

## The Way of Salvation - Ephesians 2:8-9

**Introduction:** America is called a Christian nation, but the characteristics of Christianity are slowly being eroded from the national landscape. Now that is disturbing, and Christians ought to be rising up and defending Christian principles in our land. But an even more disturbing fact is that our Church membership rolls may be populated with people who are really not saved.

Several years ago, a music evangelist from Rome gave his testimony at my former church of how he had been brought up in church, lived in a Christian home, and even been involved in ministry for a number of years before he was saved. He told of making a profession of faith at an early age, but not really possessing Christ all that time, because he had never asked Christ into his life as his Savior and Lord.

I heard just last week of a youth pastor from who admitted recently that he had been living a lie for many years, and had only recently been saved. Their testimonies are direct indictments on our churches and many evangelical groups.

Our pulpits and classes may be staffed by men and women who don't really know Christ as their Savior. If this is so, could this be the reason so many of our churches have no power or influence, and are diseased, dying or dead?

Certainly are churches are made up of some people who are unsaved church members, but we tend to think it is the church down the street, not ours. We've all heard it said, "*Well, if old so-and-so is a Christian, the woods are full of 'em.*" And what about those who join a local church and never darken the doors again? Could it be that some of our own members are not really saved?

Obviously, I cannot preach to the no-show's this morning, but I can talk to you, so let me just put it directly: Are you saved? If so, how do you know? Do you really understand what the Bible says about the way of salvation?

In Ephesians, Paul addresses this issue. "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast.*" **Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)**. If we really understand the application, then there should be no misconceptions about what salvation really is, because here we see how God has not saved us, how God has does save us: by grace; and we also see the way through which God brings this salvation to us: faith.

By dealing with these issues this morning, I hope we will be better able to understand the truth about the way of salvation. Let's look first at:

## 1. Salvation: Man's Way

There are only two methods by which people attempt to be saved. Either people attempt to be saved according to God's terms or their own. And this is exactly what Jesus said would happen. He said in **John 10:9 (NASB)**, *"I am the Door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved."* This is consistent with what Jesus said in **John 14:6 (NIV)**, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, except through Me."* Jesus is the only way to get to God. There is only one door to eternal life, and He is that door. If you go through that door you will be saved. Any other door does not lead to salvation. So there is a right way to be saved, but any other way would be the wrong way.

But it is not enough to say that Jesus is the right way. We must determine the truth of what that really means. Let's begin with what Christianity is not. Christianity is not man's attempt at salvation. Man's way is based on what man can do for himself to earn or manufacture or produce salvation.

This is the philosophy of the frog which fell into the milk can. It tried as hard as it could to leap out, but it was trapped. With nothing else to do, it just kept paddling and paddling, until it had finally churned a pat of butter, and then was able to leap out from this self-made launching pad. It is amazing that many people have this very philosophy of Christianity when they say things like *"I'm not perfect, but I'm doing the best I can."* --- *"I try to do what's right and consider myself a pretty good person --- there are people worse than me."* --- *"I think I've done more good than I've done wrong; I should be okay."* This may be the philosophy of some who may think they are saved, but it is diametrically opposed to what the Bible teaches about true salvation.

Other religions are full of examples of how people try to earn their salvation by self-effort. Some have tried to save themselves by self-affliction. The Hindus are well known for tormenting their bodies in an effort to deliver their souls. Others try by going on long pilgrimages, or by extended periods of starvation, or denying one's self of medical attention. But those things do not make us closer to God or earn us salvation. There may be something within us which feels the guilt of sin and a need to punish ourselves for it, but none of them are able to save us.

Some people think that by doing enough good works they can counterbalance the bad works they have done. They figure if they end up with more good works than bad works, everything will work out and God will accept them. Outwardly, it makes some sense. Many of our contemporary concepts of justice, fairness, and equity are based on logic like this. For example, getting time-off for good behavior, or probation because of a first offence.

The problem is that when we talk about salvation, we are dealing with eternal things. We are not talking about damaging someone's property and having to do community service. We are dealing with an eternal death in our souls. And that cannot be patched up by doing nice things. According to Ephesians 2:3, we were born with a "*sinful nature.*" We are dead, disobedient, depraved, and doomed. It will take more than a few hours of community service to clean up this mess. We are talking about spiritual transformation here. That is what's needed.

Now, when we talk about spiritual transformation, we're not talking about religious ritual. You cannot be saved by religious ritual or religious ceremonies. Merely getting baptized will not save you. Partaking of the Lord's Supper will not save you. Joining the church will not save you. Submitting yourself to some secret religious ritual will not save you. These are merely other forms of religious works. And, in many ways, they can be the most damaging of all because they are religious, and they have a spiritual air about them. By doing them, people can be deceived into believing that God will accept them because they engage in some church approved activity.

The truth is; all works, even religious works, come up short when it comes to salvation. We cannot do enough to make ourselves acceptable to a holy God.

