

By Grace, Through Faith: Getting Into God's Grammar about Salvation
Ephesians 2:8–10 | 10.01.2017 | More Than We Can Imagine

It is a joy to be back at OBC this Sunday . . .

As you may know . . .

Gary Kolomichuk and I went to Iceland last week to encourage and equip the believers.

For the last 2 years our church has supported the work of Gunnar Ingi Gunnarsson and the ministry of Loftstofan Baptist Church.

But this is our first trip we've made to the hauntingly beautiful country of Iceland.

We shared a bit during SS . . . and you can learn more at our church's website . . . but I also wanted to share a few highlights . . .

In the beginning of the week, Gary and I traveled to **Akureyri** to visit some believers there. In that town—the second largest in Iceland—there is not 1 free church.

Our hope is to see a church planted there in the coming years. So we went to encourage the weary saints there.

After that day trip . . . we spent the weekend with pastors who were visiting Iceland and we started a three-day Bible study on biblical theology in the Old Testament.

Then on Sunday . . . we went to church in the afternoon.

This corrected my sense of time when we pray for Iceland.

When we pray on Sunday mornings . . . we are not praying for events that have already happened. Rather, we are praying for the work of the gospel to have effect in the very moments that we are worshipping here.

In truth . . . it's this gospel that first united our hearts to Gunnar . . . and it's this gospel we believe has the power to bring salvation to the nation of Iceland.

That's what we are praying for . . . and why we continue to support the work there.

And it's this same gospel . . . of salvation by grace thru faith in X that beckons us today.

Indeed, this morning we come to one of the most precious and powerful expositions of the gospel in Scripture . . . Ephesians 2:8–10.

It's interesting . . . At Loftstofan Baptist Church . . .

There are three banners that stand on the platform.

Each has a verse associated respectively with faith, hope, and love.

And for faith the verse is **Ephesians 2:8–9** . . .

And knowing I would return to home to preach this passage . . . I asked Gunnar, why is this verse the verse you hung on that banner.

Here's what he said:

“Ephesians 2:8–10 was probably the most influential verse in opening my eyes to the gospel and having a healthy view of good works in light of it. I think it's the perfect defense against antinomianism and legalism. [Those are his words]

Antinomianism . . . means lawlessness . . . anti = against . . . nomos = law

Legalism . . . the practice of justifying myself by my actions / works

He goes on . . .

‘I never struggled w/ antinomianism, but (growing up in church) legalism was my thing’

However . . . it was huge . . . when I “realized that good works spring out of gospel joy and not so that I can boast in morality . . .”

Before being saved . . . Christianity was all morality to me . . . but when God opened my eyes to the gospel . . . I realized my morality wouldn't save me.

Rather, good works arise from dwelling on the reality of vv 8-9.”

And what is that reality?

That salvation is a free gift of grace . . . received by faith . . . in the finished work of Christ . . . that in turn produces a life of good works.

This is what was lost Medieval Church . . .and the Reformation labored to recover . . .

This is what has been lost in the state church in Iceland . . . and what Gunnar preaches

And this is what some of us may have lost or are tempted to lose . . . unless we give attention to Scripture and the message of Ephesians 2:8–10.

In fact . . . to put it another way

Ephesians 2:8–10 is a word that clarifies and corrects our gospel grammar.

It teaches us how God speaks about salvation, grace, faith, and works.

And thus . . . how we must speak if we're going to understand God's gospel.

So this morning . . . as we come to this text on the way to the Lord's Table

We are going to rehearse the grammar of the gospel from Ephesians 2:8–10.

And in these three verses . . . we find three fundamental truths that will help us get into the grammar of God's salvation.

1. We are Saved . . . By Grace . . . Through Faith

We will see this in verse 8 and we will need to carefully define these terms.

2. We are Saved . . . By Faith Alone . . . Not by Our Works

This – notion of faith ALONE – is what makes the difference btw RCC + Protestants

3. When we are saved . . . we are Christ's workmanship, created for good works.

That is, verse 10 shows us the positive reason for salvation . . .

