

EPHESIANS 2:8-10

INTRODUCTION

These verses are probably the best-known verses in the entire bible. They certainly stand alongside the likes of John 3:16 as one of the most memorised verses. It is so familiar to us that perhaps we think that we know all there is to know about these verses and that I am not going to say anything new.

Well you are right, I am not going to say anything that better preachers than me have not said but it is always good to hear and remind ourselves of familiar truth because we so often forget these truths not necessary theologically but in our practical walk with God. These verses tell us how God has saved us by grace, they tell us how God's grace comes to us through faith and then we are told how God does not save us by works so that we cannot boast but our salvation is a result of his workmanship.

But I want to use verses 8-10 to ask one question and seek to answer it by using these verses.

1. WHY AM I A CHRISTIAN?

If we look closely at these verses we have here a description of what a Christian is, he is saved, not by works but by grace and this is through faith so that no Christian has any right to boast. But why am I a Christian, why are you a Christian, is it because of our upbringing, our religious background, our own righteous life, our works of charity or what is it that makes me and you Christians.

a) A Christian is someone who has been shown grace by God. Paul says that we are Christians entirely and solely because of the grace of God. Let me just remind you once again that grace means unmerited and undeserved favour. It is an action, which arises entirely from the gracious character of God. This means that our salvation comes to us entirely because of God. So we are Christians because of God and not because of ourselves. He showed us grace.

Salvation comes to us in spite of ourselves, it is unmerited in any shape or form, and it is not God's response to anything in us, as some people seem to think. There are those who believe that God knew that we would turn from our sin and trust him so as a result he shows us grace. Well if that was the case then it would not be grace for grace is unearned and unmerited.

In fact the whole context of this chapter tells us that salvation is by grace for we were dead in our sins, we were following the ways of the world, the ways of Satan and our own sinful nature, we were by nature objects of wrath. But then God intervened and showed us grace. He made us alive with Christ set us free from our bondage and instead of being objects of wrath we became objects of grace, objects of his love and mercy. We deserved nothing but eternal punishment in hell but God has showed us grace and as a result has saved us. If you are a Christian tonight you are a Christian because of God and his grace. Now any honest assessment of ourselves will agree with the bible's assessment; it will show us that salvation comes to us by grace. Can you remember what you were like before you became a Christian?

Can you remember the rebellion that was in your heart, the pride that filled our hearts and the hatred towards God that we so often showed? Can you remember the wilful rejection of God's word and the scoffing of Christian things? But now look at us, O we might not be what we want to be, we might not be as godly as we seek to be but we now love God, we now have a heart and attitude towards God that shows a willingness to follow him and to pay the cost of doing so.

We now have a desire to tell others about our salvation and a desire to pray and read God's word with a submissive heart. How is such a change possible? Could we do that by ourselves, would

we ever want to change if left to ourselves? The answer is No, we are what we are because of the grace of God, without God coming to us in grace and granting us salvation then we would happily still be in our sins and in rebellion against God. No! It is by grace that we are saved.

Now this means that we have no grounds whatsoever for boasting, Paul says that this salvation is 'not of ourselves' so that we cannot boast. You see if somehow or other we could earn or achieve our salvation by ourselves or could contribute something to our salvation then would we not be the most boastful people in the world. We would also as a result probably be the most obnoxious people in the world as well.

Now before Paul was a Christian he knew what it was to boast, he was so proud of his religion and of his achievements (Philippians 3:4-6). He was a proud Jew, a proud Pharisee, proud of his religious past proud of his morality and he didn't mind telling people just how proud he was. Pharisees loved to show off their religion they loved to boast about it (Matthew 6:5) and Paul would not be any different from the rest of the Pharisees.

But now Paul as a Christian has nothing to boast about. His salvation is all of grace not of works. Now this is the same today, you can tell a true Christian from a religious person by the way they speak about their faith. A religious person will speak about what they do for the church, all the activities they are involved in and how moral and upright they are. Whereas a true Christian will speak of Christ and his salvation and how sinful and wicked they were and how great and glorious God is. A religious person is a proud and boastful person whereas a true Christian will be humble and will not boast of himself but will boast of Christ.

From a purely human perspective it seems that it is much harder to convince a religious person about the truths of the gospel than it is to convince others. The religious person is full of works, they place their hopes on works, they boast of their works they are proud of their works and therefore the idea of salvation purely by grace is repulsive to such a person.

They are convinced that their good works are pleasing God and achieving for them salvation but God says that salvation is not of works but it is by grace therefore no one can boast. It is often the religious who oppose the evangelical church and the evangelical gospel. The gospel strips us bare; it leaves us with nothing to boast about except Christ himself, it reveals our foolishness and exposes our pride in religion and it reveals our sin and unworthiness before God.

Religion sadly does the very opposite, it makes us feel proud, it makes us feel worthy, it makes us feel righteous, this is why a religious person will not be saved until they ditch their religion, until they are humble enough to see the foolishness of religion and the wickedness of their sin.

