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Not Our Ways: Saved By Grace

Ephesians 2:1-10

1. Our Sin (verses 1-3)
2. His Grace (verses 4-10)

In the early 1600's Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra wrote a fictional story that met with great success in the Spanish speaking world, which continues to be popular to this day. It was entitled *Don Quixote de la Mancha*. As the story unfolds we meet Alonso Quixano, a country gentleman in his fifties, who lived in La Mancha with his niece and housekeeper. In the course of time he became obsessed with reading books on chivalry (knights and dragons and damsels in distress). He became so consumed by these books that he had little time for eating or sleeping. Eventually Alonos Quixano became a knight. He found and old suit of armor and put it on. He fashioned a makeshift helmet and renamed himself "Don Quixote de la Manca." He declares his courtly love for an imaginary maiden named "Dulcinea del Toboso" and goes out to find adventure.

His first evening out Don Quixote comes to an inn which he believes is a castle. He meets the innkeeper whom he thinks to be the lord of the castle. Desperately wanting to be a real knight he asks this innkeeper to dub him knight which the innkeeper did. Upon returning home his family was so concerned about him that they secretly burned many of his books and sealed up his library pretending that a magician had come and carried away all of the books. While at home he convinced his dull-witted neighbor, Sancho Panza, to be his squire. In the early dawn they made their escape from home to seek more adventures. [1]

One of their most famous adventures together comes in chapter 8, where Cervantes writes,...

> At this point they came in sight of thirty to forty windmills that were there on the plain, and as soon as Don Quixote saw them he said to his squire, "Fortune is arranging matters for us better than we could have

shaped our desires ourselves, for look there, friend Sancho Panza, where thirty or more monstrous giants present themselves, all of whom I mean to engage in battle and slay, and with whose spoils we shall begin to make our fortunes; for this is righteous warfare, and it is God's good service to sweep so evil a breed from off the face of the earth."

"What giants?" said Sancho Panza.

"Those thou seest there," answered his master, "with the long arms, and some have them nearly two leagues long."

"Look, your worship," said Sancho; "what we see there are not giants but windmills, and what seem to be their arms are the sails that turned by the wind make the millstone go."

"It is easy to see," replied Don Quixote, "that thou art not used to this business of adventures; those are giants; and if thou art afraid, away with thee out of this and betake thyself to prayer while I engage them in fierce and unequal combat."

So saying, he gave the spur to his steed Rocinante, heedless of the cries his squire Sancho sent after him, warning him that most certainly they were windmills and not giants he was going to attack.

He, however, was so positive they were giants that he neither heard the cries of Sancho, nor perceived, near as he was, what they were, but made at them shouting, "Fly not, cowards and vile beings, for a single knight attacks you."

A slight breeze at this moment sprang up, and the great sails began to move, seeing which Don Quixote exclaimed, "Though ye flourish more arms than the giant Briareus, ye have to reckon with me."

So saying, and commending himself with all his heart to his lady Dulcinea, imploring her to support him in such a peril, with lance in rest and covered by his buckler, he charged at Rocinante's fullest gallop and fell upon the first mill that stood in front of him; but as he drove his lance-point into the sail the wind whirled it round with such force that it shivered the lance to pieces, sweeping with it horse and rider, who went rolling over on the plain, in a sorry condition. Sancho hastened to his

> assistance as fast as his ass could go, and when he came up found him unable to move, with such a shock had Rocinante fallen with him.
>
> "God bless me!" said Sancho, "did I not tell your worship to mind what you were about, for they were only windmills? and no one could have made any mistake about it but one who had something of the same kind in his head."
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> "Hush, friend Sancho," replied Don Quixote, "the fortunes of war more than any other are liable to frequent fluctuations; and moreover I think, and it is the truth, that that same sage Friston who carried off my study and books, has turned these giants into mills in order to rob me of the glory of vanquishing them, such is the enmity he bears me; but in the end his wicked arts will avail but little against my good sword." [2]

Don Quixote was so convinced that he was a knight and that the windmills were giants that he failed to acknowledge the real world. Even when Sancho Panza was his voice of reality and even when Don Quixote saw the reality he failed to believe saying that the dragons had disguised themselves as windmills.

