



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Ephesians 2:1-10

“His Power and Our Salvation” -- TRANSCRIPT

Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 10. I think I would like to read through the ten verses, and then we'll come back with an introduction and an interpretation of the verses that we read. The Apostle writes,

“And you hath he made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which in times past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience, among whom we also all had our manner of life in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God who is rich in mercy for his great love, with which he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath made us alive together with Christ. (By grace ye are saved). And hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. 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. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, unto good works which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.

There probably is not a passage in the Epistle to the Ephesians that is more applicable to the present day, for the Apostle's subject is the subject of salvation by grace. There is no passage in all of the Bible which more plainly and clearly sets forth salvation by grace as Ephesians chapter 2 verse 1 through verse 10.

It is a passage, I think, that is particularly applicable to all of the many ways in which grace is perverted. Grace is often perverted by Christian ordinances, and we are told that it is necessary for us, for example, to be circumcised in order to be saved. That is not something that is a present problem for us, but that was a problem for the apostles in the early church, because that doctrine was propounded by individuals who made profession of faith in Jesus Christ. And the Apostle wrote such epistles as Ephesians, particularly Galatians, in order to counter that. And in his discussion of that question, he says that if we are saved by circumcision we are actually propounding a doctrine of salvation by works.

Today, I say we’re not concerned about “you must be circumcised to be saved,” but we do have people who say that you must be baptized in order to be saved. That’s a doctrine that is very widely taught in professing Christian circles: you must now only believe in Christ, but you must also be baptized.

Now the Apostle says that if we add the work of circumcision to faith in Jesus Christ, we’re guilty of transforming salvation by grace into salvation by works. What is there about circumcision that transforms grace into works? Well, circumcision was a work that was done by means of the physical body. It was done by means of a physical instrument. It was done visibly before others. It was performed by two people: one undergoing circumcision, the other performing it. No matter how you analyze circumcision you will find that all of the features of circumcision are present in baptism. It is something performed by means of a physical instrumentality: by means of water. It is performed by a person on another person. It is performed visibly for others. If the Apostle calls circumcision a work, it is clear that if he were told that one must be baptized in order to be saved, he would say, well that is to pervert grace and to make it works. So, all of the things that are true of circumcision are true of baptism.

Now the Apostle, I’m sure, would have felt that way. And so, if that is so, since that doctrine is so prominent today, this passage in which the Apostle sets forth the principle of grace as the principle of salvation, it’s certainly one that is relevant for us.

The passage we are looking at is one that is rather simple so far as its major movement of thought is concerned. The Apostle speaks first of our former condition. He’s speaking to the Ephesians, but we put our place in the place of the Ephesians. Then he speaks of the change that has been wrought in the Ephesians, and that is the change that has been wrought in us. And finally, he discusses the motivation or the principle by which this change has been wrought in us.

There're certain parallels between the work that God does in the new creation of the church with the work that he does in the first creation, the physical creation about us. When we think of the Book of Genesis, we think of darkness covering the earth. When we think of the word of God, "Let there be light," and we think of the plan of creation set forth in Genesis chapter 1. In other words, there's chaos, there's the moving of the Holy Spirit, and the word of God, and the result is the physical creation.

So, likewise, in the new creation, there is chaos: the chaos of the fall, the chaos of original sin, the chaos of sin, guilt and condemnation, which is our condition. And then there is the word of God that comes to us concerning the Gospel. And then, as a result of the coming of the word of God through the Gospel, there is the work of new creation, by which we who were chaotic, in the sense that we are sinners are under guilt and condemnation, are made new creatures in Christ.

Now when we turn to Ephesians chapter 2, the first question that we ask ourselves as interpreters is simply this, "What's the connection between chapter 2 and chapter 1 that we have just finished?" It is possible to make several different connections, and so I'd like to just suggest them to you. Commentators have differed here, but it is possible for us to make several connections, and I'd like to present them for you so you can think about it yourself.

