

## Saved Through Faith

Written by Josh Winslett

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There are many Bible passages that can bring both comfort and debate among Christians. Among these verses is **Ephesians 2:8**. Is this verse describing regeneration? Is this verse speaking of Christ's legal work on the cross? Is this verse saying that a person must do something to be saved? There is no small assortment of views concerning this text. The following essay will consider the verse in context, as well as the various other components of the verse.

**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.*

### Regeneration Passage

**Ephesians 2:8** describes regeneration. **Ephesians 2:1** starts with "*And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.*"

"The context seems to build up to regeneration. Some point out that the phrase "*you hath he quickened*"

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” is in italics and not in the original text, but I feel that it is dangerous to build an interpretation on the ground of correcting the translators. They knew Greek, we look up definitions in Greek lexicons. Also,

### **chapter 1**

ends with Paul establishing that it is only by God's resurrecting power that we are made able to believe. Being that these chapter breaks are not original to Paul, the end of

### **chapter 1**

leads perfectly into the discussion of regeneration in

### **chapter 2**

. There is no disconnection. Rather, it perfectly shows how God vitally distributes His grace to His children.

Furthermore, both verse **8** and **10** starts with the word 'for'. The word 'for' denotes the idea of an explanatory reason. The context of verses 8 and 10 are intimately connected. Let me explain:

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How are we saved (regenerated)? By God's grace through faith. Being regenerated is a gift by God's sovereign work and not man's works.

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Why are we created in Christ Jesus through regeneration? So that we might glory God through good works.

Verses **8-9** explain the “how” of regeneration. Verse 10 explains the “why” of regeneration. Also, the context of **Ephesians 2:1-7** shows consistent pattern and flow that points toward the context as being regeneration.

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**2:1-3** The elect are quickened while they are dead in sins.

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**2:2** Mentioning of former depraved lifestyle worldview.

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**2:3** Mentioning of former depraved lifestyle and nature.

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**2:4** Introduction of exception clause to natural and practical depravity, "*But God.*"

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**2:5** Continuing from verse 1, they were dead but now are quickened or made alive. First use of the words "saved" and "grace" in connection with quickening.

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**2:6** Regeneration raises us up in Christ, like as **Col. 2:12**.

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**2:7** Glorification is the final goal. Regeneration makes our soul fit for glory.

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**2:8-10** The redemptive work of Christ is applied to the souls of the elect by God's grace.

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**2:11-22** There is now unity among all ethnicities through Christ's work of redemption.

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Notice that these verses flow from active depravity to the factor of change brought about by the new birth. This living spiritual union is described by Paul with three different prepositions; with, in, and through. We have been made alive with Christ. Regeneration raises us up vitally to sit in heavenly places in Christ. Regeneration is a part of a more grand scheme that leads to final glorification through Christ. With only knowing these three prepositions, we can already conclude that salvation is by grace.

Some have thought **Ephesians 2:8** to describe either Christ's faithfulness as Savior or God's trust in His son, or vice versa. Could Paul be referring to Christ's legal work on the cross in verses **4-6**, and possibly even verses **8-9**? Possibly, but not likely. Whereas these principles are true, I do not believe that these true concepts hold up to a critical view of the context. The overwhelming context of verse 8 seems to be directed towards regeneration. Furthermore, Paul rarely mixed metaphors. When Paul discussed the legal, he usually stuck to the legal. When he discussed the vital, he usually stuck to the vital. Elder Michael Gowens puts it this way, “

*Paul rarely mixed the courtroom with the delivery room.*

” In chapter 2, Paul is explaining why God had called the Ephesians from death to life.

Regeneration is a necessary part of the purpose of salvation. From predestination (

**Chapter 1:4-5**

) to glorification (

**Chapter 2:7**

), regeneration is a vital part of God's grace. Paul is telling the Ephesians that the reason their present life is different from their previous walk is because of this vital union with, in, and through Christ. And like all other phases of salvation, regeneration is a gift and completely by God's free and sovereign grace.

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### By Grace

The principle of grace is self explanatory. Grace simply means unmerited favor. Elder Sonny Pyles defines grace as “God's free favor bestowed upon hell deserving and wrath deserving individuals.” This concept is further established with the phrase “and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God.” So whatever “saved through faith” means, it must be completely by God's sovereign grace and not by any synergistic effort between humans and God.

