

Ephesians 2:8, Part 1

Faith is the point at which the God who saves touches the sinner.

So in beginning the section we see Here Paul is repeating his thought from verse five, “For by grace you have been saved” and he adds “through faith”. We noted a few verses ago back in verse five, Paul broke his train of thought in order to skip ahead, so to speak to this phrase, “by grace, you have been saved.” It’s almost as though he couldn’t wait to get to that part of what he had to say that this grace that saved you this grace of the Lord, this is the grace that has saved you.

But now he returns to this, “For by grace, you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing it as a gift of God.” And so in returning to this and turning his attention to it twice, really almost with the exact same words, he just adds “through faith” at the end here, we must ask the question, why is it that Paul felt the need to return to this to be so attentive to this reality, this reality of salvation by grace?

And I think there's two reasons that sort of pop out for us. One is the difficulty of the reality, the difficulty of the truth. It's not...this is a counterintuitive truth to humans, the truth of salvation by grace alone, it is something that easily fits into that phrase, that sentence, and easily goes into the back of our mind. But if we bring it to the front of our mind, in the forefront of our soul, and we sort of put a spotlight on it, it is really a truth that goes counter-intuitive to all that we know as humans.

So there's the difficulty of the reality, he wants the Ephesians, to be certain that they hear him loud and clear about the grace that has saved them. But secondly, the importance—the importance of this reality, I think is probably unsurpassed, is especially in the letter, if we don't get this, then we may as well close the book of Ephesians. If we don't, in fact, if we don't get this, we may as well close our Bibles.

Because if we don't get that we are saved by grace and grace alone, then nothing else that Paul has to say in the rest of Ephesians, nor in any of his other letters is really going to either ring home or even make sense to us—aside from by grace you have been saved through faith.

So as to that that we turn this morning, and so we'll spend just a few quick moments and just sort of look at some nuts and bolts of the words. And we'll look at Grace. And we'll look at a couple of things. And then we're going to make a beeline to what is the central focal point of the section and that is the focal point of faith.

“By grace you have been saved.” So the first thing that we see there is this ‘have been.’ It’s a perfect passive participle, which basically means that it’s describing an action that is completed in the past, that has continuing ramifications into the present.

For example, you might say something like “you have been educated.” And what that means is that there was an education that took place in the past, but that education is continuing to have ramifications

for you into the present. You have been educated the education is done, but it continues to have effect. In a similar way 'you have been saved' speaks of an action that was completed in the past, with continuing ramifications, continuing effects, continuing consequences into the present and into the future.

You have been saved. So this speaks to us of the nature of salvation as it comes to us in the scriptures, past, present, and future. The New Testament will speak to us very plainly about a salvation that is a past tense salvation, a salvation that is a present tense, salvation and a salvation that's a future tense salvation.

The scriptures will say as it says here you have been saved, it will also say you are being saved, it will also say you will be saved. So there's a past, present and future. That speaks to us of the nature about salvation in the past, the penalty of sin was removed for us that's the past tense of saved, you have been saved the penalty of the sin in which you live in which you have committed has been removed.

The present tense of Salvation means that the continuing power of sin is being removed. The penalty has been removed, but the power that sin holds over you is continuing to be removed. You are becoming more alive to God and more dead to sin. That's the present tense of you are being saved.

The future tense of you will be saved speaks to us of a final day in which the presence of sin is removed from us, that's called glorification. That's the day in which the last remaining sin is completely taken from us as we rise again to see Jesus as he is and seeing him as he is we will become like him.

So the presence of sin will be removed. We've got past, present and future, you know that I do not at all do the—what's it called the alliteration thing, but this just alliterated itself, didn't it? The penalty of sin, the power of sin, the presence of sin, that did it on its own, the three P's there, the power and the penalty. The power is being removed, the penalty has been removed, and the presence itself will be removed. That's the past, present, and future.

So Paul, speaking here of a past tense that continues to have effects into the future, into the present and into the future, the penalty of sin, the guilt of sin has been removed, you have been saved.

