions we asked people. Good. We always asked that question. Yeah. And also on faith.

You say, you have faith that when you sit on a chair, it's going to hold you. It's not going to fall. It's going to be these different things. Yeah. A penetrating question. Faith requires an object.

[13 : 35] Nobody is saved by faith in faith. You have to have an object. Is the object in which you have your faith worthy of your faith?

Is that object dependable? He is the one who will not fail you, will not leave you, nor forsake you. He is the utterly incomparable Christ.

Wow. What a package. What a package. Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship. We are his handiwork.

He has made us what we are. We are his by design. Created in Christ Jesus. Unto good works.

Or for good works. Or to do good works. You see, every so-called good deed that an unbeliever does, while it may receive accolades from his fellow men, while it may enjoy a write-up in the local newspaper, and while it may result in all kinds of pats on the back and attaboys, all of that is works that are produced by the flesh.

[14 : 53] This is the old Adamic nature. This is the old Adamic nature. And fellas, let me make this admission, because it can be really confusing. It is entirely possible, and it is often accomplished, that a whole lot of people do a whole lot of things that really appear good on the outward surface that God does not regard them as good at all.

They are tainted by the flesh. Because everything that the flesh, the old Adamic nature produces, is tainted. Unacceptable to God.

Looks good to others. It will get you the attaboys and the slaps on the back and everything, and the well done and everything. But as far as God is concerned, if it is not as a result of the fruit of the Spirit, then it is a work of the flesh.

And men may give you credit for it, but God doesn't. But once we are in Christ, then we are in a position to render the good works that God accepts as good works.

And they are, matter of fact, works of the flesh that are produced by the believer aren't any good either.

[16 : 10] They are the wood, hay, and stubble that Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians 3. And it is the work that is gold, silver, and precious stone that God accepts.

Those are the works that are produced by the Spirit as opposed to the flesh. So when we are operating and walking in the Spirit, the things that we do for Christ count for Christ. And the things that we do in the flesh when we are walking in the flesh as a disobedient believer, that we are all capable of doing, then that is the wood, hay, and stubble. And it amounts to nothing. We are created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.

Two purposes. Keep these in mind. I think they are very, very critical. There are two essential areas that God intends to accomplish in your life when He saves you.

Number one, He's going to change your eternal destiny permanently. When you are in Christ, you are baptized by the Spirit of God into the body of Christ and you become one with Him.

[17:27] And His destination is your destination. That's the immediate and most permanent thing that God does when He saves you. He gives you, as a gift, eternal life.

And the second thing that God intends to accomplish is to radically change your behavior, your lifestyle, your attitude, your agenda, your objectives here and now for this world.

We are not saved merely for heaven. That's the long-term objective. We are saved for a short-term objective. That is to impact our life in our attitude and in our actions right now, today, while we are living.

And if we are experiencing that, we are growing. We are growing spiritually and maturing in Christ. We are becoming conformed to the image of Christ, which is God's objective and goal for us.

So, keep that in mind. Two objectives. One's short-term, one's long-term. One's for eternity, one's for the present. And, in many respects, we don't know this for sure, but I suspect that it's probably kind of logical, that the success that we have in this life, functioning and operating in the power of the Spirit of God, will have some impact on our eternity.

[19:00] I don't know if that's connected with rewards or what. Some think that there's going to be different capacities for enjoying eternity as opposed to enjoying it less.

We don't know much about that, but we do know this. You cannot possibly go wrong letting Jesus Christ control your life and be submitted to the Spirit of God here in this life.

We are created in Christ Jesus unto good works. God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. And this walk, of course, we've developed before.

This is your lifestyle. This is how you go about living your life. That's your walk on a day-to-day basis. Now, he is going to remind these people to whom he's writing this letter, that they being Gentiles, keep in mind now that Paul is addressing this letter to people who are in Asia Minor.

This is modern-day Turkey, and Ephesus is right there on the coast. And some of you have been there and have seen the ruins of Ephesus, and they are absolutely magnificent.

[20:10] This is a place where the Apostle Paul, I think, spent, what, three full years here, I believe it was, in Ephesus. Spent longer here than he did in any other place.

And he had a tremendous ministry there. And he is reminding these people that formerly they were Gentiles in the flesh.

That means your heritage and everything about you was non-Jewish. And because you were Gentiles and not Jews, you were part of the unfavored majority of the world's population.

Because God had vested his love and his care and his direction and his word and his covenant and everything in the seat of Abraham. And these people in Ephesus were all Gentiles.

They were all non-Jews. And he is reminding them of their plight. He says, you are Gentiles in the flesh who are called uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision in the flesh made by hands.

[21:18] This is a cultural thing. It's probably difficult for us to get a handle on it. But you have to understand something about how the Jewish people regarded the subject of circumcision.

And this goes all the way back to Abraham. And what physical circumcision of the male penis signified was divine ownership.

And when a Jewish baby was born eight days old, he had to be circumcised in order to be considered a legitimate member of the seat of Abraham of the child of the covenant.

And the removal of that foreskin was a perpetual reminder to that man to whom he belonged.

And how would it be a perpetual reminder? Every time you take a leak, you are reminded. The Jew was reminded of his true owner.

[22 : 26] Every time he relieved himself. Now that's a pretty powerful reminder. And this was built into these people. Into these men. And remember when David, the shepherd lad, back in 1 Samuel, came up against Goliath?

Remember what he called him? This uncircumcised Philistine. That was an insult.

That was a barb. That was intended to be what it was. And when they wanted to speak in a disparaging way of anyone who was not a Jew.

