

Life Group Study Guide

Ephesians—carefully, reverently, prayerfully considered-- will change our lives. This study is based on a sermon preached Sunday morning at WEFC entitled: *To God Be the Glory* and reflects on **Ephesians 2:8-10**.

Before you begin: Take some time as a group to *pray* that God would be at work in your minds and hearts. There is a real difference between knowing and understanding something intellectually and having a heart that is deeply affected by the truth. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to *understand* God's word, *welcome* it into your heart, and then *apply* it faithfully to your lives.

Study Guide:

Have someone from your group volunteer to read **Ephesians 2:8-10** aloud:

"⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

The word "For" at the beginning of **v.8** points us back to what Paul just finished explaining in the previous verses. Have someone else read **vv. 1-7**, so we have some context for what Paul is referring to in our passage:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

How does God's goal in saving sinners, seen in **v.7**, relate to Paul's statements in **vv.8-10**? What specific quality of God, displayed in salvation, are **vv.8-10** calculated to draw our attention to?

In his book *Knowing God* (available in the WEFC library), JI Packer wrote, "In the New Testament grace means God's love in action towards men [and women] who merited the opposite of love. Grace means God moving heaven and earth to save sinners who

could not lift a finger to save themselves." What do sinners deserve from God? (**Clue:** see **v.3**) Why does God give us the opposite? (**Clue:** see **v.4**) Talk as a group about the meaning of grace and how it shines forth in Paul's presentation of the gospel in **vv.1-7**. Why does Paul take the time in **vv.8-10** to underscore and emphasize that salvation is by grace?

1) Pure Grace Flowing In

God's grace comes flowing out of His heart, down to sinners, like a pure, crystal clear stream of undeserved mercy. What is the natural tendency of the human heart whenever it contemplates the subject of God's *pure* grace? In what ways do we attempt to pollute the stream at the inlet where it enters our hearts? Why does God recon our best deeds as nothing but fowl garbage that contaminates the stream of His grace? (see **Is. 64:6; Jer. 17:9; Matt. 7:17-18; Rom. 3:11-18, 8:7, 14:23; Heb. 11:6**).

"Saved by grace" feels counterintuitive. Why do we have such a hard time believing that our status before God *isn't* based on something we have done or are currently doing? How does our pride get in the way of our embracing salvation by grace? Why is it essential to emphasize "salvation by grace" in presenting the gospel to unbelievers?

Read **Luke 18:9-14**. Who went home justified? How does salvation by grace protect Christians from pharisaical self-righteousness?

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In **v. 8**, what is the pronoun "*this*" referring to? Is it referring to grace? Is it referring to faith? In Greek, pronouns usually share the same linguistic gender as the preceding antecedent they refer to. "*Grace*" is feminine. "*Faith*" is also feminine. The interpretive challenge is that the "*this*" in **v. 8** is neuter, neither male nor female. Therefore, Bible scholars have historically interpreted the "*this*" to be referring to both grace *and* faith. Both are "*the gift of God.*" (see also **Rom. 12:3; 1 Tim. 1:13-14; Phil. 1:6, v.29, 2:13; Rom. 8:29-30**. For instances where God is asked for faith see **Luke 17:5, 22:32; Mark 9:24**).

Many of us are inclined to think of salvation as a partnership, God did his part, and I did my part; we each did our share. God can have his credit, and I can have mine. The apostle Paul disagrees and slams the door hard on all such thinking. Salvation, from start to finish, is a work that *God* has done. Even the faith you exercised to grab hold of the grace was given to you by God. Paul writes in **1 Cor. 4:7**, "*What do you have that you did not*

receive? [Rhetorical question. Answer: nothing!] *If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?*" (cf. **1 Cor. 1:28-30**).

Can you see how **Ephesians 2:8-9** acts as an effective sentry, guarding the inlet where God's grace enters our hearts?

The devil likes to point out our sins and inconsistencies and convince us that God loves us only in proportion to how well we obey. How does the message of God's grace inoculate us against despair as we go through the lifelong process of sanctification?

2) Pure Grace Flowing Out

¹⁰*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

Lest we think we were justified by grace alone but *then* we contribute some boast-worthy good deeds afterward, Paul says, No! Even your good works were planned by God long ago. How does **v.10** echo what Paul said in **1:4**? How do those two verses highlight the sovereignty of God over our justification and our sanctification?

V. 10 has been posted as a sentry to guard the outlet, where God's grace flows out of us, lest we pollute God's grace on its way out. Paul says we were "*created in Christ Jesus for good works.*" Not *by* good works (that would pollute the inlet) but *for* good works. The only positive proof that his grace has come in pure at the inlet is that it flows out pure at the outlet in a life of holiness. The grace of God in Christ **CHANGES HOW YOU WALK** (cf. **Eph 1:1-2a** with **Eph 2:10**). What perversion of God's grace is Paul addressing in **Rom. 6:1**?

"Cheap grace" is a term coined by the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book *The Cost of Discipleship* (available in the WEFC library). It is the teaching that becoming a Christian won't cost you anything. It is baptism without discipleship, communion without confession. It celebrates the cross of Christ but refuses to carry any cross of our own. It celebrates pure grace at the inlet but pollutes it at the outlet by saying we don't have to obey Christ or live godly lives. This kind of "carnal Christianity" is no Christianity at all! (cf. **Matt. 16:24; Luke 6:46; Rom. 6:1-2; James 2:14-26; 2 Cor. 5:17; 1 John 1:6, 2:4; Jude 4**).

Have you been living like you are earning your way into heaven? Have you been living like a life characterized by holiness isn't important? How are **vv.8-10** an antidote to both polluting influences? How does the doctrine of grace ensure God gets all the glory?