So we are Christians because of grace therefore it is not of works so we have nothing to boast about.

b) A Christian is someone who has been granted faith by God (v 8) – Now there has been much controversy concerning verse 8. It concerns the words and 'this not of yourself.' Is it talking about the faith or about the salvation that comes by grace? Now this controversy will never be settled for, as I understand it, it does not depend upon the Greek grammar or the words that are used and therefore you will have good preachers coming down on either side of the debate.

I think it is referring to the faith but it doesn't matter because at the end of the day both sides of the debate are saying the same thing. One says that salvation from start to finish is by grace and not of ourselves, which includes faith, and the other side says the exact same thing and emphasises that the faith is not even of ourselves.

The key thing is that it is not of ourselves, the salvation is not of ourselves and the faith that we exercise is not even of ourselves; otherwise our salvation is not of grace because it becomes dependant of something in us i.e. faith. God grants us faith to believe upon Jesus, faith is the instrument by which God's salvation comes to me personally. I am saved by grace through faith; faith is just the medium through which the grace of God bringing salvation enters my life. It is not our faith that saves us, Jesus Christ saves us and faith is the vehicle by which this salvation comes to us.

We do not by nature have saving faith, this is God's gracious gift to us, it is not that everyone has faith and all we have to do is to convince people to place their faith in Jesus. No! We do not possess saving faith, we need God to grant it to us so that we can believe and trust in Jesus for salvation.

The faith is part of the salvation process that comes by the grace of God to sinners. Salvation is not of ourselves, from start to finish it is by grace and it is through faith. I am a Christian and you are a Christian because of God's grace and because we have been granted the gift of faith to believe in Jesus and to trust him for our salvation. What this means is that when we tell people to place their faith in Christ we do so not believing that they already possess faith and all they have to do is use it for their salvation.

We do so knowing that if they place their faith in Christ they do so only because God has made them alive in Christ and has granted them the gift of faith to believe. We must not give people the impression that their faith saves them. That somehow they have contributed something to their salvation. Otherwise they will have a false idea of the gospel an idea that says God contributes grace and we contribute our faith, grace ceases to be grace if we are able to contribute anything. Now once we understand these truths we will realise that our salvation depends upon God and not upon ourselves.

So when we fail to read our bibles we are not going to think that we have lost our salvation or when we are gripped by fear we will not think we have lost our faith. I do meet people who say they have lost their faith. But the truth is that if they have faith they cannot lose it for it is God's gift to us and if they have lost it then they never had it.

Our salvation depends upon God alone therefore find your security in him alone not in Christian activity or in Christian disciplines for when we think of our security in those things then we are simply failing to understand what it means to be saved by grace through faith.

c) A Christian is someone who is created in Christ Jesus (v 10) – Paul says that we are saved by grace through faith and now he says we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus. The idea behind the word 'workmanship' is the idea handiwork; we are God's handiwork. Christians are made not born. A craftsman will take a piece of wood and out of it using his great skill will make a violin that plays beautiful music to others.

Well in the same way God takes rotten and evil sinners and he works upon them by grace and makes something beautiful out of them. God makes us Christians we are a new creation in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17) and God continues to work in us moulding us and making us beautiful. This is the work of sanctification but that is not my point this evening my point is that we are Christians because God has worked upon us and made us a creation; we are new creatures in Christ.

It's not that he has reformed the old nature and made it better, No it is that he has given to us a new nature we are a new creation. He has breathed into us new life that is the life of Christ.

This means that as we think of our Christian life we must **not** think of it in terms of what I must do, I must pray more, and read my bible more but we must see it as what God is doing, he is working in us we are his workmanship, we are his new creation in Christ Jesus and he is still working in us making us and moulding us to be more like Christ.

We will never pray more, or read our bibles more or attend the means of grace unless God works in us therefore we ought to pray for God's workmanship in one another so that we will grow as Christians and increasingly become more like the Lord Jesus. Now of course God works in us through various means. His agent is the Holy Spirit who applies the work of Christ to us and the means he uses are prayer, bible study, preaching of the word, the ordinances and the fellowship of the saints etc.

This is how God works in us today and these are the means he used to bring about our new creation in Christ.

But what is the outworking of God's workmanship. It is good works (v 10). Good works never saves us but good works is the evidence that we are saved. The purpose of God's work in us is so that we will do good works. We were created for good works. God's eternal plan was to save us but his purpose in saving us was to lead us into a life that corresponds with Christ's life a life full of good works.

He is our example (John 13:15); we were saved by grace through faith so that we will bear fruit that will last (John 15:2, 5, 8). Your life and my life if we are saved people will be impacting upon others; they ought to be seeing in us a life full of good works because that is how Christ's lived and that is the outworking of our salvation. So are we living a life full of good works, are we doing good to people both in side our church and with those in our community? Are we known for our good deeds? Well that is how it should be, that is normal Christian behaviour if we are not full of good works then there is something wrong, sin is holding us back from fulfilling the purpose for which we were saved.

Perhaps we need to repent of selfishness so that our lives can shine out for Jesus with a life full of good works.

So as I close let us remember why we are Christians? We are Christians because of God's grace; we are Christians because we have been granted the gift of faith. We are Christians because we are God's workmanship we have been created in Christ Jesus and finally let us never forget the outcome of our salvation, a life that is full of good works a life that looks just like the life that Jesus lived while he walked this earth.

AMEN