

Eph. 2:1-10; Return to the Reformation I. Saved by Grace II. Saved through Faith III. Saved unto Humility

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, today is Reformation Day. In the year 1517, Luther nailed 95 Thesis on the door of Wittenberg church- but the Reformation is more than one man's grievance against the Roman Church.

What was the reformation about? As our Latin students will remember- the cry of the Reformation was Ad Fontes- which means back to the source! The church was going back to the source- to the roots of their faith! They were digging into the Bible- and the Scriptures were both considered in their original language as well as translated into the common tongue. So there was an exploration of the original texts- but also an increased access to the Bible so that all people- every layman- could read that Bible for themselves. There was also an examination of means of grace and their efficacy. In other words, do the sacraments and preaching have a power to save in themselves- or do these means need to be embraced with a heart of faith? The Reformers rightly saw that faith is necessary in order to partake of Christ- the sacraments do not benefit if there is no faith by which to see and receive Christ. It is this focus on the need for faith and the exaltation of grace that brings focus to our sermon this morning.

Specifically, that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone. And what greater passage to teach us this truth than Eph. 2! Another way to summarize the reformation is by the use of one word- Sola. We could say that the whole separation from the church of Rome centered around this word. Children, when your choir director asks you to sing a solo- what does she mean? Well, singing a solo means that you are singing alone. The word, Sola, could really be used to summarize the core teaching of the reformation. Saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone! I believe our Sunday School students will be learning about these points as well- sometimes called the 5 Solas or the 5 Pillars of the Reformation. Our church is called a Reformed Church- meaning that this is part of our heritage and identity as well. But what does it mean to be a reformed church? Have you ever had that question- what does it mean that you go to a Reformed church? A few years back, a group of 8th Graders in our community were asked- how many of you attend a Reformed church? Many of them did not know- much less what the reformation was even about! Well- the Reformation really a recovery of what is central to the good news. Without being saved by God and His grace alone- without the sufficiency of Jesus Christ and His blood alone to atone- we

would not have good news at all! So today we see that Jesus Christ teaches us how we are saved by revealing the core of the gospel- we are saved by grace through faith- and not of ourselves! With this theme: God saves us by grace through faith in Christ alone!

I. Saved by Grace Eph. 2:8 is our text.

To begin, then- we need to keep the centrality of God's grace before our eyes. Biblical Christians are ever conscious of the fact that we are saved by grace alone- saved by God's grace! This point is so central that it is made twice in these few verses- in v. 5 and again in v. 8- by grace you have been saved. Grace is by its very nature gracious. Grace is undeserved kindness- called a gift of God. It is unwarranted and unmerited- given as a favorable attitude and action. Now children- we know what a gift is right- a gift is present – a treasure freely placed in our hands. We do not do anything to earn- and we surely do not work for it first! On our birthdays and perhaps on Christmas Eve- our parents and grandparents give us things- for no other reason than they love us! Well- what motivates God to show His grace? The reason that God gives us the gift of salvation is because He is moved by His mercy- as v. 4 says. He is struck by our state- our condition is so pitiable that He looks upon us and feels sorry for us- and in His mercy He comes to us! Mercy takes into account that we are fallen sinners- God does not give us what we deserve- rather we are given rich gifts. Mercy says- I know you deserve to be condemned- but instead of condemnation I will send my benediction- blessings! But not only mercy- also love as v. 4 continues. He is rich in mercy and because of His great love! The great love- the far surpassing and awesome love of God! In His love God chose us- we did not choose Him- He chose us freely- setting His heart upon us! As Eph. 1:4 says- He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world- in Love He predestined us! Added to this- we find out that He will show us immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness towards us- v. 7. So the mercy, kindness and love of God is what moves Him to save us by Grace! Nothing in us- the reasons are found in God alone! Our Salvation is a rescue mission credited to God alone. People love free things- we get pleasure when we get something that we did not need to pay for! My wife knows this about me- I find free things hard to pass. It feels like you are getting a great deal- right! But the free things of this world usually have a catch- some restriction- they are discarded or given

away because they have little worth. Nothing comes for free- our parents told us. Well- our salvation is fully free! No catch! The greatest gift that could ever be received is just placed in our arms! Praise God!

