

WHAT IS THE “GIFT OF GOD”?
A Study of Ephesians 2:8-9

“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.”
(Ephesians 2:8-9)

You may have memorized these verses as a child or as a new believer. The message of Ephesians 2:8-9 is extremely important because it tells us how a person is saved. Sadly, most people in this world do not understand how a person is saved.

We have here in these two verses the ABC’s of the gospel. Salvation is presented clearly and plainly. These verses are so simple that a child can easily understand them. In these two verses the simplest words are used. Almost every word in these two verses is a simple one-syllable word (except for “yourselves” and “any”).

Sometimes theologians can greatly complicate what should be very simple. God has given us His Word, and though there are some difficulties, overall it presents a message that is very clear and simple.

Ephesians 2:8-9 is a wonderful passage explaining how a person is saved. It’s a clear and simple explanation of salvation in few words, and as mentioned, mostly one syllable words.

It is wonderful to be saved by grace and not by works! Have you ever considered how difficult it would be if you had to be saved by your own good works?

Let me illustrate this by passing along an old yarn that Pastor Lehman Strauss once shared. It goes like this:

An Irish man dies. Of course, St. Patrick (not St. Peter) meets him at the Pearly Gates. Patrick says to the man, “You need 10,000 points to make it into heaven. So I want you to tell me all the good things you have done, and I’ll give you a certain number of points for each item, depending on how good it was. When you reach 10,000 points, you get in.”

“Okay,” the man says, “I was married to the same woman for fifty years and never cheated on her, not even in my heart.”

“That’s wonderful,” says St. Patrick, “that’s worth three points!”

“Three points; is that all?” he says. “Well, I attended church all my life and supported its ministry with my tithes and with my service.”

“Terrific!” says St. Patrick. “That’s certainly worth one point.”

“Only one point!?! Well, I started a soup kitchen in my city and worked in a shelter for homeless veterans.”

“Fantastic, that’s good for two more points,” St. Patrick says.

“Only two points!?!” Exasperated, the man cries, “If I ever make it into heaven, it will have to be by the grace of God!”

“You’ve hit the nail on the head,” Patrick says, “10,000 points! Come on in!”

Yes, thankfully salvation is by the grace of God and not by works!

Before we go further into this study, let me clarify one word in verse 8. It is the word in the KJV translated “that” [Greek “*touto*”]. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and **that** not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” It’s helpful to translate this word as “this thing.” “***This thing*** is not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” We need to determine what “this thing” refers to.

Our main question, as we look at this verse, is this: **What is the gift of God?** There are basically three answers to this question and only one answer is the correct answer.

1) Many people teach that the gift of God mentioned in this verse is faith. “For by grace are ye saved by faith and this faith is not of yourselves; this faith is the gift of God; this faith is not of works, lest any man should boast.” John MacArthur and John Piper are examples of men who teach that faith is the gift of God in Ephesians 2:8. This is the position of most men who embrace Reformed Theology. There are other men, not Reformed, who also hold the view that the gift of God is faith. These would include Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Darby, William Kelly, C. H. Mackintosh and others. These are men that I deeply respect, and I highly value their writings. Yet, I disagree with them on their understanding of this verse. I am not asking the reader to agree with me and I am not asking the reader to agree with these great men of God. I’m simply asking the reader to listen to what I share in this booklet and then search the Scriptures daily and diligently to see if these things be so (Acts 17:11).

2) What is the second possibility? If faith is not the gift of God, then what is?

The second possibility is that the gift of God mentioned in this verse refers to salvation. This is my position set forth in this booklet: “For by grace are ye saved through faith, and this salvation is not of yourselves, but this salvation is the gift of God; this salvation is not of works lest any man should boast.”

3) There is a third possibility which is popular among many people, even among some good dispensationalists. I’m going to explain what it is and then I’m going to rule it out. This view says that ***the gift of God is everything***. The gift of God is grace; the gift of God is faith, the gift of God is salvation; the gift of God is everything mentioned in verse 8. The gift of God is the entire salvation package which includes everything: “For by grace are ye saved through faith, and this grace-faith-salvation is not of yourselves, but this grace-faith-salvation is the gift of God, and this grace-faith-salvation is not of works, lest any man should boast.”

What is the problem with this view? The pronoun (“that” or “this thing”) is singular not plural. The gift of God does not consist of several things; it consists of one thing. Paul did not say, “These things are the gift of God,” but he said, “This thing is the gift of God.” So I’m going to rule out this third view. Paul is not referring to many things but to one thing.