This is a great illustration of our sermon series this summer that I have entitled “Not Our Ways.” The ways of Don Quixote were not the ways of reality.

For the past six weeks we have taken up various topical themes in the Scripture in which I have sought to demonstrate that God’s ways are not our ways. In our way of thinking about things we would not naturally do what God has done. 1. He has created a world in which evil prays a critical role. 2. In God’s world some are able to be guilty or innocent for the acts of another. 3. God has chosen to give opportunity for salvation to men but not the fallen angels. 4. God brought the Messiah in a lowly manner rather than with great pomp and circumstance. 5. God uses weak and frail creatures to spread the good news of His salvation rather than the strong and mighty and rich and famous. 6. God has only chosen to save a few people, not many, as we would have done.

I have gathered each of these themes from a message preached by Edward Payson in the 1800’s entitled *God’s Ways Above Men’s*. This brings us to the seventh way in which Payson put forth as an example that God has created a world that is different than we might have created should we have been God. God created a world in which we are saved by grace.

Here is what Edward Payson said,

> God's thoughts respecting the way in which men become partakers of the salvation of the Gospel; differ widely from ours. We all naturally suppose, that men are to be saved by their good works; by obeying the law; by subduing their sins; by alms and prayers. But the gospel teaches us, that men are to be saved, not by working, but by believing; that we are saved by grace, through faith; and that to him that worketh not, but believeth on him who justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted to him for righteousness. This truth men neither love nor understand, and even after they are awakened and convinced of sin, it is one of the most difficult things imaginable to convince them that their pretended good works are no better than sins; and that if they ever obtain salvation, it must be by simply believing in the Son of God. In scarcely any thing do God's thoughts and ways differ so widely from ours, as in this great doctrine of salvation through grace—of justification by faith in the righteousness of Christ. [3]

This current message is entitled, "Not Our Ways: Saved By Grace."

> Ephesians 2:1-10
> And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

This is a great passage that puts forth the depths of our sin and demonstrates the greatness of God's grace. The contrast between the two are intentional. On the one

hand we see our state as sinners as dark as can be. When Paul paints the picture of our souls for what it really is there is no hope seen for us. We are described as helpless as can be. On the other hand we see God's grace and mercy abound in all its glory. Under no obligation in any way God dispenses the riches of his mercy and grace and love and kindness to us in Christ Jesus. God is then shown to be lovely and worthy to be adored.

When jewelers show forth their diamonds and rings and watches they always put them on a black background and shine bright lights upon them. This is done so the attention will be brought to the jewelry and not to the background. They want the jewelry to shine and sparkle in every way possible. They want their potential customers to be so enamored at the beauty of their jewelry that they feel almost compelled to purchase it. In the same way that's what this text does for us in Ephesians 2:1-10. We are the black background. There is nothing in us that is good whatsoever to be looked at. God's grace is the jewel. It shines forth in all of its brilliancy.

The aim of this message is to reveal the grace of God to you so that you go forth at the end of this message marveling at His amazing grace singing, ...

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now I'm found,
Was blind, but now, I see.
(by John Newton)

I want you to walk away from your completed reading singing, ...

And can it be that I should gain,
An interest in the Saviors blood,
Died He for me, who cause His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be?
That Though, my God, shouldst die for me?
(by Charles Wesley)

I want you to come away from reading this message singing, ...

Wonderful grace of Jesus,
Greater than all my sin.
How shall my tongue describe it?

Where shall its praise begin?
Taking away my burden,
Setting my spirit free;
For the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me.
(by Haldor lillenas)

I want you to respond to this message by singing, ...

Sin and despair, like the sea waved cold,
Threaten the soul with infinite loss;
Grace that is greater, yes, grace untold,
Points to the refuge, the mighty cross.
(by Julia Johnston)

I want you to grasp this message so that you can heartfully sing, ...