Consider how grace and works are contrasted by Paul in **Romans 11:6**.

**Romans 11:6** *And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.*

**Hebrews 12:2** also tells us that Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith. Faith is said to be authored by Christ. This means that he produces, creates, or brings into being faith in us. Faith is finished when he triumphantly delivers our bodies from sin. Again, salvation is completely by God or it is not by grace at all.

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Faith is said to be of the operation of God in **Colossians 2:12**. Notice the sovereignty of God also shown in this statement. The word “of” is a genitive denoting where something is derived from. Faith proceeds from God, as is caused by his operation, or work of regeneration on the soul.

If **Ephesians 2:8** taught that man must do anything of his own ability and volition to be saved, then it would contradict itself, as well as the entirety of the written word. Salvation is by grace and grace alone.

## Saved How?

If the above exegesis is correct then the salvation mentioned in verse 8 is being vitally saved at regeneration. Though Christ accomplished the legal work of redemption on the cross, the elect sinner must also have this redemptive work applied to the soul. Regeneration makes the soul fit for heaven. This deliverance then is being saved from a death in sins unto a life in Christ. The person is also saved from the full bondage of sin in their life as their soul has now been radically changed.

## Faith

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This is probably the most debated part of the text at hand. What is the faith here mentioned? Does the word faith always have reference to gospel belief? Is faith always a verb, meaning something performed by the believer in Christ? I would contend that there is both a gospel or evangelical faith which not all of God's children will experience, and an intrinsic faith given to every child of God at the new birth.

Now, let's specifically consider the faith mentioned in **Ephesians 2:8-9**. This specific principle of faith is what all the elect are saved through in regeneration. This is a universal principle for all of the elect and must, by necessity, be identical to every child of God. In other words, being that it is a principle that will apply to all the elect, it also must be something that is applicable to infants, mentally handicapped, adults, and Old Testament saints.

**Old Testament Saint:** There was a time when full gospel knowledge was not revealed. **Colossians 1:26**

calls New Testament gospel revelation a “*mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints*”.

Full historic gospel information was not completely revealed until the time of Christ. This point is further illustrated in

**Galatians 3:3**

“

*But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.*

” There was a time before full gospel knowledge. Yet, God had a people before the gospel dispensation that served him through faith (

**Hebrews 11**

). If gospel faith was nonexistent during the law dispensation and faith is always evangelical gospel faith, how did these OT saints exercise faith?

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**Infants, Mentally Handicapped, Non-evangelized elect:** Some may feel that infants and mentally handicapped are not in need of salvation. I remind the reader of

### **Romans 5:12**

“

*Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:*

” This point is further proved in verse

### **14**

, when Paul says, “...

*death reigned from Adam to Moses...*

” The fact that every human dies proves that all humans are totally depraved and will experience everlasting punishment apart from God's grace. I ask the question, can any of these three categories believe the evangelical gospel? Obviously the answer is no. Since the answer is no, how are these types of cases “saved through faith” if

### **Ephesians 2:8**

is a universal principle? I also would like the reader to consider the fact that

### **John 3:8**

dictates that the act of regeneration itself is identical with all of the elect,

### **John 3:8**

;

*“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*

”

**What then is this gift of faith?** The word faith in **Ephesians 2:8** is not a verb, it is a noun.

From that we can gather that this is not an action performed by man, but instead, it is something possessed by the individual. **2**

### **Thessalonians 3:2**

tells us that all men do not have faith. I would add that no person would ever have faith apart from God's Spirit in them. Faith itself is a fruit of the Spirit (

### **Gal. 5:22**

). Being a fruit, it is an effect and evidence of the Spirit within a person and not the cause. A person must first have the Spirit of God in them before they can have faith. God himself gives every elect this special measure of faith at regeneration (

### **Romans 12:3**

). Some may be under the assumption that man can exercise faith in order to be born again. One must always remember that depravity is literally a death and regeneration is literally a resurrection. It would be utterly ridiculous to expect the dead to do anything of themselves to get

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life. This is the analogy that Jesus used in John 5:25-29. Consider the words of Elder J.H. Oliphant, “

*If faith is measured to us by God it can not be produced in us by teaching. “Without faith it is impossible to please God,” Heb 11:6. “They that are in the flesh can not please God,” Ro 8:8. A man without faith can not please God, and if it be said that a man must do something to get faith,” we reply, let him do what he will he can not please God.*

”

The Greek word for faith in **Ephesians 2:8** is PISTIS. One definition of the word PISTIS is “*firm persuasion*

.”

