

Learning Who You Are:
Saved by Grace
A Study of Ephesians 2:8-10

Characteristic of Completeness: Salvation by Grace

Big Idea: Not *by* works, but *for* works—works of art.

Related Scriptures: Titus 2:11-14; 3:14; Hebrews 10:24; 13:20-21;
Jeremiah 18:1-6; 2 Corinthians 4:1-10; Psalm 19:1; 139:13-
16;
Romans 1:20; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Introduction:

A. We've been studying our way through the book of Ephesians. Today we come to Ephesians 2:8-10. The first two verses—Verses 8 and 9—are among the most well-known and commonly memorized verses in the Bible. The last verse—Verse 10—is one of the most overshadowed and overlooked. The three verses go together as a unit of thought, but Verse 10 often gets left out.

1. I looked back at some Bible memory cards I've used before. I've got one for ► Ephesians 2:8-9. It says,

^{NKJ} Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you
have been saved through faith, and that
not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,

⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

But the card leaves off Verse 10. Verse ► 10 says,

^{NKJ} Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

2. Some of you may know that I take some time off from preaching in the summer to plan out a one-year preaching calendar. Last June, I planned out the next 51 messages, putting on a spreadsheet all the biblical texts we will be studying. But I made a mistake. For this Sunday, I listed Ephesians 2:8-9. I left off Verse 10. I didn't mean to. I probably just mindlessly typed it that way because I'm so used to citing Ephesians 2:8-9 and ignoring Verse 10. So my spreadsheet overlooks Verse 10 entirely.

B. There's ► a danger in emphasizing Verses 8 and 9 to the exclusion of 10. You see, 8 and 9 talk about how we become true Christians; that is, how we receive eternal life, how we get to heaven, how we are born again.

Verse 10 talks about how we are to walk as Christians; that is, how we are to live the abundant life as believers, how we are to invest in eternity now, how we are to grow up spiritually.

So to emphasize 8 and 9 to the exclusion of 10 is to risk getting stuck in spiritual infancy. To focus exclusively on the spiritual birth in 8 and 9 can stunt the spiritual growth in 10. Having been born again, to stay in spiritual diapers is not grace; it's gross. We need to grow up from 8 and 9 to 10. And 10 contains some of the richest, most encouraging truths in all of Scripture.

- I. In order to get to 10, we must first go through 8 and 9. Ephesians ► 2:8-9 says,

^{NKJ} Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

- A. Whenever we see the word, ► “saved,” it is good to ask the question: saved from what? Is it saved from hell? Or saved from illness? Or from enemies? Or from the trouble sin brings in this life? The Bible uses the term, “saved,” in all these different ways.

The context makes it clear that Paul is talking here

about being saved from the penalty of our sin, including hell. He's talking about how one is born again. He's talking about how one receives eternal life. The big theological word for this is justification.

- B. The means of this justification—this salvation—is first and foremost ► by grace—God's grace. We are saved by God's grace. Grace is unmerited favor. It's getting something good we don't deserve. God's grace is responsible for our salvation. We're saved because God is good, not because we are good. In fact, our characteristic of completeness in Christ for today is ► Salvation by Grace.
- C. This salvation that is offered by His grace is appropriated ► through our faith. By His death and resurrection for our sins, Christ alone graciously promises eternal life to all who will simply believe Him for it. We receive the eternal life Jesus so graciously offers by simply believing Him for it. Our salvation is by His grace alone through our faith alone. I like the way one scholar explains faith. He says, "Faith involves the abandonment of any attempt to justify oneself and an openness to God which is willing to accept what he has done in Christ."¹
- D. This salvation is ► not of ourselves. We did nothing to

¹ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary, Ephesians*, Vol. 42, Bruce M. Metzger ed., (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990) 111.

deserve it. It required no effort on our part whatsoever. It is purely ► “the gift of God” to be received by faith.

Some argue that the gift in our text is actually faith.² As such, they say that God gives us faith, thereby making us believe in Him. The argument revolves around the demonstrative pronoun ► “that” in the phrase, “and *that* not of yourselves.” To what does “that” refer? Paul says “it is ► the gift of God,” but what is the gift?

There are ► three specific terms to which the gift could refer: “faith,” “grace,” or “saved.” Those who argue that the “gift” is “faith” often appeal to the fact that “faith” is the nearest word that comes before “that.” There is a problem with this view, however. In Greek, the original language in which this was written, the writer has the ability to choose the gender of words to show which ones go together. The “that” is ► neuter in gender, which means it is neither masculine nor feminine. The “that” clearly refers to the “gift” because ► the “gift” is also neuter. But the term “faith” is not neuter; ► it is feminine. If Paul intended to identify “faith” as the “gift” he could have easily and clearly done so by matching the gender of the terms. That he did not makes it very unlikely—not impossible but very

² e.g., R.C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986) 119; John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles*, (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1993), 68-69, 149; Robert H. Countess, “Thank God for the Genitive!,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Volume 12 (1969; 2002).

unlikely—that the “gift” refers specifically to “faith.” We have the same problem with the terms, ► “grace” and “saved” because they are feminine and masculine respectively.

