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All Grace and Grace Alone

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One of the great truths which the Reformers declared and defended was *sola gratia* which means “only grace” or “grace alone.” This phrase emphasizes that salvation is by grace alone. It implies that God saves sinners without reference to their foreseen merits or achievements. He saves them only because it pleases Him to do it. He forgives their sins according to¹ the riches of his grace (Eph. 1:7). The New Testament explicitly teaches this truth. Paul clearly teaches this truth. He teaches it perhaps most clearly in his letter to the church in Ephesus when he reminds them that they were saved by grace alone through faith (2:8–10). The purpose of this article is to look at this passage in Ephesians in order to see what Paul is teaching the Ephesian believers about *sola gratia*. It will consider the context, content, conclusion, and consequences of the doctrine of salvation by grace alone.

CONTEXT

Paul writes to the Ephesians to remind them of their relationship to Christ and the results of that relationship in their lifestyle. He wants their conduct to be consistent with their calling. Paul begins by reminding them of their calling (1:2–3:21). God has blessed them with every spiritual blessing in Christ. He then reminds them of their conduct (4:1–6:9). They are to walk worthy of their calling. This means that they must live in a manner that corresponds to their position in Christ. Their calling must affect their conduct. Finally, Paul reminds the Ephesians of the conflict they are experiencing as they attempt to live in accordance with their calling (6:10–20). They struggle against spiritual, not human, enemies.

As Paul reminds them of their calling, he praises God for their salvation (1:3–14). All three persons of the Trinity were involved. They were selected by God, saved by Christ, and sealed with the Holy Spirit. He then prays that God will enlighten the Ephesians so that they will understand and appreciate their spiritual blessings (1:15–23). He also prays that

¹ The preposition translated “according to” (*kata*) indicates that grace is the ground or basis of God’s forgiveness.

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they will be aware of the power of God at work in their lives. Paul continues by reminding them of their salvation experience (2:1–10). They had not always enjoyed these spiritual blessings. They were lost, not saved.

Paul describes their past situations (1–3). They were dead in their trespasses and sins. Because of this they were children destined for wrath.² He next delineates God’s solution (4–7). Because they were dead,³ the Ephesians needed to be made alive. Therefore God saved them and made them alive. The solution for spiritual death is spiritual life. God has made them alive that in the coming ages He might show the riches of His grace which He showed when He saved them. This demonstration of His grace is the purpose of God’s divine activity in their lives. Paul then explains their salvation (8–10). God saved them by grace through faith that they might do the good works which He prepared for them. This explanation of God’s salvation is the focus of this article.

CONTENT

Paul begins this section by writing that the Ephesians were saved by grace⁴ through faith. This statement consists of three parts: a verb construction, “you were saved,” an articular noun which is translated “by grace,” and a prepositional phrase, “through faith.”⁵ Each of these parts requires attention.

You Have Been Saved

Paul starts by telling the Ephesians that they have been saved. This means that they have been rescued⁶ from some danger which they were facing. This danger was spiritual death. The Ephesians had been saved or rescued from this desperate state of death which their sins had brought about.⁷ The verb construction which Paul uses to describe this rescue is

² The words “of wrath” (*orges*) indicate the destiny of the readers as a result of their sinful nature—their hereditary moral corruption. It speaks of their hopeless situation. See David L. Turner, Ephesians 2:3c and *Peccatum Originale*, *Grace Theological Journal* (Fall 1980), 195–219; and Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 101.

³ The participial phrase “when we were dead” (*ontas hemas nekrous*) is most likely causal, “because we were dead.” It could be simply temporal, “when we were dead.” Either way, it describes their condition which required God’s intervention.

⁴ The article *te* with *chariti*, “grace,” is an article of previous reference. It shows that “grace” here is the same grace which Paul mentioned in verse seven. For this use of the article see Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 57–58.

⁵ The sentence order is the order of the English translation rather than the order of the Greek text.

⁶ Salvation language points primarily to the idea of rescue from danger; Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 103.

⁷ Leon Morris, “Salvation,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 858.

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quite important.⁸ He usually speaks of salvation as something future (Rom. 5:9–10; 10:9, 13). However, here (as in 2:5) he presents the Ephesians' salvation as something past and present.

