

PM Ephesians 2:1-10 Faith alone

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[0 : 00] Turn now to the Word of God in Ephesians chapter 2, same passage that we were looking at this morning. Ephesians chapter 2 at verse 1.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world, and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the Spirit, who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions. It is by grace you have been saved.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us, in Christ Jesus.

[1 : 16] Amen. For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Amen.

And may God add his blessing to the reading of his word. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, as we bow before you, we ask that your word be our rule, and your glory our chief concern.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Well, I sort of want to continue on from what I was addressing this morning. And I had mentioned three of the great watchwords of the Reformation.

These three foundational elements of the Christian faith, namely Scripture as our sole standard for life and belief, and the Reformers of that watchword of sola scriptura, Scripture alone, not the church, not church councils, not reason, not philosophy, as our ultimate authority, but Scripture.

[2 : 38] And then this morning we were thinking on another of these watchwords of the Reformation, sola gratia, grace alone. Grace is the sole ground of our salvation.

And this evening I want to go on to faith alone. Faith as the sole means, whereby we lay hold of that salvation.

Well, this morning, those of you who are here, we looked at God's grace. And we noted that grace is a word that's actually sort of slid off a bit in meaning from biblical times.

We tend to think of it as some sort of personal virtue. Whereas, biblically understood, grace is the unmerited favor of a superior to an inferior.

In other words, grace is what an almighty God does for us, his creatures who are also sinners.

[3 : 43] An unmerited favor. God reaches out to us in our sin, in grace. And now this evening I want to look at faith with you.

And faith is the key to our response to God's grace. And grace and faith, in a sense, stand together. If you like, there are, in a sense, sort of two sides of the same coin.

The sacraments in the church reflect that. Both baptism and the Lord's Supper speak primarily to us about God's grace.

What God has done for us in Christ. In cleansing us and renewing us. Giving his life on the cross for us. But the sacrament without faith is empty and meaningless.

We always must lay hold of the sacrament in faith. Trusting and believing. And what God's grace is pointing towards. When we were thinking this morning of grace alone, we based our thoughts on this passage we read in Ephesians.

[4 : 58] And there in the first three verses we see the problem with which grace has to deal. Namely that we are spiritually nothing before God.

We are dead in trespasses and sin. Enslaved to the kingdom of darkness. Under the just condemnation of a righteous God.

That's how the passage begins. Verse 1. And as for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins. And of course it's not talking about physical death.

Although physical death is also part of man's, the result of man's sin. But that death is our separation from God. Being estranged from God.

We remember that Adam and Eve are told that in the day that you eat you will die. Well they don't die physically. But they do die spiritually. The relationship that they had with God is dead.

[5 : 54] You were dead. That was the problem. And then we noted that explosive verse. Verse 4. Which most translations sort of gloss a wee bit.

It really begins. But God. That's our problem. We were dead. But God has done something. Verse 4. But because of his great love for us. God who is rich in mercy and so on.

God comes to us in Christ. Comes to us in his love and in his mercy and in his grace. And that's the divine initiative.

And I gave that little quotation from Campbell Morgan this morning. Grace is love in action. And we see that grace as love in action at the incarnation.

As Jesus comes into the world. We see it on the cross. As he gives his life for us. And our response to God's initiative. Is to be that of faith.

[6 : 55] Down in verse 8. And I'm sure for some of you it would be the same as for me. This was a verse we were given as a memory verse when I was in Sunday school.

For it is by grace you have been saved through faith. It is grace you have been saved through faith.

Now oddly enough in the Old Testament. Faith is only mentioned twice in the whole of the authorised version. Although the New International Version actually renders it 16 times.

It is often expressed in other ways in ideas of trust and obey. In the New Testament the word for faith and belief are used more frequently.

Some 240 times. And they occur interestingly in every book of the New Testament. Except 2nd and 3rd John. Why they don't appear in these two books.

[8 : 00] Well I'll leave that for you. What is faith? It is by grace you have been saved through faith. And as we consider what faith is.

