

**Ephesians 2:7—in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.**

God raised us up with Christ and seated us in the heavenlies (Ephesians 2:6) to show (“in the ages to come”) “the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:7). “Ages to come” (Ephesians 2:7) actually means “the ages that are coming one upon another.” God saved us so we might, throughout eternity future, be objects of His “kindness” through which He shows “the surpassing riches of His grace” (Ephesians 2:7). This “grace” is given to us “in Christ Jesus.” Who is watching as this “grace” is dispensed? The angelic hosts in heaven are watching (Ephesians 3:10), who while observing bow and worship the Creator. “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift” (2Corinthians 9:15)!

**Ephesians 2:8—For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;**

Paul emphasizes that salvation is most definitely by God’s “grace” (also read Romans 3:24 and Titus 3:7)—reiterating what he recorded earlier in Ephesians 2:5 (“by grace you have been saved”). He also affirms that God’s salvation is “through faith” (also confirmed by passages such as Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Philippians 3:9, Hebrews 10:38, Hebrews 11:1-2, and Hebrews 11:6).

“That,” in the phrase, “and that not of yourselves” (Ephesians 2:8), is the source of much debate. Both sides of the argument will be addressed to present the facts regarding what is at stake. A proper view of Who God is supersedes all matters of life, so to approach this subject passively or haphazardly is grossly inadequate. For this reason, we will dig deeply in our pursuit of the truth regarding this critical theological issue.

Reformed Theology, due to viewing the depraved as incapable of believing, normally perceives “that” (Ephesians 2:8) as referring to “faith” (Ephesians 2:8). Why? They picture God as spiritually regenerating the depraved and giving them repentance and faith before they can repent, believe, and be saved. (Observe Diagram 11 in the Reference Section.)

Other theologians view this passage differently due to recognizing that the terms “faith” and “grace” are both feminine in gender, and “that” is neuter. Therefore, they view “that” as referring to “saved” rather than to “faith.” The following quote from Dave Hunt’s, *What Love Is This?*, pages 452-453, expresses well the disparity that exists between “free-will” and the Reformed view (extreme and hyper-Calvinism):

... That faith is a gift is a major foundational principal of Calvinism. The favorite passage offered as proof is Ephesians 2:8–10. Mathison says, “Saving faith is a gift of God, a result of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.” Storms claims, “Numerous texts assert that such [saving] faith is God’s own gracious gift (see especially Ephesians 2:8–9...)” Clark declares:

A dead man cannot...exercise faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is an activity of spiritual life, and without the life there can be no activity. Furthermore, faith...does not come by any independent decision. The Scripture is explicit, plain, and unmistakable: “For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). Look at the words again, “It is the gift of God.” If God does not give a

man faith, no amount of will power and decision can manufacture it for him.

On the contrary, the subject of the preceding seven verses is salvation, not faith. Verse 8 then declares concerning salvation, “by grace are ye saved...it [obviously salvation] is the gift of God.” It is not saving faith, but being saved that is God’s gift. We are repeatedly told that eternal life is “the gift of God” (Romans 6:23; see also John 4:10; Romans 5:18; Hebrews 6:4; etc.). No less definitive, as Calvin admitted and then tried to deny, is the statement that “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” There is no biblical basis for suggesting that God gives saving faith to a select group and withholds it from others.

Furthermore, the construction of the Greek in Ephesians 2:8–10 makes it impossible for faith to be the gift. Such is the verdict of many Greek authorities, including Alford, F. F. Bruce, A. T. Robertson, W. E. Vine, Scofield, and others. Vance notes that “A witness to the truth of Scripture against the Calvinist ‘faith-gift’ interpretation can be found in the Greek grammarians.” He lists W. Robertson Nicoll, Kenneth S. Wuest, Marvin R. Vincent, and others.