Their salvation had a definite starting point and was completed in the past.⁹ The Ephesians were not always saved. For a period of time in the past they were dead in their trespasses and sins (2:1) and deserved God's wrath (2:3). Because of this they needed to be rescued and at some point of time in the past they were saved. The Ephesians' salvation was not only begun in the past, it was also completed in the past.¹⁰ It is an accomplished fact which needs nothing added to it. God has saved them, and their salvation is complete.

Not only was the Ephesians' salvation completed in the past, they are presently saved. Paul draws attention to the continuing effects of the state of the Ephesians' salvation.¹¹ Their salvation is not simply a past event; it is a present state.¹² God's past rescue has continuing effects for their present time. The Ephesians' status is described as—"saved." Just as a person who has been saved from some physical danger lives in a "saved" condition, so also the Ephesians are living in a saved condition.

Paul wants them to realize that their salvation is both completed and continuing. They are already experiencing the benefits of their salvation.¹³ They are in salvation territory; the danger is behind them; they are safe.¹⁴ This is in contrast to their previous state before

⁸ The construction "you are saved" (*este sesomenoi*) is a perfect periphrastic.

⁹ The force of the perfect tense of the participle "saved" describes an event that was completed in the past. See F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, R. W. Funk, translator and revisor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 1975; Wallace, *Grammar*, 573; 614–15; and M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek Illustrated by Examples* (Rome: Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 1963), 96. See also Mitton, *Ephesians*, 94.

¹⁰ The force of the perfect participle "saved" (*sesosmenoi*) describes salvation as being completed in the past. See Blass and Debrunner, *Grammar*, 175; Wallace, *Grammar*, 573; 614–15; and M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek Illustrated by Examples* (Rome: Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 1963), 96.

¹¹ "You have been saved" (*este sesosmenoi*) is perfect periphrastic construction. It is most likely used here to emphasize the results or present state of those who were saved. See Wallace, *Grammar*, 574–75. The translation "you are saved" reflects the emphasis of the construction. See Young, *Greek*, 162.

¹² The focus of the perfect tense form "saved" (*sesosmenoi*) is on the Ephesians' present state of affairs which the saving action produced. See Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, second edition (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 40; and Wallace, *Grammar*, 574–75.

¹³ C. F. D. Moule, *Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), 19, writes that "you have been saved (and therefore enjoy your present status)" makes good sense.

¹⁴ Ronald A. Ward, *Hidden Meaning in the New Testament* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1969), 44.

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they were saved. They were not safe; they were living in a state of spiritual death deserving the wrath of God (2:3).¹⁵ But since then they have been saved and are saved.

The Ephesians' salvation was also a caused experience. Paul makes it clear that the Ephesians did not save themselves. The participle, "saved," indicates that the Ephesians received rather than caused the saving action.¹⁶ Someone else saved them. That someone else was God. He did the saving.¹⁷ It was worth his work entirely. The initiative and energy operating in their salvation were God's.¹⁸ It was His energy and not their effort which caused their salvation. He saved them because of His mercy which comes from His great love.¹⁹ The Ephesians' salvation was a completed, continuing, and caused salvation.

By Grace

These words which Paul places at the beginning of the sentence for emphasis point out what caused God to save the Ephesians. The words stress the role which grace played as the cause in God's saving action. The idea of grace is not new to the Ephesians. Paul already mentioned the role of grace in the Ephesians' lives in this letter. He wrote that they were predestined to be God's sons for the praise of His grace (1:5–6) and that they were redeemed through Christ's blood according to the riches of God's grace (1:7). Now he writes that they also have been saved by grace.

The word order of the sentence indicates that they were saved entirely by grace. Grace refers to God's benevolence which finds expression in His generosity in saving them. It is God's "utter generosity, unselfish, spontaneous, recklessly prodigal generosity, which acts wholly out of loving concern for the Ephesians' need, even if they are completely unworthy of His love and help which He offers to them."²⁰ It comes from God's love that

¹⁵ The imperfect tense verb "were" in the statement "were by nature children of wrath" describes the Ephesians' state that was in progress in past time. It paints a picture of the unfolding, progressive nature of their presalvation state. See Wallace, *Grammar*, 543; and Young, *Greek*, 113.

¹⁶ The participle "saved" (*sesosmenoi*) is passive voice which means that the Ephesians were the recipients of the saving action.