Also, it is important to distinguish between the gift and the reception of the gift. Salvation is the gift and that gift is received by faith. Faith is the hand of the heart that reaches out and receives God’s gift of salvation. Our church’s doctrinal statement makes a clear distinction between the gift of salvation and the reception of that gift. Listen carefully to this well-worded statement: “We believe that salvation is the gift of God brought to man by grace and received by personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹ Notice that a clear distinction is made between the gift and the reception of the gift. The gift is salvation and that salvation is received by faith.

On this basis I reject the view which says, “The gift of God is the entire salvation package which includes faith.” No, we need to keep a proper distinction between the gift of salvation and the reception of that gift which is by faith.

So our main task is to decide between the first two views. Is the gift of God in Ephesians 2:8 faith or is the gift of God salvation?

To solve this problem I’m going to use three methods: 1) **The Common Sense Method**. Which view makes the most sense? 2) **The Grammatical Method**. We will see what the grammar requires. 3) **The “Comparing Scripture with Scripture” Method**. We will see what the Scriptures teach elsewhere about the gift of God.

1. The Common Sense Method

Let’s use our common sense. What exactly is Paul talking about in these two verses? When he says, “This thing is the gift of God,” what is he talking about? This is not difficult to answer. It’s obvious what Paul is talking about in these verses.

Let me make what seems to be an obvious statement. These verses are talking about how a person is saved. “By grace are ye saved through faith.” That is exactly how you are saved. You are saved by grace, through faith and not by works.

Paul’s main subject is salvation. He explains very clearly how a person is saved.

So Paul’s main topic is salvation.

His main topic is not faith. Now certainly faith is involved because if you are going to talk about salvation, you must include faith because we are saved through faith. But Paul’s main topic is salvation, how a person is saved.

His main topic is not grace. Grace is also involved because we are saved by grace, but the main topic is salvation. These verses are talking about how a person is saved. The main subject matter is salvation.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” What is the gift

¹Our doctrinal statement is based upon the IFCA doctrinal statement.

of God? Since Paul is talking about salvation, common sense would tell us that salvation is the gift of God.

The Reformed View

Did you know that according to the teaching of Reformed Theology, a person must be saved before he can believe? Or, as they prefer to say it, a person must be regenerated before he can believe. They teach that regeneration precedes faith.²

“By grace are ye saved through faith.” This text says: You are saved through faith. But how can you be saved through faith if you are already saved before you believe? Reformed Theology actually teaches that you are saved and regenerated apart from faith: before you ever believe, you are first regenerated. First you must be regenerated, they say, and only then are you able to believe. Some in Reformed circles even teach that a person can be regenerated as an infant and not come to faith in Christ until years later!³

Dear friends, no one is saved and no one is born again and no one is regenerated until that moment when he puts his faith in Christ. Faith is the hand of the heart that reaches out and receives God’s gracious gift of salvation, and included in that wonderful salvation package is regeneration or the new birth. The moment we believe, we are born again.

Charles Spurgeon highlighted the absurdity of saying that a man must be regenerated before he believes:

If I am to preach the faith in Christ to a man who is regenerated, then the man, being regenerated, is saved already, and it is an unnecessary and ridiculous thing for me to preach Christ to him, and bid him to believe in order to be saved when he is saved already, being regenerate. Am I only to preach faith to those who have it? Absurd, indeed! Is not this waiting till the man is cured and then bringing him the medicine? This is preaching Christ to the righteous and not to sinners. [from his sermon entitled *The Warrant of Faith*]

So in conclusion, the common sense argument understands that Paul, in Ephesians 2:8-9, is talking about how a person is saved. His main subject matter is salvation, not faith. The gift of God, provided to us by grace and received through faith—*that gift is salvation*. How we thank God for His unspeakable gift (2 Cor. 9:15)!

2. The Grammatical Method

Our second argument is based on grammar. Greek is different from English because in Greek the nouns are all assigned a gender. For example, in English the word bread is neither masculine nor feminine, it’s just bread. In the Greek language, however, the word bread (*artos*) has been assigned a gender. It is a masculine noun. In the Greek language every noun is assigned a gender—it is either masculine, feminine or neuter. Neuter means it is neither feminine or masculine. So in the Greek language there are three genders. Every Greek noun is either masculine, feminine or neuter.

Whenever I think of the neuter gender I’m reminded of a story about my father-in-law, a veterinarian. He often would neuter dogs and cats. One little boy had his cat neutered, and without remembering the correct terminology, he told his teacher, “*The Vet put my cat in neutral!*”

²See our study, “Does Regeneration Precede Faith?” This is available from the Middletown Bible Church website.

³See Appendix 4.

Let me show you a word in the neuter gender that is found in Ephesians 2:8. In the King James Version it's the word "that." It could also be translated "this thing." It is a demonstrative pronoun in the neuter gender. "For by grace are ye saved through faith and **this thing** is not of yourselves, [this thing] is the gift of God."