So it seems that the “gift” does not refer to any one specific term; rather, it refers to ► the whole idea of being saved by grace through faith. Indeed, the neuter pronoun, “that,” can be used to refer to a whole phrase or to summarize an entire thought.³ That seems to be the case here. The gift is the whole enchilada—being saved by grace through faith. And this seems to be the prevailing view of modern biblical scholarship.⁴ One scholar sums it up well, saying,

The point in the verse is that salvation is by grace in its totality . . . Though it is true that faith on the part of an unsaved person would be impossible apart from divine help, it nevertheless, is a human decision . . . The problem with making faith a particular gift from God is that it removes from man any

³ Gregory P. Sapaugh, “Is Faith A Gift?,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Volume 7 (1994; 2002), 39;

⁴ e.g., Lincoln, 111-112; Sapaugh; Roy L. Aldrich, “The Gift of God,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Volume 122, (1965; 2002); Norman Geisler, *Chosen But Free*, (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1999), 181-183; Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 342-344; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary, The Letter to the Ephesians*, D.A. Carson ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing and Leicester, England: APOLLOS, 1999), 175; Jim Townsend, “Saved by Grace Alone—This is All My Plea,” *Emmaus Journal*, Volume 7 (1998; 2002).

responsibility to believe and leaves it entirely in the hands of God. If this were true it would be useless to exhort men to believe inasmuch as they could not do so.⁵

- E. Regardless of how we might argue about the specific definition of the gift based on grammar, the main point is that we didn't do anything to earn our salvation. Paul says it is ► “not of works.” So we have ► absolutely nothing in our person to boast about. We were hopelessly starving beggars who were given the bread of life free of charge that we might never be hungry again. We simply received the gift of life by faith.
- F. This amazing grace distinguishes Christianity. Noted author Philip Yancey says,

The notion of God's love coming free of charge, no strings attached, seems to go against every human instinct of humanity. The Buddhist eight-fold path, the Hindu doctrine of karma, the Jewish covenant, the Muslim code of law—each of these offers a way to earn approval. Only Christianity dares to make God's love unconditional.⁶

In order to earn acceptance, the world says, “Be good.”

⁵ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 2:129, quoted by Sapaugh, 42.

⁶ Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 45.

But Christianity says, “be-lieve.” The message of Verses 8 and 9 can be summed up in three words: ► “not by works.” We are saved by grace through faith, not by works.

- G. This grace can make people uncomfortable. Remember Jeffrey Dahmer? In November 1994, Dahmer was beaten to death with a broom handle by a fellow inmate in prison. Not too many people were sad about it. You see, Dahmer was in prison because he had killed seventeen young men. He carved them up like a butcher, putting their pieces in a refrigerator. Then he ate them.

A few weeks before Dahmer’s death, he was interviewed on videotape in prison. The interviewer asked him how he could have done such heinous crimes. Dahmer explained that he felt accountable to no one. He started with small acts of cruelty and worked his way up. Nothing restrained him because he didn’t believe in God.

But in prison, Dahmer said he became a Christian. He was baptized in the whirlpool in prison. And he had been spending most all his time reading materials provided to him by a pastor of a Christian church. Some described Dahmer’s explanation as contrite and humble. The prison chaplain confirmed that Dahmer was one of the most faithful worshipers in prison before

his death.⁷

Are you comfortable with the prospect of seeing Dahmer in heaven? Now, I don't know if he truly believed in Jesus for eternal life or not. But if he did, I confess, there's a part of me that wants to disqualify Dahmer on the basis of his heinous works. But Paul says, "not by works."

Those of us who preach the unqualified, unconditional, seemingly unfair extravagance of this grace are often labeled as purveyors of "cheap grace" and "easy believism" who discourage good works. That might be a fair criticism if we never got to Verse 10. So let's get to Verse 10.

- II. If Verses 8 and 9 can be summed up with the three words, "not by works," then Verse 10 can be summed up with these three words: ► "but for works." Put all the words together and you get a six-pack to go. You ► get the big idea of this message: Not *by* works, but *for* works. You see we are not saved *by* the good works we do, but we are saved *for* the purpose of doing good works. We were born again so that we might live for God. The universe does not revolve around us. God does not orchestrate all things just so that we might be saved and leave it at that. Our salvation is a necessary means to a desired end. God wants us to do good works for

⁷ Yancey, 95-96.

