

Gospel Grace: From Death to Life

Scripture: Ephesians 2:1-10

Code: 49-7

This morning we're going to continue our look at Ephesians, and we're coming to chapter 2. And I'll encourage you to turn to Ephesians chapter 2; it'll take us a little bit to get there. But it feels like I'm always among the group of people trying to rescue words, trying to rescue precious words, words that are biblical words, that somehow get stolen away from the biblical intent and used for all kinds of other things. And "gospel" is one of those words. "Gospel" is perhaps the most treasured term in the New Testament, and certainly in the hearts of all who have been saved, because we believed the gospel. It is the soul of Christianity. It is the jewel of theology because the gospel is the message that provides the only way of salvation, the forgiveness of sin, escape from hell, and a life in eternal heaven. Obviously there will be efforts to confuse the gospel—to subtract from the gospel, to add to the gospel. The gospel is as assaulted as anything for the obvious reason that it's the singular message that saves sinners.

Back in chapter 1 the apostle Paul wrote that we as believers "have obtained an inheritance," that we have "been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that," verse 12 says, "we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory." And then in verse 13 he mentions the gospel. Yes, we have been promised an inheritance, as verse 11 says. Yes, this was predestined. Yes, it is ours in Christ. But verse 13 marks out the role that the gospel plays: "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory." All the redemptive purposes that God ordained in the past, all that He planned for the future, comes to reality (as verse 13 says) when you listen to the message of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, and you believe it.

The gospel is a message. The gospel is a word from heaven. It is there called "the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation"—those are parallel statements. The message of truth is the gospel of your salvation. Salvation is dependent upon believing the gospel, which is a true message from God. In Colossians chapter 1 and verse 5 we read this: "The word of truth, the gospel which has come to you." Again, the Word of truth from heaven about salvation is the message of the gospel.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 Paul says, "We had the boldness . . . to speak to you the gospel of God." In verse 4 he says, "Entrusted with the gospel, so we speak." And in verse 9 of that same chapter, "We proclaimed to you the gospel of God." The gospel is truth from heaven about salvation to be spoken, to be spoken.

If you go into the amazing book of Revelation and look into the future in the time of Tribulation as judgment unfolds on the earth, in an act of divine love and mercy we read in Revelation 14:6—this is a vision of what will come in the future—"I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people." In the future time of Tribulation, as judgment is unleashed on the earth, there will be an

angel in heaven preaching the eternal gospel. The gospel is always a message to be preached.

The term “gospel” is used about a hundred times in the New Testament. The word itself, *euaggelion*, incorporates the idea of a message, therefore of communication—announcing, preaching, declaring, proclaiming. *Euaggelion* is the message, and *eu-* is prefix to the word because it makes a reference to something that is good. So what is the gospel? It’s a good message. It is the good news. Bound up in the verb form, *euaggelizō*, is the idea of preaching a good message. *Euaggelizō* is the word from which we get “evangelize” or “evangelical.” So you cannot understand the gospel unless you understand it as something to be communicated, something to be declared, announced, preached, and proclaimed. And that something is good news.

The gospel is called the gospel of God, the gospel of Christ, the gospel of the Son, the gospel of the glory of God, the gospel of peace, the gospel of the blessed God—and then in Acts 20:24 the gospel of the grace of God. It’s all the same good news. Jesus came preaching the gospel—you see that in Matthew, Mark, and Luke; He came preaching the gospel. Subject to Jesus were the apostles, and they were told to take the gospel into the world. And so when you come into the book of Acts, it isn’t long before they are preaching right away, in chapter 2. By the time you get into—a few chapters later into chapter 8, you have Philip preaching the gospel. And then you have Peter and John preaching the gospel. And then you have, around chapter 12 of the book of Acts, the apostle Paul begins to preach the gospel. And all of them are preaching, all of them are proclaiming, all of them are declaring the message from heaven that is good news of salvation.

