

Sunday, August 25, 2024

Saved By Grace

This is the fourth in a series of sermons through the book of Ephesians, and today, we will begin looking at chapter two. Of course, Paul didn't write this epistle with verses and chapter breaks – it was written as one seamless letter. Chapters and verses were added later on to help with referencing particular passages. It's helpful to remember that when you read the Bible, because the passages you read appear in a larger context. Chapter two here starts with the word "And" which means he is continuing on with what he had just been talking about in chapter one. You really can't understand what's going on in chapter two unless you have a good handle of what just happened in chapter one. Chapter one ended with Paul saying that he's been praying for them, the final petition of which was that they would know the exceeding greatness of God's power to usward who believe. He then instructs them on the power of God in relation to how He has wrought that power in Christ (i.e., He raised Him from the dead and then exalted Him over all things). That is the topic that he continues in chapter two – the power of God working in us.

Now, I'm still living on a high from last time – I still can't get over the fact that the same power involved in raising Christ from the dead is working in us, that God considers us to be His valuable inheritance, that Christ is head over all things in the entire universe for the sake of the church, and that Christ doesn't consider Himself to be complete without us. But he continues in chapter two with even more glorious words. He wants us to understand that God's powerful salvation of us is 100% from God. From beginning to end, it is all God's grace. We contributed nothing to it. Even our faith is a gift. It is a salvation that is wrought in Christ, and intricately tied to His death, burial, resurrection and ascension. In short, God did it, and He did it in Christ. In fact, this passage gives us a lot of clarity on what it means to be "in Christ," which you need to get a handle on if you want to understand your identity as a saved person, and if you want to know what it takes to live a life that is pleasing to God.

You'll find that today's passage is a story of contrasts. Death vs. life; bondage to evil vs. victory over evil; our inability vs. God's power; our sin vs. God's grace; God's wrath vs. God's mercy; Satan's power vs. God's power; Satan's work vs. God's work. We go from the depths of depravity, hopelessness, and rebellion to the heights of being raised and seated with Christ in heavenly places. We go from walking in trespasses and sins to walking in good works.

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air,

the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. 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 2:1-10)

So, I see this passage divided up into three sections. Verses 1-3 describe in horrific detail the condition of every human who is outside of Christ, including each person in this room before you were saved. Verses 4-7 describe what God has done for us in Christ. And verses 8-10 conclude the passage by driving home the fact that our salvation is all a work of God's grace.

Dead In Trespasses And Sins

And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. (Ephesians 2:1-3)

Now this is a bleak commentary on the natural human condition. Since the fall of Adam, this is how every human has entered the world and proceeds to live while they're in the world. This is what every human currently is, or once was. Without the intervention of God, this is how every human would remain. (Every human, of course, except Christ). I say, it's a bleak picture.

I'd like to start by noting that the phrase "hath he quickened" is interpolated (i.e., it was added by the translators to try to make the translation make more sense in English – in our translations, interpolated words are generally italicized). This verb "quicken" does not appear in the original Greek text until verse 5. I believe that the translators have not done us any favors by including these words here in verse 1. More on that in a few minutes.

So, what does it mean to be dead in trespasses and sins? Well, let's first identify what it DOESN'T mean. It doesn't mean physically dead – you can still breathe, see, hear, eat, drink, walk. It doesn't mean mentally dead – you can still think, learn, process information (in fact,

you can learn a lot of accurate information about God and His standards). It doesn't mean ethically dead – you can still identify right and wrong (at least to some degree), follow commandments, and even outwardly obey God (but for all the wrong reasons). It doesn't mean emotionally dead – you can still feel happiness, sadness, anger. It doesn't mean socially dead – you can still interact and communicate with other people. It doesn't mean economically dead – you can still buy and sell, operate a business, manage your resources. It doesn't mean rationally dead – you can still reason, form logical conclusions, weigh options. It doesn't mean volitionally dead – you still have a will, you can make choices, you can make decisions. It doesn't mean civilly dead – you can still vote, pay your taxes, petition the government. It doesn't mean acquisitively dead – you can still desire things and take action to acquire them. And I could go on and on. So, what are we talking about here? Well, the passage tells us what it's talking about. If the solution to being dead in trespasses and sins is to be quickened (made alive) with Christ (v. 5), then to be dead in trespasses and sins means to be dead with respect to Christ. That is, we were spiritually dead. We didn't know Christ. We didn't know the Father. And we didn't want to know Him. We had no inclination or ability to pursue Him. Why? Because we were dead! You were so dead that you didn't even realize you were dead; you thought you were alive. This spiritual death overshadows everything else. So, while you still had a will, for example, your will was in bondage to sin and dead towards Christ, so you had no desire or ability to choose Him.

