

The Reformation (2) - Grace Alone

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 November 2017

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] Now let's turn together back to Ephesians chapter 2, and we're looking especially today at verse 8, although we're looking at it in context, so we will refer to some of the other verses as well.

But the main emphasis, as in verse 8, is our focus this morning. For 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.

Well, the Reformers were looking at these great solas, or these alones of the Reformation. We looked at Scripture alone, and we're coming now to grace alone.

We're saved by grace alone, and we'll see also, God willing, in future studies, Jesus or Christ alone. And also that there's an emphasis on faith alone, faith in Christ for our justification.

And finally, unto God's glory alone, that he alone has the glory in all of that salvation. Now the Reformers were very clear that foundational issues, foundational doctrines, had to be very clearly stated and understood as they appear in the Scriptures.

[1 : 21] They really were very important to the Reformers to have the basic foundational doctrines set out clearly. And this is one of those that they reckoned, and rightly was foundational.

That we are saved by grace, not by works, not by a contribution on our part towards being accepted with God.

Because if we're wrong in the basics, then, as the Reformers often stated, we're going to be wrong in many other things besides in our understanding of what faith is, and what grace is, and what salvation is.

And Luther saw this, of course, as one of the really important doctrines of the Bible, this grace that's mentioned that we are saved by grace. In fact, Luther called it the hinge on which all else turns.

So if you don't get this one right, then somewhere or else, somewhere or other, you're going to be wrong, seriously wrong elsewhere. If we're not saved by grace, then somehow or other, we've got a contribution, and therefore we've got some glory or boasting in that.

[2 : 31] Now he ruled that out, of course, obviously, from the Scriptures. And for Luther, the argument, really, and for the Reformers as well, you see, Luther wasn't arguing against people who would deny that we're saved by grace, or deny that we're saved by Christ, or deny that we are saved by faith in Christ.

The church of the time, although it had badly lost its way, would have agreed with that statement, that we are saved by all of these. And Luther's quarrel was not with that, but with this alone, that we are saved by faith alone, by grace alone, by Christ alone.

And that word alone makes a world of difference, because when you say by grace alone, then it shuts out any other and every other avenue through which we might come to be saved, or means, or ground, or source of our salvation.

So that's really the crucial issue for the Reformers. That's what we ourselves still insist upon, as taught by Scripture, that we are indeed saved by grace alone.

It shuts out works, it shuts out everything else apart from grace. And we'll see what that grace entails just in a moment. So it's really by grace alone, just as it's by Christ alone, and by faith in him, faith alone in him, that we come to be justified.

[3 : 58] So let's look, first of all, at the recipients of this grace, because it's really important, the setting in which Paul set out this emphasis, situated this emphasis, that we are by grace saved through faith.

And the context, the setting, is where you find in the previous part of the chapter, an emphasis on what we are. And what we are, as God sees us, in need of being saved by his grace.

And it's essential that we actually see and take with us these verses, or else you cannot really understand verse 8 at all. You can only understand grace for what it is, by looking at it against the background of our sin, of our sinfulness, of what it is we really deserve, instead of what we actually get through God's grace.

And that's why Paul here is emphasizing for the Ephesians, and emphasizing now for ourselves from Scripture, you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.

So there are three things he mentioned about us as recipients of this grace, what we are before we are saved, what we are as God sees us in our sinfulness, well, as we are in ourselves, as we are born into this world, we're dead.

[5 : 22] You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked. In other words, our spiritual condition is equivalent, in a spiritual sense and a moral sense, to a dead corpse.

And it's very obvious, whenever you see a dead corpse, if you see one, it's very obvious that that cannot bring itself to life, that there is no life there, that life has gone.

And he's saying spiritually and morally, that's actually what we are. There's spiritual deadness, there's moral deadness, we are dead in trespasses and sins.

We have no capacity in ourselves to live spiritually, to live in a way that God requires of us. That's the first thing, we're dead.

Secondly, we're disobedient. Because being dead spiritually and morally doesn't mean we're not active in anything. What he's saying is you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedient.

[6 : 41] We were dead in trespasses and sins, but in our deadness, we are defiant against God, we are resistant to God, we don't want to obey God. That's why it mentions there, you're following, we're following the course of this world.

And he mentions the prince of the power of the air, and who is that? That's Satan. That's the devil. That's that dark, malevolent power that is still at work in the sons of the children of disobedience, those who have not come to yield, to obey Christ as their Savior, as their Lord, as their Master, who have not come back to God and still follow the course of this world.