Now because the gospel is so essential, because the gospel is necessary, because there is no salvation apart from hearing the gospel, the apostle Paul knows that the gospel will be under attack. We saw this last week in 2 Corinthians 11. Paul says in verse 3, “I’m afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness,” or his cunning, “your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.”

Imagine a church willing to bear beautifully another different gospel. This is such a problem that the apostle Paul came out blazing in the book of Galatians, chapter 1, verse 6, “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!”—he’s to be damned! “As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed,” or “damned.” Again, the gospel is something to be preached, and it is so precious that anyone who preaches a different or distorted gospel is cursed.

Now why am I saying all this? Because I want to make one very important point. There is a statement that has been floating around for a long time in Christianity. It was originally basically thought to have been written by St. Francis of Assisi, the father of the Franciscan order of the Roman Catholic Church, but that’s not likely the case. We don’t know where it came from, but you’ll recognize it. And here’s the statement: “Preach the gospel at all times; if necessary use words.” Have you heard that? “Preach the gospel at all times; if necessary use words.” You see it on plaques. You see it on signs. You see it in artwork of all kinds.

“Preach the gospel at all times; if necessary use words.” That is a noxious, toxic weed in the gospel garden that is very hard to kill because it’s kind of a clever statement, and it lets you off the hook if you don’t feel like you want to say anything. The gospel is truth communicated with words. And the gospel is the most powerful reality in the world. The apostle Paul in Romans chapter 1 says—and you’re familiar with these words—“I am not ashamed of the gospel,” verse 16, “for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” The power is in the gospel, and the gospel must be communicated so that people can hear it and believe it.

In Paul writing to the Corinthians, in his first letter—he says this in chapter 1, verse 17: “Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.” You can void the cross with clever speech. You don’t do that if you preach the gospel.

In chapter 9 of 1 Corinthians and verse 14, Paul says, “So the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.” Paul is simply saying that we should pay the preacher—that preachers should be able to be supported by their ministry. Then Paul goes on to say, “But I’m not going to use that privilege, that right”—“I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case”—I don’t want your money—“for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one.” “I don’t want anyone to think I’m in ministry for money. Here’s why I preach the gospel,” verse 16: “I preach the gospel, and I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.” And down in verse 18 he says, “When I preach the gospel, I offer the gospel without charge.” “I don’t want anybody accusing me of doing it for the money.” Paul says, “Look, I’m under compulsion to preach the gospel. I don’t really have a choice; this is a divine compulsion.”

Later on in 1 Corinthians 15, “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved.” You’re only saved when you hear the gospel preached.

Another passage that I would direct you to is Romans chapter 10. And this is very important along this line, and I’ll give you the wrap-up on why I’m going down this path. But in Romans chapter 10, verse 13, we read, “Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.” That’s the free offer of salvation. “Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved,” Jew or Greek. “How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!’” Verse 17, “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the message concerning Christ.” All of that to make the very important point that you can’t preach the gospel without words. It is words, it is words.

Why am I belaboring this a little bit? Just want to remind you of your commission, and your responsibility and mine. But I also want you to know that the gospel is being confused today in our world. I heard one of the social justice pastors say this: “We have to say social justice is a gospel issue, or people won’t take it seriously.” Really? So because you have an agenda, a social agenda that you want to be taken seriously, you label it a gospel issue. This is very, very frequently being done, and has been done in the life of the church through its history.

In our national history there has been devastating, devastating ruin of churches and denominations and institutions because the gospel was redefined in a social way. We even remember the term “the

social gospel.” Well we’re back doing it again, taking all kinds of social causes that in themselves may be good, bad, or indifferent, and giving them a gospel label so that we can make people think they rise to the level of the absolute priority of the Word of God. If somebody wants a certain ethical issue to be given prominence, if someone has a social idea or a moral idea or some ideology, they want to label it as a gospel issue—which confuses the gospel, dilutes the gospel, adds to the gospel. And that is very, very unacceptable. And it’s a real problem, and I’ll tell you why.

