

By Grace Alone

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Preacher: Walt Alexander

[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Ephesians chapter 2 verse 8. 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 works so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship. Created in Christ Jesus for good works. Which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

This is the word of the Lord. One thing I don't worry about is waking up to a smoke filled bedroom with little or no time to escape.

[1 : 10] One popular author writes. He continues, you know why? Because I have four smoke alarms. That's right. Four. I am so safe.

You know what else I have? Two fire extinguishers. One in the kitchen and one in our master bedroom. Between our smoke alarms and our fire extinguishers, we have nothing to worry about when it comes to fire.

We are safe. We are safe. Unless, of course, the batteries in the smoke detector are bad. If that's the case, we might as well have hung Frisbees on our ceiling.

By the way, when was the last time you tested the batteries in your smoke detectors? I've never tested mine. I stare at them occasionally. But I don't know if they actually work.

And about those fire extinguishers, for all I know, they are full of shaving cream. A friend of mine told me I should test my fire extinguishers. He's probably right. But I've never gone to the trouble.

[2 : 16] It all sounds messy to me. Yet, in spite of my lack of investigation, I go to bed every night under the assumption that my family and I are safe from fire.

Many in our world go to bed each night with a similar assumption. We assume that if we were to die in our sleep and find ourselves standing before God at the pearly gates, we would have nothing to worry about.

Most of us know there are things in our life that are not right. Most of us know we stumble and sin. None of us are perfect after all. But we assume that good people go to heaven.

And just about everybody thinks they are good. We assume there is a good God looking for good people who do good things to welcome into His good heaven.

Many folks assume that this same good God is behind all the major religions. They all lead to the good heaven that He has provided. They're just different paths.

[3 : 21] Maybe that's you. Just different paths up the mountain to the same good and wonderful place. But even if you don't believe that, we assume the requirement for making it up to that good heaven is to be good.

The only other option is the requirement would be to be bad. So we assume it's mainly up to us. We assume it's on us.

The real activity is on our part. When we're doing good, when we're attending church, reading our Bible, loving our neighbor, controlling our anger, we assume we're safe.

As safe as if we had four fire extinguishers and two fire alarms or vice versa rather. We know we still have some things to work on, but overall we're pretty good folks.

But how good is good enough? How frequent does church attendance need to be? How faithful must Bible reading be?

[4 : 23] Is there a minimum time in prayer each day that's required? That makes the cut? How often can you lose your cool? Does a bit of profanity throw you out altogether?

Or just knock you down a few rungs? Does all that matter at all? Or does it really come down to a decision we made when we were 12 or 13? How good is good enough to be safe? How good do you have to be to be safe? Over against the assumption that most of the world goes to sleep believing, these verses uncover the astonishing truth of the gospel. We all know bad people don't go to heaven. God would owe Sodom and Gomorrah an apology. But these verses make clear good people don't go to heaven either. These verses declare the only people who go to heaven are those saved by grace. One author says, these verses contain the heart of Paul's gospel. [5 : 37] Now he wrote 13 epistles, 13 letters. These verses contain the heart. These three verses, Martin Lloyd-Jones, this quote I have for you, He says, there is no more important doctrinal, that's just theological statement anywhere in the letter, in the epistle.

Here is the statement that must be determinative in all evangelism. It's what must be proclaimed in all evangelism. In the same way, it must determine our entire practice of the Christian life. It is one of the most crucial statements to be found anywhere in holy scripture. Now if you remember in chapter 1, the apostle Paul prayed that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened to see the immeasurable greatness of God's power towards us who believe.

And over the past seven verses, he has unpacked all of God's power in making us alive, raising us from the dead. And in these verses, he announces that all that he has done has been a work of grace alone.

And where we're going, this is our anthem. May our boast forever be, salvation is by grace in Christ alone. I want this into the core of your heart.

[6 : 57] May our boast forever be, salvation is by grace in Christ alone. First point, saved by grace through faith. Saved by grace through faith.

These verses are a bit of a summary of the great argument that the apostle has been making. They begin with that four, because he's explaining and defending.