We are created in Christ Jesus FOR Good Works

Woe to us . . . if we make Good Works a qualification for our Salvation.

So . . .

We are saved by grace through FAITH

We are saved by grace through faith ALONE

We are saved by grace through faith alone FOR THE PURPOSE of Good Works

That's the balanced message of the gospel in **Ephesians 2:8–10** . . . and it's one we need to get into . . . so that God's gospel grammar gets into us . . . and enables us to worship him rightly and walk with him joyfully.

1. Saved . . . by Grace . . . through Faith (v. 8)

In verse 8, we find a short sentence with staggering truth.

It reads: “For by grace you have been saved through faith.”

The word “for” indicates that this verse is given to explain the preceding verses.

As v. 4 says . . . God’s lovingkindness, his richness of mercy, his greatness of love . . .
. . . is what motivated God to save his enemies dead in sin.

In v. 5 . . . Paul gets ahead of himself and declares “by grace you have been saved”

And now in v. 8 . . . he completes his thought & explains how grace, salvation, faith work

And so in this first point . . . we need to define grace . . . salvation . . . faith.

We need to define them because . . . these words are easily thrown around in the church . . . but unless they are defined biblically . . . they’ll lead us astray.

In the days before the Reformation, this is exactly what happened . . . The church spoke often of salvation, of grace, and of faith . . . But . . . they defined them in error.

For the RCC. . . grace was a substance communicated through the seven sacraments.

It was by grace that a person was saved . . . but such grace came through infant baptism, where the pollution of original sin was removed . . . through the mass and thru penance.

In this system of religion . . . grace became a thing, a commodity to buy or sell through various religious practices.

In short . . . grace became a work . . . and so did faith.

Justification was not something God declared of those who believed.

Justification—a right standing with God—was the work of the faithful.

It was a process that the faithful completed through the sacramental system.

Assurance was lost . . . and the child of God always wondered – have I done enough?

And all this . . . because grammar of salvation was massively different!

So . . . here's the point . . . and it has massive application for us today.

Definitions matter . . . and especially when we talk about grace and faith.

If salvation—which we still need to define—is by grace and through faith . . . IF these things are what grants salvation . . . **we must know what they mean . . .**

AND what they don't mean! So . . . what do they mean?

Let's go back to Ephesians . . . to find definitions for grace, saved, faith.

First, GRACE is defined for us as an undeserved gift from God to man. But what is this gift?

First . . . it is the eternal gift of God to plan our adoption in Christ – **READ 1:5–6**

Paul praises the Father for his grace . . . which is defined by God's election of his children . . . that is in eternity past he chose a people on whom to lavish his love – this is grace

Second . . . grace is the gift of forgiveness and redemption – **READ 1:7**

The grace that God gave freely in eternity . . . has a specific focus in time – it is the forgiveness of sins.

Third . . . grace is the eternal unveiling of God's glory in the age to come – **READ 2:7**

Grace does not end at the end of this age . . . rather, for eternity God's grace will continue to awe and amaze the people of God.

Thus . . . grace is God's free gift to make sinners his adopted children through the sacrifice of his Son, or as **2 Timothy 1:9–10 speaks of God . . .**

Who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,¹⁰ and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

This free, forgiving, gospel grace is what grace is . . . and it defines what salvation is too . . .

Salvation is rescue from God's righteous wrath;
. . . it is the forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life.

Salvation is not a religious message of morality . . . or a political message of social action . . . or even a promise of earthly success to those who acknowledge God.

It is salvation from judgment upon our sins . . . and salvation for good works.

And we know this is what salvation is because of what the context Ephesians 2 says

Look at 2:1–3 . . . Here we learn what we are saved from . . . **READ**

So salvation is pardon for sin . . . redemption from judgment . . . rescue from captivity.

At the same time . . . salvation is the free gift of life . . . **READ 2:10**

Those who are saved . . . are new creations in Christ . . . they are saved **FOR** good works.