The last verse of the first chapter reads "which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all." Now it is possible to go on and read "the fullness of him that filleth all in all *and you.*" You'll notice that chapter 2 verse 1 begins with the insertion of some words in italics: "Hath he made alive." Those words were not in the original text, the authors of the Authorized Version supplying them to give what they thought was the sense, because the word "you" is in the objective case, the accusative case in Greek. And so they have supplied "you hath he made alive." But it's possible to think of this as the church which is body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all, and that fills you." That's unlikely, but nevertheless some students have contended that that is perhaps the Apostle's connection.

It's possible to make a different connection. It's possible to look all the way back to verse 20 where we read "which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead and set him as his own right hand in the heavenly places," and then to read chapter 2 verse 1 as following "and *you* who were dead in trespasses and sins, he has set in Christ at the right hand of the father." That's a possible connection, too.

Then it is also possible that there is no real connection between chapter 1 and chapter 2, and that chapter 2 verse 1 is picked up, or resumed, in verse 5 of chapter 2. And so in that case we would not make a definite connection with chapter 1, but simply

say, "And you, hath he made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins," and then after the description of "you" in verse 5 we read, "even when we were dead in sins hath made us alive," so that he picks up what he started in verse 1, in verse 5, and says that it is you who have been made alive. Now it seems to me clear from the Authorized Version that that's the way the translators of that version took it. They supplied "hath he made alive" from the following verses, because the idea is expressed there.

There is one other possible connection, and that is it might be that this is to be connected with idea of power to us what who believe. And the Apostle then might be saying that God's power raised Christ and it quickened us. And we are to know it. The tie, then, or the "and," would simply be a connective: "and you." In other words, he raised Christ and he quickened us with him. That's the power that we are to know.

Well, let's just leave it at that. I think that's something for you to think about as we read the epistle. It does not make a great deal of moment as far as the principle sense of the passage is concerned, and so we'll just drop it at that.

The Apostle speaks in verses 1 through 3 of our former condition. And our condition before we came to know Jesus Christ is related to three things. First of all, we are related to the Creator: "and you, hath he made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins." Now, the best exposition of what it means to be dead in trespasses and sins, for me, is what happened in the Book of Genesis chapter 2 and chapter 3. Remember in Genesis chapter 2, after God had created Adam & Eve, he gave them a simple command. We all know this, but I'll repeat it, because there may be someone who just does not know this. I doubt it in this auditorium, but then someone may hear the tape and wonder what the Apostle means by dead in trespasses and sins.

Remember that in the Garden of Eden, after the creation of Adam and Eve, he took the man and he put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and to keep it. And he commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the Garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil thou shalt not eat of it, for in the day thou eatest of it thou shalt surely die." Now we know that in the third chapter description is given of how Adam ate of the fruit of the tree. No reference is made to his physical death, it is simply said that he has come under the judgment of God, and because he has come under the judgment of God, he shall die.

Now we gather, then, from the fact that he has said "to die" in the day that he eats thereof, but he didn't die physically, that the reference in Genesis 2, 16 and 17 must be to spiritual death. And so when Adam partook of the fruit, he didn't die physically, he died

spiritually. And that death, spiritually is to have its ultimate consequences as physical death. “Dust thou art, unto dust thou shalt return.”

Now we read in the New Testament, then, in Ephesians, “you who he hath made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins.” What does it mean to be dead in trespasses and sins? Well, it means to be spiritually dead. Adam was driven from the Garden of Eden. The fellowship that he had with God had been broken as a result of the sin, but he had been given word of a redeemer that was to come, and evidently he responded to that word. And even though he has been restored to a relationship with the Lord God, the consequences of his sin must be carried out and he must physically die.

Now we, today, are all born of sons of Adam and born in sin. We are born in sin. We are born in guilt and condemnation, because of Adam’s sin. As Paul says, “For this cause, by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin, so death passed upon all men for all sinned.” And it is clear from the following context of Romans 5 that the Apostle means all have sinned in Adam. Now we don’t have time to talk about the different ways in which that statement has been understood. I just state what I think the Apostle means. He means that when Adam sinned, Adam stood as the representative of humanity, as the covenantal head, and consequently the race was plunged into sin, every one of us. At any rate, we are dead in trespasses and sins, naturally. That is our condition.