Last week we talked about, you know, eternity will be the display of the immeasurable greatness of his kindness, immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us.

How can that be? How can that God be this good to us? And the answer is, because salvation is by grace alone.

These three verses come to us as one kind of complete package. But we're going to break out the three statements, essentially, that come out. The first is, by grace you have been saved through faith.

[8 : 02] Look down there in verse 8. For by grace you have been saved through faith. What the apostle is saying is that we are Christians solely as a result of the grace of God.

We are Christians solely because God has been moved to act on our behalf. Because he's rich in mercy, great in love, and he has been moved to act on behalf of us by grace.

God has not been moved to act because of anything we have done. There is nothing in us that moved him to act for us. That's why Taylor reminded us grace is for the undeserving.

But what's more, God was moved to act on our behalf in spite of all that we have done. Not only was there nothing in us that moved him to act for us, there was so much in us that should have moved him to act against us.

Grace is not merely undeserved. It's for the ill-deserving. We were failures, but we were also rebels.

[9 : 17] And the ground, the basis, the foundation of salvation is grace alone. By grace we have been saved. Saved.

This word saved is used throughout the New Testament. Many times we're told that we will be saved from the wrath of God. Much more will you be saved from the wrath of God by trusting in Jesus Christ.

Talking about the day of judgment. That you will be saved. Other times we're told that we're being saved. 1 Corinthians 15, that we're being saved. We're in the process of being saved. Well, this is not in that way or the other way.

It's not will be saved or being saved. It says we have been saved. It's finished, complete, done, in Jesus Christ. The people of Ephesus would have been quite familiar with this word saved and its accompanying word Savior.

It was on a statue of Julius Caesar during these days. Likely still standing in Ephesus. A statue which no doubt the apostle would have walked past during his three years there arguing for the

gospel in the hall of Tyrannus.

[10:29] Julius Caesar was famous for his swift victories. You probably read about Julius Caesar. He fought over 50 victorious battles and killed well over a million enemies.

After one particular quick victory, he famously said, I came, I saw, I conquered. He was an unstoppable force. He was, according to many, the greatest emperor.

And so the statue read, to the cities of Asia, honor Julius Caesar, Caesar, the universal savior of human life.

All that they called life. They said, honor Julius Caesar for that. But Paul uses this word carefully to underline the greater salvation that has come to us through our great savior, Jesus Christ.

The Roman Empire eventually crumbled, but the salvation of Jesus Christ is finished and complete. If you notice, this is the second use of this same phrase.

[11:35] Look in verse 5. He said, kind of set apart, he says, by grace you have been saved. It's as if the apostle's moving along, making his argument, just blurts out ahead of time to say, by grace you have been saved.

Last week, Taylor did a wonderful job celebrating the great reversal God has brought about. We've been saved. We were dead. Now we're alive.

We were enslaved. Now we're raised. We were under wrath. Now we're seated with Christ in the heavenly places. Glorious reversal.

But we must see that this salvation comes to us because we've been joined to Christ our Savior. Unlike Caesar, who does a great deliverance on behalf of the people, Christ does a great deliverance by uniting us to Him.

Look in verse 5 again. He made us alive together with Christ. Verse 6, raised us up with Christ.

[12:38] He seated us with Christ. All that He did in Christ's life because of our union with Him, He did in our lives as well. We talk about salvation.

We often rightly talk about salvation as something done for us. It is. Salvation is objective and representative. Christ did what we could not do by paying the penalty for our many sins so that by trusting in Him, we might have full and final forgiveness.

He died for the ungodly. He died for us. But we must also remember that the work of salvation is something Christ does in us.

It is wonderfully objective and representative, but it is also curiously personal and subjective.

The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us and raises us to new life. We are one with the Lord in spirit.

[13:49] We are vines of Him who is the branch. We are members of His body. We are living stones planted in the temple. We are one with Him like the way a husband is one with his wife.

It is not just that Christ is for you. That is not what He offers. Christ is in you. That's the hope of glory. Salvation does not promise that you will be saved.