Now this word saved is the typical New Testament word for save—sozo. It just means delivered or rescued. You've been rescued, you've been delivered from. And we know from last week, what we've been delivered from, we've been or (I'm sorry), two weeks ago: we've been delivered from the wrath of God. The righteous, just completely, true wrath of God that is fully deserved by us as sinful people. We've been delivered or rescued from the wrath that is to come—you have been saved. And Paul says, By grace you have been saved. So that's how it has happened—by grace.

Now this word grace is once again the typical New Testament word for grace Charis. We've talked previously about grace, so we'll just touch on it briefly here. But by grace, the grace of God means this: the grace of God is a predetermined disposition that God takes towards sinners. Disposition means something like attitude or stance, a predetermined stance or position or disposition that God takes

towards lost sinners, in which he determines ahead of time to deal with them with favor and kindness and mercy.

So God determines beforehand—and Paul taught us in chapter one, verse four, that that was before the foundation of the world, he determined to have this disposition of grace of favor of kindness of mercy toward the sinner. Now, this disposition of favor causes him to deal with favor or with kindness or with mercy toward sinners.

Now, we know the concept of dealing with favor of having favor towards something or favor towards a person, we know that it just means a preference towards or, or a special kindness towards dealing with favor. But the thing that about favor in our life is that everything that we favor, or every person that we favor, we do so because of something in the person or something in the thing. There's something about the object, or there's something about the person that causes us to favor them.

And so we're responding to something favorable in them, if you were to say, I favor Bojangles, over Biscuitville, then there'll be something about Bojangles that causes you or something about Biscuitville or both, that causes you to prefer or to favor Bojangles, over Biscuitville.

However, when we come to the grace of God, the favor of God, since he was determined before we existed—chapter one, verse four, therefore, the favor of God, the disposition of favor towards sinners, cannot be conditioned by anything with us, it cannot be affected or influenced by anything within us. It's completely separate from us. And that's where the grace of God gets difficult, because we don't know how to deal with a grace or a favor, that's not in any way conditioned by the one, or the thing being favored.

So that's the struggle with the grace of God, we've struggled with that previously, we just mentioned that now. And we're going to keep going.

So by grace—by this favor—you have been saved and impulses through faith. So faith is the means faith is the mechanism. It's the avenue through which this salvation by grace comes to us.

So we'll talk just a minute about the means of faith. The, if you want to use the word conduit, the mechanism by which the salvation of grace comes to us—is by faith, we'll get to that in just a moment. But before we go there, we need to talk about another little word and that's the word 'this.'

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 work so that no one may boast. All right, so what is the 'this' referring to?

Does anybody know what part of speech 'this' is? Anybody tell me what part of speech the word 'this' is? It's a hard one isn't it? It actually it could be four different parts of speech, this one of those words, it could be four different parts of speech. It could be an article, it could be an adverb, it could be an adjective, and it could be a pronoun. Or here in this context is the pronoun. And so we know what pronouns do, what's the pronoun do? It's a word that stands in the place of another noun—he, she, or it

right? So that's what a pronoun does. And that's what this is doing in this context is standing in the place of another noun.

'This' is not your own doing. It is the gift of God. All right, so the question is, what noun is 'this' standing in place of?

The word for that as antecedent, every pronoun has an antecedent. And that's just a big fancy word that means that's the noun that the pronoun is taking the place of. So every pronoun has an antecedent. And sometimes it can be a little bit difficult to determine what the antecedent is, right? You ever talk to somebody and you get confused with their pronouns? And you're like, Wait, who is he? Or wait, which one is they? Which one is us? Right? And what you're asking them to do is clarify your pronouns. If you want to sound really smart, you might say, Hang on, clarify your antecedents for me, right?

So what you're asking them to do is you're saying your pronouns are confusing, because I don't know what he refers to. I don't know what they refers to. So clarify this for me, right?

So an antecedent in English—here's how we normally know what, which word is the antecedent. And you do this all the time, you don't even know you do it. Here's how you do it.