Many years ago – you’ve heard me tell this story – but many years ago, I read a story by a Scottish expositor. And he said that there was a graveyard in Ayrshire, one of the counties of Scotland, where once a stranger was buried. It greatly distressed the people of that particular parish, so much so that they put a notice up on the outside of the graveyard to this effect, this is what it read: “This graveyard is reserved exclusively for the dead who are living in this parish.” Now, that is what we have in this parish of the whole wide world. We have dead people. They’re alive, just like Adam was alive, physically, after he had sinned, but nevertheless, he was spiritually dead. We are living in the parish, but we are dead, as we are born into this human race. The Apostle says, “We are dead in trespasses and sins”—that’s the relationship that we have to the Creator.

Now he also speaks of our relation to the created. He says in verse 2, “In which in times past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all had our manner of life in times of past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind.” So the Apostle not only says that we are dead with reference to the Creator, but we are like the other members of the world, bound together

in a life according to the world. We are under the power of the flesh and under the power of the devil.

What does Paul mean when he says “in which in times past ye walked according to the course of this world”? There are things that are worldly. It is possible for Christians to be worldly. Often Christians, in an honest attempt to avoid legalism, have so lived that they live a worldly kind of life. Their lives are dominated by the things that dominate the world. The interests of the world become the interests of the Christians: materialism, that is an aspect of worldliness; the desire to, at the expense of spiritual things, to succeed, to make your mark on the world. It’s perfectly alright to succeed. It’s perfectly alright to have ambition. It’s perfectly alright to want to be a success in all of our endeavors, business, whatever it may be. But when those things take the place of a relationship to the Lord God, that’s worldliness. That’s become like the world. That’s the kind of thing the Holy Spirit, after we are converted, desires to remove from us. Our minds need to be renewed. So that’s the course of this world.

But he says also that we are related to the prince of the power of the air. We walked according to the prince of the power of the air before we came to know Jesus Christ. In other words, the things that dominate Satan are the things that dominate us. A characteristic of Satanic activity is opposition to the word of God. We often blame Satan for things that are really, simply, the lusts of the flesh. I don’t deny that Satan may use the lusts of the flesh. But really Satan is more interested in the counterfeit of the truth. And so he’s not so interested in the fleshly lust types of things as he is in infecting the mind with false doctrine. Satanic things are the things that primarily have to do with the denial of the truth of God, the counterfeit of the truth of God.

The Apostle Paul, in 2 Corinthians, says that the servants of Satan are ministers of righteousness. He’s not interested in people living a coarse, fleshly, lustful life – that’s not Satanic – because even the world recognizes that as contrary to the will of God. What he likes is a minister of righteousness, a man who gives all the impression of being a very kind, gentlemanly, righteous individual, who stands in the place of a servant of God and gives out the word of God falsely. He’s much more interested in having a false teacher within the Christian church than he is with someone committing adultery, or in other types of fleshly sins.

So when the Apostle speaks here of our manner of life being according the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience, he’s talking about how we were walking contrary to the teaching of God. We did not understand the salvation by grace, which we have now come to understand.

You’ll notice too that he says we’re dead but we’re walking. The dead do walk. It’s a very clammy atmosphere in which the dead walk. That’s the atmosphere of the world. And it is, spiritually, a clammy atmosphere. But they do walk. And when he says “we all” he means both Jews and Gentiles, just as in Romans chapter 1 verse 18 through chapter 3 verse 20. So, he says, we all, among whom we all, had our manner of life in times past in the lusts of the flesh fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind. So, we walked according to the world, we walked according to the price of the power of the air, we walked according to the flesh.