Him. Verse ► 10 says,

^{NKJ} Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

- A. It says we were ► “created in Christ Jesus.” That is, we were born again. We became new creatures the moment we believed in Jesus.
- B. We became new people for a new cause. We were created ► “for good works.” That is, we were created for the purpose of doing good things.
- C. And not just any good things. Not just for random acts of kindness. No. We were created for the specific good works ► “which God prepared beforehand.” God had in mind works for us to do before we ever existed. He planned them out. He knows exactly what he wants us to do. He mapped out the works ahead of time so ► “that we should walk in them.” To “walk in them” means to live them out.
- D. Some take this verse to mean that, because God prepared the works beforehand and intends for us to walk in them, a true believer will always walk in them. This has spawned catchy sayings like, “Faith alone is never alone,” and “Faith works,” meaning genuine faith will always produce works. But it’s very difficult to

draw this conclusion from our text. Rather, it seems clear that walking in the works God has prepared *should* happen, but it may or may not happen, depending on our choices.

1. You see, the verb “walk” is in something called the subjunctive mood, confirming that it is something that may or may not happen.⁸
2. Also, a comparable grammatical construction appears in ► John 3:17,⁹ where it says,

NKJ John 3:17 “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

This says that God sent His Son for the purpose of saving the world. This doesn’t mean that the entire world will be saved; rather, it means that God wants to save the world and He sent His Son to make it possible. Similarly, in ► our text, God wants us to walk in the works that He has prepared, but He doesn’t force us; it’s up to us to walk.

⁸ James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1979), 118.

⁹ The comparable grammatical construction is the term *i[na* (in order that) coupled with a verb in the subjunctive mood.

3. One Bible scholar explains it this way:

Sometimes this text is misunderstood. Sometimes it is read as though it meant that the believer will most certainly walk in good works. But Paul does not say that at all.

Instead, Paul declares God's purpose for us. God wants us to walk in good works. Whether we do so or not depends on the many biblical factors which are relevant to spiritual development.

. . . God's miracle of salvation in our lives, accomplished by grace through faith without works, makes ample provision for the lifetime of good works for which He has designed us. But it does not guarantee this.¹⁰

- E. Well then, how are we to walk in the good works that God has prepared beforehand? One word in Verse 10 gives us a picture that is worth a thousand words. Paul
 ► says,

¹⁰ Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, (Dallas, TX: Redencion Viva, 1989), 73-74.

^{NKJ} Ephesians 2:10 . . . we are His workmanship . .

The word “workmanship” comes from the Greek word, *POI-ma*.¹¹ Does that sound familiar? It’s the word from which we get our English word, “poem.”¹² It is a work of art. Paul is saying that God is the Artist and we are His works of art that He created. We are His masterpieces.

This idea is reflected elsewhere in Scripture. For example, in ► Jeremiah 18:6, God says to His people,

^{NKJ} Jeremiah 18:6 . . . “Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand . . .”

In Ephesians, God is the poet and we are His poem. In Jeremiah, God is the potter and we are the clay. “Aha!” you say, “I was wondering what the clay was doing on my chair.” We’ll get to that in a moment. I want you to think of yourself as God’s ongoing work of art. In fact, I want to add something to the big idea, so that the big idea becomes, “not *by* works, but *for* works—► works of art.”

If we are God’s works of art, what does that tell us

¹¹ poi,hma

¹² *The Nelson Study Bible*, Earl D. Radmacher ed., (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 1985.

about us? What does that tell us about who we are and what our role is on earth? Let me offer some ideas.

1. Works of art are intended to convey something about the artist. Art is a reflection of the artist, and so God's art is intended to reflect Him.

Psalm ► 19:1 says,

^{ESV} Psalm 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the word for ► “handiwork” is the same root as the word for “workmanship” in Ephesians—*POI-ma*—it's God's art. Here the sky is God's painting, and this painting is intended to tell us something about the Artist. The painting declares ► the glory of God.

Romans ► 1:20 conveys the same idea. It says,

^{NKJ} Romans 1:20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made . . .

“The ► things that are made” is a translation of

our word, *POI-ma*. Here, the world God created is His sculpture. And this sculpture is intended to convey ► “His invisible attributes,” His power, His majesty, His beauty.

Back in ► our text, we are told that we believers are “created in Christ Jesus.” So, as God’s works of art, we are to reflect God in general and Jesus in particular. Just as a knowledgeable observer can look at a painting from a great artist and say “That’s a Monet,” or “That’s a Picasso,” people ought to be able to look at you and say, “That’s a Jesus.”

2. That is not to say that all believers should look alike. On the contrary, every work of art is unique, even when they are from the same artist. The good works God has prepared for you are not exactly the same as the good works He has prepared for me. The same elements are there—things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control—but these are expressed through different personalities and gifts and talents. The same notes can produce very different songs, the same colors can produce very different paintings, the same clay can produce very different pieces, depending on how the Artist chooses to arrange them. So don’t try to be somebody else. You’ll

end up looking like a cheap imitation. Psalm 139 says to God,

▶ ^{NKJ} Psalm 139:13 For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. ▶ ¹⁴ I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well. ▶ ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. ▶ ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them.