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:44)

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Cor. 2:14)

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you... (John 15:16)

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. (Matthew 11:27)

This spiritual death is the state that every one of God's elect started in. This includes everyone, from the most vile, profligate, notorious sinner, to the tidy, proper moralist; from the one who thought the Bible was boring, to the one who was very interested in learning facts about God and doctrine, even debating about them and holding forth on them, but all the while failing to see the beauty and the necessity of the Savior; from the one who had a blinding "road to Damascus" conversion experience, to the one who very slowly and imperceptibly came to realize that they needed Christ.

Yes, we were all dead in trespasses and sins. There may have been different levels of decay and corruption, but we were all equally dead. Our trespasses and sins may have all varied in details and extensiveness, but we were all offensive and unclean in the sight of God. We were all unable to go to Christ. You must realize this if you want to understand the depth of God's grace; God's plan of redemption makes no sense if you don't understand this. You were DEAD; not just sick. You were DEAD; not just in a tough situation. You were DEAD; not just in a spot where you needed to read a self-help book so you could cure your low self-esteem and realize your own potential. You couldn't repent; you couldn't believe; you couldn't seek God – you were dead! It was God who made you alive.

“Trespasses” and “sins” are very similar. A “trespass” means that you have veered or deviated from some standard – like you've veered off the narrow path, or you're not quite in line with the plumb line. (This, incidentally, is what Ephesians 1:7 says we have been forgiven of in our redemption). A “sin” is an archery term, meaning that you have missed the mark. Your whole aim is off – your thoughts, your words, and your actions have all failed to hit the mark of glorifying God. I don't think Paul is necessarily trying to make a fine distinction between the two words, but the two together send the message that our lives were once characterized by rebellion against God. Our inward motivations were wrong and corrupt, so our outward behavior was therefore wrong – everything was wrong. We were dead because of trespasses and sins (both Adam's and our own), and the whole sphere of our existence was in trespasses and sins. Like a fish in water, we were in trespasses and sins. Now we are in Christ.

Your life of spiritual death was characterized by three things:

1. You walked according to the course of this world. A “walk” is a manner of life. Walking is a natural, voluntary, progressive, pleasant thing that people do. The implication is that you lived that way, and you liked to live that way. You were primarily interested in this world, and not the world to come. You were conformed to this world (see Romans 12:2). You were guided by the philosophies, mores, values, ideologies, politics, economics, peer pressure, media (fake news or otherwise), fashion, false religion, conspiracy theories, culture, customs, etc., of this world. In short, you were under the control of anything and everything that this world had to offer that would divert your attention away from God, act as a substitute for God, and/or lead you to have false notions about God. When you should have “loved not the world, neither the things that are in the world,” (1 John 2:15) you did the opposite.
2. You walked according to the prince of the power of the air. You were under his control. You were in bondage to him. This prince is none other than Satan. He rules over an army of devils who reside in the air that surrounds us. The very air that sustains us is inhabited by these devils, who can see us, influence us, deceive us. Satan goes to and

fro in this earth (Job 1:7), and as a roaring lion, he walks about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). He presides over a worldwide, intricate, elaborate system of intelligence to know where and how he can cause the most damage. And you were ruled by him. He's a master of deception, so you probably didn't even know you were ruled by him and would certainly have never admitted it; but you were. He's called "Beelzebub the prince of the devils" (Matthew 12:24), where many say that the name Beelzebub derives from "Lord of the flies" – an apt metaphor for these tireless devils, who live to cause mischief. I also think of this verse: "And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away." (Genesis 15:11).

Satan is also the prince of the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience. "Children of disobedience" are people who are characterized by their disobedience. The "spirit" here is a principle. Think of the zeitgeist – the spirit of the time. Satan is ruling over that spirit, and that is the spirit that is currently energetically working in the children of disobedience. Where you find children of disobedience, you'll find that Satanic spirit at work with great fervency. This unseen spiritual realm of Satan has much to do with this world, and Satan and his minions, by God's permission, are able to wreak much havoc. We'll get to this topic later in the book of Ephesians (Lord willing), but don't underestimate the power of Satan. We know from the book of Job that he was able to attack Job's livelihood, his possessions, his family, and his very body...but he can only go as far as God allows.