In English, if we want to speak clearly, if we want people to understand us, we try to place our antecedents close to our pronouns in our sentence usage, that's just, you're accustomed to doing that, you're accustomed to hearing that, you don't even know you do it.

But the further your antecedents get from the pronoun, the harder it can be to understand—the more confusing it can be. Let me give you an example. And this, this will make sense with the example. Here's the example: "The dog ate all of the food because it was good."

What was good? The dog or the food? What was good, was 'it.' The question is, what is it? The dog ate all the food? Because it was good. So how many people would say that the food is good? That's most of us. Why would you say that because food is close to 'it.' Dog is further than 'it', it could be that the dog was a good dog and ate all the food. But usually, we would say the food was good because it's closer to the to the pronoun in the sentence. That's how our minds work. That's how our English speaking brains work.

But many of you may know that when we look at other languages, many other languages have something called gender. And gender can often be clarifying, because when languages have gender usually it's two genders: usually masculine and feminine. And when language has gender, then what happens is, a pronoun takes a gender to match its antecedent. And that helps us, other things happen too, articles match, adjectives match and gender. And that can kind of help us when we're reading or listening to other languages that can kind of help clarify those pronouns that can sometimes be confusing.

So a pronoun will take the gender of the noun that it is referring to, all right. And sometimes that can be clarifying for us. So in this sentence, we have two nouns that 'this' could be talking about. The two nouns are 'grace' and 'faith.' Both grace and faith are feminine. And this is neuter. Neuter is the third gender in the Greek language, which just like neutering your cat, it's neither male nor female, neither masculine nor feminine.

So what this means for us—and I know that just really interested everybody what I just went through right there—but what this really means for us is, Paul specifically intentionally uses a pronoun that doesn't match either grace or faith. Why? Because he wants it to refer to the whole package.

So the gift is not specifically the faith. The gift is not the grace, the gift is the whole package. This not interpretation. That's not my take on it. That's the Biblical Greek language. Every—the whole package is what Paul's referring to. The undeserved salvation by grace that comes to us through faith to the one who's been made alive to God—that's what Paul's saying is the gift of God.

We've often heard I've said this myself, that faith is the gift of God, we don't do it. God, God Himself does that work of faith of belief in our hearts. And then I'll say Ephesians, two, eight—by grace, you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doings. It's the gift of God. Why? Because this and faith are right beside each other, and my English brain wants to put them together. But Paul didn't put them together.

Paul's point is the whole thing. The whole package of salvation by grace that comes to you by means of faith is the free gift of God. You didn't do it. It's not your work. You can't boast in it. Okay.

Now does that mean that faith is not the work of God is not the gift of God? Of course it is. Because again, Paul saying the whole thing is the gift of God: the grace, the faith, everything—the being of made alive to God, that's God's work.

Plus, other scriptures will tell us the same thing. Philippians chapter one and verse nine, "It has been granted to you, that you not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake." So has been granted, granting is giving something to someone, it's been granted to you that you believe upon him.

Or Second Peter one in verse one, "you have obtained a faith and the salvation"—obtaining is meaning, something is being given to you. Okay, so faith is a gift of God. But let's be clear, Paul's talking about more than that. Here. He's talking about the whole package—the entire salvation package that comes to you by means of faith, that is the working of grace, that makes your heart alive to God and dead to sin. And you change your preference from eternal things to Earth—to heavenly things, from anti-God to pro-God. And you see him as beautiful and glorious and desirable and loving and compassionate and merciful, and your heart is drawn to him, and you're compelled to trust him.

All of that is the gift of God that Paul says is not your work. It is his work. And so therefore, the boasting is in him, not you.

Okay, so now let's turn our attention to faith, this reality, this truth, this spiritual reality of faith. "For by grace, you have been saved through faith."

Faith, oftentimes, we will think of faith in these terms. I've heard it put this way, many times: Grace is what God does. Atonement is what God does. Salvation is what God does, believing is what we do. Our part is believing, his part is saving our part is believing, right?