Isn’t it striking that he calls Satan the prince of the power of the air? The Lord Jesus had a word for him, too: the prince of this world. Paul speaks of him as the prince of the power of the air. Many years ago, there was a very modern, liberal preacher by the name of S. Parks Cathman. He was a person who was known far and wide, very much like Harry Emerson Fosdick. He had a radio broadcast, very well-known man, very influential man. He was introducing a man over the radio one day, and an evangelical heard him. He introduced this man as being a mighty Christian minister, and he built him up by talking about his education and his background and his accomplishments, and then in one final rhetorical flourish he said, “And now we present to you the prince of the power of the air.” He didn’t realize, of course, that he was introducing him in a term that is used in Scripture as a term for Satan. Fortunately, an evangelical heard it and that’s story has been told by evangelicals around the country for about 50 years now.

So, the prince of the power of the air. The prince of the power of the air is Satan. The prince of this world is Satan. For this world has fallen into the hands of Satan by reason of the sin which took place in the Garden of Eden. We are naturally prisoners of sin and prisoners of Satan. It is the work of God through the Gospel, through the preaching of the Gospel to deliver those who are his from the prison house of sin.

Now, finally, in verse 3, in the latter part of the verse, the Apostle relates our former condition to our condemnation. He says “and were by nature children of wrath.” “By nature” means that we didn’t have to develop to become children of wrath. “By nature” denies any process of development. We are by nature, by birth, we are children of wrath. Charles Haddon Spurgeon says, “He who doubts human depravity had better begin to study himself.” We are by nature the children of wrath.

The Apostle then, having said that, goes on to speak of the change in our present standing. The Spirit of God – just as the Spirit of God must move over the chaos in Genesis chapter 1 – the Spirit of God must breathe on these dry bones of lost humanity in order to bring life to them. Now when we think of individuals who are dead in trespasses

and sins, we should not necessarily think of them as all having precisely the same condition in their death. Louis T. Talbot, who was for a number of years the pastor of the large Church of the Open Door in Los Angeles, told of conducting two funerals in one day. One was of a young man who had died in France, and his casket had been sent over to the United States, evidently, on a boat. And the body was such that in the casket it could not be opened because it had already begun to corrupt. But he said later on that same day he conducted the funeral of a young woman who had died at 21. He said her body was almost lifelike, and she looked as if she was just sleeping. But both of them are dead. There are different degrees in our death, but we are naturally dead in our trespasses and sins.

Now, if justice alone were meted out by God, then of course we should all be lost. Hosea says, “Thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help.” Now I think that’s what Paul means here when he says “but God”—most expositors of the Epistle to the Ephesians chapter 2 have pointed to that little expression—“but God” to speak of God’s intervention into this scene for the benefit of his elect. “But God, who is rich in mercy on account of his great love with which he loved us.” If you look at that in the original text, that word translated in the Authorized Version “for” is a preposition that means, because of the case that follows, “on account of.” So that it is by reason of his great love with which he loved us that he exercises mercy toward us. It’s love that is the source of the Father’s mercy to us.

How easy it is for us to think there’s something in us that caused God to exercise his mercy in behalf of us. But there is nothing that caused God to exercise his mercy to us except his sovereign love. That’s all. It’s not because he saw we would believe. It’s not because he saw that we would do some particular work. It is because of his sovereign love. You see how often the Apostle mentions this? People say, when you stress this in your preaching, “Well, you’re just riding the same old hobby horse.” Yes, it’s the same old hobby horse the apostles ride. They ride it all through the New Testament, and if you look carefully, the prophets and the historians of the Old Testament say the same thing, over and over again: but God who is rich in mercy, on account of his great love for us – not because he saw we would believe, not because he saw some good work in us – but simply according to his good pleasure, his love.

Now notice what he did, and I want you to notice the little word “together here,” because that’s the important word, it seems to me. “But God who is rich in his mercy for his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath made us alive together with Christ. (By grace ye are saved).”—we’ll talk about that in a moment, but



Paul inserts it here as a parenthesis—(By grace ye are saved). And hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ.” Notice the word together. Now if you’ll look at that in the original text, you’ll find that the Apostle has used a compound verb in these cases. He has, as he says here, he says made us alive together with Christ, he’s raised us up together, he’s made us sit together, in heavenly places in Christ.