Among the reasons the experts cite is the fact that the word faith is a feminine noun, while the demonstrative pronoun that (“and that not of yourselves, it is the gift”) is neuter and thus could not refer to faith. Nor will the grammar, as W. G. MacDonald says, “permit ‘faith’ to be the antecedent of ‘it.’” Of course, “it is” is not in the Greek but was added for clarity by the KJV translators and thus is italicized. Nor does it require a knowledge of Greek, but simply paying attention to the entire context of Ephesians 2:8–10, to realize that salvation, not faith, is “the gift of God”—as all of Scripture testifies.

A number of other Greek authorities could be cited to that effect. Though a Calvinist, F. F. Bruce explains, “The fact that the demonstrative pronoun ‘that’ is neuter in Greek (touto), whereas ‘faith’ is a feminine noun (pistis), combines with other considerations to suggest that it is the whole concept of salvation by grace through faith that is described as the gift of God. This, incidentally, was Calvin’s interpretation.” Calvin himself acknowledged, “But they commonly misinterpret this text, and restrict the word ‘gift’ to faith alone. But Paul...does not mean that faith is the gift of God, but that salvation is given to us by God...” Thus White and other zealous Calvinists who today insist that faith is the gift are contradicting not only the Greek construction but John Calvin himself.<sup>1</sup>

Let’s examine more closely Calvin’s quote (mentioned above by Hunt) regarding Ephesians 2:8— taken from Calvin’s *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, in *The Comprehensive John Calvin Collection* (Ages Digital Library, 1998).

Many persons restrict the word gift to faith alone. But Paul is only repeating in other words the former sentiment. His meaning is, not that faith is the gift of God, but that salvation is given to us by God, or, that we obtain it by the gift of God.<sup>ii</sup>

Note that Calvin’s words contradict the Reformed position.

Sir Robert Anderson, in *The Gospel and its Ministry*, thirteenth edition revised, page 54 footnote, views “that” (Ephesians 2:8) as pointing to “salvation”:

“The gift of God” here is salvation by grace through faith. Not the faith itself...

The matter is sometimes represented as though God gave faith to the sinner first, and then, on the sinner's bringing Him the faith, went on and gave him salvation! Just as though a baker, refusing to supply empty-handed applicants, should first dispense to each the price of a loaf, and then, in return for the money from his own till, serve out the bread! To answer fully such a vagary as this would be to rewrite the following chapter. Suffice it, therefore, to point out that to read the text as though faith were the gift, is to destroy not only the meaning of verse 9, but the force of the whole passage.<sup>iii</sup>

How does this input tie in to Ephesians 2:9?

*not as a result of works, that no one should boast. (Ephesians 2:9)*

Paul is confirming that “salvation” (Ephesians 2:8) is “not...of works” (Ephesians 2:9), as he communicates elsewhere. Read Romans 3:27-28, for example, realizing that “justified” points to salvation:

*Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. (Romans 3:27-28)*

Paul's message in Romans 3:27-28 is that salvation is not “Of works”—that God bestows salvation once the depraved exercise “faith” (along with repentance, of course). Paul also confirms that “boasting” is “excluded” among those who exercise personal “faith” in Christ while depraved. Thus, faith is not a work, for Paul contrasts “faith” with “works” on many occasions in the Scriptures. Consequently, choosing to exercise personal “faith” (in the midst of one's depravity) can never be viewed as a meritorious deed. Paul expresses this same truth in Romans 4:5, contrasting “work” with believing:

*But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness, (Romans 4:5)*

Paul again contrasts “faith” with “works” in Romans 9:30-33:

*What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; 31 but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. 32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, 33 just as it is written, “Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.” (Romans 9:30-33)*

Once more we observe that salvation (“righteousness”) is not of “works” but is the gift granted to those who exercise personal “faith” while depraved. The same principle is communicated in Paul's words to the church at Galatia:

*nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified. (Galatians 2:16)*

*This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? (Galatians 3:2)*

The following passages also confirm that salvation (not the faith exercised prior to salvation) is God's "gift" to those who become part of His family:

*Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." (John 4:10-11)*

*But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. 16 And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. 17 For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:15-17)*