3. We all had our conversation among the children of disobedience in the lusts of our flesh. Here, Paul changes from "you" to "we." He's making sure that they understand that he's including himself in this assessment of life outside of Christ. He defines living in the "lusts of our flesh" as "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind." It is the whole being that is infected in our fallen condition – both body and mind. The basic message here is that you obeyed your own lusts rather than God, and if you happened to obey God along the way, it was only because it aligned with the lusts of your flesh at that particular time. Remember, this is Paul including himself here – the same Paul who described his pre-saved self like this: "touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." (Philippians 3:6). As far as anyone could tell by looking at his outward behavior, he was blameless...but he still puts himself in the category of those who walked according to the lusts of the flesh. This goes way beyond the obvious, like fornication, adultery, drunkenness, theft. One of the lusts of the flesh is that you think you can make yourself righteous by your own works. This is an important thing to grasp, especially for the ones who are raised in the church and are taught from the cradle to obey God. You might think you're a good person because you do this and you don't do that, but as long as you remain outside of Christ, your whole manner of life is conducted according to the lusts of your flesh, along with all the other children of disobedience.

And just as we were children of disobedience, we were by nature the children of wrath. We were born this way. We weren't born good. We weren't born neutral. We were born as children of wrath. In one sense, this could mean that we were people characterized by wrath toward one another, and that is certainly true – just look at the world! But the primary meaning is that we were people characterized by being under the sentence of the wrath of God. All these other descriptors have been grim, but this is the worst of all – our biggest problem was how God saw us in our fallen, corrupt state. We were abiding under His wrath (John 3:36). And that was our very nature. You can't escape your own nature. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." (Jeremiah 13:23).

Before moving on, I have just a few observations:

- People hate the doctrine taught in these three verses. It's too morbid; too pessimistic; too depressing. People just want to hear happy things. "Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits." (Isaiah 30:10). There is a whole army of false teachers who have itching ears and are ready to say "Peace, peace; when there is no peace." (Jeremiah 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:3). In their quest to be everyone's therapist and buddy, the so-called preachers in our generation have done a grievous thing to the poor people in this world. People don't know they're abiding under the wrath of God, because the preachers don't want to talk about it. People don't know they're rejected and condemned by their very nature, because the preachers are telling them that God accepts and loves them just as they are. People don't know the danger they're in, because the preachers have failed. This is something that must be taught – you cannot preach the gospel without preaching what is taught in these verses.
- This is where we'd be if God hadn't rescued us. If we truly believed this about ourselves, deep down, it would produce a compassion, gentleness and patience toward lost souls that is lacking in many of us. Just consider that they are the living dead; it's a spiritual graveyard out there. John Newton: *"Of all people who engage in controversy, we...are most expressly bound by our own principles to the exercise of gentleness and moderation. If, indeed, they who differ from us have a power of changing themselves, if they can open their own eyes, and soften their own hearts, then we might with less inconsistency be offended at their obstinacy: but if we believe the very contrary to this, our part is, not to strive, but in meekness to instruct those who oppose."*

But God...

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the

ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-7)

This “But God” marks the transition from hopelessness, despair and death to hope, comfort and life. These two words are among the most glorious and comforting of all the words in scripture. I hope you see that the fundamental message of the gospel is about what God has done – not about what you have done. The passage does not say “But I, in an exercise of my free will, pulled myself up by the bootstraps, raised myself from the dead, and made a decision to accept Jesus as my personal savior.” There’s not a scintilla of free will in this passage – God did it all, He did it in Christ, and He did it so His grace would be put on display for all to see.

Here we finally meet the main subject and verb of the passage – “God” and “quicken.” I mentioned earlier that the language of “quicken” was interpolated in verse 1. Paul dramatically, agonizingly and purposefully postpones this main verb “quicken” (which means “to make alive”) until verse 5 to make the contrast all the clearer between what we once were and what we are now. He wants to first establish just how dire our condition was before God gloriously came on the scene and saved us. The stark contrast shines a bright spotlight on the power of God at work in us. We were dead, and now we’re alive. We were under the wrath of God, deserving hell, and now we’re seated with Christ in heaven. And this is all by the grace of God. To paraphrase: “the power of God that is at work in you is the same power that was at work in Christ when He was resurrected and exalted above all things. And you were dead! Dead in trespasses and sins. Children of disobedience, living in bondage under the power and influence of the world, Satan, and the lusts of your flesh. Children of wrath. It is YOU people, YOU who were once dead, that God has mercifully made alive with Christ, raised with Christ, and seated in heavenly places in Christ.” And it’s all based on the sovereign will of God – these are the same people who we are told in chapter 1 were elected, predestinated, adopted, etc. “The Son quickeneth whom he will.” (John 5:21).