¹⁷ The passive participle (*sesosmenoi*) is an example of a divine passive which is used when God is the obvious agent of the verbal action. See Wallace, *Grammar*, 437; and Young, *Greek*, 135.

¹⁸ J. L. Houlden, *Paul's Letters From Prison* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 284.

¹⁹ The prepositional phrase "because of his great love" (*dia ten pollen agapen autou*) indicates that God's love is the motivation for His mercy; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians, Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, 1990), 103.

²⁰ C. Leslie Mitton, *Ephesians, New Century Bible* (London: Oliphants, 1976), 92.

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commands His action, but which is absolutely free.²¹ It means the completely undeserved, loving commitment of God to them.²²

It points to the special nature of God's saving action as one of gratuitous generosity to an undeserving sinful humanity.²³ Grace speaks of the "wholly generous act of God"²⁴ which reflects the wholly generous nature of God. This grace is what caused God to save the Ephesians from death. They deserved God's wrath but instead received His grace.

Grace is the basic ingredient in God's dealing with mankind; everything else comes from and builds on grace. Therefore the Ephesians' salvation comes from grace. It was the cause²⁵ of the Ephesians' salvation. They were in danger because they were dead and could not save themselves. For this reason God intervened in their situation and initiated salvation. This grace is the same grace²⁶ which Paul mentions earlier in his letter.

It is that grace which causes God to give all His kindness to the Ephesians (2:7). Paul leaves no room for human merit. The meaning and message of "grace" eliminate any human merit in salvation because the basic thought of grace is that of free giving.²⁷ Paul's emphasis is that it is by grace that the Ephesians have been saved.

Through Faith

Paul now explains how the Ephesians received the salvation which was caused by God's grace. The phrase "by faith" denotes the means²⁸ by which God saved the Ephesians. Paul uses this same phrase elsewhere to show that men receive God's justification in the same way (Rom. 3:22–25; Gal. 2:16). Salvation was God's activity, but the Ephesians had to receive it. This required a human activity. Faith was the human activity. Faith was the

²¹ Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3 vols. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 3:501–502.

²² Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 103.

²³ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 103. For a summary of the meaning of "grace" see pp. 102–104.

²⁴ J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 202.

²⁵ The dative case of "grace" (*chariti*) indicates the cause or the basis of God's saving act. Therefore it is best to translate it with "by" or "on the basis of." See Wallace, *Grammar*, 167–68; and Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms*, 99.

²⁶ The presence of the article (*te*) with "grace" (*chariti*) indicates that Paul is referring to the "grace" which he previously mentioned in his letter. It is sometimes called the *anaphoric article*. See Wallace, *Grammar*, 217–20; and Young, *Greek*, 57–58. Consequently, this verse could be translated "For by *this* grace you have been saved."

²⁷ H. Conzelmann, "charis," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 1304.

²⁸ The preposition "through" (*dia*) when used with a noun (*pisteus*) in the genitive case denotes means. See James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Wimbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Washington: University Press of America, 1979), 24; Moule, *Idiom*, 56; Porter, *Idioms*, 149–50; Wallace, *Grammar*, 167–68.

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link which related the Ephesians to God's salvation. It was the response which allowed salvation to become operative in their lives. It was the response which made it possible for the Ephesians to receive what God has already accomplished. It describes the simple act of accepting. God accomplished their salvation by His grace; they accepted His salvation by their faith.

It is important to notice that their faith was not the cause of their salvation. It was the mere *causa apprehendens*.²⁹ Paul's language does not allow for their faith to be the cause of their salvation.³⁰ When Paul wrote earlier that God's love was the cause of His mercy (2:4), he used a different construction to indicate cause.³¹ Here he uses a different construction which indicates means and not cause.³² God did not see or know in advance that the Ephesians would believe in Christ and then save them because of their faith. Rather, God saw that they could not believe because they were dead, and He saved them because of His grace through their faith.

"Faith" connotes persuasion, conviction, and commitment and always implies confidence³³ which causes a person to respond and believe or trust someone. When the Ephesians heard the gospel, they responded by believing its message and trusting God (1:13). Paul uses "faith" here to describe the Ephesians' response at that time. Their belief was an active commitment, denoting their trust in God. Through this act of faith the Ephesians received God's salvation. Faith was the means by which the Ephesians apprehended and accepted what God had accomplished.

