

*An excerpt from the sermon “By karis you have been saved and for karis you have been saved” by Sir Kevin P. Larson in 2005.*

Notice here, in **Ephesians 2:8-9** what is actually says. It says, **“For by grace you have been saved, through faith.”** This is our third use of the word *karis* here. It doesn’t say, “By faith you have been saved, through grace.” That’s the way that it is normally presented when you hear the gospel shared. If you have faith, you will be saved, and this opportunity comes through God’s grace. This is NOT what Paul says. It’s not “by faith and through grace.” It’s “by grace and through faith.” Faith, then, is the means of salvation. It’s not the ground or cause of our salvation. Grace is the ground or cause. Faith is just the means. Our faith doesn’t save us. God saves us. Faith is our reaching upward to God. But we only reach up because His grace has already reached down. Paul describes God’s sovereignty in salvation in **verses 1-7** and uses the word **“for”** here. Salvation happens as he described *because* it is totally by grace alone.

It is totally a work of God. As **verse 8** says, **“This is not your doing.”** As **verse 9** says, **“It is not a result of works.”** Most would agree that walking an old lady across a street or feeding the hungry or being a good dad can’t save you. But Paul means more than that. *Nothing* that we do can bring us salvation—not praying a prayer, not being baptized, and not even the act of believing itself. Nothing merits our salvation. That’s because, before we’re alive, we’re dead. Sam Duncan won a county board election this past week in North Carolina, while he was dead. The Democratic Party even ran newspaper ads endorsing him right up the election, unaware of his passing. He somehow won the election while he was dead. But there is no way we can win salvation while dead. We need His amazing grace.

In between those two phrases—**“this is not your doing”** and **“it is not a result of works”** is found this one—**“it is a gift of God.”** Now there has been much debate, just so you know, about what exactly the gift is here. Some here, trying to minimize God’s sovereignty in salvation have said, “Faith isn’t the gift here.” The reason they argue this is that Greek nouns have gender. You may know from Spanish that some words are masculine and feminine. Greek also has neuter words that are neither. When you have a pronoun like **“this,”** you find out what it’s referring to, its antecedent, by looking for another word that has that gender, as well as the same number, singular or plural. **“This”** here is neuter singular. **“Faith”** is feminine singular. Therefore, people say, “There’s no way faith is the gift here because the two don’t agree in gender. The problem, though, is that doesn’t tell us anything, because nothing else in the verse is neuter either. **“Grace”** is also feminine singular.

Those same people like to say, and I’ve discussed this with people, that John Calvin didn’t think faith is a gift here. So, if you think that, they reason, you go beyond Calvin himself and that makes you a hyper-Calvinist. In his commentary on Ephesians, Calvin says this:

“And here we must advert to a very common error in the interpretation of this passage. Many persons restrict the word gift to faith alone. But Paul is only repeating in other words the former sentiment. His meaning is, not that faith is the gift of God, but that salvation is given to us by God, or, that we obtain it by the gift of God.”

Here’s how we understand this. It’s common in Greek to use a neuter pronoun to summarize a section as a whole. **“This”** refers to the whole section before, the entire phrase—**“For by grace you have been saved through faith.”** That is Calvin’s point. In other words, no, faith isn’t here specifically the gift. Rather

everything is—all of salvation. It's all a gift of God. Salvation is all of grace.

And it's not like many say, that we are sitting with a Christmas present before us, and we can choose to open it or not. It's not that kind of a gift. No, again, we're dead in our sin. The next time you're at a funeral, throw a gift in a coffin and see if the person opens it. He won't. The gift God gives is raising us to life, bringing us to faith in Christ, by His grace. It's raising the dead man out of that coffin. The gift doesn't give an opportunity to be saved. The gift saves!

Why, you might ask, is this the case? Paul answers, "***So that no one may boast.***" None of us can ever look in the mirror and say, "I'm wise, smarter, more spiritually perceptive, more religiously sensitive," or whatever from the next person. No Jack Handey comments are allowed. We can't begin to boast. That's because it's all His doing. It's all a gift. It's all by grace. God did this so that our salvation would lead to worship of Him and not idolatry of self. This is not surprising to see this here, in view of the context of **chapter 1 of Ephesians**. There Paul begins the book by speaking of God's sovereignty over all things, and particularly salvation, for the "***praise of His glorious grace.***" We were created for God's glory. We were redeemed for His glory. It's by His grace and for His glory. It's all about His amazing karis.

We do exercise faith. We place our trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ. We love Him for who He is. We praise Him for what He has done—living a perfect life, dying a perfect death, and rising from the grave to win the victory. But the fact that we believe is totally by grace. And this is so that God would get the praise, and not us. That faith is in Christ, and all of salvation is a gift of karis.

We have talked much about the five *solas* of the Reformation here. We stand on *sola scriptura* (scripture alone), *sola fide* (faith alone), *solus Christus* (Christ alone), *sola gratia* (grace alone), and *soli deo Gloria* (for His glory alone). That is what I am proclaiming to you today. God speaks to us and saves through His word. We can only be made right with God based on faith. That faith is directly solely toward Christ. This salvation only comes about through grace. This is so that only God would be glorified.