God is characterized here as being rich in mercy and loving us with a great love. This is superlative language. “Rich” means that He’s abounding in mercy – valuable, free, liberal mercy - there’s nothing stingy about it. “Great” means large and abounding. There’s an emphasis in the verse on His love. It is possible to get so fixated on the wrath of God and the fact that He doesn’t love everybody, that you forget that He loves anybody, and the love of God is reduced to cheap debate point. You can get to a point where you think that any talk about the love of God means that you’ve joined ranks with those who presume upon His love, those who treat it so flippantly and superficially with a lot of weak sentimentality, and those who redefine it to mean that He takes pleasure in our sins. But the solution is not to shy away from the love of God. The solution is to do the exact opposite – glory in it, rejoice in it, be thankful for it, speak of it often but accurately. His love is put on full display here – even when

I was dead in trespasses and sins, when I was hated as a worker of iniquity, when I was a child of wrath, He rescued me. His love overruled all of that. That is how rich His mercy is and how great His love is. Please talk about His rich mercy and His great love and the exceeding riches of His grace. You'll note that Paul can't even get through the sentence without interjecting a "by grace are ye saved" in the middle of it all. (Remember: grace is favor from God towards people who deserved the exact opposite). It's like it's so amazing to him that he can't get past the gracious nature of it. And how could it be anything other than grace, when we were dead? He doesn't want us to forget that – he doesn't want us to forget God's mercy, love and grace, and slip into boasting - that's why he also repeats here "even when we were dead in sins." Trapp: *"We are apt to conceit better of ourselves than there is cause for, and can hardly be persuaded that we are dead in sins and trespasses, and lie rotting and stinking in the graves of corruption."*

But what exactly did He do for us? The passage tells us three things. He quickened us together with Christ, He raised us up together, and He made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. I hope you see that this is all intimately tied to Christ – in fact, Paul made up new compound words to describe this phenomenon. "Quickened us together with" is one Greek word. So is "raised us up together" and "made us sit together." I hope you remember that this same type of language was used in describing the power of God with respect to Christ back in chapter 1 – "he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places." (1:20). Now he's saying it about us. Our salvation is tied directly to our union with Christ because He is our head and representative. He is the vine; we are the branches. Salvation doesn't only involve being forgiven of our sins; it also involves a new life from death. And our new life is tied to His life from the dead and His exaltation in heaven. God co-quickened us, co-raised us, and co-seated us. I don't understand it all, and there are so many nuances to it that we can't even begin to fathom, but it's clear that there is no salvation without Christ. It's clear that this is more than just Christ merely being our representative; there's also some organic, vital union between Him and His body. And it's clear that this is something we have even now.

So, what does this mean for us, for us to be quickened, risen, and seated with Christ? Clearly, this is a spiritual thing – our physical new bodies won't come until later; nobody here is literally sitting with Christ in heavenly places...you're sitting in this room. So, what does it mean for us? The big picture is that you are now the exact opposite of what you used to be in the description in verses 1-3. Here are a few thoughts:

- We were dead in trespasses and sins. Now, we are alive in Christ. We have a lively hope. We have a living relationship with God and a desire to know Him.