"By faith," along with "by grace," eliminate any suggestion of human merit. The passive verb form, "you have been saved," rules out any possibility of human effort. Together these words show that the Ephesians had nothing to do with their salvation. Salvation was not and could not come from or be caused by human effort or merit. It was the work of God totally, and it was by His grace alone.

And That Not of Yourselves

Paul continues his explanation of salvation by grace by writing that the Ephesians' salvation did not come from the Ephesians. This statement is the first of three statements

²⁹ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 118.

³⁰ If Paul wanted to indicate cause, he would have used the accusative noun (*pistin*) instead of the genitive (*pisteos*). See Porter, *Idioms*, 149–50.

³¹ Paul uses the same preposition (*dia*) ("because of") with an accusative case noun (*agapen*) ("love") to indicate cause.

³² Paul uses the same preposition (*dia*) ("through") but with the *genitive* case noun (*pisteos*) ("faith") to indicate means.

³³ Spicq, *Lexicon*, 3:110.

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which emphasize this truth. It presents a problem since the Greek reads literally “and this is not of you.” The problem concerns the antecedent of “this.”³⁴ Is its antecedent “faith,” “grace,” or the entire salvation process? In other words, is it “grace” or “faith” or “salvation by grace through faith” which did not come from the Ephesians?

It seems most likely that “salvation by grace through faith” is the antecedent. This means that the entire salvation process which is “by grace” and “through faith” did not come from the Ephesians.³⁵ Paul is then saying that this “by-grace-through-faith salvation” did not come from³⁶ the Ephesians themselves. This statement excludes their involvement in their salvation. They are not the source or cause of it. Paul is explicitly stating that the Ephesians’ salvation is not their doing.

It Is the Gift of God

After telling the Ephesians where their salvation did not come from, he tells them what it is. It is the gift of God. By writing this, Paul continues his emphasis on salvation by grace. Their salvation did not originate from them, it was offered to them as a gift from God. Both nouns in this short clause³⁷ are significant. The word “gift” underlines the thought of the graciousness of their salvation. Its use here reinforces the statement that they are saved by grace.

A gift is something not earned but given because someone wants to give it. Paul’s use of “gift” means that God wanted to give the Ephesians something which they did not earn. The characteristic feature of this gift of salvation is not God’s act of giving it, but His intention behind it.³⁸ God intended the Ephesians to be a showpiece of His grace. He wanted people to see His grace in them.

³⁴ “This” (*touto*) is a demonstrative pronoun and must refer to a preceding noun or concept as its antecedent.

³⁵ Since the gender of “this” (*touto*) is neuter, and that of both “grace” (*chariti*) and “faith” (*piesteos*) is feminine, neither can be its gender grammatically. For a discussion of the possible antecedents see F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann, 1984), 289–90. For the view that “faith” is the antecedent see Hodge, *Ephesians*, 119–20; William Hendriksen, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), 121–22; and Robert H. Countess, “Thank God for the Genitive!” *The New Testament Student in His Field*, John H. Skilton, ed. (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1982), 252–56. For a helpful grammatical study on this problem see Wallace, *Grammar*, 334–35.

³⁶ The basic meaning of the preposition “of” (*ex*) is “out of,” Porter, *Idioms*, 154. It indicates origin, cause, or source.

³⁷ There are just three words in the Greek, (*Theun to doron*).

³⁸ Dictionary of *New Testament Theology*, 2 vols., Colin Brown, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975–78), 2:39. Hereafter DNTT.

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He adds that this gift comes from God.³⁹ The word “God” occurs first in the word order which provides both an emphasis and a contrast. Paul emphasizes that God is the source of the gift. It comes from no one else. Paul also contrasts God with “you” in the preceding statement. It is not from you; it is from God. The literal translation brings out the emphatic force of the clause: salvation—not of you; of God is the gift.

Not As a Result of Works.

Paul concludes his description of salvation by grace by stating in yet another way that the Ephesians had nothing to do with their salvation. He already told them that they did not cause their salvation. He then further explains that statement. The Ephesians did not cause their salvation, and in particular their works were not the cause⁴⁰ or basis of their salvation. This is a logical step in Paul’s explanation. Since their salvation was caused by God’s grace, it could not come from them. Since their salvation was a gift from God, it could not come from works. To put it another way, if salvation came from works, it could not be a gift. Salvation cannot be both a gift of grace and a reward for works. This terse statement rules out any kind of human effort. It negates any contribution on the Ephesians’ part. Their salvation is not the result of self-originated and self-supported effort.⁴¹ This statement brings out by way of contrast the absolute character of God’s grace in their salvation. His grace was the cause or basis of their salvation.