Now who has been quickened? Who has been raised? And who has ascended to the right hand of the Father? Well first of all, Jesus Christ has done that. He is the one who’s done it. But the Apostle says you were quickened together with him, you were raised together with him, you have been made to sit together with him in heavenly places. Now what does that tell you? Just ask yourself, “What does that tell me?”

Well now, the most obvious thing – and if you haven’t got it you may have to take Theology 101 when you get to heaven – the most obvious thing is that our destiny is identified with Christ’s destiny, his work. He was made alive; we were made alive together with him. He was raised up, we were raised up together with him. He was made to sit at the right hand of the Father in heavenly places, we have been made to sit together with him. Why have we been identified with him? For this simple reason: he is the covenantal head of the redeemed family. What he does, he does for us. What we do is done because we are in him. We’re identified with him. That’s why he came, to redeem his people. His name is Jesus, for he shall save people from their sins. How does he do it? Well, he accomplishes an atonement for them, he is quickened as a result of his work, he is raised up, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and his people for whom he stands, they, too, have been quickened, raised, seated in him, because our destiny is identified with him. Everything that he did he did as a covenantal head. So when he bore the penalty for sin, our penalty was borne. That’s why heaven cannot punish one iota those for whom Christ died. You see, he has borne the penalty. There is no further penalty. We have borne our penalty in him. Heaven has no just grounds to punish those whose penalty has been paid.

Not only that, but having paid our penalty, he went to the right hand of the Father. And we, identified with him as our covenantal head, have, spiritually, taken our place at the right hand of the Father. Sure, to be quickened, raised up, eventually to be at the place of the right hand of the Father. That covenantal headship; what a magnificent thing that is. The life of the whole body is in the head. And when the head rose, the whole body rose. The Apostle speaks at great length about this in Colossians chapter 6 and Romans chapter 6, where he says we’ve been baptized together with him, we have

been raised up together with him to walk in newness of life. The Apostle expounds it as the great truth of identification with the Lord Jesus Christ.

I do not think that you can understand the New Testament if you do not understand that. But having that clue, you will understand what it means to have a redeemer, to have a covenantal representative who has done for us what we could never do, that, related simply, to the love of God in Christ. What a magnificent thing it is to realize that my acceptance with the Father is the acceptance Jesus Christ has with the Father. That’s why Paul talks about being in him so often, united to him. That’s why it meant so much for Paul. He saw him as our covenantal representative. Well, I don’t want to belabor that too much.

Now I want to turn to the fundamental motivation of this work. And the Apostle writes in verse 7 of that which is revealed of the future plans of God: “That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace and his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.”

Now notice the little word, “for.” For by grace are ye saved through faith. Not of works. Gift. His workmanship. Over and over the Apostle will stress it is by grace that is the fundamental motivation. But first of all, he will speak of this fundamental motivation as revealed in the future plans that he has for us: “that in the ages to come he may show the exceeding riches of his grace and his kindness toward us through Jesus Christ.” That is going to take ages to go over. So, one of the great things of the future is the manifestation of the exceeding riches of his grace and his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. I think one of the most wonderful things about heaven is going to be revelation and the manifestation of the wonderful ways in which God has shown grace to the saints of God. All of the countless myriads of saints, for there shall be many.

You know, people think if you preach the doctrine of the sovereign grace of God that what you’re really saying is that there’s just gonna be a few people in heaven, and the rest, well, it’s too bad about them. No, no. The Bible says that the sovereign grace of God is so great towards his creation that there will be a multitude in heaven which no man can number, out of every kindred tribe and tongue and nation. And if it’s true, as the Bible seems to teach, that in the last days there will be a conversion that can be called the conversion of the world, why do you know that in the future there will be more people on earth living and breathing than have been on earth throughout all of earth’s history? We’re not to think of the fact that when you put all of men together there’s just a little company to be saved. There’s a little flock now. There’s a remnant now. But then a vast manifestation of the sovereign grace of God in salvation, and then in heaven, we’re

going to see how God has manifested the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

When God says that he's going to manifest his grace, we do not have any right to expect him to act the way he has expected, and that he has no obligation to provide salvation for us. If God had done exactly what he did and if the fall had taken place, and men had fallen, and down through the years no man had been saved, God would be perfectly just. He didn't have any obligation to save you. He didn't have any obligation to save me. But his grace is manifested in the vast numbers of those who have come to know salvation through Jesus Christ.