Let's be clear that we understand that faith is not the ground or the basis of our salvation. It is the grace of God expressed in the finished work of Christ on Calvary's cross.

That alone is the basis of salvation. Just sometimes this is presented as though it's faith somehow. If you have faith that will save you. It's not your faith that saves you.

It is the finished work of Jesus on the cross. But faith is the instrument if you like. The means by which we lay hold of the grace of God.

And let me say one of two things about faith. And the first would be that faith is knowledge based. And I hope that doesn't surprise you. Faith is often seen as an opposite to reason.

[9 : 10] Faith is an opposite to facts. Faith is an opposite to knowledge. We seem to think in our modern world that to have faith is to shut your eyes.

Ignore reality. And take a leap into the dark saying I believe. Well that's nonsense. Faith is not hung up in the air. Jesus makes God known to us.

In his prologue to his gospel John says. No one has ever seen God. But God the one and only who is at the Father's side has made him known.

Has made him known. And as you go on in John's gospel there's an interesting section in John chapter 5 from verse 31 on. But Jesus is asking people to believe in him.

And he says believe in me on the basis of the evidence that's before your eyes. The teaching that I'm giving you. The miracles that you see me performing.

[10 : 16] The fulfilment of prophecy that you see being enacted in my life. So Jesus makes an appeal to the evidence if you like. That is before people. In the great high priestly prayer of Jesus in John chapter 17.

Jesus says this. John 17 verse 3. Now this is eternal life. That they may know you.

The only true God. And Jesus Christ whom you have sent. At the end of the day all trust depends on some level of knowledge. To me that seems self-evident.

I assume that you would have a problem in allowing complete strangers. To take possession of your belongings or your children. Simply because you don't know them well enough.

If they're complete strangers. You're unlikely to trust them. You can't have faith divorced from knowledge. So faith is first of all knowledge based.

[11 : 28] There's a level of evidence there for faith to latch onto. And then secondly faith is assent or agreement.

It's more than bare knowledge. It involves our assent. That certain things are true. It involves our assent. That we are sinners.

In need of salvation. It involves our assent. That Jesus is the unique son of God. It involves assent. That Jesus paid the price of sin.

On the cross. I mean John sums up his gospel by saying. These are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ. The son of God. Basically two things that you may believe.

Who Jesus is. And what he came into the world to do. That's why I've written my gospel. And the understanding who Jesus is. And what he came into the world to do. Through faith.

[12 : 29] That by believing in his name. So faith is more than bare knowledge. It is assent. To certain basic propositions.

It's never then faith. Less than knowledge and assent. But it must always be more. You remember when Thomas met with the risen Christ.

And made his great confession. My Lord and my God. What was he doing? Well he was assenting to the truth of the resurrection. Up to then he had questioned the factuality of that event.

And has gone down in history as doubting Thomas. Which is a bit unfair. Because all the other disciples at various points doubted as well. But Thomas doubted. Not because he had no evidence.

He doubted in the face of the evidence. He had had the teaching of Jesus. Jesus had told them. Well I must go up to Jerusalem. And be condemned to death. And after three days rise again.

[13 : 34] Not only had the teaching of Jesus. He had the evidence of the empty tomb. He had the word of the other disciples. Who said we've met the risen Christ. And yet he would not believe.

But now at last he was assenting to the truth of these things. And moving on from simple assent to a proper faith.

Now thirdly faith is first of all knowledge based. And then assent to certain propositions. Thirdly faith is trust in Christ.

Or I should say Christian faith. Is trust in Christ. Everybody has faith. The atheist has faith.

That when he flicks a switch. The lights will go on. Maybe he doesn't understand the ins and outs of electricity. But he has a faith. Press that switch. The light will go on. When we get in the car.

[14 : 42] We have a general faith. That the other folk who are driving on the road. Will keep to their side of the road. Or will be in trouble. And interestingly even science is faith based.

And if you read books on the philosophy of science. Which I did at one time. You'll discover that there is a very strong degree of faith. Underlying the whole scientific endeavour.