Grace unmeasured, vast and free
That knew me from eternity
That called me out before my birth
To bring You glory on this earth
Grace amazing, pure and deep
That saw me in my misery
That took my curse and owned my blame
So I could bear Your righteous name.
(by Bob Kauflin)

I want to so stir your heart with the wonderful grace of God so that you cannot help but rejoice in the greatness of His grace. I believe that this is right in line with Paul's purpose as he writes.

Our text begins with the word, "and" which means that the thought is a carry-over from the end previous section, which gets its start in verses 15 and 16. Paul had communicates to those in Ephesus that he had heard about their "faith in the Lord Jesus" and their "love for all the saints" (verse 15). As a result Paul was continually praying for them (verse 16). We see his prayer request in verse 17, "... that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him."

In other words, Paul prayed for these believers to be enlightened into a true knowledge of God. Paul was fully aware that while we walk upon the earth, "we

see in a mirror dimly” (1 Cor. 13:12). We don’t fully see the heavenly realities. Now, we know only “in part” (1 Cor. 13:12). So we haven’t yet arrived in our knowledge of God. We can always grow deeper into an understanding of Him. As we grow deeper into our knowledge of Him our lives will change.

If you knew fully of the greatness of God’s working in your life, you would be compelled to worship Him always. Also, you couldn’t hold back in telling everyone that you met about Him! In fact, anytime you sin or fail to speak with others about Christ, it is simply because you don’t fully understand God and what He has done.

In verse 18, we see Paul expand upon his prayer request, “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe” (1:18-19a). Paul is praying that these believers would know the hope that they have in Christ. It’s far better than anything you could even dream of. He wants them to understand how rich they will be someday, when they receive their heavenly inheritance. It’s far greater than you could ever dream of. He wants them to grasp how great God’s power is toward those who believe. God is far stronger than you ever thought possible.

From verses 19-23, Paul speaks about the power and authority of God, which was demonstrated in raising Jesus from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenly places (verse 20). And then, beginning in chapter 2, Paul says, “and" which continues the thought of the incredible power of God. In these verses, Paul shows the power of God in that He raised dead souls to life. God chose to do so by His grace.

As chapter 2 is a continuation of Paul’s prayer in chapter 1, he wants your eyes to be enlightened to know the greatness of the grace of God in your salvation! And that’s my aim also this morning. I want you to see how great God’s grace is in your salvation, that you might never think that you were in any way saved by your own works. Let’s look first at ...

1. Our Sin (verses 1-3)

Paul writes, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins."

These words describe the spiritual anatomy of all who are not Christians. For us who have embraced Christ these words describe what we used to be like. They are not flattering words. These words give us a sense of hopelessness. These words give us a sense of helplessness.

Paul describes our spiritual anatomy as being dead in our sins (verse 1). In describing us as being "dead" it doesn't mean that we were physically dead. In verse 2 we see these same people walking according to the course of this world. In verse 3 Paul says "among [these sins as well] we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh." Those who are "dead" in verse 1 are being described as "walking" in verse 2 and "living" in verse 3. So these dead people have life in them. They are living and breathing and walking and talking. Yet they are dead. They are walking corpses!

There are certain animistic religions in this world that have a category for these types of people. Some of those who practice voodoo believe that a human corpse can be revived by a sorcerer. However when this corpse comes alive it lacks a soul and so it lacks true life. They are called zombies. If you ever see pictures of zombies you will always notice that there is something wrong with their eyes. They are often glazed over or look as if they are staring into space. Such sorts of eyes represent that there is no real life within them. This is because people believe that a zombie doesn't have a will of its own. It is controlled completely by the one who brought it to life. This is what all of us were like before we believed in Jesus! We were spiritual zombies! Certainly we were living and breathing and doing things but we were "dead in our trespasses and sins." We were animated dead people. We were dead in the sense that sin ruled our lives! We lived for our own pleasures. We willingly transgressed the law of God. We failed to hit the mark of God's righteousness. In fact we were so into our sin that Paul calls us "dead" in our sin. We were responsive to nothing in the spiritual realm.