Now if salvation exhibits grace, then salvation must be free. How could God exhibit the exceeding riches of his grace and his kindness toward us if we did things in order to merit his salvation? Anything that clouds grace and the freeness of it must be wrong. So like I said Sunday, what I'm doing on Tuesday night is the same thing. I'm clipping away some of the underbrush, which has grown up, which causes us to think, if we're not careful, there's something in me which caused God to exercise his grace toward me; something that I have done.

I used to love to hear Dr. Ironside preach when he came to Theological Seminary. He was a very remarkable man with a wide experience. He had worked with the Salvation Army. He was a preacher among the brethren, but he had worked with the Salvation Army. He also worked with the Navajo Indians. He later on was the pastor of the large Moody church in Chicago. Traveled all over the world. He had a great ministry of exposition.

Dr. Ironside used to just open the Bible up and expound the Bible chapter by chapter. He wrote 50 or 60 books. You can get them; some are very simple, especially the ones written later in his life. They're not a whole lot more than a few comments on the texts of the Bible, but his earlier ones, he has a lot of good material in them. Dr. Ironside had such a wide experience as an evangelist and Bible teacher that almost all his messages would tell us some very interesting story about his personal experiences. He was a man with a great sense of humor, too.

He used to tell the story of John Nelson who was a preacher in the time of John and Charles Wesley. He was a blacksmith before God saved him. And God used him in a very wonderful way to lead souls to Christ. One day he was talking to a self-righteous individual who said, "I don't need your Savior. I live right, and I've done good things. I'll take my chances with the rest of the people."

Well, Mr. Nelson replied, “Well look here my good man, if God let you into heaven, you’d bring discord there, because all the others would be singing ‘worthy is the lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing,’ and you’d be singing ‘worthy am I, glory to me, because I lived a consistent Christian life.’” He said, “If an angel heard you sing a song like that in heaven, why he’d throw you over the wall.” [Laughter]

Well, I’m not sure that that’s what an angel would do, because there wouldn’t be anyone in heaven singing that in the first place. But that’s a rather crude way of expressing the truth that there’ll be nobody in heaven singing about what they have done, but they’ll all chime in and say, “My soul shall make her boast in the Lord, and nothing else.”

Now, the Apostle having said that God’s fundamental motivation in our salvation, grace, will be revealed in his future plans for us, he also says it’s revealed in the present situation. And he explains *for* – this is why he’s going to show his grace in the ages to come – *for* by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God lest any man should boast. Now who could ever expound a text like this? “For by grace ye are saved through faith.” What is grace?

Well, grace, is God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense someone has said. G-R-A-C-E: God’s riches at Christ’s Expense. Well even a child can understand that. It reminds me of the incident in Acts chapter 15 when the Apostle came down from the north to the city of Jerusalem. And there they had a discussion in the early church, over the relationship of the grace of God to the salvation of Gentiles. They had been troubled in Antioch by men who said, “Except ye be circumcised in the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.” Well Paul had, Paul and Barnabas, had a great deal of dissention and disputation with them. By the way, those words express that in Antioch there was a great deal of an uproar. Now when false doctrine is proclaimed, we ought to get excited about it. The Apostles did.