The word “works” in this verse most likely means something that a person does.⁴² It means any conduct by which the Ephesians try to earn God’s approval.⁴³ It refers to any human efforts in general directed towards obtaining salvation. It is unlikely that “works” here refers to works of the law. Paul does not write “works of the law” as he usually does when he is referring to the works of the law.⁴⁴ Also, since he is writing to predominantly Gentile readers, it seems unlikely that “works” means “works of the law.”⁴⁵ Paul told the Cretans that they were not saved by any works of righteousness which they did (Titus 3:5) and he is telling the Ephesians the same thing. The Ephesians were not saved by doing any works which they might think would earn them salvation.

³⁹ The noun “God” (*Theou*) is a subjective genitive which means that God gives the gift.

⁴⁰ The preposition “of” (*ex*) denotes source or cause.

⁴¹ Brooke Foss Westcott, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Macmillan, 1906), 32.

⁴² Since Ephesians was written to predominantly Gentile readers, it is extremely unlikely that “works” means “works of the Law.” See Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 112–13.

⁴³ G. B. Caird, *Paul’s Letter From Prison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 53.

⁴⁴ When Paul does not use the phrase “works of the law” to refer to those works required by the Law, it is clear from the context that he has the Law in view.

⁴⁵ See Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 112–13.

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Paul writes that the Ephesians were saved at some point in the past which resulted in their present saved state or status. This means that they are saved. They were and are saved because of God's grace. They had nothing to do with their salvation. They apprehended their salvation by means of their faith. Because their salvation is by grace through faith, it is not caused by them.⁴⁶ It is the gift of God, and it is not caused by their works.⁴⁷

That No One Should Boast

After Paul very clearly and emphatically tells the Ephesians that they are saved by grace alone, he now gives the purpose for salvation's being by grace alone.⁴⁸ God has saved them by grace alone in order that none of them might boast. "Boast" is an interesting word. It does not primarily refer to boastful words. It rather describes the attitude of mind—self-congratulation and pride—which may lie behind boastful words.⁴⁹ It describes an attitude which expresses a high degree of confidence in something.⁵⁰ "Boasting" refers to confidence in one's own spiritual competence before God.

If salvation came from the Ephesians or their works, then they could have had confidence in their accomplishments, and they could have boasted concerning their salvation. However, since the Ephesians contributed nothing to their salvation, they could not have confidence in anything they did, and therefore had no grounds for boasting regarding their salvation. Grace eliminated any possibility of an attitude which resulted in boasting. They had to humbly accept it as a gift from God.

Paul wrote earlier that the purpose or goal of God's elective program for humanity was for the praise of His grace and glory. God chose the Ephesians to salvation for the praise of His glorious grace (1:6). They received an inheritance in Christ that they might be to the praise of God's glory (1:12). They were sealed with the Holy Spirit to the praise of God's glory (1:14).

⁴⁶ The different prepositions which Paul uses in these three statements are significant. The Ephesians are saved by *means* of their faith, not *because* of themselves, not *because* of their works.

⁴⁷ Since these three clauses, "not of you," "the gift from God," and "not because of works," are joined without connectives, they form a kind of asyndeton. This construction gives the statements greater liveliness and force. See John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1883), 153.

⁴⁸ The words "lest anyone should boast" denote God's purpose or intention in saving the Ephesians by grace.

⁴⁹ Mitton, *Ephesians*, 97.

⁵⁰ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 1:431.

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God's glory refers to His person and power, His revealed character.⁵¹ Man recognizes God's glory, and then he responds to Him.⁵² Man responds to God by praising Him because of his character. The Ephesians' salvation reveals God's character. It shows them who God is through what He has done for them. God saved them that they might respond by praising Him for who He is and what He has done when He saved them. God has done everything, and they have done nothing. As a result, salvation by grace eliminates boasting. One can only imagine how much man would do if his salvation were by works and not by grace. Salvation by grace results in praise, not pride.