It announces that you've been saved. John McKay, later the president of Princeton Theological Seminary when it was still sticking to the Word was changed while reading Ephesians.

John McKay was 14 years old. He wandered out in the hills of the highlands of Scotland with a Bible in his hand. I just feel impressed this morning. I think this message is for the youngsters in this church.

14 years old. This is the time to do business with the Lord. You have to wait until you get settled. Get married and settle down.

[15:04] That's when people start going to church. You can do it now. He read through the book of Ephesians on the hills of the highlands of Scotland. I've been there.

It's amazing. He made what he called and I quote, a passionate protestation to Jesus Christ among the rocks and the starlight.

But he didn't just make a decision. He was completely changed. He said, many years later looking back, I saw a new world.

Everything was new. I had a new outlook. New experiences. New attitudes towards other people. I loved God. Jesus Christ became the center of everything.

I had been quickened. I was really alive. And if you have trusted in Christ, that's what's happened to you. You have new life inside you.

[16:10] Giving you new understanding. We don't just need to be saved in our hearts. Our minds need to be saved, 1 Corinthians 2. You have new affections, new spiritual taste buds, new

emotions, new longings.

I remember after being saved, suddenly everything was new. I could hear birds singing almost. It's like I didn't even see them before so enslaved to my lust and suddenly spiritual taste buds.

What better do on a Friday night than read the Bible? That was so foreign to me. You have new freedom once you're in prison, sold under sin, following the world, the flesh, and the devil.

But now you're no longer in chains. You can see where the chains were. But you're walking in newness life. You have been saved. So has this happened to you?

Has God joined you to Himself? Has He taken a hold of you? If you look back on your salvation and there's no sense that God has dealt with you, that He's chased you down, rescued you, taken a hold of you, then you are no Christian at all.

[17:12] The definition of salvation here is God grabbing a hold of you even when you were dead and raising you to life. And all this wonderful salvation has come through faith.

You have been saved through faith. If grace is the ground of our salvation, faith is the means.

It's not as if we got faith and reached out there and grabbed salvation from God's hand. That's not it at all. Faith is just the response to this dramatic work God has done.

You were born again by the Spirit and by faith ran towards the Lord. It's a gift. It's a fruit.

For that reason, it's not perfect faith or strong faith or great faith that saves, but faith simply in Jesus Christ. Point two, saved by grace, not by works.

[18:13] after declaring positively that we've been saved by grace, Paul balances this with two negative statements. Negatives are helpful.

We think negative is always bad, but it's helping to clarify what exactly he is saying. Look in verse 8. He continues, and this is not your own doing.

It's the gift of God. Not a result of works so that no one may boast. It is not your own doing. It's not an achievement by you.

It's not a result of works. It's not a reward for anything you have done. So let's look at these negative. By grace you have been saved and this is not your own doing.

It is the gift of God. Not your own doing. It is the gift of God. What is the this? I think the most common natural reading is this refers to faith.

[19:13] What immediately precedes it. What is not our own doing? Faith must be. And surely faith is a gift as I just said a few moments ago.

But the this here is not a reference to faith alone, but to the whole work of grace. It's not as if the rest is our own doing, but faith is not.

It's a reference to all of that which is not our own doing, which is the whole work of grace. What Paul is saying is all that God has done in saving you is not from you.

Salvation did not come from you. It did not originate with you. It is not a result of your initiative. It is the gift of God.

Literally in the text, it's not from you of God, the gift. God's the giver.

[20:18] God's the blesser. Your salvation is not a transaction between you and God. Not an agreement. Not a contract. Not an achievement in any way. After all, He saved us when we were dead.

Not exactly in the place to sign papers. If we're honest, and we should be honest at church, that was a joke, but you know, this truth rubs us a little wrongly.

We live in America, the land of the American dream, the land of promise to those who work. There's a largely good desire for us to be independent, who aren't needy.

Aren't those people that are needy, looking for a handout, asking for help, who figured out to live life, how to live life, and contribute to society. That's the ideal that drives America in so many ways.