*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)*

*And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. (1John 5:11)*

Salvation is a free gift, given to the depraved who choose (by means of their free will) to accept Jesus as Savior. The following verses are highly problematic for those who reject the free will of man:

*"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)*

*Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." (John 4:10)*

*Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. (John 7:37)*

*And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost. (Revelation 22:17)*

We well understand that Reformed theologians (due to their definition of depravity) view spiritual regeneration as preceding faith. However, spiritual regeneration is equivalent to salvation (read John 3:3-6). This fact refutes Reformed Theology, because no one can be saved prior to exercising personal faith. Such a scenario would cause the believer to be saved twice, forcing Christ to die a second time (an impossibility according to Hebrews 6:4-6, 9:28, and 10:10). Keep this truth in mind as we proceed.

To receive the gift of salvation (spiritual regeneration), the depraved must first believe (exercise personal faith). Therefore, faith precedes salvation (spiritual regeneration) rather than follows it, as confirmed by the following passages. (Many additional verses could have been cited.)

*“He who has believed...shall be saved;... (Mark 16:16)*

*“And those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they may not believe and be saved. (Luke 8:12)*

*“Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.” (Acts 10:43)*

*And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.” (Acts 16:31)*

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Romans 1:16)*

*But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe;... (Romans 3:21-22)*

*for “Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Romans 10:13)*

*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26)*

*...as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. (1Timothy 1:16)*

*And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)*

The following passages confirm that the faith exercised prior to salvation is the seeker’s faith—not God’s gift to the seeker. Note the words, “*your faith*,” in the verses listed below:

*... “Be it done to you according to your faith.” (Matthew 9:29)*

*And He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” (Luke 7:50)*

*“...your faith has made you well.” (Luke 17:19)*

*...your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. (Romans 1:8)*

*that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. (1Corinthians 2:5)*

*and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is*

*vain.* (1Corinthians 15:14)

*since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus...* (Colossians 1:4)

*...but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth...*  
(1Thessalonians 1:8)

Reformed theologians disagree with these findings due to viewing the faith exercised in the previous verses as originating with God—yet, becoming the possession of the elect in conjunction with their being spiritually regenerated. Reformed Theology cannot allow a person to exercise faith prior to spiritual regeneration. As a result, Reformed Theology (extreme and hyper-Calvinism) must view those who believe in free will (who believe that the depraved can exercise faith) as teaching a works-based salvation.

To choose Christ through personal faith (while depraved) does not mean that we approach God based on anything good we have done. All that is required is a humble heart that recognizes its need for salvation. Some would ask, “Is not humility a virtue?” God doesn’t think so, or He would have omitted James 4:6:

*... “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”* (James 4:6)

Humility and pride are opposites—never equal. You can’t be prideful and humble at the same time! Hence, to see one’s need for a Savior, through a broken and humble heart, would never cause one to approach God on the basis of personal merit or virtue. Yes, man is to humble himself before God (Psalm 138:6; Proverbs 3:34; Matthew 23:12; 1Peter 5:5), but never with the mindset that his humility grants him the right to boast. If so, he has never known what it means to be humble.

Because the depraved are capable of exercising personal faith (a fact proven in the Scriptures), Total Depravity (the “T” of the TULIP), as defined by Reformed Theology, cannot stand. However, let’s assume for a moment that the Reformed view is correct—that man in his depravity cannot humble himself and exercise faith. Irresistible Grace (the “I” of the TULIP) would then be necessary to bring the elect to Christ. But forced grace (grace is “Irresistible” in Reformed Theology) is no longer grace, for free will belonging to the depraved (who can exercise personal repentance and faith should they see their need for salvation) is required for grace to remain grace.

Let’s review for a moment why Paul’s words in Ephesians 2:9 forever settle how Ephesians 2:8 is to be perceived. Paul is confirming that “*salvation*” (Ephesians 2:8) is “*not...of works*” (Ephesians 2:9), as he teaches elsewhere. Consequently, “*that not of yourselves*” (Ephesians 2:8) must point to “*saved*” (Ephesians 2:8) rather than “*faith*” (Ephesians 2:8). (*God’s Heart as it Relates to Depravity*, a work generated and distributed by this ministry, communicates a great deal more regarding this subject matter.)