So, they came, they decided they would go down to Jerusalem and talk over the matter. Now when they arrived in Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders there, and they told them all the things that God had done through them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees who believed – they were confused – saying that it was needful to circumcise them and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

And the apostles and elders came together to consider this question. And where there had been much disputing, again, you can see the whole church gathered together,

and you can see them debating the doctrine now: “Is it necessary to be circumcised in order to be saved?” And I can see them standing up here and standing up there, and expressing their viewpoint, and finally after a great deal of disputation, and a little bit of quiet settled over the audience, Peter stood up and he said, “Look here, men and brethren, ye know that a good while ago God made choice by the word of my mouth that the Gentiles should hear the Gospel and believe.” He reminded them of what happened in Cornelius’ house. And he said, “God who knoweth their hearts, bore them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit as he did unto us.” In other words, the Holy Spirit was given to Gentile individuals, and given to Gentiles before they were baptized, before they were circumcised, of course. And further, Peter says, “He put not difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.”

It wasn’t circumcision. It wasn’t baptism. It was by faith. They had not been circumcised, they were Gentiles, and they had not yet been baptized. So, Peter concludes with the Apostle’s creed. Now I know, when we think about the Apostle’s Creed, we think about an historical document. It’s alright. Many churches recite it every Sunday morning. It’s a lot of good Scripture in it, lot of good truth in it. Here’s something that’s perfect. He said, “But we believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved, even as they.”

Now, I’ve been always been impressed by what Peter said there. He said, “We shall be saved, even as they.” You would have thought he would have said “they shall be saved, even as we” because he’s talking about the salvation of Gentiles, whether they can be accepted in the same way that Jews are. But he turns it around, and he says “we believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved, even as they”—as if to say, any you who have any idea that because we are Jews, have some special relationship to the Lord, I’m more troubled about your salvation than I am about those Gentiles. “We shall be saved, even as they.” So the Apostle clears away a little bit of underbrush so that we can see the grace of God. For by grace are ye saved through faith.

Now when he says “though faith,” he’s talking about the instrumentality of our salvation. Kessig has a motto: “forsaking all, I take him.” Faith is simply the means by which we take him. Augustine said, “*qui creawit te sin a te, non sinawit, te sin a te.*” I didn’t hear anybody say amen, [laughter] so what Augustine said was this, “He who created you without you will not save you without you.” And what he meant in the context was that our part in salvation, which is not to be confused by being made of works, is simply to receive the salvation by faith. We do believe, God doesn’t believe.

We believe. But that response, Augustine goes on to say, is something created in us by God. We do believe. By grace are ye saved through the instrumentality of faith.

A faith given by God he [the Apostle] goes on to say. He states here, “And that not of yourselves lest any man should boast, it is the gift of God.” I don’t have time to talk about the exegesis of the Greek text here. Strictly speaking, looking at verse 8 and the expression, “And that not of yourselves,” literally “this not of yourselves,” that demonstrative pronoun, “this,” is neuter in gender. The word faith is feminine. The word grace is feminine.

Now some, there are illustrations in Classical Greek, in which I majored, in which demonstrative pronouns in the neuter gender may refer to feminine antecedents. So it is possible that we are to understand this, “By grace are ye saved through faith, and this, *faith*, that is the gift of God.” But that is not the ordinary thing. Generally, when a neuter pronoun refers to something in the preceding context, if there is not something neuter, specifically, some noun, it usually refers to a statement. Now that is what we have: For by grace are ye saved through faith, and *this* – what does he mean? Faith, specifically? Grace, specifically? No, not specifically. What he means is the whole statement: “For by grace are ye saved through faith” and this, this *by grace through faith salvation* is not of yourselves.

Now if this “by grace through faith salvation” is not of yourselves, it’s obvious that the grace is not of ourselves, by definition. And faith is not of ourselves, because the “by grace through faith salvation” is not of ourselves. If faith were of ourselves, he couldn’t say “by grace through faith salvation” is not of ourselves. So, when he says, this, not of ourselves, he means that our salvation is not of ourselves, faith included. Faith is the product of the working of God.