We want to buy the things that show off. We figured out how to make life work. We figured out how to contribute. That's why the heroes that we watch in the movie screens are the self-made man or the independent woman, William Muni, for these old fans in here, Jason Bourne, John Wick, Ray, Maverick.

[21:27] We could go on and on, but there will be no self-made men and women in heaven. Now, I don't miss Nick Saban on the sidelines on Saturday, although I would have loved to see him throw a headset yesterday, but I miss his press conferences.

Last year, he began one by saying, okay, y'all ready for a lecture? And anybody that's ever done a presser with Nick Saban knows he's ready to give one. He said, let's talk about the importance of

nothing.

You get up every day and you're entitled to nothing. Nobody owes you nothing. You could have talent, but if you don't have discipline and don't execute and don't focus on what you get, what do you get?

Nothing. If you're complacent and not paying attention to detail, what does that get you? Nothing. So, nothing is acceptable but your best, so everything is determined by what you and what you determine to be your best.

That's the only thing. There should be nothing else but that for everybody. That's what we have to do to stay focused. The Apostle Paul is saying to us, beloved, let me tell you the importance of nothing.

[22 : 59] Nothing that you have contributed, nothing you have done has contributed anything to your salvation. Nothing you will do or could do can contribute anything to your salvation.

None of your reading or praying or trusting or obeying or serving or giving matters one bit. Your upbringing, your background, your experience, your decisions have not made the difference. They make no difference at all. They matter none. There is no relationship between who you are and what you do to the salvation of God.

Salvation is always and only given freely by grace alone. this is what I want this church to see. There was this audio recording years ago when they interviewed the people at a Christian book convention. They asked them what is the gospel?

[23 : 59] And R.C. Sproul said, the late R.C. said he was driving down the road listening to the recording as they asked what is the gospel and person after person after person said, well, to go to church or to be baptized or to do these things it all came down to things you do not to what God has done.

R.C. said he pulled over on the side of the road and just wept. Well, this beloved is what I must proclaim to you. It's very hard for good people, for good religious people to be saved by grace alone.

It's easy for bad people to be saved. It's hard for good Bible believing church going people to be saved by grace alone. Those are the things we say and the things we do the things we live and we begin to think those are the things that make us Christians.

that I would have failed as a pastor if you don't get this. There's nothing I want more than you to get this. It's a wonderful gift to be raised in a Christian home to have so many things at your influence and at your disposal but it will crush you if you turn it into a ladder to reach God.

The gospel, what Paul is doing, the gospel he proclaimed strips us of everything. It tells us that all of our bad deeds do not disqualify us. They don't cancel us out.

[25 : 22] They don't throw us out like our culture loves to do but none of our good deeds qualify us. We're completely stripped of any standing outside of Jesus Christ.

And so the apostle said if you would come I say to you if you would come today you must come by grace alone in Christ alone you must duck your head and receive the gift.

The greatest temptation after salvation is adding to God's work of grace. Some of us are tempted to add to his work of grace by feeling bad for what we've done. We will not receive grace.

We failed too many times. We try to pay penance. Try to feel sorry for ourselves. Mope around. It appears humble but it's not. It's proud.

What it says is I must add to your work of grace Lord with my low grade guilt. He doesn't need help.

[26 : 33] Others of us probably most of us are tempted to add to his work of grace by feeling good for the good we've done. It happens so subtly.

You come to church. You engage. You do something nice. Give some cup of cold water and then gradually this self congratulation happens in your heart.

I'm so glad I'm not like that scoundrel over there. That neighbor whatever it is. You begin to shift the ground of your joy from Jesus Christ and his salvation that are accomplished with no help of your own to begin to rest.