You uncircumcised. And that was a big issue back then. Today, of course, it's looked upon strictly as a hygienic or a physical health problem or a situation. But it really meant something to these Jews.

And if you were circumcised or not circumcised, that made a great day different. Mike? Where is it described in Scripture that they were to be circumcised? Genesis. You know, I brought my Scripture sheet.

[23 : 46] I didn't bring my Bible. Genesis, I would say, maybe 14 or 15. Can somebody look that up? Genesis 14 or 15.

Somewhere around there. I don't know that it was prescribed earlier. I think that that was the initial one. And Abraham, of course, being the father of the faithful.

Sticks in my mind. It was probably Genesis 15. Maybe 14. And remember later.

Many years later. Probably, let's see. Probably 400 to 450 years after Abraham was circumcised. God called Moses. And Moses and his wife.

[24 : 45] What was her name? Can't think of that. It wasn't Jochebed.

That was Moses' mother. Anyway. Anyway, Moses came down. Moses came down with this serious illness. And it looked like he wasn't going to make it.

And he recognized that it was God punishing him. And God was punishing Moses because he had neglected to circumcise his son.

And I don't know how old his boy was at that time. But obviously, Moses was being disobedient to God by not circumcising his son.

And God obviously communicated that message to him. And Moses did it. He took the instrument that was used back then.

[25 : 48] This gives me pain, guys. It was a sharpened flint stone. To remove the foreskin of the flesh from this little baby.

And his wife, Moses' wife, was really ticked at him. She was mad. Because she saw this little priceless little baby boy as product of her body.

And here this brutal husband of hers is going to cut him. Make him bleed. And she said to Moses, surely a bloody husband are you to me.

And she read him out. And Moses would have none of it. He went ahead and circumcised him. And the Lord brought him back. What do you got, Ron? It is 17. 17. 17. Okay.

Read the passage, would you? Verse 9 says, 17. 17 says, God said further to Abraham, Now as for you, you shall keep my covenant and your descendants after you throughout the generation.

[26 : 54] This is my covenant that you shall keep between me and your descendants after you. Every male among you shall be circumcised. And you shall be circumcised in the flesh before you.

And you shall be a sign of the covenant. Yeah. Yeah. A sign of the covenant. It was a permanent, indelible kind of mark that was placed on the body that was a perpetual reminder.

And it was a very, very big item. And you know, I'll just throw this in as an interesting aside. This is something that took place, I think, in the 1970s or 80s.

And it's in Dr. S.I. McMillan's book on none of these diseases. He was a medical doctor. And he wrote a rather interesting book. It was a bestseller at the time. And he talked about the tests that they had done on the infant's blood.

And there is a chemical in our blood that contributes to the clotting of the blood. And it's called pro-thrombin. And the fascinating thing about this is, as they examined and tested the blood of newborn infants, they discovered that on the eighth day after the birth, the blood clotting ingredient, pro-thrombin, reached its maximum peak for the entire lifetime of that individual.

[28 : 24] And after the eighth day, it started downward again. And God never told Moses or Abraham why to do this on the eighth day.

He just prescribed it. Do this every male child on the eighth day. Not the seventh day. Not the ninth. On the eighth day. And I'm sure some of them probably wondered, Well, why?

What's the big deal about the eighth day? Well, scientifically, God knew that that little baby's blood was going to reach its maximum, clotting capability on the eighth day.

That's when you do it. He didn't tell them that. He just said, Do it on the eighth day. And it became a matter of simple obedience on their part to do it the eighth day. And this other test that they were doing, I think this came out of Mount Sinai Hospital in New York.

They were trying to find out what it was that women who had cervical cancer had in common. And they were compiling all of these statistics and information about women and their ages and when they were diagnosed with cervical cancer, how many of them didn't survive it, and how many of them underwent different kinds of treatment and everything.

[29 : 42] And they came up with this startling statistic that they didn't know what to do with. And as they looked into the ethnicity and the background of all of these women, compiling thousands and thousands of women and creating this database, they discovered that cervical cancer was virtually non-existent in Jewish women.

What's that all about? And there were some Jewish doctors on the scene and they said, Aha! Eureka! The reason cervical cancer is virtually non-existent among Jewish women is because their husbands are circumcised.

Quite a breakthrough. And this is touted today in some of the medical journals, particularly in dealing with prevention of cancer, etc. So it's amazing how all of this ties together.

And you know, God doesn't give explanations to a lot of this stuff. He just says, Do this or do that. In Leviticus, an illustration is given where they used a lot of clay pots.

They didn't have much else. They'd fire these clay pots and make water vessels out of them and wine vessels and stuff like that. And they make these clay pots. And the illustration is given that if a mouse is found dead in one of those clay pots, you don't wash it out and use it.

[31 : 20] You break it. You destroy it. Well, why? I mean, it looks like a perfectly good pot. And you look at it and you scrub it out good. And what's the big deal?

Why do you have to break the pot? Why can't you continue to use it? Just clean it good. No, no. God said, You break it. And he didn't explain to them at all that that clay will absorb the bacteria into the pores of that clay.

And you can't see it. But it's there. You can see it with a microscope. But they didn't have microscopes back then. And God didn't say, You destroy the pot because it is irretrievably contaminated.

He didn't give them the answer. He just said, Break the pot. No explanation. Just break the pot. So then it became incumbent upon them and their willingness to obey what God said, not knowing why.

Because we want to apply our superior reason and say, Well, it looks like a perfectly clean pot to me. But it didn't to God.

[32 : 26] And he gave the directions that he gave for people's protection. And many times they went against it and violated what God said, but they did so to their own hurt.

And they did so.