In a recent survey of “Christians,” fifty percent of the people surveyed believe that salvation is earned by good works. This is fifty percent of professing Christians who believe you earn your salvation by good works. So they already are at the point where they think works are what earn salvation. And if you give them another social agenda and you make it a supposedly gospel issue, you just compound that error. The survey included the question about who goes to heaven. And the same percentage of people say, “Heaven is for those people who earn it by their good works.”

So when certain behaviors, certain actions, are elevated to the level of, “This is the gospel,” the true gospel is confused in the eyes of an already confused, professing church. The gospel is not about any behavior. It is not about any activity, any social cause, ethical cause, moral cause. The gospel nowhere is something you do; it is always something you believe. We never read anywhere in the New Testament, “Do the gospel”; all we read is, “Believe the gospel.”

Your life is a testimony. Your life is a testimony; it is a testimony of what the gospel has accomplished in your life. But your testimony will not save anyone, particularly your sort of silent testimony where you’re just living your life, even if in a noble and righteous way, because salvation’s not going to come to anybody who doesn’t hear the words of the gospel. You have to speak the gospel. The gospel is not behavior. You don’t do the gospel, you preach the gospel.

And just so we know for certain what the gospel is, let’s go to our text in Ephesians 2. Now normally, I confess to you, I could spend a month in this section of 1 to 10, but that’s not going to happen because I wanted you to see the gospel and its full content as revealed here. Let me read those opening ten verses of Ephesians chapter 2:

“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 beforehand prepared so that we would walk in them.”

Now I want to break that down for you. Twice—verse 5 and verse 8—you see the same statement: “By grace you have been saved,” end of verse 5; beginning of verse 8, “By grace you have been saved.” Salvation is by grace, by grace. The Reformers taught grace alone, *sola gratia*. Why did they make such an issue out of grace alone? Because the Roman Catholic Church teaches salvation by grace; but what they teach is that everyone has a certain deposit of grace, kind of like a pilot light of

grace in them, so that you have the capacity to do what is the right thing, to do what is the righteous thing in bringing about your salvation. The Roman Catholic Church said, “Yes, we’re all enabled by grace; we’re kick-started by grace. The pilot light is lit by grace, but the salvation depends upon works. We are enabled by grace to some preliminary degree, but the achieving of salvation is a matter of works.” Well that can’t possibly be true because verse 9 says it’s “not a result of works.” It couldn’t be more explicit than that. That negates that whole thought.

“Not as a result of works”—that’s the negative. The positive is, back to verse 8, “It’s the gift of God.” And prior to that, it’s “not of yourselves.” It’s not of yourselves, it’s not of works; it is the gift of God. You have nothing to boast in. You can’t say you cooperated with some measure of grace deposited by God, and brought about your own salvation to any degree that could allow you to be self-congratulatory.

In Titus chapter 3, starting in verse 4 we read, “When the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Romans 3 says the same thing.

So salvation is by grace, and that Reformation term *sola gratia* is absolutely accurate. It is all by grace, fully by grace and grace alone. If grace is not all, then grace is not grace. If grace is mixed with law or some kind of works, then grace is not grace. Grace is unmerited favor from God, not a result of works; it is a gift of God. No one can boast in anything with regard to salvation. So that’s the foundation of understanding the gospel. It is not of works, it is a gift of God; it is by grace, undeserved kindness.

Now with that as Paul’s sort of theme, as he repeats it twice, I want to break down the gospel here into the six parts that Paul does—and we’ll do these rather rapidly. Gospel grace has these components: It is from sin, it is by love, it is into life, it is for glory, it is through faith, and it is unto good works. We’re going to look at soteriology from prepositional viewpoints. It is from sin, by love, into life, for glory, through faith, unto good works.

It’s a magnificent treatise that Paul gives us. Let’s begin where he begins: Gracious salvation is from sin. Look at the opening three verses: “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.” That establishes the condition of every human being. Every believer once walked according to the course of the world, once according to the prince of the power of the air. “All,” verse 3, “formerly lived in the lusts of the flesh . . . desires of the flesh and of the mind.” All of us were by nature children of wrath. This is the human condition. So before you get to the good news, you have to have the bad news, which is why the good news is so good.

