

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Saved, Created By God, and Fashioned For a Purpose

by Dan Trygg

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, He made us alive together with Christ (by grace you are-being having-been-saved-ones), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For in/by the grace you are-being having-been-saved-ones by-means-of faith; and this not out-from yourselves, of God’s gift; ⁹ not out-from works, in order that not anyone may boast. ¹⁰ For of Him we-are-being a fashioned-thing, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand in order that in them we might walk-about.”

Ephesians 2:4-10

Our focus today is on Ephesians 2:8-10. Often, you will read or study verses 8 and 9, in the context of a discussion of *salvation by grace through faith*, versus the notion of *salvation by works* (by “being good enough”). While that is an important discussion, it interrupts the flow of Paul’s argument in this letter. It was not his purpose to get sidelined by a defense of salvation by grace through faith. Paul has an entirely different agenda here.

Since we have the luxury of stepping outside of the argument, momentarily, we *can* briefly address this issue. Paul really confronted this issue in his letters to the Galatians and Romans, but the wording of Ephesians 2:8,9 in most English translations, provides a convenient “proof text” for defending the idea of salvation by grace through faith, even though it is *not* the focus of his argument *here*. In Galatians, Paul *was* directly arguing against the teachings of the Judaizers. They were Jewish proponents of a false teaching that was influencing the believers there. The Judaizers were saying that it wasn’t enough to simply “believe in Jesus”. They insisted that non-Jewish converts to following Messiah Jesus had to get circumcised and keep the Jewish law and traditions. Although their group had a particularly Jewish flavor, their approach came down to a “gospel” of *works-righteousness*, which has appeared in many forms and expressions over the centuries. He took a very strong stand against them. He called their teaching a “different gospel”, ...one that *isn’t* really a “gospel” (good news) at all (Gal. 1:6-9). The reason is that trying to be justified by works is impossible, because we can never be “good enough”. It is a false hope, an empty pursuit, doomed to fail.

Are we saved by *grace alone, apart from works of the law*, ...or are we saved by *grace plus* keeping certain customs, traditions, or living a moral life? *Grace plus works*? Moreover, do we *grow* in our Christian walk, and *become spiritually mature*, by walking in God’s grace, or by keeping customs, rules, traditions or moral practices?

Paul looked back to Abraham for the basis of his argument. Abraham *believed God, and he was counted as righteous* (Gen. 15:6). It was not about *his behavior*, at all. It was about whether or not he *trusted in God*. The laws of Moses were not even given for another 430 years! While it was declared that “the one who practices them shall live by them” (Lev. 18:5), the warning of the ineffectiveness of the law was also clearly stated by Moses, “Cursed is everyone who does abide by *all things* written in the law, to perform them” (Gal. 3:10; Deut. 27:26). James, the brother of Jesus, clearly saw this point. He said, “Whoever keeps the whole law, but fails *in one point*, has become guilty of *all*” (2:10). Even *one failure* makes a person a “law-breaker” or a “sinner”, and he or she would be under judgment. Even later in the Hebrew scriptures, it declares that “the righteous person shall live *by faith*” (Hab. 2:4).

While certain religious sects within Judaism (and within Christianity) have become legalistic and hyper-focused on right behavior, God has always drawn *sinners* to Himself, offered them His grace, and they were counted as righteous when they trusted in Him. No one was counted as righteous because they were “good enough”. Paul was convinced, “by works of the law *no one* will be justified in God’s sight, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). When we try to keep the law, we only become more aware of our failings. Paul said, “We maintain that a person is justified (counted innocent) by faith *apart from* the works of the law” (Rom. 3:28). In Romans 7, Paul says that the same thing happens if we try to become righteous by focusing on keeping the law. While there is nothing wrong with the law, sin will rise up in rebellion against the moral standard, and will work to cause us to fall.

The righteousness of God comes to us as a gift, to be *received by faith* (Rom. 3:21-24). That is how we become children of God in the first place. We *hear the good news* that God sent Christ to die for our sins and reconcile us to God, ...and we *believe* that message. God “counts us” as righteous, and causes us to be born from above by the Spirit.

Growing in Christ is by the same method. God’s word says that He has placed the Spirit within us to enable us to live a new, righteous life. If we *believe* that message, we *will draw near to focus on the life of the Spirit*, ...we won’t focus on trying to keep commandments in our own strength. To walk in faith is to *trust in the Spirit’s presence and leading*. To walk in the law is to *trust in our own self-ability*, ...which has been shown to be bankrupt again and again. To walk in the Spirit is to draw near to God in dependence. To walk in the law is to attempt to do God’s will as we

understand it, and by our own strength. Like the Pharisees, and legalistic religious people of every stripe, we will have a thin veneer of religiosity, but the inner heart will be a caricature of godliness. There will be judgmentalism, pride, arrogance, exclusion of others, and hypocrisy. Living by grace produces humility and graciousness, because that is His heart.