This the point of 1 Corinthians 2:14, "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised." Before Christ, we are dead to the things of the Spirit. Oh, we may hear about them but we are not interested. Someone may talk to us about the gospel but we don't understand it. We don't understand because we cannot understand!

Have you ever seen people so interested in one thing that they are totally oblivious to all that is around them? Perhaps your husband in your house has been reading

the morning newspaper intently. You have asked him a question but his expression has remained unchanged. It is as if he didn't even hear you. You ask again and he didn't hear you again. So it is with the spiritually dead person. You can talk and talk and talk to them about Christ but they won't respond.

Maybe you have seen someone watching the television with great attention. Some movie is playing and they are really into it. (I know that our kids can be like this at times). You ask them a question and you get no response. You raise your voice and you get no response. The only thing that I have ever found to fully get their attention is by turning off the television! Then they wake up to the real world!

I believe that this is what Paul is talking about here in verse 1. Before anyone ever becomes a Christian they are totally engrossed in their own sins. They want nothing more than to pursue their sins and they do so willingly and with much passion. They are controlled by their sins like a zombie is controlled by the sorcerer. They are resistant to righteousness.

Continuing on with verse 2: "[in your trespasses and sins] you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." We see several factors at work here. First of all we see the factor of the world. In verse 2 we read that we walked according to the world. That is because the world naturally dominates our thinking! The world doesn't want God. The world doesn't want the ways of God.

Just think about the advertisement industry. What do they use to lure people to purchase their goods? They use the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life. These things are not from God, but from the world. The world uses such things as sensuality, greed, lust, glory, and pleasure to attract people to purchase their good. Can you imagine any television commercial attracting people with the fruit of the Spirit to purchase their goods? Patience and self-control are the opposite of what the world wants. The world wants you to purchase their goods now! That's the ways of the world. That is also the course that everyone born into this world naturally walks.

We also see the devil at work here. We see, "the prince of the power of the air." This is referring to Satan. Satan works in "the sons of disobedience" to accomplish his will in this world. He tempts (Matt. 4:1-11). He seduces (2 Cor. 11:3). He

deceives (2 Cor. 4:4). He lies (John 8:44). He attacks (1 Peter 5:8). Those in the world, who are dead in their sins are under his satanic spell. He has blinded their eyes so they cannot see the glories of Christ!

The extent of sin has not merely affected those out there somewhere. It has affected all of us inside the church as well as outside the church. Paul confessed of his own depravity in verse 3, “Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.” In the context here Paul is extending his description of sin even to the Jews who from childhood were taught the law and the prophets. They weren’t exempt in their sin simply because they were outwardly religious. No, sin affected them as well.

The Jews had the same lusts as the Gentiles. They had the same wicked thoughts as the Gentiles. They indulged “the desires of the flesh and of the mind” just like the Gentiles did. This is because sin has affected us all! It does not matter how religious you are and how nice you look. Apart from Jesus Christ, you are deep in your sins. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees describing them as “whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness” (Matt. 23:27). This is where many religious people are! On the outside they may look all nice and clean but should you probe into their mind and should you know exactly what they thought, you would find that they are as sinful “as the rest.”

Verses 1-3 show the desperate situation of all who live on this planet and are apart from Jesus Christ. As a result they are “by nature children of wrath” (according to verse 3). This means that they are objects of the wrath of God. Every single person that has ever lived is “by nature children of wrath.” It’s part of our constitution. It is the way that we are made. Certainly we do sinful things but the problem is much deeper than that. It descends into the depths of our being.

If I put on some clothes and do a dirty job down at the local sewage treatment plant I can always come home, change my clothes, take a shower and become clean again. However if I live at the sewage treatment plant where there is no shower or change of clothes I would have no hope of becoming clean again. Why? Because by nature I am an inhabitant of the sewage plant! Because I am there, I will stink.

This is the way we all are. We are inhabitants in this world with sinful flesh. In God’s nose we stink. Without God doing anything for us we love our sin! We

wallow in it like a pig does in the mud. We do not smell our sin. It does not smell badly to us. The result is that there is no hope of escape. “By nature, we are children of wrath,” and can only expect to feel the anger of God come upon us.