That's what you were, he's saying to them, in order to understand how you've come to be saved, in order to come to appreciate and to be thankful for the grace that came to save you, the grace of God that actually came and took you out of that condition, you have to appreciate something of that condition, or you cannot understand grace.

You were dead. You were disobedient. Thirdly, you were deserving of hell. You see, he mentions here, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind, destined for the hell that we deserve.

I know that's not popular nowadays to even mention, or to even think about this as a possibility, let alone a reality. But that is what the Bible tells us, and it tells us that for a reason.

[8 : 22] And you know it says that for a reason, so that you and I would see that being the kind of people we are, we desperately need the grace of God in Christ. We need the salvation that God provides for us there.

Otherwise, what is to be done with us? What is to be our destiny? It is hell. It is being the children of wrath forever. But that's what we are here, naturally, in this life.

We are the children of wrath, even like the rest of mankind. It's not just that we are undeserving of God's mercy, but we are ill-deserving.

We are deserving of the very worst, the very worst of hell itself. A lot of people have a difficulty, of course, understanding that. Why would such a thing be true of people who try to live a decent life, who have never committed any great crimes, who have not murdered anyone, who have not been engaged in violence or robbery?

How can it possibly be that such a good person, as people would say, could be destined for hell? Well, the reason is that we don't appreciate what sin actually is.

[9 : 41] Sin is not primarily what we do to each other. It's a violation of God's rights. It's a transgression of his standard. It's a rebellious, defiant dismissal of his authority, as he's revealed it in his word, in his law.

We are deserving of hell. We are disobedient rebels. We are dead in trespasses and sins. And the reason these verses appear there, is so that we'll come to appreciate, as much as we possibly can,

the wonder, the nature, the impact of this grace.

And how wonderful it is that such people as that, can at all be saved. That God would actually bestow salvation, and provide salvation for, people who are dead, and disobedient, and deserving of hell, against himself in every part of our being, until he comes, by his grace, to save us, and take us out of that.

In other words, we're saved, really despite ourselves, and despite what we are. Remember, in that wonderful chapter, in 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul is dealing with, the resurrection, and the resurrection of Jesus, and how, without the resurrection of Jesus, we don't have, the prospect of our resurrection, and therefore we have no hope, or basis of hope.

As we saw recently, last week with, with 1 Peter, the hope, that we have this living hope, of God's people, it's anchored, in the resurrection of Christ. But he then went on to, just as a kind of aside, but a very important aside, in verses 9 to 10, he says, this grace, he said, but I'm an apostle, but I'm not worthy, to be called an apostle, because I persecuted, the church of God.

[11:38] But he said, by the grace of God, I am, what I am. By the grace of God, I am what I am. And he's not just saying, were not for the grace of God, I would not be what I am.

He is saying that. But what he is saying also, is in a positive way, the grace of God, has undoubtedly, made me, what I am. An apostle, a believer, a saved sinner.

That's the, these are the recipients, of this grace, and that's why, they're so described. But let's move on, to the actions of grace. Because as he moves towards, this emphasis in verse 8, you come to verse 4, we were, all of these things, verses 1 to 3, but God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love, with which he loved us, even when we were dead, and sins made us alive, together with Christ, by grace you have been saved.

So the same emphasis, you see there, the end of verse 5, as you have in verse 8, he's anticipating verse 8, but what is he saying here? By, but God, being rich in mercy.

It's rightly said, by some commentators, and we can appreciate, why this is the case. That in the context, these two words, are really the greatest emphasis, in the whole Bible.

[13:04] Because here, there's an emphasis, on what we are, as lost sinners, as rebels against God, as being dead, and deserving of hell, and the children of wrath, like the rest of mankind, but God.

You see the power of that, the emphasis, in these two words, is just so tremendous. When you appreciate everything, that's in verses 1 to 3, then you really begin, to appreciate, the impact of these words, at the beginning of verse 4, but God, despite all of these things, in verses 1 to 3, despite all of the things, that we were, despite God's perfect knowledge, of all of that, despite the fact, that it was against him, that all of that was directed, but God, he who is rich in mercy, because of that great love, made us alive together, with Christ, by grace, you have been saved.

In other words, God was not, under an obligation, to save anybody. We're completely mistaken, if we think, that somehow, God owed us salvation.

That somehow, or other, we had a right to, the salvation, that he, by grace, provides for us. We don't have rights. God is under no obligation, to actually bestow, that salvation.

He's not constrained, by anything that he sees in us. It's simply, out of his great love, with which he loved us. And because he's rich, in mercy.

[14:37] Rich in mercy. Mercy is not something, that God is obliged, to show us. He chooses, to show mercy. If you like, to use the word, he decides, to be merciful.