Augustine said he came to understand that faith was a gift of God by the statement, “Who maketh thee to differ.” What have you that you have not received? Do you have faith? You have received it. Faith is the gift of God. Ah, that makes the semi-Pelagians angry. But I love to cut off that limb of the growth so you can see grace. For by grace ye have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God: God’s gift. Not of works, for if it were of works, we’d be boasting. We’d have something to boast about. But we don’t have anything to boast about. I’m sure you people don’t have anything to boast about. Every time I look out, I’m amazed: are these the people of God? [laughter] And every time I come in you say, “Is he a man of God?” We don’t have anything of which we can boast. “That not of yourselves, it is the gift of

God, not of works, lest any man should boast.” If we boast, well my soul shall make her boast in the Lord, the Psalmist says.

Finally, *for* – listen, this salvation and its gracious nature is revealed in the new creation – for (there’s a great deal of emphasis in the Greek text on the pronoun, his) for *his* workmanship we are. Not our workmanship; his workmanship we are created in Christ Jesus *for* good works. We’re not saved by good works, we are saved for good works. For works: that’s a construction of purpose.

When we talk about salvation by grace, we don’t deny that Christians are to live moral lives. We just say no one can live a life pleasing unto the Lord until he has been born again and has the life of God, and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. We are not saved by works, but we are saved for works. Luther said, “It’s not against works that we contend, it’s against *trust* in works that we contend.” The Protestant Reformers spoke of this as *sola fide justificat sed non fides qua est sola*: “Faith alone justifies but not the faith which is alone.” True faith will issue in good works. Now not necessarily seen by you or me, but there must be good works.

Further, he says “good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” “Before prepared” the Greek text has it. In other words, God has not only prepared a people, but has prepared works that they should walk in. You see the fore-preparation of our Christian works goes with the fore-ordination of our salvation. “Which God hath before prepared that we should walk in them.” So, God uses you to be the means of the salvation of an individual that was prepared by God long before you ever came into existence, long before you were saved. “Before prepared that we should walk in them.”

One of the Calvinistic commentators has said, “Some spend all their lives praying, what wilt Thou have me to do?, and in their days caught napping.” God has before prepared certain things that we are to walk in as believers. And it is our responsibility to find them by the grace of God.

Well, our time is just about up. There are a number of great illustrations of this truth. I think that if I were looking for some illustration of Ephesians 2:1-10, the most obvious illustration would be Lazarus. Lazarus was raised from the dead by the Lord Jesus Christ. You read John chapter 11 and you’ll find Lazarus dead. And then you’ll find Lazarus loved, “Behold how he loved him,” they said, when Jesus wept at Lazarus’ grave. And then, the Lord Jesus standing by the grave of Lazarus said, “Lazarus, come forth!” The word of God. And he came forth.

Gary Custis, who was Carolyn Custis' brother (Carolyn was our, one of our church secretaries for so long and now is the wife of Frank James who's attending Theological Seminary in Philadelphia). Gary and Martha Custis were here over the last couple of weeks, and while Gary was here we were talking a couple of times, and we were talking about grace. And he was talking about, specifically about the doctrine of the sovereignty of God in our gracious salvation apart from free will, and apart from works. And I think he said – I've got the substance of this, I'm not sure of the source of it – but, he said that he heard some preacher talking about Lazarus and how that Lazarus came forth through the word of God and not by any exercise of free will. He said the preacher said that Jesus stood by that grave and (he said this cynically) he said he looked down in there and he said, "I see that hand, I see that hand." [laughter]

No, no. Lazarus was dead. He was loved. "Lazarus, come forth!" And the word of God reached Lazarus by the power of God, and this dead man responded through the grace of our great God. Well, that I think is salvation by grace. That's his power by salvation. The great imperative of course, is faith. For by grace ye are saved through faith. In Ephesians 1 verse 13 the Apostle says, "In whom ye believed." Believe is our responsibility. There is human responsibility. We are responsible to believe. And even though that is the gift of God we are responsible to believe. And so I call upon you, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shall be saved if you are not. Let's bow for a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for these wonderful words from the Apostle Paul which so beautifully expound the grace of our salvation.

Lord, we acknowledge there is nothing in us which would merit any acceptance before Thee. We thank Thee for great love which Thou hast directed toward us in the sovereignty of God.

How blessed we are and we give Thee thanks through Christ, Amen.