These are God’s ways. Our sin is so bad that we are completely helpless and completely hopeless! Our sin is so bad that we cannot understand spiritual truth unless God first works on our soul!

Now this is not the way of the world. You simply need to talk with people about their outlook on mankind and many will tell you that man is basically good. Yet God’s assessment of things is a bit different. God says that we are dead in our sins without any ability to discern spiritual truth. Those in the world look around and see good things that people do and say. People do indeed do good things but this is all on a human level without taking God into account. But were we able to see how people behaved in the spiritual realm with God, we would see how they entirely lacked any goodness in reference to God.

So now against the black backdrop of our sin we see ...
2. His Grace (verses 4-10)

IVerse 4 begins, “But God.” We need to stop there. These are two of the most blessed words in all of the Bible: “But God.” They are words of contrast. They are words of hope! Our sin as described in verses 1-3 is very dark! Yet, oh, how lavish is His grace! Listen to God's grace flow in verse 4-6, ...

> Ephesians 2:4-6
> But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

These verses begin with a description of the mercy and love of God. Verse 4 says that God is “rich in mercy.” This means that he has a lot of it! Bill Gates may well have a lot of money. He is rich. God has a lot of mercy! To save such sinful wrath-deserving people as we are it took much mercy! Later in the verse Paul describes God has having “great love.” This means that God has a whole lot of love! The ocean has a lot of water. God has a lot of love! To rescue us from our sinful hell-deserving state it took much love!

We have seen already in verses 1-3 how helpless it was for us. Now in verse 5 Paul brings it up again exactly how bad it was. He wrote, "...we were dead in our transgressions" We were not spiritually alive! We were spiritually dead! We were unresponsive to the things of God until God acted. A dead man can be poked and prodded but such a one won't respond. A dead man can be told to arise but such a one will remain lying in the casket. A dead man does not get better on his own. If anything he gets worse as his body begins to decay and he begins to stink!

This is where we were before Christ saved us! We were dead. We were unresponsive. We had no hope. He had no spiritual desire. Yet God changed all that. Being dead we needed life. That is what God did for us as can be seen in verse 5. Look at how Paul describes our salvation, "[God] made us alive together with Christ." We were dead but God made us alive.

I hope that you feel how deep your sinful situation was. Because, if you don't feel this you won't grasp that grace that is ours in Christ Jesus. Suppose that I came up to one of you and gripped your arms tightly and violently jerked you up here to the stage. What sort of response would I get from you? You would probably be a bit angry with me. Perhaps you might curse me or try to swing at me.

Now suppose that the floor where you are sitting is a lake and this stage is a dock. Further, suppose that you were drowning and I came up to you and gripped your arms tightly and violently jerked you up here onto the dock. What sort of response would I get from you? You would be happy with me and thankful that I just saved your life. You would say some good things about me. You might even stoop down to kiss my feet.

When you know what you are saved from there is great joy in your heart that goes to the savior. When you fully grasp exactly how hopeless you were before Christ saved you, your joy will exponentially heighten!

See, the great reality of life is not that you were drowning and that God threw you a flotation device where you simply needed to reach out and grab it. No, the predicament was far worse. You had already drowned in your sins. You weren't at the surface of the water struggling to survive the waters breaking over your head. No, you were at the bottom of the sea. You were cold, purple, and not breathing without any hope of a breath. That is when God acted. He didn't merely throw you a lifeline. He jumped into the water, swam down to the bottom of the lake where you were, gripped your arms tightly in His, brought you up to the dock, gave you

supernatural CPR, and brought you to life! Not only do you really live in this day and age but in the ages to come you will live eternally. That is what God did for us. It was entirely God's work. It was entirely God's doing. This is the point of the parenthetical comment at the end of verse 5, "(by grace you have been saved)."

This is what grace is! Grace is giving spiritual life to spiritually dead people. Grace is acting before we even do any seeking. Grace is working, before we even see the need. Grace is not merely helping us but doing everything for us! In and of ourselves we had no power to make ourselves alive! God did all of the work. We didn't even initiate the work! Sick men may cry out to the doctor, "I'm sick! Can you help me?" However dead men don't cry out to the doctors, "Hey, Doc! I'm dead! I need to be made alive!" They don't do that! However God initiated and intervened and made us alive.