What does "this thing" refer to? The word "that" (KJV) or "this thing" is a pronoun; it stands in place of a noun. What noun does this pronoun refer to? We need to find the antecedent of the pronoun. This simply means that we need to find the noun that the pronoun refers to. We know that the pronoun ("this thing") is neuter in gender.

Here is the grammatical rule: ***Pronouns must agree with their antecedent in gender.*** For example, if the pronoun is feminine, then the noun that it stands for must be feminine. In this case, our pronoun is neuter ("this thing), and so "this thing" must stand for something that is neuter.

This is an enormous problem for those who say that faith is the gift of God. "This thing" cannot be faith because the noun FAITH is feminine. The word faith is not neuter, and thus it cannot be the antecedent of that pronoun. If Paul had wanted to say that faith was the gift of God, then he would have made the pronoun feminine, but he did not. Faith is not the gift of God. Faith is not what Paul is referring to in this verse.

So if it cannot refer to faith, then to what does "this thing" refer?
It cannot refer to "grace" because grace is also a feminine noun.

It is interesting that there are no neuter nouns in verse 8 except for "gift" which is what we are seeking to identify. Thus we have somewhat of a dilemma. However, I'd like to call your attention to the main verb. The main verb is the verb "saved." "For by grace **are ye saved.**" This key verb tells us what Paul is talking about. The question he is answering is this: How is a person saved?

According to experts in Greek grammar, if Paul had wanted the pronoun to refer to **the idea or concept contained in the verb**, then the neuter gender would be the one to use.

You could say it this way: "For by grace are ye saved through faith and **being saved** is not of yourselves, and **being saved** is the gift of God, and **being saved** is not of works lest any man should boast."

In other words, "this thing" that he's talking about, "this thing" which is conveyed by the main verb "saved," "this thing" refers to salvation.

So with this in mind, let us look at the verse again.

"For by grace are ye saved through faith, and this thing that I'm talking about, this salvation is not of yourselves" (paraphrased).

When the text says that salvation is "not of yourselves" what does this mean? It means that salvation is (literally) **not of you**. Salvation is of the Lord. There is no way that you could ever possibly save yourself. You need a saving solution outside of yourself. Salvation is not **of you**. You could never work for it; you could never earn it; you could never merit it. Salvation is not of you; it's by grace. The great majority of the people in this world think that salvation is of themselves, that it is something they must achieve, something they must earn, something they must gain by good works, etc. No, salvation is not of you.

Let's go back to the Reformed view for a moment. Instead of understanding that salvation is not of

yourselves, they would say “Faith is not of yourselves.” Literally, “faith is not **of you.**” Reformed men would say, “God must give a person the gift of faith.” We would agree with Reformed men that apart from God’s mercy and gracious enabling and enlightenment, saving faith could not be exercised (John 6:44,65; Romans 9:16; Matthew 11:27; 16:16-17; Acts 16:14; etc.). On the other hand, it is also true that there is a sense in which faith really is **of you.** You must do the believing (Acts 16:31). Men are responsible to believe (John 3:15-16). Men are commanded to believe (1 John 3:23; 2 Thess. 1:8). Men are condemned if they don’t believe (John 3:18). We cannot save ourselves, but our part and our responsibility is to believe. God does the saving; we must do the believing.

So it does not make good sense to say “*faith* is not of you,” because God puts the responsibility to believe squarely on man. Man must believe or perish (John 3:16; 2 Thess. 2:12). On the other hand, it does make good sense to say “*salvation* is not of you.” Salvation is of the Lord. We contribute nothing to our salvation. Salvation is based totally on the finished work of Jesus Christ which fully satisfied God’s justice. The penalty was paid in full! By faith we simply receive Christ, resting fully on what He has accomplished for us.

So back to verse 8: “salvation is not of yourselves (literally, not of you); salvation is the gift of God.” God wants to give you something that you could never have apart from God’s grace. It’s the most valuable gift in all the world.

So far we have covered our first two arguments, the first being the common sense argument. Paul is talking about salvation, about how a person is saved. Common sense tells us that salvation is his main subject, not faith.

Secondly, the grammar argues strongly against faith being the gift of God, because the word “faith” does not agree in gender with the pronoun. Faith is feminine; the pronoun “that” or “this thing” is neuter. But it makes perfectly good grammatical sense to say that this neuter pronoun agrees with the concept or idea found in the main verb. The main verb is “ye are saved,” and thus Paul is discussing salvation in these important verses. A person is saved by grace through faith. Salvation is the gift of God.

3. The “Comparing Scripture With Scripture” Method

What does the New Testament teach elsewhere about the gift of God? There are a number of New Testament passages which refer to “the gift of God.” When carefully studied, these passages will help us to determine whether **faith** or **salvation** is the gift of God.