Now this is not to say that people can’t do some moral good. The apostle Paul in Acts 28:2, for example, said that “the native people showed me no small kindness.” So even nonbelievers showed him some kindness. So there are things that humanity does that are philanthropic and have some element of goodness, but they do not overcome the reality of the fallen condition; and the fallen

condition is defined in verse 1 as being dead, dead in trespasses and sins. What does “dead” mean? Completely unable to respond, like a corpse. If you had a corpse here, dead body, you can touch it, you can stick a pin in it, you can yell at it; it doesn’t respond. Death is the inability to respond, it has no capacity to respond.

So this is the condition of the whole human race. And it’s not that they’re dead because of their sins and their trespasses, it’s that they’re dead in their trespasses and in their sins—it’s the sphere in which they exist. Their condition is a condition of utter deadness, completely unable to respond to God. No life in them. They are totally cut off and alienated from the life of God. If you go to chapter 4, verse 18, “Being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God”—they’re dead, and that deadness means that they’re unable to respond to the truth.

This is difficult to deal with. We are called to preach the gospel, and we’re talking to people who can’t hear, who can’t listen, who can’t understand, who can’t believe. And we saw that, didn’t we, in Isaiah 6. And Jesus repeated it in His own ministry: “Hearing, they don’t hear; seeing, they don’t see.” This is a formidable challenge, for us to confront people who have no capacity to hear the truth and believe it.

And then not only do they have that because of their condition as dead in sin—no capacity to respond to God manifesting itself in trespasses and sins—but secondly, they are walking—that is the daily routine of their life—as according to the course of the world. They follow the zeitgeist, whatever the trend is, whatever the worldview is, whatever is popular. So first of all, they are dead; and secondly, they are therefore subject to whatever is going on in the world around them, and they cannot elevate above it.

Not only that, the one ruling the system around them is the prince of the power of the air, a title for Satan. And he not only operates the world system around them, but look back at verse 2: He “is now working in the sons of disobedience.” They are given that sort of Hebraic title, “sons of disobedience,” because disobedience characterizes them.

So here is the problem; this is depravity: You have a condition of absolute deadness, and that deadness engulfs every human soul in a life of trespasses and sins—two different words for violating the law of God, unrighteousness. Compound that with the fact that they are subject to the world around them, which is full of “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life,” as the apostle John says, and which is under the control of Satan, who operates the system of the world to his own evil ends.

But it’s not only around them; at the end of verse 2 it says he “is working in the sons of disobedience.” It isn’t just that Satan has surrounded them with this world of temptation that panders to their deadness, it is that he operates in them; and that is laid out in verse 3: They all live “in the lust of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.” Not only are they characterized by disobedience, so “[children] of disobedience,” they’re characterized by wrath, so “children of wrath”—and they’re all in the same condition.

So when we’re talking about salvation, I just want to make it clear: We’re not talking about the Lord coming to rescue you from lack of purpose in your life. We’re not talking about the Lord coming to

rescue you from unfulfillment, or loneliness, or dissatisfaction, or unhappiness, or a bad marriage, or poverty, or abuse, or disappointment, or illness. The gospel is about delivering you from sin, massive depravity in which everything about you ends up in eternal wrath. You cannot respond to God because you're dead, you are under the control of the system around you run by Satan, and you are driven by desires that are evil. The default position of every human being is wicked. Why do you think the world is drowning in a sea of pornography? You don't have to fight to get into that; that is an alluring seduction that is essential to your own fallen desires. As a believer, you are given power over that. You don't see a culture fighting for evil, fighting to try to be polluted, filthy, vile; that's not a fight because that's their condition.

So this is the first reality to understand about the gospel: We're not rescuing people from abuse. We're not rescuing people from something done to them in this life or some other generation of life. We're not rescuing people from bad marriages. We're not rescuing people from inequities. We're not rescuing people from poverty. That is not the gospel message. We are rescuing them from sin at a massive and all-encompassing level. So the gospel is a message: the good news that you can be rescued from sin.