Let's go back to Ephesians 2. What is Paul's point?

First, it is *not* to answer, or argue for, the matter of law versus faith.

Second, verse 8 is *not* to be understood as a statement of God's sovereignty in saving us, apart from our choice.

I have heard people try to interpret this passage that way. The text says, "For by grace you-are-being having-been-saved-ones by means of faith, and *this* not of yourselves, of God is the gift." **They try to say that even faith is God's gift, but the original language does *not* support that idea.** If God had wanted to make that point, He could have very easily. The word for "faith" is a feminine word. If the word, "this", was also feminine, then you could rightly argue that "this (faith) is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God", ...but the word "this" is *not* feminine, it is neuter. **Clearly, God did *not* want to say that our faith was His gift.** "This" refers to the *grace* that saves and transforms us to become "having-been-saved-ones". **The *grace* is not earned or produced by our works, or our religious investments. It doesn't come "out-from" you; it comes from God. BUT, it comes to us *through* or *by means of* faith.** The salvation provision is a gift made available and offered to us *from* God, ...BUT the provision becomes applicable and activated in my life when *I* trust in God. The power doesn't come *from* me; it comes *from* God. BUT it comes into my experience *by means of* faith, as I trust God. **There is a necessary partnership with God: He gives, ...I receive.**

Now we can go back to pick up Paul's argument. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. He has determined certain things for those of us who would be in Christ long before the world was created. We will be holy and blameless, adopted as full-heirs, and He is working things out to sum everything up in Christ and make *us* to be to the praise of His glory. **Paul was praying that we might come to know Him, ...and that we might perceive what He has called us to, what is our field of work, and what is the incredible power that is available to us to do His will.** These things are comparable to what He did when He raised Jesus from the dead, exalted Him to the Father's right hand, far above all other powers in the universe, ...and He gave Him, the exalted Jesus, to the church, to be our Source, origin, and the One who will enable, empower and bring us to the completion of God's purpose. We ourselves had been dead, spiritually lifeless, living in agreement with Satan's agenda and propaganda, and seeking to only satisfy our selfish desires, and were even, by our very nature, children of wrath, worthy of God's judgment. **BUT GOD, ...being rich in mercy made us alive together with Christ, raised us with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places to display His incredible, incomprehensible grace.**

By that grace we are-presently-being "having-been-saved-ones". HE did it all! It *didn't* come from *us*, at all. It wasn't from *our* works, in order that we could not boast in ourselves. All we did was to *believe* Him, ...to *trust* Him. It was all HIM! ...HIS initiative, HIS provision, HIS life-giving and transforming power!

(Okay, here comes the point!) **For "of Him" YOU are a fashioned-thing, ...something designed-and-made by Him, ...created in Christ Jesus for good works, ...acts that are beneficial and advantageous to people and for God's purposes, ...which God Himself has prepared beforehand for YOU to walk in. YOU have been shaped, molded and tooled by God, created in Christ to do things that God has in mind for YOU to accomplish. HE is going to bring these opportunities into your life, so that YOU could carry them out in conjunction with His inner working.**

You see, everyone of us is called to serve, ...to participate. A disciple is a trainee, an apprentice, one who is learning skills to apply in his or her area of work. Someone put it this way, "The ship of Christ has no spectators. All aboard are members of the crew." Are you okay with that? Have you seen yourself in that way? **Paul used another illustration. He said that we were all members of the body of Christ. We all have a necessary function that is meant to benefit the entire body.** Interestingly, Paul used that illustration in contexts where he wrote about spiritual gifts, ...Spirit-empowered enablings that we are to learn to use in our service to one another. **Again, we see God's grace, ...His empowerment and provision..., alongside of our opportunity to choose. In order to serve, we must choose to get involved, ...to take action.**

Do you believe that what Paul wrote about is true? Do you *believe* that God has molded, shaped and fashioned YOU, ...created YOU in Christ, ...and given to YOU new, Spirit-empowered abilities to serve and help others? Do you *believe* that He is sovereignly at work in YOUR life to direct hand-picked, God-prepared opportunities for YOU to use the gifts, skills and resources He has placed in your life to bring benefit to others? **If you *did* believe, how would that affect your outlook, your prayers and your expectations?** By grace we have been saved by means of faith. By grace we are also to live by means of faith. **What is faith?** Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, ...or expected? **Faith is *watching*, ...*expecting* that what God said is true. Faith is *ready to act*, because of what God had said, or is saying. Grace and faith come together in actions of obedience, ...when we step into opportunities God has prepared for us, and we put to work the unique abilities He has placed in us to help someone else.**