II. Saved through Faith

And as v. 8 continues- we are saved by grace through faith. Faith then- is the instrument by which we are united to Christ and His works. By faith we are joined to the fountain of life. Faith relies on someone- trusts and believes in someone- depends on the promises received! So the grace of God is received through faith- God's kindness purchased by Christ is made ours by faith. But what is this faith- is this faith a work of ours? Is faith our response that merits our reception? Well- as v. 8 concludes- this is not of yourself- it is not of your own doing! Even faith is a gift of God! So we say that salvation- beginning and end- is all of grace and a gift of God! Even my believing- is a work of God! Yes- faith is a response- it is our trusting and embracing; it is also true that this faith is instilled within us by Christ through His Spirit! Faith does not spring from our hearts unaided- even the fact that we can believe is only possible because God gives us the heart of faith! God gives us the faith- and then we are able to believe! The imagery of these verses proves the point- we are raised with Christ- v. 6; made alive together with Christ- v. 5. Jesus Christ by His Spirit gives us hearts of flesh- He opens our eyes to see and ears to hear. By Him we are born again- raised to live and given the ability to believe! Even our faith is not work- even our response that embraces and accepts is work of God within us! The point of this all is the "in whom" we believe! The object of our faith- that is where the merit comes from. It is faith in Jesus Christ- alone! We are made alive- raised with Christ- the riches of Christ are ours as v. 7 says. Or as Acts 16 says- believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Or Rom. 10- whoever believes in His heart and confesses with your mouth that Jesus is Lord- will be saved. The centrality of Christ in our salvation cannot be overstated- as we preach Christ and Him crucified- there is one mediator between God and men- the man Jesus Christ! No other name under heaven can save! He died for us- in our place- and our faith in Him is what opens the gates of righteousness. We are brought near by the blood of Jesus- v. 13; He is our peace! In this glorious One is our trust! This faith is not a work- even that believing in Him is a gift of God. Faith comes from a new heart- and new heart is the Spirit's work- He raises us so that we have the

desire and ability to believe in Jesus- thus we are saved by grace through faith alone- and that faith is a work of God as well! By faith- we are brought empty before God to receive what He graciously gives. Faith is where we turn to God in our need and trust in Him to provide.

III. Saved unto Humility

But what about us- if we cannot save ourselves- if salvation is a work of God in us from beginning to end- what do we bring to the table? What do we contribute to the equation of our salvation? Well- since our salvation is a gift of God- unmerited- we have to consider why we cannot merit our salvation! We are saved by God alone- and we are not saved of us- or as the ESV says- this salvation is not of our own doing! Why not? Well- who are we- the ones that are getting saved? It is not a flattering assessment. We are by nature children of wrath- v. 3. Sons of disobedience- who kicked and rebelled at any thought of God- running away from the light- and hopelessly shackled to our sin. We are also born dead in our trespasses- v. 5. Now this is important- as we studied in our HS Catechism class. The RCC teaches that man is weak- sick- in need of help to be sure. In their doctrine, Jesus came to help, to aid and assist. Jesus offers us medicine, but it is up to us to take that medicine. But the Bible teaches that we are dead- completely unable to do anything good! Totally unable to save or help ourselves! Being dead means that spiritually we are unable to do anything good- even to desire to obey and please God! Dead means unable- without power. We need a resurrection- not a crutch- but to be revived! This is concept that our little ones understand- kids- if you see a dead animal at the side of the road- do you expect that animal to get up and run away? Even if you put a bandage on their injuries- it will do them no good. Why not? Because it is dead! Well- as the descendants of Adam we are spiritually dead! We cannot aid- assist- or do anything in regards to our salvation until we are made alive! Brought back to life- resurrected from the grave! By nature, we are children of Satan- totally depraved- unable to do anything good- as Romans says- there is no one righteous- no one that does good- not even one! Not only are we unwilling- we are unable to save ourselves! This truth serves to make it abundantly clear- we cannot dig our way out of this pit! We are dead! Therefore- if we will be saved completely by God- there is no room for us to boast! And this is the payout- the application as given in v. 9- so that no one my boast!

Reformed Christians should be the most humble, patient and joyful people on the face of the earth because we know who we are by nature and what God has done for us! We live in the midst of proud people- where boasting and bragging is extremely common. But not here in the church- there is no room to boast when it comes to our salvation! Let him who boasts, boast in the LORD! The T of Tulip- our total depravity- removes any possibility for pride- because our salvation is not of ourselves- not what my hands can do! We need to see ourselves rightly- for us to see the greatness of our God and His great love and mercy towards us! Our hearts are stirred towards gratitude- when we know what we have received how can we help but be thankful? We want to do everything to the glory of God- because our salvation is such a rich, expensive gift that we have received by no work of our own! Since our salvation is God's work alone- He alone gets the praise! And how do we come to know all this- we read about it in the Bible alone! And by the way- that is the point of the last two Solas of the reformation- that we are saved to the glory of God alone as revealed in the Bible alone. So by Christ- as revealed in the Word- we are brought from deepest hell to highest heaven- saved by grace through faith as taught in the Bible! We cannot boast any work of our own- but let Him who boasts- boast in the Lord! We are His workmanship as v. 10 says. We are His product- His work- His creation! He is the potter; we are but the clay that He molds! We are the objects who receive as we are formed and fashions- He is the creative genius who molds and makes us into something new!

To conclude- our passage clearly reveals how our salvation is a work of God alone! No paying money to the church to get our souls or the souls of loved ones out of purgatory! No work on our behalf- only the great works of Christ can merit our new life! No amount of prayer, sighs and tears can make us right with God! One of the reasons that God saves us in the manner He does is to exclude our boasting- so that He alone would receive all the praise! So what does it mean to belong to a reformed church? Well- it means that we trust what the Bible says- and the Bible tells us that we are saved by God alone- justified by grace through faith in Christ alone! Jesus Christ teaches us how we are saved by revealing the core of the gospel- a core truth that we hold dear as reformed, Bible believing Christians! That is the truth that we celebrate on this Reformation Day!