

Chapter 3: Amazing Grace

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

Christianity has always been cross-cultural. Its message transcends the various cultures of the world. Its roots were in a first-century Middle Eastern Jewish culture. Later it deeply impacted a sophisticated European culture. Then it continued to spread westward and became the basis of a New World culture. Today it is growing exponentially in an Eastern culture.

The modern church sometimes forgets that the Christian faith is not simply cross-cultural, but has always been countercultural as well. Western culture today is telling us in a thousand ways that there are many different roads that lead to eternal life. Many contend we are all going to the same place, just simply getting there by different paths. However, the Bible reminds us that "there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12). Salvation is entirely God's work, in God's way, and according to God's will.

Salvation is God's work

"by grace you have been saved"

Where does our salvation have its origin? Many today believe it is the work of man, that one can merit good favor by one's own good deeds. But Christianity is countercultural. Salvation began way back in the eternal councils of God in eternity past. Earlier in this Ephesian letter, the apostle Paul said that God "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (1:4). Salvation is God's work.

Our salvation is "by grace" and not in response to any good works we may or may not have done. It is provided for us wholly because of His grace, His unmerited and undeserved favor. The Father did not send the Lord Jesus to die for our sin because we kept begging and pleading with Him to do so. It was by His grace alone. There is a difference between mercy and grace. Mercy is not getting what we do deserve; grace is getting what we do not deserve. No wonder we call it amazing!

Salvation is God's work in God's way

"through faith . . . not of yourselves . . . the gift of God"

Whenever I read this verse, I find myself wanting to shout those words, "Through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God"! And, in the context, the following verse continues, "not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Scripture says our salvation is by grace and through faith;

that is, by trusting in God alone. The Greek preposition preceding the word faith indicates that our faith is the channel through which our salvation flows from God to us. It is through faith. In Israel archaeologists have uncovered an ancient aqueduct through which the Romans brought their fresh water from the Carmel Mountains in the north down to the port city of Caesarea. It stands today as a reminder, a word picture, of how our own faith is the aqueduct through which the living water of God's saving grace flows to us.

Paul's repetition of this truth that salvation is "not of yourselves" and "not of works" emphasizes the point. Go to India today and the religion of the masses will reveal some followers pulling wagons with giant hooks in their backs, others lying on beds of nails, and still others plunging into the Ganges River. All of these things are being done in a feeble attempt to appease the Almighty. But it is "by grace . . . through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." Certain followers of Islam today rush out to die in jihad in hopes of being ushered immediately into heaven and being welcomed by dozens of virgins. In Latin America, one can find people during the Holy Days of Obligation crawling on their knees up rocky paths to the top of mountains to be nailed to crosses, all in their morbid search for penance. But it is "by grace . . . through faith . . . not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."

There are only two religions in our world: true religion and false religion. One is a religion of works while the other is freely obtained "by grace . . . through faith." No amount of human effort, good deeds, or giving of our resources can buy God's favor. And what amazes me is that God is freely offering this incredible gift, and we still have to encourage and exhort people to receive it. Salvation is God's work ("by grace") in God's way ("through faith").

Salvation is God's work in God's way, according to God's will

Ephesians 2:8-9 cannot stand alone without the context of 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 is an awesome thought - "we are His workmanship." We actually get our English word poem from the Greek word translated "workmanship." You are God's special creation, His own work of art. He so fashioned and formed you that no one else has DNA like yours. You are unique to Him and indescribably valuable. You are His workmanship, His own special work of art.

The believer is a new creation. He is "created in Christ Jesus." Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, addressed this very fact, saying, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Christians are not men and women who have been improved upon because they took on a new set of moral standards. They are new creations in Christ Jesus, His own special "poem." Thus, the Christian life is not simply a changed life but an exchanged life.

And all this was "prepared beforehand" by God Himself "that we should walk" with Him. Not only is this salvation His work done in His way, but it is also according to His will.

As you memorize this valuable verse this week, meditate on the fact that God has made a way out of no way for any and all who will come to Him by faith alone in His finished work of redemption. And it is all because of His amazing grace! Yes, salvation is God's work, in God's way, according to God's will.

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