For We Are His Workmanship

Paul now gives a further and final explanation why the Ephesians' salvation cannot be caused by them or their works. It is God's workmanship.⁵³ Actually, Paul writes that the believers are God's workmanship. They are God's creation. The word "workmanship" denotes that which is made. Paul uses this word elsewhere only in Romans 1:20 where he refers to the material creation as that which God made. Here he uses it to refer to the Ephesians' spiritual creation and to describe the Ephesian believers as God's workmanship.

The word describes the complete change that occurred in the Ephesians' lives when God saved them. Salvation was more than a reformation; more than a change of the reigning purpose in life; more than change, however great a change, in the life itself.⁵⁴ Their salvation was a divine creation. Paul's use of the word "workmanship" indicates that he views their present condition as saved people to be the result of God's creative activity.⁵⁵

The emphasis of the statement "we are His workmanship" is on the pronoun "His." It reads: His workmanship we are. It means, "We are His (and no one else's) work."⁵⁶ The

⁵¹ A. Skevington Wood, *Ephesians in The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 11, Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 26.

⁵² *DNTT*, 2:44.

⁵³ The word "workmanship" (*poiema*) means "creation." It refers to what is made. Hendriksen translates it "handiwork"; *Ephesians*, 124. Harold W. Hoehner, "Ephesians" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuch, eds. (Wheaton: Victor, 1983), 624, writes that it denotes a work of art or a masterpiece.

⁵⁴ Justin A. Smith, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians, An American Commentary on the New Testament*, Alvah Hovey, ed. (Valley Forge: The American Baptist Publication Society, n.d.), 39.

⁵⁵ Greek nouns which end in (*-ma*) as "workmanship" (*poiema*) does usually specify the result of an action. See Blass and Debrunner, *Grammar*, 59.

⁵⁶ Marcus Barth, *Ephesians*, 2 vols., *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), 1:226.

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force of Paul's statement is that God, not the Ephesians themselves, made them what they are as believers.⁵⁷

With this emphasis Paul continues to stress God's exclusive role in their salvation. Just as they contributed nothing to their original creation, so also they contributed nothing to their new creation. The Ephesians' salvation is the result of God's activity, not of their attainment.

Created in Christ Jesus for Good Works

After Paul describes the Ephesians as God's workmanship, he adds that they were created in Christ Jesus for good works.⁵⁸ Paul is here giving them the purpose of God's new creation. God saved the Ephesians that they might do good works. The role of "works" in salvation now changes. Works were not the cause of salvation, but now good works are the consequence of salvation. The Ephesians were not saved because of works, but they were saved for good works. The goal of their new creation is actual good works. Their works did not cause their salvation, but their salvation causes works.

Before they were saved their lives were characterized by sinful works. They fulfilled the desires of their flesh and mind (2:3). Now that they are saved, the Ephesians are to experience an actual life change which is evidenced by a change of works. Their lives now are to be characterized by good works which reflect God's character and action.⁵⁹ Their whole course of life must change.

God's choice of the Ephesians to salvation has in view this actual life change. Holiness is a goal of salvation. God chose the Ephesians that they might be holy and without blame (1:4). An improvement in their manner of life is an aspect of this holiness. Good works are an important part in the improvement in their manner of life. Therefore, when God saved them, He created them anew for good works. In fact, Christ died to purify for Himself a people who were zealous of good works (Titus 2:14). In addition, those who have believed in God should take care to do good works (Titus 3:8). Holiness or sanctification, then, is a corollary, not the cause, of salvation. Salvation does not come

⁵⁷ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 114.

⁵⁸ The participle "created" (*ktisthentes*) most likely indicates an attendant circumstance. It means that "created ... for good works" accompanies "we are his workmanship." For this use of the participle see Wallace, *Grammar*, 640–41; and Young, *Greek*, 158–59.

⁵⁹ Bruce, *Ephesians*, 291.

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from works, but works come from salvation. Works are the outcome, not the cause, of salvation.⁶⁰

Which God Prepared Beforehand, That We Should Walk in Them

Paul concludes by writing that these good works for which the Ephesians were saved were prepared beforehand by God. The verb “prepared beforehand” carries the sense “determine beforehand.”⁶¹ This word occurs elsewhere only in Romans 9:23 where Paul refers to believers as vessels of mercy which God prepared beforehand for glory. It refers to God’s decision in eternity past to bestow His mercy on certain individuals whom He has sovereignly chosen.⁶²

This decision is related to God’s electing activity.⁶³ Here Paul uses this word to relate the ethical activity of the Ephesians to the electing activity of God. It describes something which He did. It denotes His living and active work in their sanctification. The word indicates that God’s preparation of good works not only preceded their salvation but also preceded the foundation of the world.