- We walked according to the course of the world and according to the lusts of the flesh. Now we walk after the Spirit and in newness of life (Rom. 6:4, 8:1; Gal. 5:16). We operate under the control of the Holy Spirit and mind the things of the Spirit (Rom. 8:5).
- We walked according to the prince of the power of the air. We were under his dominion. We were in his kingdom. Now we've been delivered from the power of darkness and we've been translated into the kingdom of his dear Son (Colossians 1:13).
- We were under the wrath of God. We were condemned. We've been delivered from that now, in this life (Rom. 1:18) and from the awful judgment to come (1 Thess. 1:10).
- To be seated in the heavenly places is to be a citizen of heaven (Philippians 3:20). We belong to the kingdom of God now. We no longer belong to this doomed world. Heaven is now our home, and we are strangers and pilgrims passing through.
- The heavenly places is where God manifests His presence and His glory in a peculiar way. To be seated in heavenly places, then, means that we are near God. We were once estranged from God. We were once enemies. Now we are reconciled and near Him. We are able to enter the holy of holies (Hebrews 10:19-20). We are come to Mt. Zion, the city of the living God, the new Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22-24). We're in the presence of an innumerable company of angels. We usually don't see or sense them, but they're there. That's where we are when we're seated in heavenly places in Christ.
- For Christ to be seated means that His work of redemption is done. He is victorious. For us to be seated with Him means that we don't have to keep trying to work our way to heaven. We can rest in His finished work. We are with Him in His seat of victory, so because He is victorious, we are victorious over all those foes that once dominated us (world, Satan, lust). We may foolishly allow them to persuade us, but they don't rule us.
- To be seated with Him in heavenly places is to be in a place that is safe and secure. Our salvation is secure. Jesus said of His sheep, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." (John 10:28). "Your life is hid with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:3).
- To be seated with Him in heavenly places means that we are heavenly-minded. We seek those things which are above. We set our affection on things above. (Colossians 3:1-2). We operate under heavenly principles. We have an eternal view in mind.
- Finally, to be seated with Him in heavenly places means that we already begin to receive heavenly blessings here. We can know something of heaven even now; we have a small foretaste now. Fleeting glimpses of glory break through, perhaps when meditating on some truth, or communing with God in prayer, or singing hymns.

And why has God done this for you? It's so "in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." It's not just His grace; it's not just the riches of His grace; it's the exceeding riches of His grace. More superlative language, to show the great value and overflowing nature of His grace. There is no poverty or

paucity or reluctance when it comes to God showering us with His grace. Note that it's not your "free will" that is being put on display for all the ages to come. In fact, salvation itself is primarily about God, and not about you. That's a perspective you need to get if you don't already have it. Human beings love to start with themselves instead of with God, but if you do that, you have everything backwards. The reason given here for God raising you from the dead to be seated with Christ in heavenly places is to showcase His grace in the ages to come. It's not because of you; you are just the happy recipients of His matchless kindness in Christ Jesus. He didn't have to save you. It was an act of gracious kindness.

Yes, this grace will be put on display in the ages to come. We see it now primarily in the church, which consists of guilty sinners saved by grace. It will be there for future generations to take comfort in if the Lord tarries, and it will be put forth on exhibition for all to see through eternity. This is one of the many things that the angels desire to look into (stoop down and carefully inspect – 1 Peter 1:12) – it's a fascinating and amazing thing that God would save sinners, and the gracious way that He did. His glory is chiefly shown in having mercy on unworthy sinners. I'm going to suggest to you that if you think you understand all the ways that God has been gracious and kind to you, you don't know anything – it's going to take all eternity to learn all those facets. It will be a subject of learning that will never be exhausted.

By Grace Are Ye Saved Through Faith

**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)**

Here we come to the conclusion of the passage, with one of the greatest statements on salvation in all scripture. He picks back up his line of thought that he introduced back in verse 5 and fleshes out this grace that will be shown in the ages to come. Why is that grace put on display? Because our salvation is 100% due to that grace. He's not going to share His glory with another. Paul goes to great lengths here to make it clear that our salvation is not in any way, shape or form a response by God to anything that we have done. We are saved solely by His grace. He's not waiting around so He can react to something that we decide to do. This is where the rubber meets the road. If you add works as a reason for salvation, to any degree, salvation is no longer by grace. It's not 99% God's grace and 1% some decision that you think you've made, because the moment that you add any of your own merit to the equation, grace is gone. Romans 11:6 says, "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." People don't like this. They want to play a part in being born again. They want to introduce

their own ideas and philosophies here and say, “if God was really a good God, and if He really is love, He wouldn’t do things this way. He’d let me be involved; He’d let me cooperate; I deserve to make the final decision.” Once you inject notions of this kind of “free will” into the work of God, you have dismantled the display of God’s grace and have set yourself up in its place. Trapp: *“The patrons of man’s free will are enemies to God’s free grace.”*

So, we’re saved by grace. Saved from what? Well, according to the context, we’re saved from the wrath of God (see also Romans 5:9), we’re saved from a hopeless spiritual death, we’re saved from those powers that once ruled over us (the world, Satan, the flesh). Saved to what? We’re saved to a new life in Christ, where we are risen and seated in heavenly places in Christ. We’re saved to do good works. It’s all by grace, and it must be all by grace, because we were dead and unable to do it ourselves!