The gift of faith then in essence describes the radical transformation God makes in us by changing our nature from loving sin and being drawn to it; to hating sin, loving God, and being drawn towards Him. This firm persuasion happens to every elect upon regeneration.

It must again be pointed out that this gift of faith is not measured by or is dependent upon knowledge. This can be illustrated as a hand gripping gold. The hand represents the gift of faith, and the gold represents divine revelation. The amount of gold does not determine the strength of the hands grip. The amount of gold may vary greatly, but the hand grips the gold regardless. Likewise, the amount of divine revelation may vary greatly depending on location, former indoctrination, human frailty, hardness of heart, etc. The amount of knowledge is inconsequential; faith is the persuasion that embraces what ever knowledge is available.

Of faith and **Ephesians 2:8**, Elder Michael Gowens writes, “*This verse describes the initial gift of faith in regeneration. When the Lord Jesus Christ speaks the life-giving voice to one who is dead in trespasses and sins (Joh 5:25), He creates faith in the soul by the sheer power of His command, so that the sinner irresistibly responds to His effectual call. The sinner is “made willing in the day of [God’s] power” (Ps 110:3). Like Lazarus, he responds to the Divine*

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*imperative involuntarily – below the level of consciousness. The power that raise Jesus from the dead is the very same power that creates faith in the soul (*

*Eph 1:19*

*).*

*”*

Also, consider **Hebrews 11:1**, “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*”

The word substance in **Hebrews 11:1** is defined as a setting under or support, ie; a foundation. Faith is the foundation and ground by which we have hope. Faith gives us evidence, or assurance, of things not yet fully realized. Again, faith is a persuasion.

We can see this persuasion illustrated by what God teaches us at regeneration:

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We are taught to know God and Christ. -**John 17:3, Hebrews 8:10-13**

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We are taught to deny ungodliness. -**Titus 2:12**

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We are taught to deny worldly lusts. -**Titus 2:12**

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We are taught to live soberly. -**Titus 2:12**

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We are taught to live righteously. -**Titus 2:12**

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We are taught to live godly. -**Titus 2:12**

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We are taught to groan for deliverance from sin. -**Titus 2:13, Romans 8:20-23**

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We are taught to love. -**1 John 3:14**

All of these things that regeneration teaches us are in contrast to our former depraved nature that is described in **Ephesians 2:1-3** and **Romans 3:9-18**. It is evident that our God-given faith is most certainly a persuasion. The argument could be made that it can't be God giving us the gift of faith because that happens after we are born again, or saved. Whereas I agree that regeneration precedes the gift of faith, we cannot be born again without also being given the gift of faith. It is a whole package deal.

**Faith is Christ in you!** Faith is also literally Christ in you, the hope of glory. Some have thought that the phrase through faith denotes through Christ's faithfulness on the cross. Whereas this principle is true, it does not fit the context itself. Also, Paul already said through, by, and in Christ multiple other times. In verse 8 he says faith, so it must be something else specific. It would be better said that it is Christ's faithfulness applied to the soul. It is certainly true that we

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are saved by Christ in us. Consider the following verses:

**1 John 5:4** *For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*

**1 John 4:4** *Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.*

Notice that in **1 John 5:4** the giving of faith is how we overcome the world. In **1 John 4:4** it is Christ in you that makes you overcome. John equates the gift of faith as being Christ in you. Where sin reigned, grace now reigns. Christ reigns in you.