### **Ephesians 2:9—not as a result of works, that no one should boast.**

Salvation is not a result of man’s effort (Ephesians 2:9; Romans 3:20; 4:4-5; 5:20; Galatians 2:16; Titus 3:5); it is by God’s “*grace*” (Ephesians 2:8). Were man capable of keeping the whole Law, his effort would count for something. In fact, he could “*boast*” before God (Ephesians 2:9). But Romans 3:23 confirms that “*all have sinned,*” and James 2:10 verifies that one broken

commandment is equivalent to breaking them all. Only Jesus lived the Law perfectly (Matthew 5:17; 2Corinthians 5:21; 1Peter 2:21-22). Thus, righteousness comes through Him alone, the One who lived righteously (2Corinthians 5:21), the Righteous Son who now lives in every church saint (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27).

Should I choose to accept a free gift, no work would be performed. In the same way, to make a choice (while depraved) to accept Christ as Savior must not be equated with performing a meritorious deed.

**Ephesians 2:10—For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**

*For we are His workmanship, (2:10a)*

We lacked the ability to work our way into a righteous standing with God, so we became God's "workmanship." In other words, God's work saves us, not our own (Ephesians 2:8-9). "Workmanship" can also be interpreted "a work," "creation"—even "masterpiece." This masterpiece consists of all individuals who accept Christ between Acts 2 and the Rapture of the church. As a result, the church, the body of Christ, is God's masterpiece. We can be certain of this truth due to the next phrase in Ephesians 2:10, "*created in Christ Jesus.*" Only church saints are placed "*in Christ*" ("*created in Christ Jesus*"—2:10) and made righteous (2Corinthians 5:21) the moment they repent and believe while depraved (1Corinthians 1:30; 2Corinthians 5:17). Old Testament believers were only declared righteous ("*reckoned*" as righteous—Genesis 15:6) when they repented and believed. They were not made righteous until Jesus' death. Neither were their sins forgiven until the cross (Hebrews 10:12)—their sins were only covered until Jesus died (Romans 3:25; Hebrews 9:15; 10:4, 11). Hence, the Old Testament believers are "*the spirits of righteous men made perfect*" of Hebrews 12:23.

What an awesome thought! God, at this very moment, is preparing His masterpiece (the church) to be revealed at Christ's Second Coming. Since Acts 2, each time someone accepts Christ and is placed into Christ (2Corinthians 5:17), God the Father makes an addition to His masterpiece by strategically placing that individual in the most beneficial location within Christ's body. Some New Testament believers become part of the hand, and others part of the foot, etc. (1Corinthians 12:12-27). As the church grows numerically, the Father, as the great Sculptor, fashions His work for its day of unveiling. God's masterpiece will be unveiled as Christ's body, made up of mature church saints "*conformed to the image of*" God's "*Son*" (Romans 8:29), having immortal bodies that radiate the Father's glory. Jesus' Second Coming will be incredible!

The Father is experiencing great joy while fashioning this work. He has the awesome privilege of taking new family members, who are "*holy*" (Ephesians 1:4), righteous (2Corinthians 5:21), and even "*glorified*" (Romans 8:30) in their souls and spirits, and bringing them to a place of maturity (to the place where their behavior begins to line up with who He made them into at the point of justification/salvation). The Father is assisted in this training exercise by the Son (Romans 5:10) and the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:4, 14) until New Testament believers experience physical death and the Father takes them home (2Corinthians 5:1-8). Only then will their behavior be perfected (nothing will tempt us in heaven, so sin will cease). Later, at the Rapture, all who make up the body of Christ will receive their glorified bodies (1Thessalonians 4:13-18) and be presented to Christ "*as a pure virgin*" (2Corinthians 11:2). The marriage between Christ and His bride, the church, is then consummated (Ephesians 5:27), a ceremony that takes place in heaven sometime before the Second Coming. But, at some point after the wedding, the church,

who is also the Father's masterpiece, is unveiled as Christ returns to earth. She will be unveiled as Christ's body!