Yet, God did more than merely making us alive. Verse 6 continues with two things that God did for us, "and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." These are strange words to our ears!

The Bible often speaks of how Jesus has taken His seat in heaven at the right hand of God the Father. Consider the following verses, ...

- 1 Peter 3:22, "[Jesus] is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven."
- Hebrews 1:3, "When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."
- Hebrews 8:1, "We have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens."
- Hebrews 10:12, "He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God."
- Colossians 3:1, "Keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God."

We can understand these things but verse 6 says something more. It says that we have joined him. God "raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (verse 6). These things are strange to our ears because it sure does seem like we are here on earth and not in heaven with Jesus. I don't begin to understand these words. I simply say that God has made us so alive that three is a sense in which we are already seated with Jesus where we will someday experience in all its fullness all by God's grace.

Now we come to verse 7 which is my favorite verse in this entire section. I would even say that verse 7 is my favorite verse in all of the Bible because it speaks about the purposes of God in our salvation and puts everything into its proper perspective! Paul writes, “so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” This is God's whole purpose for our salvation!

The ultimate reason why God saves us is far beyond us! He wants His entire creation forever to behold His amazing grace! Have you ever noticed when a little girl does some artwork? She’s anxious to show her mommy and daddy what she made? Have you ever noticed when a little boy learns how to ride a bike he is anxious to show his friends what he can do? Have you ever noticed when adults are involved in some sort of project, they like to point it out for others to see? I know all of this by experience. I have seen these things in my children. I have seen these things in myself. Recently, I have been working on finishing my basement. We had several people over at our house this past week. I showed them my work.

Well, God is the same way. He wants for others to enjoy the things that He has done. One of the things that He is especially delighted to share with His creatures is His marvelous grace. In fact this is the ultimate reason why anybody is saved. We are saved so that God might show to all how gracious He is. That’s the flow of this passage. For the first three verses we see how utterly sinful we are! For the next three verses we see how gracious God is in our salvation. And now in verse 7 we see why it is that God has saved us, “so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

Everyone who God saves will ultimately be put on display for the entire universe to see. I remember in college having times of "Open Mic" where people were invited to come to the microphone and use it however they wanted to. People could sing, tell jokes recite poems, or any other sort of performance. In heaven there will be a continual opportunity for people to give their testimony of God's saving grace in their lives.

One may stand and say, "I was born into a single family household and had a difficult time when I was a youngster. Money was tight; mom was off working trying to make ends meet. My mother wasn’t a Christian and would often come home drunk. She didn’t treat me very well and often left me at home alone. As a result I became involved with the wrong crowd. I joined a gang. Eventually I spent three years in prison for grand theft auto. While he was there God broke me. He gave me a new life. He caused me to be born again. He gave me several years to

study His word. When I came out of that jail my life was never the same. I grew in my love for Him. He used me to bring thousands to Him. Isn't His grace wonderful?"

Another may stand and say, "I grew up in a religious home and yet it was a home filled with hypocrisy. My parents looked great at church but our home life was a wreck. I experienced little love from my parents. When I was married I proceeded to do the same thing. I was very active in church but had no heart for God. I was all externals thinking that I could work my way to God merely by doing my own religious things. I was very condemning of others who didn't live up to my standard. When he was in his forties I had a car accident in which I nearly died. At that point God worked His grace in my heart. He caused me to become born again. He showed me my sin and my need of a savior. He gave me faith to believe. I confessed my sin to my wife, my children, and my church. Everyone saw what a change God worked in me! Isn't His grace wonderful?"

Testimony after testimony will come. People will be able to go on and on telling their stories of how God made them alive. There will always be a willing audience; especially the angels who long to look into salvation (1 Peter 1:12) and rejoice when sinners repent (Luke 15).