There's a sense in which that's true. And there's a sense in which that's not true. But let me just suggest a better way to think about the faith-Grace connection. Instead of thinking of faith as what we do, it's more biblical, more biblical, more biblically precise, to think of faith as the touching point. Faith is the point at which the God who saves touches the sinner.

It's the contact point, think of think of the outlet being plugged into the wall for the appliance, you plug it into the wall, that point of contact, that point of connection, is faith.

Put the next screen up on the graphic, if you wouldn't mind. We're all familiar with this, right? It's called Creation, DaVinci I think it was, or maybe it's Michelangelo, Michelangelo? Alright, so you know what this represents, this represents the creation of Adam. And it's well known, this God reaching out his finger and the fingers are almost about to touch, right. And you can thank me later for cropping it out so that we're not pornographic here at church.

So this represents the point at which God is touching the man to give him life. Let me redefine this for you. Let me just say, okay, that's nice, but that point of touching there, if I could paint the picture of faith, that's it. If I could put faith into a picture, that's what faith is. That's the point at which the God who seeks to save touches the one in need of salvation.

And by that touch, comes, being made alive to God, having your preferences changed from the earthly to the eternal, seeing his glory and beauty, seeing yourself rightly seeing him, rightly, loving Him, trusting him believing him. All of that comes by way of that touch right there.

So when we come to the issue of faith, the topic of faith, let's just first of all, establish some importance.

There's no more important doctrine in the Scripture. Faith is the point at which salvation comes to us. And so it's hard to imagine something more fundamental, more important to our life in Christ than understanding properly faith.

So there's two misunderstandings, or two misconceptions that I think are common with faith and the first is to think too highly of faith. We can think too highly of faith, by elevating faith itself to the status of being a god. Our faith saves us—your faith doesn't save you. Jesus Christ saves you. He comes to you at the point of faith, but Jesus Christ saves you, faith saves no one.

So we can make faith too lofty, of a thing too high of a thing, make even an idol out of faith. We can also think too lowly of faith. And we think too lowly of faith by equating Biblical faith, saving faith with

simple mental agreement, mental assent. "I believe the scriptures are true, I believe Jesus was the Son of God, I believe He died for my sins and rose again. Therefore, I'm saved." Maybe, maybe not.

We can take the idea of faith and bring it down, lower it to simply the point of agreeing with what the Bible says is true, and call that saving faith.

Now, the Bible speaks to us frequently about a type of belief or a type of faith that does not save. We know what James has to say about the demons and how they believe. We also know places like, well—Jesus's parable, the soils, where Jesus is going to talk about, for example, the rocky soil. And he says that the seed that spread on the rock, those are those who they hear the word, they receive it with joy, but these have no root, they believe for a while. And in time of testing, they fall away.

So Jesus speaks plainly there of a type of belief, that is not a saving belief. Or we can look at Acts chapter eight, for example, the story of Simon the magician. We're told plainly in that story, that Simon, the magician, hears the gospel and believes and becomes a disciple, and begins following the disciples and he's even baptized. It's not until later that it's realized well, that his faith wasn't a true saving faith.

Or we could turn to the Gospel of John. And John actually makes quite a theme out of this idea of two types of belief. There's a type of belief that saves and there's a type of belief that doesn't save. And we see it brought up time and again, in the in the Gospel of John. Just one occasion, it comes up we see in chapter eight.

"And he says, who sent me is with me, He has not left me alone, I always do the things that are pleasing to Him. And He was saying these things. And as he was saying, these things, many believed in him (the very next sentence), so Jesus said to the Jews, who had believed in him, (and then there's going to come this discourse), If you abide in me and my word abides in you abide in my word, you're truly my disciple, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. (But then it begins), well, they answered him, we're all the offspring of Abraham, we've never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say to you, that you say that we will be free? Jesus answered them truly I say to you..."

...and from that point on is this contentious argument between Jesus and unbelieving people, the same people that John just described as the Jews who believed in him.

And there's other places we could see the same sort of thing. But we see here that the scriptures say to us plainly, that there is a faith that saved and there's a faith that does not save.