

Ephesians 2:8

Saving Faith the Gift of God

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"By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."
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Most men try to lay God under a debt to save them. They work for salvation instead of working from it. They "go about to establish their own righteousness." In this way worldly people seek eternal life: "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" (John 6:28). Although in words they renounce all pretence of any worth in themselves or in their duties, yet they have a secret hope of recommending themselves to God by their decency, sobriety, and religious performances. In this way those who have a little concern for their souls, like the young ruler, seek for eternal life: "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" (Matthew 19:16). His earnest desire was to make himself appear righteous before God. In this way, also, those who are under the deepest concern often wander in search of pardon and peace. Perhaps there may be traces of this feeling in the anxious question of the poor jailor, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved" (Acts 16:30); and in the piercing cry of the prostrate Saul, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). Certain it is that self-righteousness is the worst and longest-lived viper in the human breast. Most men under convictions are very unwilling to throw away all *self-confidence*. They are not willing to despair of ever being fair in the sight of God in themselves. They shrink back from the idea of being lost and undone, for anything that they can do. They do not like to venture to lie helpless and without a plea at the feet of a sovereign God. How solemn to a sinner in such a state should these words be, "By grace ye are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God"!

1. *Salvation is by grace.* When a man chooses an apple off a tree, he generally chooses the ripest, the one that promises best. It is not so with God in choosing the soul He saves. He does not choose those that have sinned least, those that are most willing to be saved; He often chooses the vilest of men, "to the praise of the glory of his grace." This is proved by the instances given in the Bible of brands plucked out of the burning. Why did God choose Manasseh, who "caused his children

to pass through the fire," set "a carved image in the house of God," and filled Jerusalem with the blood of holy men, while many of his deluded people, who had sinned far less, perished? (2 Chronicles 33). Why did God save Zaccheus the hoary-headed swindler, "the chief of the publicans"? (Luke 19: 1-10). Why did Jesus tell the Pharisees, "the publicans, and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you"? Why did Jesus enter into the pearly gates of paradise with a poor thief, who had never done anything but sin up to his last hour? (Luke 23:43, comp. Matthew 27:44). Why did He leave the other thief, who was no worse than his fellow (both were hell-deserving), to sink into perdition within an arm's length of an Almighty Saviour? All these things happened unto them for ensamples, to show us that God saves according to the good pleasure of His will, not for our goodness, but to show His own free adorable grace.

The same thing is proved by the experience of every child of God. Who that has ever "tasted that the Lord is gracious," does not feel a response in their bosom to the declaration of a simple believer, "Had He not chosen me before I was born, He had never seen reason to choose me afterwards. There was nothing in me to attract the love of God." "Behold, even to the moon and it shineth not, yea, the stars are not pure in his sight; how much less man that is a worm, and the son of man which is a worm." He loves what is pure, holy, heavenly; but "I am carnal, sold under sin." There was every thing in me to drive God away. "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Psalm 7:11). He was angry with me. His whole nature abhorred me, for I was under Adam's sin; I was shapen in iniquity; every member of my body, every faculty of my soul, had been only the servant of sin. Yet He came over all these mountains to my soul. I said, Art thou come to torment me before the time? I desire not the knowledge of thy ways. But He made me willing in the day of His power. Glory, glory, glory, to the Father who chose me, the Son who died for me, and the Spirit who quickened me. Salvation is of the Lord, and it is all of grace.

2. *Salvation is through faith.* When David Brainerd was under conviction of sin, the corruption of his heart was dreadfully irritated by this, that faith alone was the condition of salvation. Of this very text he used to say, "It is a hard saying: who can bear it?" Another thing that kept him in misery was this, "I could not find out what faith was, or what it was to believe, and come to Christ. I read the calls of Christ to the weary and heavy laden, but could find no way that He directed them to come in." This is a difficulty which almost every inquiring sinner feels. It is probable that Satan often uses it as a fiery dart to keep poor sinners away from Christ. The only way really to know what

faith is, is to experience it. In one part of the word it is described as "*knowing*," "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). A true realizing knowledge of God, and of Christ as the sent of God, is saving faith. Have I this knowledge, O my soul? I was born like a wild ass's colt. God was not in all my thoughts. I did not like to retain God in my knowledge. But it pleased God to reveal His Son in me. Flesh and blood could not reveal Him unto me, but my Father who is in heaven. He has opened to me the way of salvation, so that I see its wisdom, excellency, and freeness; I cannot but believe, and this I humbly trust is that faith which is the gift of God.

Again, it is described as *discovering the beauty and excellency of Christ*: "In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel" (Isaiah 4:2). A real discovery of the glory, suitableness, and freeness of the Lord Jesus Christ in the soul, is saving faith. Natural men know what it is to get a discovery of a beautiful countenance, and the natural heart immediately glows with admiration. None but believers know what it is to get a discovery of the fair face of Him who is "fairer than the children of men," and to have the heart filled with all joy and peace in believing. Has this discovery been made to me? Can I say, "Whom, having not seen, I love; in whom, though now I see him not, but believing, I rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory"? Once I saw no form nor comeliness in Jesus, no beauty that I should desire Him. But He came like a roe or a young hart, leaping on the mountains, skipping on the hills. He stood behind our wall, He looked in at the window, *showing Himself* through the lattice. He showed me His hands and His feet pierced for sinners. He showed me that there was room beneath His shining righteousness. He showed me His heart, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and now I cannot but say, He is to me beautiful and glorious, excellent and comely. If there were ten thousand other ways of pardon, I would pass them all by, and flee to Him. He is altogether lovely. This I trust is saving faith, which is the gift of God.