3. And ▶ we are not just works of art individually; we are a work of art collectively. In Corinthians 12, Paul describes all of us together as the body of Christ made up of unique individual parts. Together, in community, we are intended to be a work of art. So don't isolate yourself. We need you. No one else can take your spot—the spot God created beforehand that you should walk in it.

4. If all this is true, that each one of us is a unique work of God's art, that together we are an artistic rendering of the body of Christ, then why don't people always recognize us right away? Why don't people always see us and say "That's a Jesus"?

The truth is, sometimes when people look at me, they don't say "That's a Jesus." Instead they say, "He's a real piece of work." You see, when we don't walk in the good works the Artist has prepared beforehand, we don't fulfill our intended purpose. When we don't walk in good works, people look at us and don't know who created us because we bear none of the imagery of God our Artist. And when we say we're believers but don't look like it, people say, "That's a fake."

Let me illustrate the problem we can pose for the Artist. Pretend you are the Artist and the clay is you. Pull out the piece of clay from the baggie. That's you. It's not much to look at, but it has great potential in hands of the Master. You're the clay. That's what God has to work with. Now, go ahead and mold that into any shape that you have in mind for the clay. Create your masterpiece. Go ahead.

Is there a problem? What seems to be the

problem? The problem is the clay ► is hard and dry. It's not moldable. It will not yield to the Potter's hand. It's stubbornly resistant to change.

Sometimes the clay can seem hopelessly hardened. But having believed in Jesus, no clay is beyond hope. Exposure to one simple ingredient over time can soften the hardest clay. What does this clay need to become moldable again? The clay needs water. The clay needs to be immersed in water.

What's the water? The water is the Word of God. The water is what God has revealed to us in the Bible. The clay says, "Oh, I know that. That's why I go church on Sunday morning. The Bible teaching can be really refreshing. I get a refreshing Sunday dip and I'm good to go. One, two, three, four, five six, dip. That's my seven-day routine. One, two, three, four, five, six, dip."

Only one problem. A little dip won't do ya. Lot's of people go to church and are refreshed by the sermon and never soften up. When you're hard and dry, a little dip won't do ya.

The clay says, "Come to think of it, the refreshment of Sunday morning does dry out pretty quickly. I guess I need a little more water.

Maybe if I just read my Bible for fifteen minutes every day, then I'd be good to go. It'd be like, Monday dip, Tuesday dip, Wednesday dip, Thursday dip, Friday dip, Saturday dip, Sunday dip.”

Only one problem. A bunch of little dips won't do ya. Lots of people read their Bibles religiously and have a lots of Bible knowledge and never soften up. When you're hard and dry, a bunch of little dips won't do ya. You need to soak.

“Soak!” the clay says, “I don't have time to soak! What, do you want me to become a pastor? I don't have time to study the Bible all day every day.”

Soaking is not about how much water you can accumulate. Soaking is about how much water you absorb. Soaking is about applying the Word of God to your life. Soaking can be taking just a little water on Sunday and staying immersed in it all week, allowing the Holy Spirit to penetrate the deepest parts of you, prayerfully asking, “Lord, based on this one idea from this one passage, what good works to you want me to do? What good works have you prepared beforehand for me this week—this day—that I should walk in them?”

The clay says, “Well, once I become softer, then life gets easier, right?” Not exactly. When you become softer, the Potter begins to mold you. He does it by applying pressure until you yield to His will. And when He encounters part of you that is still too hard and dry for Him to work with, He brings water so you can soak it in. And if you don’t soak it in, sometimes He breaks you, but not to angrily punish. Sometimes it’s the only way He can get water to the innermost places where it needs to go. Sometimes it’s the only way to get you soft enough to use.

But as you keep soaking, as you keep asking, “Lord, based on Your word, what good works have you prepared beforehand for me this day?”, the Lord will shape you into a beautiful masterpiece.

The Potter’s eye is always attentive. The Potter’s heart is always compassionate. The Potter’s hand is always trustworthy. The Potter’s work is never ending. He knows exactly what He wants you to become. You were created, not by works, but for works. Trust Him to make you His work of art.

Are you ready to quit dipping and dive in? We are going to close this service with some music that will last a good six minutes or so. During the

music, we're going to show a video of a potter making a pot. I invite you to listen, to watch, and to pray, reflecting on your own dryness. If, in the midst of your reflection, you feel that God is calling you to dive into the water, if you decide that you need to immerse yourself in God's Word, if you are determined to soak, I invite you to show it. I invite you to show it by bringing your clay to the front and dropping it in the water as a demonstration of your surrender to the Potter's hand.