The Bible explains itself. We do not need to depend only on Ephesians 2:8 in order to find out what the gift of God is. There are many other New Testament passages which clearly tell us what the gift of God is. How is the expression “gift of God” used elsewhere in the New Testament by Paul and the other writers?

A study of the places where the word “gift” is used in the New Testament reveals the following:

δῶρον (gift, present) neuter noun

This word is used to refer to the “gift of God” only once, and that is in the passage under consideration (Ephesians 2:8). However there are other related Greek words that are translated “gift” and these are as follows:

δωρεά (gift) feminine noun

John 4:10--the gift of God is living water; in verse 14 this living water is identified as **everlasting life**.

Acts 2:38; 8:20; 10:45; 11:17--the gift of God is the **Holy Spirit**. Salvation involves the reception of the Holy Spirit and those who do not have the Holy Spirit are not saved (Rom. 8:9).

Romans 5:15,17--these verses speak of the gift of **justification** (the sinner being declared righteous) and life (compare verses 18,21). Justification is one of the key terms that describes our salvation.

2 Corinthians 9:15--“Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.” What is God’s unspeakable gift? No doubt, God’s unspeakable gift is Jesus Christ and the salvation that is found in Him. This salvation involves justification and eternal life and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. But the gift of God is never said to be faith. It is always said to be something that relates to salvation.

This particular Greek word **δωρεά** is **never** used of faith.

δῶρημα (gift, present) neuter noun

This word is never used of faith but it is used of God’s gift of salvation or justification (see Romans 5:16).

χάρισμα (a gift freely and graciously given) neuter noun

Romans 6:23--the gift of God is **eternal life** (compare Romans 5:15-16). Eternal life is synonymous with salvation. If a person has eternal life, he is saved; if a person is saved, he has eternal life.

This word is never used of faith (except in 1 Corinthians 12:9 which is speaking of the temporary gift of miracle working faith and not saving faith).

Conclusion: The term “gift of God” used in the New Testament always refers to salvation or to other salvation terms such as justification, eternal life, etc. The “gift of God” is never said to be faith.

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Three main arguments have been used to demonstrate that salvation is the gift of God. 1) Common sense recognizes that Paul’s main theme in Ephesians 2:8-9 is salvation, not faith. 2) Grammatical considerations strongly point to the antecedent of the pronoun as being salvation and not faith. 3) The New Testament teaches elsewhere that salvation or other terms referring to salvation constitute the gift of God.

Consider the Reformed View.

Let’s think about the Reformed view. Most Reformed men believe that Ephesians 2:8-9 is teaching that faith is the gift of God.

For the sake of argument, let’s assume that they are correct. So if faith is the gift of God, then how do I get that gift?

Reformed theology has two basic answers to what a person needs to do in order to receive the gift of faith.

First Answer: “You can do nothing. All you can do is hope that God will sovereignly bestow the gift of faith upon you. It is totally up to God. There is nothing you can do.”

This answer is contrary to Scripture. When the Philippian jailer cried out and said, “What must I do to be saved?” what did Paul and Silas say? Did they say, “You can’t do anything. Just hope that God will decide to give you the gift of faith.” No, Paul and Silas said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). Men are responsible to believe, men are commanded to believe and men are blamed and judged if they refuse to believe.

Actually the Bible does have an answer to the question, “What must I do to have faith?” We read in Romans 10:17 that “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” If we want people to believe on Christ, let us make sure that we use the sharp sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God (Heb. 4:12).

D.L. Moody once said, “Some say that faith is the gift of God. So is the air, but you have to breathe it; so is bread, but you have to eat it; so is water, but you have to drink it. Some are wanting some miraculous kind of feeling. That is not faith. ‘Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.’ It is not for me to sit down and wait for faith to come stealing over me...it is for me to take God at His Word.”

So one Reformed answer is that you cannot do anything to get the gift of faith because God must sovereignly bestow it upon you. Yet some in Reformed Theology have another answer to the question, “What must I do to receive the gift of faith?”

Second Answer: “You need to pray and ask God to give you the gift of faith.”

Let me illustrate this from the lips of Dr. John MacArthur. MacArthur believes that you should urge the sinner to pray for the gift of faith. At the end of one of his messages he gave a salvation appeal and said the following: “Faith is a gift from God...it is permanent...the faith that God gives begets obedience...God gave it to you and He sustains it...**May God grant you a true saving faith**, a permanent gift that begins in humility and brokenness over sin and ends up in obedience unto righteousness. That’s true faith and **it’s a gift that only God can give, and if you desire it, pray and ask that (God) He would grant it to you.**”⁴

Notice carefully what MacArthur is doing. He is not telling the sinner to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31), but he’s telling the sinner to **pray and ask God to grant the gift of faith!** *This perverts the gospel of Christ by making the condition of salvation prayer instead of faith!* Sinners are commanded to believe on Christ. They are not commanded to pray for the gift of faith.