But he didn't, strictly speaking, have to. But he did. Rich in mercy. By grace, you have been saved. So what is this grace then? Well, you can see, begin to see, from that, if you didn't have a definition, of it before, that grace, is essentially, the undeserved, favor of God, towards the undeserving.

The undeserved, favor of God, towards us, who are undeserving. It's completely, undeserved. The God, the favor of God, God's favor, toward us.

God's countenance, positively coming, toward us, not to condemn us, but to save us. God's mind, God's attitude, towards us, despite all, that we are, in verses 1 to 3.

[15:45] That's grace, undeserved favor. And everything, that that favor bestows, you can see, that is God's grace, revealed, and God's grace, at work.

Which is why, he says there, in verse 9, that, by grace, you've been saved, this is not your own, doing not as a result, of work, so that no one, may boast. Now here's a man, who once, boasted tremendously, in his own achievements.

And you can see that, in his, testimony, if you like to call it, in Philippians chapter 3. He says, if anyone had reason, to boast, I even more.

He boasted, in his lineage, he boasted, in his birth, he boasted, in his being a Hebrew, of the Hebrews, he boasted, in being a Pharisee, he boasted, in his achievements, in regard to, keeping the law of God, as he saw it, in his commitment, to that, he boasted, in his persecution, of these people, of Jesus.

This was a man, who really knew, what it was to boast. And then he said, what? But what things, were gained to me, what I once thought, was gain. This I now count, loss.

[16:58] I counted, he says, but worthless rubbish, but dung, so that I might win Christ, and gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness, of my own.

Here's the boaster, you see, where does he, where does he put his boasting? He's put in the skip. He's put it into the skip, of his life. He is saying, boasting? No, I don't want to boast, in anything now, in myself, in my achievements, in anything that I think, I could by works, gain the favor of God. I will boast, he says, but I'll boast in him, and I'll boast about Jesus, and I'll boast about his righteousness, and I'll boast about the grace of God, I'll boast about that, but there's no boasting to me, no boasting on my part.

How can I? I was saved by grace, not by works. There's nothing to boast of, nothing to be proud of, nothing but to say, Lord, what amazing grace, that saved a wretch like me.

And so you see, grace, first of all, is seen in the accomplishment, of salvation, and that means that, before we ever lived, salvation was accomplished, in Jesus Christ, by God, in Christ, and what Christ did, in this world, especially through his death, and resurrection.

[18:18] And, I want you to turn just briefly, to Titus, this letter to Titus, which Paul wrote, just coming immediately, after the two short letters, to Timothy, but, this letter to Titus, at chapter 2, and verse 11.

Notice what Paul says there. For the grace of God, has appeared, bringing salvation, for all people, training us, to renounce ungodliness, and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives, in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory, of our great God, and Savior, Jesus Christ, and so on.

So, he's really emphasizing, the grace of God, has appeared, appeared in Christ, especially, and that grace of God, that has appeared in Christ, has brought, or is bringing salvation, it was bringing salvation.

When Jesus appeared, and was born in this world, that was the appearance, of the grace of God, bringing life with it. And then you go to chapter 3, and you find, an emphasis there, on the same thing, we're looking at in Ephesians.

The kind of things, that we wear, he says, we ourselves, verse 3, were foolish, disobedient, let us slay, slaves to various passions, and pleasures, passing our days, and malice, and envy, hated by others, and hating one another, but, when the goodness, and loving kindness, of God, our Savior, appeared, he saved us, not because of works, done by us, in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us, richly through Christ Jesus, our Savior, so that being justified, by his grace, we might become heirs, according to the hope, of eternal life.

[20:12] In other words, what he's saying, there as it fits in, with Ephesians, is that, in obtaining, and providing, and securing salvation, in accomplishing salvation, that was done, by the grace of God, in Christ, it's grace that has provided, salvation for us, but it also tells us, as Titus there, included, that it's, in the application, of our redemption, of Christ's salvation, he didn't just obtain it for us, it's also grace, that applies it to us, so that we come, personally, to be saved, by the grace of God, just as by the grace of God, salvation was provided, in Jesus Christ for us, and that's an important distinction, between the accomplishment, and the application, the accomplishment, is outside of us, it happened in Jesus Christ, it's been done, the application, the application, is the salvation, that was accomplished there, is applied to us, and it's applied to us, by the Holy Spirit, as the shorter catechism, remember, puts it, in the shorter catechism, 30, how does the Spirit, apply to us, the redemption, purchased by Christ, and it says, it does so, by working, faith, in us, and thereby, uniting us to Christ, in our effectual calling, you see, it's all the gift of God, that's what it's saying here, in Ephesians 2, verse 8, by grace you've been saved, this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, everything that comes to us, that's applied to us, is applied by grace, as a product of grace, it's the working of grace, it's God's undeserved favor, coming into our lives, personally, you

see, so, it's not simply, you don't simply think of the grace of God, in terms of God's attitude, toward us, and therefore, providing us with salvation, goes beyond that, it's both the attitude of God, in providing the salvation, and God at work, in the application of that salvation,