Sinclair Ferguson helpfully says the glory of the gospel is that God declared Christians to be rightly related to him in spite of their sin. But now this is a wise pastor this is crucial our greatest temptation you see that our greatest temptation and mistake is to try to smuggle character into his work of grace to begin to relate to him based on the grace I mean based on our character instead of the work of grace and that we must not do this salvation is all by grace from this day to the last you'll

never be more saved in this sense than the day you've trusted in Jesus Christ you don't need to look back or try to work on things and look better as you're going forward you need to keep looking to Jesus who did all this on your behalf point three saved by grace for good works saved by grace for good works

Paul in this final statement Paul tells us why we're saved by grace we're not saved by grace through good works but we are saved by grace for good works look at the way the apostle unpacks this truth verse 10 for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them this verse begins emphatically his work we are we are his work this is another way of saying in some ways another way of saying what he's been saying throughout these verses what makes us a Christian is not who we are or what we do it's not our good life our efforts our desire to serve God all of that is our work what makes us a Christian is his work we are his work God is the worker that's the worker he's the acting party in salvation he's the craftsman he's the potter we're the clay he's the artist we're the product the thing he has fashioned and formed molded and shaped but he continues and gets more specific where his workmanship created in

[29 : 46] Christ Jesus now all people are God's creatures! Christians are new creatures in Christ referencing back to what we've seen before later Ephesians said Christ died as we'll see next week he died to create himself one new man to create in himself one new man later we're called put off the old self with your former manner of life and put on the new self created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness we are raised with him as we learned last week but we're also recreated in him we're born again we're remade it's Genesis 1 over again in our hearts to see the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ who can boast now who can create themselves who can invent themselves no one the whole passage comes together look at verse one you are dead in trespasses and sins in which you once walked now we've been born again in

Christ to walk in newness of life salvation wonderfully is not grace plus works but salvation plus grace is equals works salvation is not grace plus works but salvation plus grace equals works what do we do with this life we work unto the Lord we're not saved through good works but we're saved for them John Stott says good works are indispensable to salvation not as its ground or means however but as its consequence and evidence and sometimes when you proclaim a gospel like this good works can become little more than a four letter word but faith without works is dead Jesus said they'll know you're

Christians by your fruit a good tree that bears bad fruit is a dead tree not a good tree good works is what we want it's what we're born for but it's after conversion not the reason we're converted all this is not surprising from what we've learned so far in the epistles we are saints as we learn in Ephesians 1 we're set apart unto God set apart to serve him and to please him we're chosen that we should be holy and blameless Ephesians 5 calls us to imitate him we're called to be like him as Leviticus said be holy as I am holy if grace is the ground of our salvation and faith is the means of our salvation then holiness and good work are to be the fruit of our salvation how do we devote ourselves to good works love your neighbor as yourself

Martin Luther said God doesn't need your good works but your neighbor does your neighbor does I find it provoking that apostle Paul says we're to walk in these things all this God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them not called to run in good works you have to become converted you may need to be caged for a little while you start running and everything you know pulling a china shop not called the sprint just called the walk most basic human movement referred in this letter several times as a metaphor for life it's slow and gradual but it captures the simpleness and the steadiness of someone that has learned that salvation is by grace I hope there's a sense in which in this church you can loosen up the belt you can stop putting on a silly smile when you come to church maybe leave your

Sunday best at home but don't come in sweats no not you may be in sweats you can stop playing a charade why because salvation is all by grace and yet there's nothing we want more than to please him who saved us there's no fear no striving no smuggling in character just walking one step at a time one day at a time one person at a time in good works I pray that we be a church that is!

[34 : 50] filled with the fruit of repentance that put on love joy peace patience kindness gentleness faithfulness and self control a church that does good to everyone especially those of the household of faith that is seasoned with salt ready to give a hope to that which the hope that has rescued us and changed us a church that does not grow weary in doing good let good works be our food one of

my favorite verses to meditate on the Lord said it is my food to do the will of him who sent me he is man fully alive and that's who we follow that's our food to do the will let's let's boast safe secure emptied of all striving that salvation is by grace in Christ alone let's pray father in heaven we thank you for the wonder of these verses they announced to us most surprising news

Lord I pray that you would cause us to see the wonder of what Christ has done and let us run from all of our good deeds and all of our bad deeds to find peace and forgiveness and salvation in Jesus we thank you you've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens Tennessee for more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at