There's a second principle, very important: The gospel is not only *from sin*—this is wonderful—it is *by love*. Salvation is from sin by love. Verse 4, "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 live together with Christ." God loved us. This is the amazing reality. It's the word *agapaō* or *agapē*, the most elevated word for love. And it's almost like the apostle Paul didn't even try to use adjectives, so he just said, "Great love," which is far below what it deserves, adjectivally speaking. "But God," who is "rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us."

God loved us. And that's John 3:16, right, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." There is no other religion that has a god of love. There is no other religion that has a god sacrificing for people. All demonic, devilish, satanic religions have people sacrificing for God, right? Sacrifice your children, sacrifice whatever, sacrifice living beings, sacrifice animals, sacrifice your wealth, whatever. The god demands the sacrifice. But the true and living God gives Himself as a sacrifice of love. His love is great.

You say, "Well how do you measure the greatness of His love?" And you measure it obviously because of redemption. You start measuring it because in eternity past He chose to redeem sinners; that was an act of love. You see again His act of love as He demonstrates His love toward His people through redemptive history. And then His love reaches a peak at the cross, does it not, where He places His Son to die in the place of those whom He loves. The love of God is best measured by death because Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that a man lay down"—what?—"his life for his friends." And that's what God did. There's no such story in any other religion. So salvation, the gospel, is from sin and by love—this great, incomprehensible love of God.

There's a third reality in verse 5: Salvation is into life. And we just read it: "Even when we were dead in our transgressions, [He] made us alive together with Christ." So you were dead, and He made you alive. Because of the richness of His mercy, the greatness of His love, the extensive expression of His grace, He made us alive. How did He do that? He made us alive together with Christ.

So He placed us into Christ; and in Christ we died, and in Christ we rose. We were dead in our transgressions until He placed us into Christ. This is an amazing thing. In eternity past God knew

upon whom He would set His love. And when Christ went to the cross, God placed all the sins of all who would ever believe—though they hadn't even lived, He knew the path of their sin, He knew the full record of their sin (our sin!)—and He placed it on Christ and punished Christ for it as if we were there. And we died then. And all you can do as a penalty for sin is die: "The wages of sin is death"; we read that this morning. We died. We died in Christ, and we rose in Him to newness of life.

This union is a very important part of Christian understanding. Romans 6 gives us insight into it—just a few verses. Romans chapter 6, maybe verse 3: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ, Christ Jesus, have been baptized into His death?" That's just amazing. It's not talking about water baptism.

We have been immersed. Think of it in a metaphoric sense: We've been immersed into Christ, we've been immersed into His death, we've been immersed into His burial. Verse 4, we've been immersed into His resurrection because He "was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so that we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin." We have died with Christ, and now we live in Him. This is the amazing, amazing reality of being united to Christ in His death and resurrection. And He said, "Because I live, you shall live also," right?

Salvation is from sin, by love, into life, and number four: Salvation is for glory. Verses 6 and 7—God who loved us, God who placed us into Christ, is the one, verse 6, who "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." This is just staggering.

Back in chapter 1 verse 20 it says that God "raised [Christ] from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places." God raised Christ and seated Him at His own right hand in heaven. And here it says exactly the same thing about us: He raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ. He is at the right hand of the Father, and so are we. Obviously this hasn't yet happened. But in the purposes of God, the sovereign purpose of a timeless, eternal being, it is done, it is done. Salvation is not about fixing things in this life, salvation is about glory in the life to come, and in the meantime enduring the difficulties of this life and counting it all joy when you have to endure them, because the [testing] of your faith strengthens it.

We were not only united to Him in His death and united to Him in His burial, as it were, and united to Him in His resurrection, but we are now seated with Him in the heavenlies. It's spoken of as if it already happened, though it hasn't. But what God plans, God does. And we are as good as there; we're in glory. Why? "So that . . . He [can] show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." That is just beyond comprehension.