Science seeks to uncover frequently the laws of what are called nature. But that involves a belief that there are laws of nature to be discovered.

And interestingly Boyle. Whom some of you may remember from your science classes at school. Boyle's law. Pressure. $P_1 V_1$ equals $P_2 V_2$.

Pressure volume. Boyle regarded as the founder of modern chemistry. Wrote a book. In which he warned. That this idea of nature.

[15 : 50] Was going to take over. From what should be properly understood as God's creation. And it's quite interesting. In the Old Testament.

There is no word for nature. In our sense of laws of nature. Faith is general. But we need to be thinking about Christian faith.

And their faith is trusting in Jesus. Yes it's founded in knowledge and assent. But with that foundation. Faith involves abiding in Christ.

Receiving him. However you want to put it. Again the prologue of John's Gospel. Yet to all who received him. To those who believed in his name. He gave the right to become children of God.

And we are children of God. Not because of something that we have done. Or will do. But because of God's grace. And our laying hold of that grace. And trusting in it.

[16 : 52] So faith is knowledge based. It is assent. And it is trust. And if we look at the passage we read.

We see faith's focus. The focus of faith. Is not faith. But Christ. Look at Ephesians verses 2.

Verses 8 to 10. It is by grace you have been saved through faith. For we are God's workmanship. Created in Christ Jesus. To do good works.

Created in Christ. Go back and look at verse 6 and 7. God raised us up with Christ. And seated us with him in the heavenly realm.

In Christ Jesus. In order that in the coming ages. He might show the incomparable riches of his grace. Expressed in his kindness to us. In Christ Jesus.

[17 : 48] And now if you will go back. To chapter 1 of Ephesians. And I like to mark my Bible. I think it is a good practice to mark your Bible. Make it your own.

But if you go through chapter 1. And we have to mark in some way. Every time you come across with Christ. In Christ. Through Christ. You are going to have quite a densely marked.

First chapter. Of Ephesians. And you really got to be thick. Not to see that the whole focus of what Paul is saying. Is Jesus Christ.

What he has done. Through his death and resurrection. So the key then. Is not the strength of our faith. But the object of our faith.

Because faith is not the cause of our salvation. It is Christ who is that. And so we must be ever careful. Never to think that it is our believing.

[18 : 49] That saves us. Faith does not save. It is Christ. And Christ alone. Not my belief. Not my faith. Not my understanding. Nothing that I do. It is by grace alone.

That we are saved. And interestingly. In this passage. Paul. Notes a couple of things. That faith excludes. And the first of these.

Would be works. Faith excludes works. Verse 9. Not by works. So that no one can boast. Not by works. And by works. We can think of.

Trying to be good. Doing good to other people. We might think of ceremonies. A lot of people seem to think. That they are alright with God.

If they have been baptised. There are some people. That think that they are alright with God. If they come to communion. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Once a year. But faith excludes works.

[19 : 52] We do not gain entry rights to heaven. Because we are good. But because God in his grace. Reaches out to us in Christ. We have entry rights to heaven.

Because Jesus died for us. Now of course I am not saying that we are not to do good. Of course we are. And Paul reminds us of that.

Verse 10. For we are God's workmanship. Created in Christ Jesus. To do good works. That is still there. But note the order. It is once we are saved. Once we are children of God.

That we are to do the good works. I would imagine most of you will be familiar with the hymn. There is a Green Hill Far Away. Which is one of three hymns that Mrs. Alexander wrote to teach.

The Apostles Creed to her Sunday school class. She was very creative. And she wrote. I think it was once in Royal David's City for the incarnation. All things bright and beautiful for the creation.

[20 : 51] And there is a Green Hill Far Away. For the death of Jesus. But the last verse is this. Oh dearly of. There is a Green Hill Far Away.

Oh dearly, dearly has he loved. And we must love him too. And trust in his redeeming blood. And try his works to do. And Mrs. Alexander gets it quite right there.