Believing on Christ: Did God Have Anything To Do With This?

We have seen that Ephesians 2:8-9 teaches that salvation, not faith, is the gift of God. Having concluded this, there is yet one passage we must carefully consider if we are to be governed by all the facts of God’s Word. We must not ignore certain Scriptures when they may seem to conflict with what we might believe. We don’t want to have the attitude: “I have my view; please don’t confuse me with the facts.” If we are wrong, then we need to let God’s Word correct us, and we should never be afraid of further light. As we expose ourselves to God’s Word we will learn, and sometimes unlearn and sometimes relearn.

The passage we want to consider is found in John chapter 6. This passage does not say that faith is the gift of God, but it seems to be saying that faith or the act of believing is given to us by God. Consider the following:

⁴John MacArthur, Tape GC 90-21 on Lordship salvation, these comments were made during the closing invitation, emphasis mine.

“No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him” (John 6:44). No man can come or no man is able to come to Christ unless God the Father draws him.

What does it mean to “come to Christ”? This question is clearly answered in the context of John chapter 6. Coming to Christ is synonymous with believing in Christ. For example, if a person really believes that a surgeon can help him, then he will come to him and allow him to operate. Likewise, if a person really believes that Christ is able to save, he will come to Him and allow Him to do His saving work.

In John 6:35 we see that these two expressions are synonymous: “**He that cometh to Me** shall never hunger; and **he believeth on Me** shall never thirst.” What does it mean to come to Jesus? It means to believe in Him.

Applying this meaning to John 6:44 we learn that no one is able to come to Christ or believe in Christ, unless the Father draws him. God’s drawing is wonderfully described in Jeremiah 31:3—“I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore **with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.**”

So John 6:44 is saying that we cannot come to Christ, we cannot believe on Him, unless God the Father does something. He must draw us. With that in mind, consider John 6:65: “Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto Me, except it were **given** unto him of My Father.” No one can come to Christ or believe in Him unless it were given unto him from the Father.

This leads us to an important question: When a person believes on Christ, does he do this totally on his own or does God have anything to do with it? There are several passages that shed some light on this question:

“Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 16:17). Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Did he figure this out on his own or did God supernaturally reveal it to him? When you believed, did God have anything to do with it? Did God reveal to your sin-blinded heart who Jesus Christ really is?

Consider Acts 16:14 regarding Lydia’s conversion. Did God have anything to do with her salvation? Did He open her heart? Have you thanked God for opening your heart so that you could understand the message of the gospel? Remember, our hearts were once blinded (1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:4).

In Acts 18:27 we find an interesting expression. These people had “believed through grace.” If they believed through grace, doesn’t that imply that God had something to do with their believing? We were saved by grace (Eph. 2:8) and certainly that indicates that God was deeply involved in our salvation. If it is by grace, then God must get the credit! If we believed through grace, this implies that God had something to do with our believing. These people believed through grace. These people came to faith in Christ, and God was involved. God in His grace was working in their hearts.

Consider finally Acts 26:18. When you believed in Christ, did God open your blind eyes? Once I was blind but now I can see, and I give God the credit for giving me spiritual sight!

As you think about your salvation testimony, do you see God’s hand in bringing you to faith in Christ? Can you think about how God worked in your life to bring you to that point where you trusted in the Saviour? Perhaps God brought the right person to you at just the right time to give you just the message you needed to hear about Jesus and His love.

One of the most remarkable examples of the sovereignty of God in salvation is Saul of Tarsus. This fierce

persecutor of the Church was headed for Damascus to imprison Christians, and suddenly God met Him, Saul's eyes were opened as to who Jesus Christ really is and he was instantly converted. Saul was not seeking salvation; he was not desiring salvation. Instead, he was seeking to imprison Christians. But the Saviour suddenly met him on that road to Damascus and conquered him.

Dr. John Whitcomb, in one of his Seminary lectures on the attributes of God, made this statement: "The story of our salvation is that we resisted God, fought Him every inch of the way, and finally He won, we lost and we are His."

We all believe that God must do a work in the heart of unsaved people if they are to believe. We believe this because we pray this way. We ask God to work in their hearts. We often pray in this manner: "Lord, draw this person to yourself; open his eyes to the truth of the Gospel; help him to see what Christ has done for him. Lord, do whatever You need to do so that this person might come to the end of himself and see his need for Christ. Lord, may the Holy Spirit convict this person and move in his heart, that he might believe on Christ and pass from death unto life."