Why does the Lord want to take you to heaven? So that He can show you eternal kindness. How much grace is that? How much surpassing grace is that? How much surpassingly rich grace is that, that leads loving God to bring us, all redeemed sinners, into His presence for the sole purpose of seating us on the throne with His Son—making us joint heirs of all that His Son possesses, who is most perfectly loved by the Father, so that we too can be loved by the Father as He loves the Son, and therefore forever and ever God will pour out on us unimaginable, eternal kindness. We're the

trophies of His redeeming love, we're the trophies of His redeeming grace; and the trophy case is the throne of His Son. And God will forever pour out indescribably surpassing riches of grace. And by the way, it'll always be grace, because we will never deserve to be there. His grace will be on display. And who will be looking at the trophies? The angels, the angels who look into the glory of saving grace.

Salvation is from sin, by love, into life, for glory. Number five: Salvation is through faith. That gets us to those familiar words in verses 8 and 9: "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." Again, saved through faith.

Well is faith a work? Is faith something I exercised, and therefore apprehended salvation? No, because we just read, "Not of yourselves," verse 8; "not . . . of works," verse 9. So whatever faith is, it isn't from you, and it isn't your works. Maybe a good way to illustrate what faith is: You're breathing right now, but you're not thinking about it. It would make life very difficult if we had to remember to take a breath. But we don't because there's air pressure exerted on our lungs that causes us reflexively to breathe. And as a believer, faith is the breathing that comes under the pressure of sovereign, saving grace. Breathing is not something we do on our own, it's something grace produces in us.

So what is the gospel? It is the good news of salvation from sin, by love, into life, for glory, through faith, and finally, unto good works. That's verse 10: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus." "Created in Christ Jesus" means that we were created. You weren't a part of your creation, were you? No, God is the Creator. So we were created like everything else that God creates, making no contribution to our creation. But verse 10 says, "For good works"—there is where the good works show up. You're created by God in Christ unto good works. "We are His workmanship"—love that: *poiēma*, from which we get the word "poem," which is a work of art. A beautiful poem is a work of art. We are God's masterpiece. We're not finished yet, but we are His masterpiece. And what He does with His masterpiece is produce good works, because that's what He prepared beforehand for us to do. That's what we walk in.

So this is where we show our compassion, our love, our affection. This is where we do deeds of kindness and mercy and all the righteous things, all the righteous behaviors that the Bible calls us to. But they are not the cause of our salvation; they are the result of our salvation. So that's the gospel. So I'll say to you this: Always preach the gospel, and always use words. Let's pray.

Your Word is truth, Your Word is life, Your Word is wisdom, Your Word is sanctification, Your Word is blessing, Your Word is joy. What a treasure. Renew our desire to proclaim the gospel. And Lord, protect the pure gospel from distortions and additions and subtractions. May there be a clarity in the proclamation of the gospel that will rescue people who think they can be saved by doing works, works of righteousness, self-righteousness, works of benevolence. Lord, rescue any deceived person who wants to alter the gospel, add to the gospel, diminish the gospel, corrupt the gospel. May we always understand the gospel to be exactly what You have clearly told us: the good news that You save sinners and take them to heaven so that You can pour out the surpassing riches of Your kindness on them forever, and in so doing, display Your own glory eternally. Help us to be able to deal the issues of this life, fallen world.

Thank You for saving us. Thank You for letting us triumph over all of this in the strength of Christ.

Thank You for filling our hearts with hope, eternal hope that gives us strength in every trial. And Lord, turn us loose in this world to speak the message of salvation, just as Scripture lays it out, and let sinners know their condition. Let them know the love of God, the mercy of God, the grace of God. Let them know that He wants to give them life through faith in His Son, and bring them to eternal glory, to show them divine kindness forever. May that message be always on our lips. And may You use us individually, wherever we are, to lead others to the true gospel, and in Your will and purpose, to salvation. We thank You for such a high calling, in our Savior's name. Amen.

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