The Ephesians’ new creation, then, involves not so much their salvation and their sanctification as God’s elective activity. When Paul writes that God has prepared these good works beforehand, he is stressing that their good deeds, or their sanctification, as well as their salvation are by grace. The Ephesians’ good deeds cannot be chalked up to their own resolve but are due solely to divine grace.⁶⁴ God saved the Ephesians to be holy, and in His grace determines the good works He wants them to do in order to be holy. God not only desires a life change, but He designs that life change. Consequently, the Ephesians can take no credit for their salvation or sanctification; both are by grace.

While it is true that God prepared these good works, it is also true that the Ephesians must walk in them. Their sanctification involves human responsibility. The human activity of “walking” is still necessary. The Ephesians must still live out God’s purpose in their everyday lives.

⁶⁰ Paul’s choice of prepositions is instructive. The Ephesians are saved *for* (*epi*) good works, not *because of* (*ex*) works.

⁶¹ *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3 vols., Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990–93), 3:154.

⁶² Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, Gordon D. Fee, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 608.

⁶³ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 369.

⁶⁴ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 116.

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Paul uses the word “walk” for the walk of life, particularly in the moral sense. It designates one’s conduct or behavior or way of life. This word pictures the Ephesians as walking through life as one walks through a marked path. Since the word is neutral in itself, it must be qualified by some word or phrase. Paul qualifies it here by the phrase “in them” which refers back to the good works which God prepared beforehand. The good works then mark the path in which the Ephesians are to walk. In other words, God has prepared a path of good works, and the Ephesians are to walk in that path.

God prepared these good works in advance that they might mark the Ephesians’ way of life.⁶⁵ Before the Ephesians were created anew and saved, God had prepared a sphere of moral action for them. This sphere was like a road of good works which He prepared for them to walk in.⁶⁶ The purpose of the whole plan of their salvation is the glory of God through them doing the good works which God prepared for them.⁶⁷

CONCLUSION

What does Ephesians 2:8–10 teach us about salvation? It teaches us two important truths. First, it teaches us that salvation is by grace alone. It is not by works at all. We are saved because of God’s work and not because of our works. It is God’s gift. Second, it teaches us that sanctification is by grace alone. We are not saved because of works, but for works. There is more to salvation than just “getting saved.” Salvation also involves “acting saved.” However, God prepared beforehand the works which lead to our sanctification. God saved us that we might do the good works which He designed and determined for us. He saved us by His grace alone, and He sanctifies us by His grace alone.

CONSEQUENCES

What then? What are the consequences of salvation by grace alone in our lives? There should be at least three. Salvation by grace alone should affect our worship, our walk, and our witness.

Worship can be defined as recognizing God’s worth and responding to Him. It therefore involves both recognition and response. The consequences of salvation by grace alone, then, involve recognition and response. We must recognize that God saved us by grace—

⁶⁵ Bruce, *Ephesians*, 291. Here Paul writes that God prepared good works for the Ephesians to walk in. In the pastoral epistles he writes that God’s people are to be prepared for every good work (2 Tim. 2:21; 3:17; Titus 3:1).

⁶⁶ Charles J. Ellicott, *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians*, reprint edition (Minneapolis: James Family, 1978), 52.

⁶⁷ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983–85), 352.

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not because of works, but for works, and we must respond by praising our gracious God for His gracious salvation.

Walk refers to our conduct as we live each day. It includes our whole course of life. It also involves recognition and response. We must recognize that God saved us that we might walk in good works which He prepared for us. Then we must respond by practicing those good works.

Witness refers to telling other people about salvation by grace alone. They need to know that they are dead in their sins and trespasses and need to be rescued from this danger. This, too, involves recognition and response. We need to recognize that they are dead and need to be rescued, and we need to respond by telling them that they can be saved by grace alone.

God has saved us that we should be to the praise of His glory. May our lives bring praise to His glory through our worship, walk, and witness because we have been saved by grace alone.

About the Author

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⁶⁸ Arp, W. (1997). "All Grace and Grace Alone." *Reformation and Revival*, 6(4), 25–48.