



Unit 2: The Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth
Sermon Series Title: Trust His Word
Sermon 2: Saved by Grace
Bible Passage: Ephesians 2:8-10

Background/Context

Many people don't understand how a person is saved. They believe that salvation is a human achievement. Like the people who tried to build a tower that reached from earth to the heavens (Gen. 11:1-9), many people try to stack up their morality, their generosity, and their religious behaviors in an effort to reach God and achieve salvation. As Paul clearly told the Christians in Ephesus, salvation does not come from us reaching high enough to find God. Salvation is only possible because God has reached down to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Salvation is a gift that the believer receives, not a prize than anyone can earn.

We also need to understand how salvation is connected to living a holy life. We are not saved because we live holy lives. We live holy lives because we are saved. When a person receives God's gift of grace, that person is transformed and empowered to be God's gift to the world as a witness and a minister. Grace creates Christians who offer Christian service.

A. We Are Saved by Grace (Eph. 2:8a)

The wording of "You are saved by grace" is important. This phrase is in the passive voice, "you *are* saved," meaning that salvation isn't something we do for ourselves. God saves us. The Bible describes the experience of baptism by saying that believers "were baptized" (Acts 2:41). They didn't baptize themselves. Someone else lowered them into the waters and lifted them up again.

We don't save ourselves. God places us in the cleansing stream of forgiveness, then lifts us up to live a new life. This short phrase also tells us how God saves us: "by grace." Grace is the free gift of a right relationship with God, a gift made possible through Jesus' suffering on the cross and victory over death. The word "you" in verse 8 is plural, reminding us that every Christian has been saved by God's grace. Therefore, we need to be gracious to each other, looking past our faults and failures, and sharing God's love.

Remember a time when someone gave you a gift, not because you'd earned it, but because you needed it. How did you feel when you received that gift? Have you had that kind of experience with God? Have you received His grace as a free gift that you cannot earn, but desperately need?

Application Point: What does grace mean to you? In what ways are you tempted to "earn" your salvation? Salvation isn't a prize you can win. It's a gift you receive from God—because you need it.

B. We Are Saved through Faith (Eph. 2:8b)

Grace is the saving gift that God offers to us. Faith is how we receive God's gift. Some people make faith a terrible burden instead of a liberating joy. They live as though God only saves and keeps those who exert enough effort—have “enough faith”—to qualify for God's love. Faith isn't trying harder. Faith trusts more.

A drowning person will thrash about in the water, struggling desperately to survive. That person can only be saved when he stops struggling and lets his rescuer bear up his weight and carry him to shore. We have faith in God's saving grace when we stop struggling to save ourselves and trust God to bear us up and carry us to solid ground.

Application Point: What is faith to you; the burden of trying harder and harder to “have enough faith” to convince God to work, or the joyful freedom of resting in the gift of God's grace? How does the truth that you are saved by grace change the way you see others?

C. No One Can Boast (Eph. 2:9)

Grace is not a “Plan B” for those who can't make it on their own merits. Paul stated that salvation has nothing to do with our works. Anyone who boasts about being good enough to earn salvation is totally lost. Our works don't count. Grace is the only way.

My friend wrestled with alcoholism. He entered numerous treatment programs, but left every one of them after a day or two, always saying the same thing—“*I'm not like those people—they're a bunch of drunks.*” As long as he was boasting about being better than his fellow strugglers, he was dying. And so are we.

As long as we are in denial about the power that sin has over us and our ability to get free on our own, we're lost. As long as we're boasting, relying on our own virtue, we're dying. Grace is the only way to salvation.

Application Point: What are the good things that you have done that tempt you to boast, to trust in your own goodness instead of God's grace? Do you focus on the wrong things that others do as a way to feel morally superior to them? How would your life change for the better if you no longer felt the need to boast?

D. God's Grace Makes a Believer into a Ministry Masterpiece (Eph. 2:10)

An ice storm struck my home town. A maple tree, under the weight of the ice that clung to every branch, fell to the ground. Before that tree could be cut up and hauled away, my friend, Trey, asked the owners if he could have some of the wood. With their permission, he carefully picked several pieces and carried them to his home. Over the next several months, Trey cut, shaped, sanded, and coated that wood until he had created a beautiful guitar. Through Trey's creative touch, the maple became a musical masterpiece.

The grace that saves us also recreates us. *Created*, in verse 10, comes from a Greek word used to describe a carving, a sculpture, a poem—any masterpiece that reflects the creative power of the one who made it. God's grace shapes us for a purpose, to do “good works.” These works don't save us, but they do celebrate the good news that God, by His grace, has made us new.

Application Point: Do you believe that God has created you as His masterpiece to do wonderful things for Him? Write down some of the good works that God has prepared

you to do. Ask three people who know you well to name some ways that they see you doing good works for God.