God's Spirit, God's Spirit at work, it's by grace, that you have been saved, through faith, through what God does in your soul, and you can see that, actually, that, in verse 10, for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, for good works, we're saved by grace, not by any contribution ourselves, in fact, he says, we are his workmanship, and that's a beautiful word, created in Christ Jesus, what it says is, God is really the master craftsman, because salvation is not just something, coupled together quickly, it's not something, without specific design, it's not something, without magnificent beauty, it's workmanship, it's God's craftsmanship, a Christian, a Christian, a Christian, is a product, of God's grace, and God's grace, always, results in beauty, in workmanship, in a work, that really, is to be admired, all the way, throughout eternity, forever, we are his workmanship, and of course, part of the emphasis, there is that, how can we possibly be, contributors, to our salvation, if we are in fact, the workmanship of God, we are the result, of his work, you see, you're not a Christian, because of something, that you do, by any work, that you do yourself, you're not a Christian, you're not saved, not even by, the work, that you do, in repentance, or in the activity, of your faith, you're not saved, because of any of that, these are not the source, of your salvation, though they're necessary, toward your salvation, you're saved, not because of anything, you do, but because of what, he has done, because of the work, of God, of the doing of God, of the grace of God, at work, by grace, you have been saved, not by works, lest anyone should boast, this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, every Christian, is a new creation,

God has crafted, that person, with new life, it's not a patch up job, it's not just a renovation, leaving part of the old intact, it's a new creation, is that where we're at, today, we come to see, our need of grace, we come to see, our need of grace, so that as we read, verses one to three, and realize, that's what God is saying, about me, about you, that it's so, we'll turn to God, and plead with him, for his mercy, for his grace, to work in our lives, for that life, that he alone can give, to be a life, that you and I possess, for that righteousness, which we cannot, create ourselves, as Paul said, in Philippians 3, a righteousness,

I don't have it of my own, or of my own, ability, but a righteousness, which is in Christ, which is mine, by faith in Christ, when you put, your trust in Christ, when you believe in him, when you lean, your whole life upon him, for now, and for eternity, what happens, well the righteousness, that is his, the salvation, that's in him, becomes yours, that passes over, into your possession, and we'll see tonight, how from Peter, that brings out, that whole, wonderful emphasis, of having an inheritance, kept or reserved, in heaven for us, and we being kept, by God, towards that inheritance, well he says, that's, his workmanship, created in, Christ Jesus, but you do notice, just finally, created in Christ Jesus, for good works, he's not saying, that good works, don't enter into, the matter of being, a Christian, or being saved, at all, they don't enter into, how we come, to be accepted, with God, that is, by his grace, in Christ, which we by faith, come, to receive, and to accept, but then, that makes us workers, that makes us, people of good works, our good works, are not just, discounted, by the reformers, when they came to, emphasize, these, solas, that we're looking at, in the reformation, by grace, alone, not of works, that's how you come, to be accepted, with God, but that's when, your good works, then come into the picture, because you are saved, for good works, you're created, in Christ Jesus, unto good works, the good works, are a result, of being saved, not a contribution, towards it, but you mustn't, leave it out, and, it's interesting, that Luther, really didn't like, the epistle of James, in fact, at one stage, he thought, it really ought not, to be in the canon, or the body of scripture, because he saw it, as against, what he came to, be convinced of, in Galatians, and Romans, and Galatians especially, also there in Ephesians, that we are saved, by grace, and he saw James, as emphasizing, something contrary, to that, remember, how James actually, deals with, this matter, if you turn, to the epistle of James, and we'll conclude, with this, epistle of James, chapter 2, and, verse 14, what good is it, my brothers, if someone says, he has faith, but does not, have works, can that faith, save him, if a brother, or sister, is poorly clothed, and lacking, and daily food, and one of you, says to them, go in peace, be warmed, and filled, without giving them, the things needed, for the body, what good is that, so also, faith, by itself, if it does not, have works, is dead, and then he brings out, two examples,