If you were having guests over for dinner and you laid out a dirty plate, you would clean it up. But our problem is worse. We're not just dirty on the outside; sin is thoroughly ingrained into our being. We cannot be just be cleaned up on the outside. Our sin nature must be reborn. Good works, even religious works only cleans the outside. We are like the Pharisees Jesus described in **Matthew 23:27 (NIV)** as "*white-washed tombs which look beautiful on the outside, but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean.*" In the end, even with all our good works, we are still unable to really do good. As the Bible says, "*There is none righteous, not even one...All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is none who does good, not even one*" **Rom. 3:10-12 (NIV)**. The sum total of all our works add up to less than zero when compared to a holy God.

The reason why God gives His salvation is not as a result of works is so that no one will be able to say, "*I saved myself.*" We must all come to Jesus in the same way. No matter what our education, title, degree, riches, or ability, we must all come in humility, acknowledging our need for Christ. Next, We see:

## **2. Salvation: God's Way**

Because God knew that we could not earn our way to heaven, He provided another way. In fact, it is the

only way. It is His way. It is by grace you have been saved through faith. If this is God's way, then it is important for us to understand both grace and faith.

**A. Grace.** Grace is how God saves us. The word comes from the Greek word *charis* which means "*the undeserved favor of God.*" The idea is that we receive from God in a positive way what we do not deserve. We deserve condemnation and punishment, but we receive salvation. But we do not receive it on the basis of any good which we have done. This grace by which you have been saved is the gift of God. In other words, God bestows on us his undeserved favor as a gift.

If not by our works, then on what basis can God give us this gift? It's on the basis of the work that Jesus did on the Cross. There, Jesus bore the penalty for our sin. God does not ignore sin, but our sin has been borne by another. Speaking of Jesus, Peter said, "*He Himself bore our sins in His body on the Cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed*" **1 Peter 2:24 (NASB)**. God could not ignore our sins, so He sent Jesus to pay the penalty for our sin that we might receive His gift of salvation by grace through faith.

One Sunday, a large church had a combined Communion service with its three mission churches. The mother church was a very prestigious church and was made up of many prominent people in town. But the mission churches were all located in the slums of the city, so many of the worshippers there were poor people or former thieves and drug addicts whose lives had been changed by Christ. So on this Sunday, as they came for Communion, they all knelt side by side to receive the elements.

The Pastor saw a former thief kneeling beside a judge - the very judge who had sent the former thief to jail.

After the service, the pastor approached the judge and asked, "*Did you notice who was kneeling beside you this morning?*" The judge said, "*Yes, I did! What a miracle of grace.*" The pastor said, "*Yes it is. That man has received so much he didn't deserve.*" The judge said, "*I wasn't talking about him. I was talking about myself. You see, when that man got out of jail, he had nothing but a history of crime behind him. He was offered the best when he discovered God's grace. And when he accepted Jesus as his Savior he knew there was hope for him. He knew how much he needed that help. But look at me. I was brought up in a Christian home. I was taught to say my prayers, to go to church. I went to college and earned my degree, was called to the bar and eventually became a judge. Pastor, it was God's grace that drew me; it was God's grace that opened my heart to receive it. I'm a greater miracle of His grace.*"

Whoever you are, if you have received the true salvation of God, you have received it as a gift of God's

grace.

**B. Faith.** Finally, we are told that the channel through which the grace of God comes to us is faith. But what is faith?

Faith is not merely intellectual knowledge. True biblical faith is not believing in Christ as we believe in Abraham Lincoln. Both Christ and Lincoln are historical figures. But biblical faith is not knowledge about Christ.

A basic element of faith is trust. Faith begins with knowledge to be sure. There is a certain understanding about Christ we must have. We must know that He died on the Cross for our sins, that He paid the penalty there for our salvation. But then we must trust in Him as the only hope we have for salvation. Faith begins with knowledge but ultimately we must trust Christ with our lives.

Trust is not very hard to understand. In fact, we trust things every day. When we go to work, we trust that the vehicle we ride in is going to start and take us to our destination. When we take a dose of medicine, we trust that it is going to make us feel better.

But when it comes to trusting God for salvation, some folks have a hard time with it. They are like the man who fell off a cliff, but grabbed a tree limb on his way down. He cried out, *“Is any one up there?”* The voice said, *“I am here, I am the Lord, do you believe me?”* *“Yes, Lord I believe, I really believe, but I can’t hang on much longer.”* *“If you really believe you will be alright, I will save you, just let go of the branch.”* The man paused and said, *“Is there anyone else up there?”*

The man wouldn't let go because he didn't really believe. He didn't have real faith because he didn't have trust. If he really had faith, he would have staked his life upon God enough to let go, but he couldn't.

True faith in Jesus means that we stake our lives on Him. We commit ourselves to Him as our only hope for salvation. We give ourselves totally to Him, and burn our bridges behind us. Without trust, there is no faith. Without faith, there is no reception of grace. Without grace, there is no salvation.

**Conclusion:** Are you saved, or do you just think you are? If you have not trusted in the finished work of Jesus, and asked Him into your life as your Savior and Lord, then you are not saved. If you are not willing to trust Jesus with your life and your death, then you cannot be saved.

This morning, I invite you to let go of whatever else you may be trusting in for your salvation, and trust Christ today. He is the Door. He is the only way to eternal life.