First we trust in his redeeming blood. And then we try his works to do. I mean could you ever imagine getting a sheet of paper.

And writing down on it all your merit. All your goodness. And taking it to God and saying. See how good I am. I go to church. I help other people. Etc, etc.

I live a good moral life. I deserve to get into heaven. Is not God liable to produce a much longer list of our lack of love. Our lack of service.

[21 : 49] Our unruly tongue. Our unforgiving heart. And so on. Faith and grace exclude works. As Toplady puts it in another hymn.

Not the labours of my hands can fulfil thy laws demands. Could my zeal no respite know. Could my tears forever flow. All for sin could not atone.

Thou must save. And thou alone. Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to the cross I cling. And we come to God with the empty hands of faith.

Faith excludes anything that we might do or aspire to do. And faith also excludes boasting. Have you ever heard someone saying.

I am as good a person as. Well I can assure you as a minister. I've heard that many a time. I am as good a person as. And the implicit suggestion is that.

[22 : 51] And therefore. God should see me alright. Or again. I have never done anyone any harm. I always want to say to the folk that say that.

You're right okay. But have you done anybody any good. And again people say. I can be as good a Christian as so and so.

Without going to church. But all of that is to boast in self. Faith excludes boasting.

What's your idea of yourself as a Christian? What are you depending for your eternal destiny? Do you think any of the credit of salvation belongs to you?

Ephesians 2 and 8 again. It is by grace you have been saved. Through faith. And if not from yourselves. It is the gift of God. Not by works.

[23 : 50] So that no one can boast. If there's any sense of pride. Or boasting in our hearts. We miss what the gospel is all about.

The gospel excludes boasting. Paul says in Romans 3.27. Where then is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle?

On that of observing the law? No. But on that of faith. By grace you have been saved. Through faith.

Faith doesn't look to itself. But to God. Our being a Christian is entirely the result of God's work. We are his workmanship. It is God who has done something in our lives.

Not our works. But his work. And so I say again. It is not our good life. Or our efforts. Or our hoping to be good. That helps us to find favour with God.

[24 : 53] It is God alone. As we sang this morning. Not what these hands have done. Can save this guilty soul. Not what this toiling flesh has borne.

Can make my spirit whole. Thy work alone, O Christ. Can ease this way of sin. Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God. Can give me peace within.

Thy grace alone, O God. To me can pardon speak. Thy power alone, O Son of God. Can this sore bondage break.

Sometimes when people are talking about faith. And they talk about deciding for Christ. And choosing to believe in God.

And I quite like the way that Martin Lloyd-Jones puts it. And let me read you what he says here. He writes, I was dead in trespasses and sins.

[25 : 52] But God began to do something to me. I became aware of God dealing with me. I felt God smashing me.

I felt the hands of God remaking me. That is Paul's way of putting it. Not I decided. Not I went in for Christianity.

Not I decided to follow Christ. Not at all. That comes in. But later. It all begins with the work of God in Christ. Thy work alone.

Thy blood alone. Thy love alone. Thy grace alone. As in that wonderful hymn by Horatio Bonner. So grace is the basis of our Christianity.

God's unmerited favour. To us who are sinners. But faith is the means.

[26 : 50] The empty hands by which we reach out. And take hold of that grace of God. The great missionary Hudson Taylor. Used to say that you should translate Mark 11.22.

Which reads have faith in God. Well he said you should translate have faith in God in this way. Hold on to the faithfulness of God.

Because the focus is God. Not our faith. That's the reference. And so faith is holding on. To the grace and the faithfulness of God.

And as long as we do that. Then we cannot go wrong. Let us pray. Father God we thank you.

That in your unsearchable grace. You sent your son into the world to be our saviour. And we cannot begin to comprehend what it cost.

[27 : 52] To leave the glory and the majesty of heaven. To come into this fallen sinful world. But not only that. Our Lord and saviour went to the cross. Taking to himself our sin.

And paying the price of it. And that was your grace. And help us with the empty hands of faith. To lay hold of your grace. And bask in all its benefits.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen.