

*Back to School*  
**Ephesians 2:8-9**  
**"Salvation 101"**

**I. YOU ARE NOT WORTHY OF SALVATION**

- A. How feeble we are in the sight of God
- B. How far we are from the standard of God

**2. YOU CANNOT WORK FOR SALVATION**

- A. It is extended as a gift from God
- B. It is exclusively for the glory of God

**3. YOU SHOULD NOT WAVER ON SALVATION**

- A. The acceptance of salvation
- B. The assurance of salvation

1. Chuck Swindoll told of eating dinner one evening with a man who had worked as a magician. The man talked about his experience and said, "You know, on the surface these things an illusionist does look very complicated."

2. He said, "They saw women in two and they put the legs over here and the head over there. You sit there in the audience and you think, 'Oh, how in the world can that happen? She didn't even scream'..."

3. Then he added, "You know, when you're on the inside and you work with an illusionist, it is so simple. So simple! Once you have it explained to you, there's nothing to it. But the audience is amazed."<sup>i</sup>

4. Swindoll went on to point out how in many ways, that is what it is like with salvation. It seems incomprehensible that a Man's death on a cross can secure the salvation of those who believe – that is, until you believe and see it for yourself. Then it seems so simple.

5. Before us in Ephesians chapter two is one the clearest passages in the Bible on the work of salvation.

6. R. Kent Hughes says of these verses, "This is the gospel in a nutshell – the most cogent summary of the dynamics of salvation to be found in Scripture."<sup>ii</sup>

7. The plan of salvation is so great, so miraculous, that it could only come from the heart and mind of the eternal God.

8. Yet, it is so simple that even a child can grasp it and receive it into their lives when the Spirit reveals it to them.

9. Paul said, "*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.*"

10. Let's look at this wonderful statement from the Word of God, and consider what it teaches us about the matter of salvation. First of all, we learn here that:

### **I. YOU ARE NOT WORTHY OF SALVATION**

1. We call the gospel "the good news", and that it is. However, the good news starts with some bad news.
2. The bad news is that you are a sinner, along with everyone else in the fallen, human race. Because you are a sinner, you need to be saved, but, you are not deserving or worthy of that salvation.
3. In verse 8, a wonderful, glorious, and positive little word reminds us of the hard truth of our unworthiness. It is the word "grace".
4. The fact that it is *only* by the grace of God we can be saved reminds that nothing in us merits or deserves the salvation that grace alone can give.
5. My friend, Tom Hayes, once said, "Grace is something special for nothing special." The truth is; we are nothing special in and of ourselves.
6. Consider this word "grace" with me, and notice what it teaches us about our unworthiness. First of all, this word points us to:

#### **A. How feeble we are in the sight of God**

1. Paul said, "*For by grace are ye saved...*" The word "grace" has been defined as "unmerited favor". It is the work of God giving us what we do not deserve and cannot do for ourselves.
2. When God in eternity past decided that He would redeem men from their sins, He knew His creatures well enough to know that the only way they could be saved is if He did it for them.
3. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, had only one restriction – one commandment – placed upon their lives in the Garden of Eden, and they failed to obey it.
4. Likewise, we are too feeble to do what we should do on our own. Left to ourselves, we would never find a way to be anything but fallen sinners, separated from God.
5. The grace of God reminds us that we need something we do not have in ourselves. We cannot be what we should unless God gives us what we need.

6. In Romans 3:10 and 11, it says, "*There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.*"

7. The Christian philosopher, Pascal, said, "Grace is indeed required to turn a man into a saint; and he who doubts this does not know what either a man or a saint is."<sup>iii</sup>

8. This word "grace" reminds us of our unworthiness for salvation, because it points us to how feeble we are in the sight of God.

9. Consider further that this word "grace" also points us to:

### **B. How far we are from the standard of God**

1. The Bible tells us that God is absolutely holy. His character is flawless and completely absent of anything that is sinful. He is, as one described Him, "radically righteous."

2. We, on the other hand, are completely sinful. Even our very best deeds and works have the stain of sin upon them, and cannot come close to the surpassing holiness of God.

3. The truth is, as Romans 3:23 puts it, all of us has, "*...come short of the glory of God.*"

4. Even those who have climbed to the highest heights of human decency and goodness are still a universe away from where God is in His holiness.

5. When we read that it is only by grace that we are saved, we realize that salvation is not an act of us climbing up to God, but rather of God coming to down to us.

6. When Jesus came to this earth, God condescended down to our lowly level. We could not come to where He was. We were too far below His standards. He came to us in grace.

7. No more than a new-born baby could leap from its crib and climb Mt. Everest could a man reach the level of God's holiness.

8. But when we could not come up, grace came down! Though we are unworthy and undeserving of it, salvation is possible because of, and only through, the grace of God in Christ Jesus!

9. Looking at this great text, we see here not only that *you are not worthy of salvation*, but we are also told that:

## **II. YOU CAN NOT WORK FOR SALVATION**

1. Thomas Edison famously said that, "Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration."
2. There are some people who feel that way regarding salvation. They believe that if you work hard enough at doing right, somewhere, somehow you will *become* right, and earn your salvation as a reward.
3. The Apostle Paul clearly shoots down that notion in our text. He says, "*For by grace are ye saved through faith...not of works, lest any man should boast.*"
4. No matter how hard you may try, you could never do enough to earn the salvation of God. Consider what our text says about this. First of all, you cannot work for your salvation because:

**A. It is extended as a gift from God**

1. Just as the word "grace" teaches us an important truth regarding salvation, so also does another word in verse 8. It is the word "gift".
2. Paul said, "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.*"
3. In other words, God does not present salvation to men as a goal to be achieved. He presents it to men as a gift to be received.
4. A gift by its nature is given unconditionally. It does not have to be bought, earned, or even reciprocated.
5. Imagine a young man getting down on one knee. With a trembling hand and voice, he pulls a ring out of his pocket and presents to the girl he loves and wishes to spend his life with.
6. Now imagine that the girl says, "Oh! that is a beautiful ring. How much would you take for it? Will you finance it? Can I have a few more years to work for it?"
7. No! In most cases, the girl receives the ring, along with the love behind it! She sees it is a gift, and takes it gladly from the hand of him who loves her.
8. When God sent His only Son to die for our sins, He was not presenting a product for us to purchase or try to obtain. No, He was demonstrating His love in *giving* to us Heaven's priceless Jewel!
9. You cannot work for your salvation because it is extended as a gift from God. Moreover, you cannot work for it because:

**B. It is exclusively for the glory of God**

1. Why is it that men cannot work for their salvation? The answer is given to us in verse 9. It says that salvation is, "*Not of works, lest any man should boast.*"
2. The word "boast" means not just to brag, but to glory and revel in something. Picture the running back who scores the touchdown on Sunday.
3. He throws his hands in the air, spikes the ball, does a little dance, and waves to all his screaming fans. He is glorying in what he achieved.
4. When God offered salvation to humanity, He designed it in such a way than no one will ever do an end-zone dance when they make it to heaven.
5. R. Kent Hughes said, "If salvation came by works, eternity would spawn a fraternity of...chest-thumping boasters – an endless line of celestial Pharisees [saying], 'I thank you that I am not like...other men...'"<sup>iv</sup>
6. Salvation is not about bringing glory and honor and pride to men. Salvation is about bringing glory to God!
7. All those who spend eternity in heaven will not spend it talking about what they did to get there. When they have been there 10,000 years, they will have only begun to sing the praises of Him whose grace brought them in.
8. Heaven is not a retirement home for religion's hardest workers. Heaven is the Father's House, where His children go to worship Him and celebrate the inheritance He has given them by grace.
9. In heaven, the saved will rest from their labors, but they will not rest *because* of their labors.
10. This text teaches us that *you are not worthy of salvation, and you cannot work for salvation*. With that in mind, consider with me lastly that:

**III. YOU SHOULD NOT WAVER ON SALVATION**

1. In Matthew 27:22, Pontius Pilate asked a question that every one of you must answer at some time in your life. Pilate asked, "*What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?*"
2. Those who hear the gospel and the truth about Jesus must reckon with the message they are told.

3. When the gift of God in Christ is presented, we must respond to it in some way. Jesus may be received or rejected; but He cannot be ignored.

4. My plea to you is that you not waver or hesitate in your response to the truth of salvation. Please, don't waver when it comes to:

#### **A. The acceptance of salvation**

1. There is another little word that has much to say to us in these verses. It is the word "faith". Paul said, "*For by grace are ye saved through faith...*"

2. The word translated "faith" carries the idea of belief, persuasion, and conviction. It is closely connected to the word "trust".

3. When you consider what it means to really trust someone, you get a better idea of what it means to accept the gift of God's salvation.

4. The story is told of a famous acrobat and performer in the early 1900's named Blondin. Several times he crossed Niagra Falls on tightrope 1,100 feet long and 160 feet above the water.

5. On one of those occasions he even carried a man on his back across the falls. When he reached the other side, he said to one the spectators, "Do you believe I could do that with you?"

6. The man said, "I do. I just watched you do it." Blondin said, "Hop on, I'll carry you across." The man said, "Not on your life!"

7. The kind of faith that saves us not only believes that what the Bible says about Jesus is true, but it is also willing to trust Him by putting their eternal lives upon His saving shoulders.

8. Seeing the gift that God has given to you, don't waver or wait! Trust Him completely! Throw yourself at the foot of cross, and give your life completely to Him!

9. Don't waver, not only when it comes to the acceptance of salvation, but I would add further, don't waver when it comes to:

#### **B. The assurance of salvation**

1. There are some people who have heard the gospel before. They were convicted of their sins, and in faith they have trusted in Christ.

2. Nevertheless, they still wonder if they have done all they need to do. They fear that perhaps there is more required, or something additional that needs to happen.
  3. I point you to one more important word in this text. It is the word "saved". Paul said, *"For by grace are ye saved..."*
  4. Though the English doesn't fully show it, the word translated "saved" is in the perfect tense, which means it indicates something that has already happened.
  5. One commentator explains it as, "...thus 'ye have been saved;' not – ye will be finally saved; not - ye are brought into a state in which salvation is possible...but – ye are actually saved. The words denote a present state..."<sup>v</sup>
  6. When a person accepts through faith the gift of salvation offered in the person of Jesus Christ, God saves them by His grace at that very moment.
  7. Salvation is not a "wait and see" process. Salvation is a once and for all event.
  8. God has offered salvation to you. If you have fully trusted in Christ, then He has given it to you and it is yours by grace!
  9. To doubt that is to question the honesty and integrity of God. You may doubt yourself, but you should never doubt God.
  10. Speaking of Himself, Jesus said in John 3:18, *"He that believeth on him is not condemned..."* We have a sure word from God. We need not waver in our assurance of what He has done.
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1. Vance Havner said, "I came to Christ as a country boy. I did not understand all about the plan of salvation. One does not have to understand it; he only has to stand on it."<sup>vi</sup>
  2. We don't have to understand all the details of how salvation works in order to believe that it does in fact work.
  3. The grace of God saves us when we place our faith in the gift of Jesus Christ as the sacrifice for our sins.
  4. In that truth there is both simplicity and complexity. Yet, the message is clear to all who will hear it and believe.
  5. *"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."*

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- <sup>i</sup> Swindoll, Charles, The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart, (Word Publishing, Nashville, 1998), p. 505
- <sup>ii</sup> Hughes, R. Kent, Ephesians, (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 1990), p. 73
- <sup>iii</sup> Hughes, R. Kent, p. 77
- <sup>iv</sup> Hughes, R. Kent, p. 74
- <sup>v</sup> Eadie, John, The John Eadie Greek Text Commentaries: Vol. 2 Ephesians, (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 150
- <sup>vi</sup> Hester, Dennis, The Vance Havner Quotebook, (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1986), p. 201