Good works does not save anyone . . . because dead men can't do good works.

Go back to Ephesians 2:1–3 . . . when you are dead . . . you follow the world, the devil, and your devilish desires.

In this condition you must be saved, you must be raised to life . . . only God can do that

So . . . as Ephesians 2:8 puts it . . . By Grace . . . You are Saved . . .

But Ephesians 2:8 also says . . . you have been saved **through faith**.
As with grace, we have already encountered **FAITH** multiple times,

For instance, in 1:13, he talks about how the Ephesians believed the gospel . . . **READ**

In this verse, we find faith has a material object . . . the person of X as told in the gospel.

IOW . . . saving faith is not just sincere belief in something spiritual . . . rather it is a personal trust in the person of Christ.

But also . . . it's not faith in Jesus however you like him . . . it's faith in the X of the gospel

In the time of Luther and Calvin . . . there was little disagreement about Trinity, deity of Christ, the reality of his resurrection, etc. . . . rather the debate revolved around the content of the G.

The same is true today. Lots of people talk about Jesus . . . but not the Jesus of the Bible.

Francis Schaeffer: I have come to the point where, when I hear the word "Jesus" . . . I listen carefully because I have with sorrow become more afraid of the word "Jesus" than almost any other word in the modern world. The word is used as a contentless banner. . . . [T]here is no rational scriptural content by which to test it. . . . Increasingly over the years "Jesus," separated from the content of the Scriptures, has been the enemy of the Jesus of history, the Jesus who died and rose and is coming again and who is the eternal Son of God. *Escape from Reason*, 78–79.

This is why we must define our terms carefully and repeatedly . . . because in speaking about grace and faith and Jesus we can miss salvation . . . IF we use the wrong grammar or the wrong words.

2. Saved . . . by Faith Alone (vv. 8b–9)

So . . . we can miss salvation if we wrongly define our terms . . .

But . . . we can also miss salvation . . . or struggle with assurance . . . or lead others astray . . . if we misunderstand the relationship between faith and salvation.

This is the main point Paul makes in verses 8 and 9 . . . and it hangs on one word – **Alone!**

In Ephesians 2:8–9 Paul makes three clarifying statements regarding what he said at the beginning of v. 8—2 negative; 1 positive.

He writes: And this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Paul isn't simply saying . . . we are saved by faith.

He's saying . . . WE ARE SAVED BY FAITH ALONE.

This one word . . . is vital for identifying what saving faith is.

It's not that faith in combination with other religious works saves us . . . it's that we are saved when we abandon trust in any other work, idol, or religion and trust in X alone!

This was a key point in the Reformation . . . and it's a key point today.

In every generation . . . mankind is tempted to trust in self . . . to trust in our own works

Either . . . to verbally boast in what we've done
Or . . . to smugly sit back and smile at our superior selves.

But the Word of God comes in to end all boasting . . . and to make us look away from ourselves . . . and to trust only in God.

And that's why Paul insists . . . that grace, salvation, and faith are all a gift.

If you read any commentary on this v. . . . you'll find attention given to the word THIS

Some commentators . . . want to say THIS is referring to faith . . . that even faith is a gift. This true, but the grammar doesn't quite work.

This is a neuter pronoun . . . faith and grace are both feminine.

Typically, feminine words are followed by feminine pronouns. That is not the case here.

For that reason, some want to say . . . because of the grammar . . . faith is not a gift

But that doesn't quite work either . . . B/C Paul speaks of faith as a gift in Phil 1:29.

And in this case . . . THIS does refer to the whole package . . . of grace, salvation, faith.

Going back to 2:5 . . .

When God makes us alive in Christ, we see how it is God's grace that saves us . . . meaning his grace supplies everything we need for salvation.

To say it differently . . . when dead in sin . . . we were unable to believe . . . but when he made us alive by grace . . . he granted us power + desire to believe and thus to be saved.

In this way . . . faith is not something we produce; it is not a work we conjure up.