By praying in such a way, we are acknowledging that if a person is going to be saved, God must do that wonderful inward work in the heart that only He can do. So I not only thank God for the gift of salvation, but I also thank Him for working in my heart in a wonderful way and bringing me to faith in Christ.

Conclusion

What Do We Learn From Ephesians 2:8-9?

God has an amazing gift. It is the best gift that any person could ever receive. A person could never find this gift at Walmart and could never order this gift on Amazon. It's a priceless gift, worth more than all the gold at Fort Knox. It was paid for at the infinite cost of the shed blood of God's perfect Lamb, the Lord Jesus. And yet this gift, so costly, is presented to us as a free gift, fully provided, fully paid for; all we need to do is believe and receive it. Jesus paid it all.

This priceless gift is offered freely to all men, to everyone, to each and every individual, to every hell-bound sinner, to every child of Adam, to every member of the human race. It is offered freely to every person for whom Christ died, and thank God, He tasted death for each and every man, for every one of us (Heb. 2:9; Isa. 53:6).

Those who receive this gift have eternal life and they will never perish. They have been justified freely by His grace. They have the Son (1 John 5:12) and they also have the Holy Spirit living within (1 Cor. 6:19-20). This gift, this salvation package includes everything a person will ever need. It includes justification, righteousness, eternal security, no condemnation and an eternal home in heaven.

Every day the believer should gladly thank God for this unspeakable gift, and I trust that everyone reading this booklet has received God's free gift of salvation. If not I would strongly urge you to do so. You do not need to wait until God sovereignly gives you the gift of faith. The wonderful divine working in your heart is God's business. God will do His part. Your responsibility is to take God at His Word and believe on His Son. God says, "Now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). The time to receive His gift is right now, without delay. You do not need to pray for the gift of faith, but you do need to obey God's command to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who died and rose again for you so that you can be saved.

Hallelujah What a Saviour!

Appendix #1

“Not of works”--New Testament Usage

“Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:9). What is not of works? Is Paul saying that faith is not of works or is he saying that salvation is not of works? Here again it is helpful to do a study of New Testament (Pauline) usage:

In Romans 3:20 Paul says that **justification** is not of works.

In Romans 3:27 Paul says that **justification** is not of works.

In Romans 3:28 Paul says that **justification** is apart from works.

In Romans 4:2,6 Paul says that **justification** is not of works.

In Romans 9:11 Paul says that **election** is not of works.

In Romans 9:32 Paul says that **righteousness** is not of works.

In Romans 11:6 Paul says that **election** is not of works.

In Galatians 2:16 Paul says that **justification** is not of works.

In 2 Timothy 1:9 Paul says that God’s **salvation** and **calling** are not according to works.

In Titus 3:5 Paul says that **salvation** is not of works.

If Ephesians 2:9 means that **salvation is not of works**, this would be in harmony with all of these above passages. That salvation is not of works is repeatedly taught by Paul, but nowhere in the New Testament does Paul ever say, “**Faith is not of works.**” Again and again Paul says that salvation (justification) is not of works, but he never says that faith is not of works. It would be foolish to say such a thing. That faith is not of works is so obvious (or as Alford says “irrelevant”) that it does not need to be said. As John Eadie has said, “you may declare that salvation is not of works, but cannot with propriety say that faith is not of works.”

This is why men like Charles Hodge are forced to put a parenthesis in this passage. This view could be stated as follows:

“For by grace are ye saved through faith (and this faith is not of yourselves, this faith is the gift of God), not of works [that is, this salvation is not of works] lest any man should boast.”⁵ Hodge wants to make the verse say that faith is the gift of God (because this fits in well with his Reformed Theology). However, Hodge knows that Paul would never say that “faith is not of works.”

Charles Hodge is correct in saying that salvation is not of works; he is wrong in saying that this passage teaches that faith is the gift of God. If salvation is the antecedent of the pronoun, then no parenthesis is needed.

The Bible repeatedly says that we are not saved by works (see the verses cited earlier). Also the Bible repeatedly says that we are saved or justified by faith (Romans 5:1; etc.). If a man is not saved by works but by faith, then faith is obviously not a work: “but to him that **worketh not**, but **believeth...**” (Romans 4:5). Faith and works do not go together. Faith is not a work. Work is something that we take credit for. Work is something that we can be rewarded for. Work is something that we can boast about. Work is meritorious. Faith is **non-meritorious**. A person cannot “take credit” or “praise himself” for his faith, because faith is not meritorious (deserving of reward or honor). Faith is not something that a person can

⁵See Hodge’s commentary on *Ephesians* under Ephesians 2:8.

boast about. Faith does not take credit for itself. Faith gives all the credit to Christ. Faith acknowledges that Christ gets all the credit and praise and honor, for He did it all! Faith is not something “good” that a man does; it is simply a recognition on the part of man that “I cannot do any good thing, and therefore I need a Saviour.” Only someone totally ignorant of the gospel and of the meaning of “faith” would ever try to take credit for faith. There is no merit in the act of believing.