This interpretation of **1 John 5:4** may seem different than the way most modern evangelicals interpret it. Most would interpret this to describe a person's active gospel obedience and not the initial gift of faith, or change of nature at regeneration. Yet, it is not exclusive to Primitive Baptists. 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian John Stott writes, "*By the use of the neuter 'whatsoever' John states the principle in its most general and abstract form. He does so to emphasize not 'the victorious person' but 'the victorious power'. It is not the man, but his birth from God, which conquers.*"

Elder J.H. Oliphant also addresses how faith is Christ in you, "*I desire to continue this subject in a plain, simple way, to show that faith is not a mere conviction, or the result of teaching by men.*"

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*Heb 11:1, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," etc. The word rendered substance in the text is the same that is rendered person in Heb 1:3, in which Christ is called the "express image of his person." Evidently the word person here and the word substance in the text means more than a mere influence or belief. It is certainly God referred to, so the word substance is not a mere influence, but it is no less than Christ. The Greek word rendered substance in our text is Hupostasis, signifying "anything set under as a support." What is it that supports the people of God? Is it a simple belief? No, it is Jesus. He is the chief corner stone that bears up all our hope. "Metaphorically it is the ground-work of a thing, the foundation or ground of our hope or confidence," also subsistence. The definitions given this word forbid the idea that this faith is anything less than a God-given grace which upholds our hopes, and upon which we feed, and by which we are sustained.*

”

With this understanding we can see how those in Hebrews 11 were able to live such miraculous lives by faith. When they were acting through faith, they were acting through Christ in them. Our heavenly persuasion is built on the foundation of Christ in us. Grace reigns in our life because Christ reigns in our soul.

**Colossians 1:27** *To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:*

## It Is A Gift

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What is the gift? Is grace or faith the gift? Or is it salvation? It is all of the above. The gift mentioned is God's grace causatively acting in the vital work of regeneration, by which we are given the gift of faith. Again, neither faith or salvation originates in man. Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith (**Hebrews 11:2**). He alone is the giver of faith (**Romans 12:3**). Let's consider the word gift in that passage. The word gift itself means a *present; specially, a sacrifice:—gift, offering*

.

The psalmist David wrote that God desires truth in our inward parts (**Psalms 51:6**). **Hebrews 11:6** also

says that it is impossible to please God without faith. Humans naturally do not have faith, nor truth in them because they are dead in trespasses and sins. This point is illustrated in

**2 Thessalonians 3:2**

when Paul wrote that all men have not faith. Again, apart from God's regenerative work, no person conceived in this world would have faith, a heavenly persuasion toward God. We cannot please God in the flesh, therefore God imparts a measure of faith unto our soul.

How then is the gift of faith a sacrifice? David described this sacrifice in **Psalms 51:17**, "*..sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart*

..". When a child of God is born again, he is given a spiritual mind whereby he mourns the sinfulness in his flesh and the vanity of this world (

**Romans 7:9-11, 8:20**

).

**Galatians 2:20**

further describes how this sacrifice gift is made, "

*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me*

..". Just as Christ was sacrificed on the cross for your sins, He is also sacrificed in your heart to sanctify you in regeneration. Faith, or truth, in our inward parts is God offering Christ as a sacrifice in us, to himself, to please himself.

## Created In Christ Jesus Unto Good Works

This initial gift of faith that is worked in the child of God at regeneration is the foundation by which we are able to understand the gospel, and actively serve God in discipleship. Apart from God's work of grace in the heart, no child of God has the capacity to understand spiritual things (**1 Corinthians 2:14**). The present tense verb "is" in **1 John 5:1** reinforces this point. A person that believes is already born of God's Spirit. Consider this excerpt from A.T. Robertson's Word Pictures in Greek concerning

1

### **John 5:1**

, "The Divine Begetting is the antecedent, not the consequent of the believing".

Dear reader, does the gospel of grace strike a chord in your heart? Does the foolishness of preaching deliver you from sorrow and grief? If so then rejoice, God has sacrificed himself inside of you. You have passed from death unto life.

If you rejoice in this message of sovereign grace then God has created you for something greater. He has ordained works that you should do. He has commanded you to believe and be baptized. He has commanded you to be ready to give an answer for the hope that is within you. He has called you to glorify him. Paul would later exhort the Ephesians of whom lived in a pagan culture to "*Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light*". This message is simple. If you rejoice in the message of the gospel then stop living among the dead. God has sovereignly worked faith in your heart, who were dead in sins, and has created you unto good works.