Can you even begin to envision the glory the Father will receive through Jesus' return? Jesus brought the Father much glory at His First Coming but not nearly the glory the Father will receive at His Second.

God is presently at work seeing that His "masterpiece" is truly that—a "masterpiece." And why does He display such intense interest in this work? The Son expresses Himself to the universe through this "masterpiece." This same "masterpiece" also serves as a "temple" for the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1Peter 2:4-5) and is part of the Father's family (John 1:12). Therefore, God's masterpiece is three in one. Interestingly, God is Himself three in One—Father, Son, and Spirit.

The Father is completing this masterpiece for the benefit of others—the Son, the Spirit, and the church. But we who make up Christ's body, which is also the Spirit's temple, will be the very vehicle through which the Son and Spirit glorify the Father at the Second Coming! What an awesome privilege! Are you beginning to see the advantage of viewing the cross based on what God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit, and others receive through that selfless act—rather than viewing it based on what you alone receive? Oh, the shallowness of a self-centered life!

***created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (2:10b)***

In verses 8-9 we found that salvation is by grace through faith and that no amount of good works makes man right before God. Here, in verse 10, Paul teaches that the natural byproduct of salvation, and becoming God's "workmanship" (Ephesians 2:10a), is a desire to perform "good works" (Ephesians 2:10b). Considering what Paul states in 2Corinthians 9:8, 2Timothy 3:17, and Titus 2:14, why shouldn't the apostle make this statement in Ephesians 2:10? Thus, the new person God made (after we repented and believed while depraved) desires to carry out (by yielding to Christ's indwelling presence) the works God previously prepared.

We became a "new" creation when we were placed "in Christ" (2Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15), for we (once we repented and believed) were "created in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:10b). We were also "created in Christ Jesus for good works." Don't overlook the fact that God prepares and accomplishes these works—"which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10b). This truth ties in well with Philippians 2:13, where Paul states:

*for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:13)*

Remember: The believer lives abundantly through living by the life of Another—by Christ's life (Romans 5:10; Colossians 3:4). Because Christian service always results in deeds, these deeds must be of a creative nature rather than imitative. In other words, the New Testament believer's good deeds must be accomplished by Christ—not the New Testament believer trying to imitate Christ's actions and character in his own strength. Therefore, as church saints prepare for ministry, they must view themselves as God's instrument through which He works creatively.

Paul encouraged the church at Corinth to imitate him, since he was an imitator of Christ (1Corinthians 11:1):

*Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.* (1Corinthians 11:1)

But in imitating Christ, Paul did nothing in his own strength; for Christ did nothing in His, but the Father's (John 14:10). Paul actually viewed Christ as his very "*life*" (Philippians 1:21; Colossians 3:4; Romans 5:10)—the Source of everything accomplished through him. Keep this perspective in mind as we continue, for even in Ephesians 5:1 Paul states that believers are to "*be imitators of God.*" We will discuss the context of this verse when we arrive at chapter five.

Ephesians 2:10 does not teach that believers are forced to do God's work and have no choice in the matter. Paul, writing to Timothy, said:

*But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.* (2Timothy 4:5)

This passage proves that God's children have a choice. They can either make themselves available for service as willing vessels, or they can compromise and do their own thing. But, any lasting work (any work that results in change) is done by God—not by His people. We serve only as the vehicle through which the Father works creatively. Hence, no member of the body of Christ can boast of his good deeds.

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<sup>i</sup> Hunt, Dave. (2006). *What Love Is This?*, Third Edition, pages 452-453. The Berean Call. Bend, OR. Used by permission.

<sup>ii</sup> Calvin, John. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, from *The Comprehensive John Calvin Collection* Ages Digital Library. ©1998.

<sup>iii</sup> Anderson, Sir Robert. (1978). *The Gospel and Its Ministry*, page 54. Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI. Used by permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.