To say that faith is a work is totally contrary to what the New Testament teaches on salvation. Salvation is “not of works” and entirely “apart from works” (Romans 3:28; 4:6). Those who believe are those who “**do not work**” (Romans 4:5). What then do they do? They merely **rest** upon the finished work of Christ who did it all and paid it all!

If Ephesians 2:9 speaks of faith as being “not of works,” then this is the only place in the New Testament where Paul makes such a statement. If on the other hand the verse is saying that salvation is not of works, then this would harmonize with Paul’s frequent teaching elsewhere and this would be one of many verses in the New Testament which teaches this truth.

As a practical example, think of how we share the message of salvation with those who are lost. Often we tell them that salvation is not of works. All false religions teach some form of salvation by a system of works. In our sharing of the gospel we make it clear to people that salvation is not of works and there is **nothing that they can do** to work for their salvation or to earn favor with God. On the other hand, we do **not** tell the sinner: “My friend, faith is not of works. There is **nothing that you can do** to believe.” No, faith is something that the sinner is responsible to do. The sinner is responsible to take God at His Word and to rest his all upon the **WORTH** (who He is), the **WORK** (what He has done) and the **WORD** (what He has said) of the Saviour. Even though faith is not a meritorious work, it is a work that man must do: “Then said they unto Him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, **This is the work of God, that ye believe** on Him whom He hath sent” (John 6:28-29). It is something that man is responsible to do, and condemned for not doing (John 8:24; 3:18).

Appendix #2

A Very Lively Corpse

Some extreme Calvinists tend to speak of faith as if it is something that man cannot do. This results in an unbiblical understanding of man’s inability. The question the Philippian jailer asked was this: “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). Some might answer in this way: “Nothing! You can’t do anything! You are dead and totally unable to respond to God until you are regenerated. You have no part in salvation. God must do it all. You cannot exercise saving faith.” This answer might harmonize with one’s theological system, but there is only one problem. This is not how Paul and Silas answered the question! Paul and Silas told the jailer that there was something that he could do and was responsible to do: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!” (Acts 16:31; compare how Peter answered a similar question in Acts 2:37-38).

Regardless of one’s theological system, Acts 16:31 is very clear. **GOD MUST DO THE SAVING; MAN MUST DO THE BELIEVING.** The saving is something that God alone must do. The believing is something that the sinner must do. God does not do the believing for man. Even William Hendriksen (who is Reformed in his theology and who believes that faith is the gift of God in Ephesians 2:8) says, “both the responsibility of believing and also its activity are ours, for God does not believe for us.” Another illustration would be the account of the deadly serpents in the wilderness in Numbers 21. Should we say that the Israelites had no part in their deliverance from the deadly snakes? Of course not! Their part was to **look**; God’s part was to **heal**. They did the looking and God did the healing.

Faith is when the sinner humbly recognizes his desperate need and acknowledges that God must do all the saving. **SALVATION IS WHOLLY THE WORK OF GOD; FAITH IS WHOLLY THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MAN.**

Man does not contribute to his own salvation. It is the work of God. God alone must do the saving; man must do the believing (Acts 16:31). Those who are saved have only God to thank; those who are lost have only themselves to blame. God gets all the credit for man's salvation; the unsaved man must take full blame and responsibility for his eternal damnation. The saved person thankfully says, "I'm in heaven because of God!" The lost person must truthfully say, "I'm in hell because of me." His damnation is based, not on God's rejection of him, but upon his rejection of God (Mark 16:16; 2 Thess. 2:10,12; John 5:40).

No one will ever stand before God and say, "I am condemned because God never gave me the gift of faith."

No such excuse will ever be uttered. All men are responsible to believe. All men are commanded to believe and to repent (1 John 3:23; Acts 17:30). God says, "**Look unto Me** [that's faith!] and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 45:22). According to 1 Timothy 2:4, God desires all men to come unto Himself (and coming to Christ is equated with believing on Him--John 6:35). Men are responsible to believe and to come and to repent. Men are condemned eternally for their failure to do this (John 8:24; 3:18; etc.).