Abraham, and Rahab, and he says, was it not, in verse 21, was not, our father Abraham, justified, justified, by works, when he offered up, his son Isaac, on the altar, you see then, that faith was active, along with his work, and the same then, of Rahab, verse 25, Rahab, the prostitute, was she not also, justified, by works, when she received, the messengers, and sent them out, by another way, now how do we bring that together, with Paul's emphasis, why was Luther, so much against, James, and what he thought, was contrary, to the teaching of Paul, well we can put it, something like this, Paul is asking the question, what is the place, of works, in relation to, our acceptance, or being accepted, by God, or justification, in other words, being accepted, with God, what is the place, of our works, in relation to, being accepted, with God, and the answer to that, is none, no place, absolutely no place, at all, this is by faith alone, through the grace, of God alone, no works, no contribution, on our part, but James is asking, the question, we could put it, something like this, what kind of faith, is it, that leads to, acceptance with God, and James answers, it's the one, which is seen, in our good works, in other words, somebody says,

[30 : 35] I'm a believer, I have faith, I am a Christian, and that person, doesn't bother at all, in helping their, fellow human beings, they're not interested, in showing practical love, they just come to church, and go away, and that's it, oh boy, James is saying, that's not faith, that's not the faith, through which we come, to be justified, the faith, by which we are justified, is one, which is seen, James says, in good works, we are created, in Christ Jesus, as Paul says, for good works, for good works, so don't decry, good works, don't go to the other, extreme, in avoiding, works, as a contribution, to your salvation, remember, that we are created, in Christ Jesus, that we are, Christians, by the grace of God, saved, for good works, how else, will people say, that we are indeed saved, if we're not showing, this product, of God's own creation, in our good works, so we are saved, by grace, those people, that we are, as described, the recipients of grace, are saved, by the grace, that's described there, in its actions, the grace, that has come to us, in Jesus Christ, in the accomplishment, of salvation, and through the Holy Spirit, that salvation, applied to our hearts, and lives, the grace of God, at work, in that way, as well, let me quote, finish with a quotation, from, a book by, an American,

Terry L. Johnson, the book was called, A Case for, Traditional Protestantism, came out a few, good few years ago, and in that book, he deals with, these, Solas, of the Reformation, when he comes to this one, Sola Gratia, or by grace alone, this is what he says, is the battle cry, of Sola Gratia, still relevant, yes it is, Martin Luther, was right, it is the hinge, on which all turns, if the doors, of self-righteousness, are to remain, barred, if we are to resist, the seductions, of the religious systems, of merit, if salvation, is to remain, free to us, as God's gift, if God alone, is to receive, all the glory, then, Sola Gratia, is as important, to us today, as it has ever, been, because if you, tamper with, the foundational matters, you end up, giving the glory, to other than God, we cannot, have, that, let's pray, we thank you,

Lord, today, for your grace, for your grace, in the way, which you have, revealed it, in the providing, of salvation, for us, in the person, of your son, we thank you, for your grace, at work, in the lives, of your people, for that grace, that comes, through your spirit, to work, in our, recreation, in Christ, we thank you, for your ongoing, extending of grace, to us, day by day, Lord, help us also, to praise you, for that grace, and that as we too, can follow, the writings, and the, the sentiments, of another, who wrote, of such amazing grace, and how sweet, was it sound, that saved, a wretch like him, enable us also, to follow, in the footsteps, of such, who have come, to extol your name, for your grace, and help us, to show that grace, so Lord, enable us, in the good works, that you have created us, unto, to truly manifest, that you have also, come, to receive us, by your grace, into fellowship, with yourself, so receive our thanks, we pray, in Jesus name,

Amen. We're going to, conclude our worship, now singing, in Psalm 84, Psalm 84, that's on, page 339, and singing, to the tune, Weatherby, we're singing, the final verses, from verse 8, through to verse 12, Lord God of hosts, my prayer here, O Jacob's God, give ear, see God our shield, look on the face, of thine, anointed dear, and the emphasis, in verse 11, particularly, fits in, with our study, this morning, for God the Lord's, a sun and shield, heal grace, and glory give, so Psalm 84, on page 339, singing to the tune, Weatherby, Lord God of hosts, my prayer here, Lord God of hosts, my prayer here, O Jacob's God, sing, on our shield, look on the face, of thine, anointed dear, hart, O States and earth, And well in tents of sin For God the Lord's Son and Shield In grace and glory give And will with hope no good from them That now I need to live

[37 : 29] O thou that art the Lord of hosts That man is truly blessed Who by assured confidence
On me alone the rest I'll go to the main door this morning Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus
Christ The love of God the Father And the communion of the Holy Spirit Be with you now and
always Amen Thank you Amen¹⁹ Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen

Amen Amen Amen