This salvation is through faith – that is, faith is the conduit or instrument or means through which we receive our salvation and all its benefits. Here is where some people get their ox in a ditch. They think “well, if it’s through faith, then that means I deserve some credit for believing, right?” Wrong. Paul addresses that immediately. The whole process of salvation is not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. That includes your faith. And if this passage isn’t clear enough that faith is a gift of God, here are some more: Acts 3:16, 5:31, 11:18, 13:48, 16:14; Philippians 1:29; 2 Peter 1:1; Hebrews 12:2. Yes, we have to believe; yes, we have to repent. But it’s a gift of God – it’s not something we manufacture; it’s not something that comes naturally to us; it’s not something that we can just decide one day to do.

He continues in verse 9 to drive home the point – “Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Salvation is not based on any of your works whatsoever. Why? Because if it was, you would have a reason to boast. People who understand that they’re saved by grace do not boast, and they have no desire to boast. But the landscape is littered with “Christians” who do boast. They’ve turned their “faith” and their “decision” and their “free will” into a work! Granted – a substantial number of them have never thought this through (no thanks to lying preachers). That’s why I like to try to get them to think it through by asking stuff like, “Why is it that you believe when other people don’t believe? Are you smarter than them? More rational? More concerned about your soul? More righteous?” That usually is an exercise in futility, where you go around in circles and the answer is always “I have free will.” But I’ll say this: If you truly believe that your salvation is based on anything, to any degree, that gives you cause to boast in yourself, you are not really a Christian. “Where is boasting then? It is excluded [the word means you’ve turned it out of doors].” (Romans 3:27). I hope you all see that this isn’t just some minor difference in opinion – this strikes at the very heart of the glory of God. Satan has always been very interested in trying to put a blight on the glory of the grace of God, and this “free will” lie has been a very potent tool in his armory.

The passage says that your salvation is not your work, because it's HIS work. We are HIS workmanship. HE created us in Christ Jesus unto good works. "Workmanship" is an interesting word – it is the Greek word "poiema" from which we get the word "poem." It means we're His work of art, His masterpiece, His handiwork, the result of His artistic skill, design and craftsmanship. It's a new creation (2 Corinthians 4:6, 5:17), meaning that something is being brought into existence that wasn't there before; we have a new nature, a new will, a new life, etc. Our nature was to not have faith in Christ; now our nature is to have faith in Christ. It's a creation in Christ, meaning that it involves us being united to Christ. Think of a potter and the clay, or a sculptor and the block of marble. He has an end in mind, but it's a process to get to the final product. If you look at the piece of art along the way, it can look pretty ugly. It can be lopsided, it can have sharp edges that need to be chiseled off, etc. But when it's done, it will be beautiful. Think of it like this – God's workshop is the church's existence in this world, and the showroom will be heaven, where we're put on display to showcase the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. Here, He is preparing us, individually and as a body. He's forming Christ in us (Galatians 4:19). He's conforming us to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29). His artisan tools are the work of the Holy Spirit, the scripture (reading, preaching), the circumstances He puts us in, chastening, afflictions, a word from a fellow saint, etc. It might help you to stop thinking primarily in terms of what you do and instead start thinking primarily in terms of what God is doing to you.

One of the things that this workmanship, this creation, produces is good works. Good works is the result of you being saved, not the cause. And even these good works were before ordained by God that we should walk in them. You see, God is not impressed with the skanky, miserable works of a person who is dead in trespasses and sins. He's interested in the good works that He's ordained for you to do. Every good work that you perform was ordained by God, and is a result of His workmanship, so even these you have no reason to boast about. He ordained these works before we even existed, and in fact they are the result of His eternal election of us ("He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." – Ephesians 1:4). There is no salvation without good works – you have no evidence that you're saved if your faith isn't attended with good works (James 2). Good works are not optional. But the good works themselves are ordained by God. And He's ordained that we should walk in them. A "walk" is a course of life, and again, it's a process and not a single event. We've gone from walking in trespasses and sins, to walking in good works. The Son has made us free indeed. (John 8:36). He doesn't give us the details here of what these good works look like, but that will be a major topic later in the book.

Thank God that salvation is by His grace. Thank God for Christ. Thank God salvation is not dependent on me. Lord willing, next time I'll be able to go over Ephesians 2:11-22. "Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen." (Galatians 6:18)