I would recommend an article by Roy L. Aldrich entitled "The Gift of God."⁶ The author convincingly shows that the interpretation of Ephesians 2:8 which says that faith is the gift of God leads to a hyper-Calvinistic doctrine of faith, which in turn leads to an unscriptural plan of salvation. For example, Shedd says: "The Calvinist maintains that faith is wholly from God, being one of the effects of regeneration" (*Dogmatic Theology*, Vol. II, p. 472). This results in a strange plan of salvation. According to Shedd, because the sinner cannot believe, he is instructed to perform the following duties: 1) Read and hear the divine Word; 2) Give serious application of the mind to the truth; 3) Pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit for conviction and regeneration (*Dogmatic Theology*, Vol. II, pp. 512-513). Aldrich's comment is as follows: "If the sinner is so spiritually dead that he cannot believe, then how can he hear the divine Word, give serious application of the mind to the truth and pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit? The extreme Calvinist deals with a rather lively spiritual corpse after all."

Arthur Pink agrees with Shedd saying that the sinner is to "ask God...to bestow upon him the gifts of repentance and faith" (*The Sovereignty of God*, pp. 198-199). Here is Roy Aldrich's excellent comment: "**The tragedy of this position is that it perverts the gospel. The sinner is wrongly instructed to beg for that which God is already beseeching him to receive. He is really being told that the condition of salvation is prayer instead of faith**" (Aldrich, p. 249).

Appendix #3 **The Neuter Gender**

[This material is somewhat technical, but I have included it in case any have been influenced by Mr. Parker's argument.]

There are some who give another explanation for the neuter gender being used. Mr. Stephen Parker, for example, argues that the pronoun is attracted to the neuter gender of the word "gift," and he cites Mark 15:16 as an analogy.⁷ It is true that attraction does take place in Mark 15:16 as Mr. Parker correctly points out. This is one of those rare cases where the pronoun agrees with the predicate when the relative clause is an

⁶*Bibliotheca Sacra*, July 1965.

⁷See Stephen Parker's booklet, *Calvin's Specs Examined and Re-examined*, pages 9-10.

explanation. Another example would be in Ephesians 6:17: “the sword (feminine) of the Spirit, which (neuter) is the Word (neuter) of God” (the antecedent is “sword” but the pronoun is attracted to the neuter gender). However, we do not really have the same thing in Ephesians 2:8. First of all, in Mark 15:16 we have a relative pronoun, but in Ephesians 2:8 we have a demonstrative pronoun [τοῦτο]. In Mark 15:16 the verb is explicitly stated, but in Ephesians 2:8 the verb is understood (the words “it is” are in italics). The greatest problem, however, is that in Mark 15:16 the word “praetorium” comes right after the word “hall” but in Ephesians 2:8 there is a whole additional phrase which comes between “that” and “gift,” and this would make attraction much less likely: “...through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift...” In other words, in Mark 15:16 there is only one word (the verb εστιν) which comes between the pronoun and the word to which it is attracted. In Ephesians 2:8 there are five Greek words which come between the pronoun and the word which Mr. Parker claims it is attracted to. This explanation seems highly unlikely, and I did not find this argument in the respectable commentaries that I consulted, even among those men who believe that the antecedent is “faith.” It could also be noted that Mr. Parker is wrong when he says that the words “hall” and “which” in Mark 15:16 do not agree in number. They do agree. They are both singular in number.

Appendix #4

Can Infants Be Regenerated?

Concerning regeneration preceding faith, some Calvinists take this to a ridiculous extreme. Though it seems unthinkable, they actually teach that a person can be regenerated by God and then not come to faith in Christ until years later.

The Reformation Study Bible (formerly called *The Geneva Study Bible*) claims to be a clear statement of Reformed Theology. On page 1664 there is an article on Regeneration. It is a shocking statement relating to infant salvation: "Infants can be born again, although the faith that they exercise cannot be as visible as that of adults." I wrote to R.C. Sproul (General Editor) to ask for clarification of this statement. I received a written response from Sproul's assistant, V.A. Voorhis (dated 1/6/2000) in which he made the following statement which is even more shocking:

When the RSB speaks in the notes of John 3 of "infants being born again," it is speaking of the work of quickening God does in them which inclines their will to Him. In Protestantism, regeneration always precedes faith and if God quickens them, the person will surely come.... Often, regeneration and our subsequent faith happen apparently simultaneously but logically, regeneration must precede faith. **An infant's faith may not come until years after God has worked by His Holy Spirit to regenerate him or her** [emphasis ours]. Two Biblical examples of infants who were born again are seen in Psalm 22:9-10 and Luke 1:15.

According to this teaching a child can be born again or regenerated as an infant and not come to faith in Christ until years later! This may or may not have been the teaching of the Reformers, but it certainly is not the teaching of the Word of God. George Zeller (1/80; revised 6/91, 8/98, 5/07, 8/22)

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God's Rescue Plan