In all of these testimonies, who receives the praise? God does! Why does He receive the praise? Because of His grace! Testimonies of salvation will go on forever! Everyone who is in heaven will marvel at the undeserved kindness that gave to those who deserved to have none of it.

Here is a great catechism question to teach your children. Question: "Ultimately, why have you been saved from your sin?" Answer: "So that forever I can show forth 'the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward [you] in Christ Jesus.'"

None of us will deserve to enjoy the pleasures of heaven. It is only the grace of God that allows us to do so. Our presence will redound forever of His grace! That is ultimately why God saves us. That is why I love this verse of Scripture. It centers all of its attention upon God.

Verses 8-10 continue to get at this same thing.

> Ephesians 2:8-10
> For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one

may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Your salvation can be attributed to only one thing: the grace of God. It was entirely His work that took you from a state of death to a state of life. You might object saying, “Well, there was one thing that I did. I believed! I heard the gospel and I believed! That’s the thing that I brought to my salvation. I brought my faith.”

Well, look closely at what verse 8 says, “By grace you have been saved through faith [so far so good] and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Paul is saying that your salvation isn’t of yourself. The grace didn’t come from you. Nor did your faith. In fact your faith originated in God. Your faith “is the gift of God.” God had this present that He gave to you, wrapped nicely with a bow, ribbon, and beautiful wrapping paper. It's called your faith.

It is true that you believed in Jesus who alone can save. But, if you step back a moment and ask the question, “Why did I believe?” you will come to see that you believed only because God gave you the faith to believe. “By grace you have been saved through faith; and that [grace and faith are] not of yourselves, it’s the gift of God.”

There are many scriptures that speak of God giving repentance, which leads to faith. Consider the following verses, ...

- Acts 3:26, “God raised up His Servant, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.”
- Acts 5:31, “He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.”
- Acts 11:18, “God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.”
- 2Ti 2:25, “If perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.”

Why does anybody repent of their sins? Because God gives them repentance. Why does anybody believe? Because God gives them faith.

Verse 9 explains the reason why God does things this way. “Not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” God saves us in such a way that it would be clear that it wasn’t our own doing. If our salvation was our doing in any way, we

might have something to boast about. If our faith and repentance originated in ourselves we might be able to say, “Look at my work! I repented! I believed!” But God has done His marvelous saving work in such a way that we won’t have anything that we can point to in ourselves as grounds for God saving us. We are saved by His grace! We are saved when we didn’t deserve it! We are saved when God initiates the work in our life. Surely we believe but it’s only so that we can boast that God opened our hearts to see and believe.

The theme continues on in verse 10. Even our good works were prepared by God. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” When God makes us alive from our sinful state, we are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), created in Christ Jesus. As a new creation God intends us to do good works but He already prepares the way for them. All we need to do is walk in them.

In the ages to come do you think that you will say, “Look at all of the good works that I did!"? You won't. Rather, you will say, “Look at all the good works that God prepared beforehand for me to do!”

It’s all grace! It’s all God! May we boast in Him!

As a final illustration, I want to direct you attention to 1 Corinthians 15:10 in which Paul writes, "By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."

Here we see Paul first acknowledging that he is a product of God's grace and God's grace alone. "By the grace of God I am what I am," he said. He didn't think of himself as a self-made man. He considers himself to be a product of God's grace. But, this didn't prevent him from working. In his very next breath, he writes, "His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of [the apostles]." Paul boasted that he worked harder than all of the apostles. You name them, and Paul worked harder than they did. He worked harder than Peter. He worked harder than Matthew. He worked harder than Bartholomew. And yet, Paul never took any credit for his labors. He described the source of his labor, "Not I, but the grace of God with me."

So it is with all of us who believe. Certainly, we experience our belief in God. But, it is God's grace that works in us. It is God that gives us to be everything that we are. May we boast in Him.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on July 22, 2007 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

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[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Don_Quixote

[2] http://www.online-literature.com/cervantes/don_quixote/12/

[3] Edward Payson, "God's Ways Above Men's." See http://www.rvbc.cc/ResourceLibrary/PaysonGodsWays/PaysonGodsWays.htm.