Rather . . . when God saves someone . . . he gives us Christ's resurrection life by giving us his Holy Spirit . . . This is God's grace . . . which comes with faith needed to be saved.

This reading . . . finds support in the two negative statements . . .

Nothing in salvation is from yourself
Even your faith is not something you produce
Rather . . . it is the faith that God gives you as a gift of grace.

And this reading fits Paul's other letters . . . for instance in **Titus 3:5-7**

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Nothing in these verses mentions faith . . . rather salvation is entirely God's work.

Which is what salvation is . . . God raising dead men to life . . . so that with the life of the Spirit . . . new creations in Christ can believe the gospel and be saved.

For this reason . . . we believe salvation comes by grace alone . . . thru faith alone.

Faith is not the source of your salvation . . . God is the source of your salvation.

But in that salvation, God gives faith to believe in the grace of the gospel . . . and this faith is not coupled with anything else.

Rather . . . as the Reformers put it . . . we are saved by grace alone thru faith alone.

And (not but) . . . And . . . this faith alone . . . is NOT and canNOT be alone, which is the 3rd point

3. Saving Faith . . . is Never Alone (v. 10)

Ephesians 2:10 rounds out Paul's grammar lesson grace, faith, salvation, and works.

And in v. 10 . . . he says . . . **READ**

Truly, this verse is important because of the way that it describes salvation as a new creation . . . AND . . . for the way it speaks of salvation and works.

Thus far . . . Paul has rightly insisted that salvation IS NOT earned by works.

In his wording he goes beyond just saying . . . that the works of the law won't save. Rather . . . as Calvin put it . . . "there is no human effort that can save a man."

But that does NOT mean there is no place for good works in the Christian life.

Just the opposite . . .

For the man or woman who is saved . . . they are a new creation in Christ, created by Christ FOR the purpose of good works.

These works, Paul says, were designed by God before the foundation of the world.

They are not an afterthought in the plans of God . . . Instead . . . they are a primary reason for why God saved his people . . . so that we would glorify God with good works

Indeed, this is one way we know that we are children of God . . .

The faith we exercise leads us to love and serve others – Galatians 5

In truth . . . faith without love and good deeds is suspect – as James 2 says

Saving faith is visible through the good deeds it does . . . that's why James 2 emphasizes the point . . . that Abraham's faith was SEEN by his works.

No one is justified and made right with God by works . . .

But neither is anyone saved who is not sanctified and led to do good works – Eph 2:10.

[To cite John Calvin again](#) . . . Faith alone saves . . . but saving faith is never alone.

Good works are the glorious fruit of salvation . . . the evidence that God has rescued us from walking after the world . . . and given us new life to walk in his way.

So these verses give us the biblical grammar of God's plans of salvation . . . but so what?

Why should we labor over our grammar?

Well . . . for same reason computer programmers labor over code . . . and the reason coaches labor over fundamentals . . . if the basics are wrong . . . it all falls apart.

So much anxiety . . . assurance . . . joy . . . peace . . . good works are lost when the basics of salvation are mispronounced . . . **That's what Gunnar learned when he was saved**

If the grammar is bad enough . . . it not only destroys love and good works . . . it can actually threaten salvation . . .

So for the Christian . . . the grammar of the gospel is not incidental.

It is the root from which all good works flow . . .

and because God has saved us from walking in the ways of the world

and because he has saved us to walk in the ways of his Son

The first step of knowing God . . . is to know what God has said . . .

And . . . how grace, faith, and salvation inform every area of life!

The rest of Ephesians will give us greater instruction on how to do that.

Both how to believe . . . and how to walk in accord with the gospel we believe.

But for now . . .

We pause to worship the God who sent his Son to die in our place for our sins.

We ponder all God has done in eternity and time . . . to lavish on us his grace.

And We prepare our hearts to come to the Lords' Table . . .

to feast on the bread and the cup . . .

to taste the sweetness of his grace . . .

and to thank him for the salvation that comes by grace through faith.