

# MYTH 5

Faith Causes Salvation



## HOLD FAST

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*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.*

Ephesians 2:4-7

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Did you ever go hunting? Climbing into the truck with his buddies, the talk is all about past hunts and prospects for today. However, the hunt isn't exactly like the tall tales make it seem. These guys are not heading out to actually wrestle down and kill their prey with bare hands. No, they pull a trigger on a gun that in turn takes the animal's life. In fact, to be technically correct the bullet causes the animal's death. However, no one would suggest the hunter was not the one who takes credit.

### First Things First

There is a similar disconnect found in the Scriptures about salvation. In Acts 16:25-31 after an earthquake, the Philippian jailor rushed up to Paul and asked, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul responded, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved." Like hunting, there seems to be a simple cause and effect. In this passage the cause is faith and the effect is salvation—*saved by faith*. Looking at Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul puts a different perspective on this subject. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that

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not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.” The text tells us that we are *saved by grace*. So, which is it? Saved by grace or by faith?

### Ephesians 2:1-10

The progressive development of Ephesians 2:1-10 moves from *man’s problem* (vv. 1-3) to *God’s provision* (vv. 4-7) and then to *man’s potential* (vv. 8-10).

#### *Our Problem* (vv. 1–3)

Paul wrote that man, meaning you and I, are separated from God because of sin. So, we are spiritually dead—no life, nothing! We have fallen short or missed the mark of God’s standard of perfection and complete holiness. Nothing can be done to earn God’s favor. We belong to the world system and to the ruler of this world, Satan. Our self-centered behavior results in satisfying our every longing and imagined need, no matter it may cost us or others. The outcome is that a holy God must render a verdict regarding sin and the sinner. Since man is by nature corrupt, he is under the judgment of God.

#### *God’s Answer* (vv. 4–7)

In contrast to sinful humanity, God is absolutely holy, just, and merciful. His love and compassion for mankind demonstrates itself in three gracious ways. Based upon Christ’s sacrificial death, God chooses to (1) give men spiritual life, (2) raise them in spiritual resurrection, and (3) position them spiritually with Christ in heaven. A believer in Christ now lives spiritually in heaven and will physically be there upon death or when Christ returns. The believer, at this instant, is now alive to God, raised, and seated in heaven. Eternal destiny is secure. This is why Paul writes in Ephesians 2:19 that believers are now citizens of heaven.

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These compassionate acts by God testify to the unending and overflowing richness of His great mercy. His grace is shown in giving spiritual life to those who believe. Each believer is an eternal trophy to His grace, His love, and His mercy.

*Man's Potential* (vv. 8–10)

Ephesians 2:8-10 explains God's purpose in redemption. First, verses 8-9 make clear why salvation illustrates God's grace. His love and sovereign favor alone are the sole reason for our salvation; we cannot boast that we participated in any way. We were spiritually dead; unable to please God, much less earn or deserve any kindness from Him. We were in open rebellion as God's enemies. We deserved hell. But, as recipients of His undeserved favor, we are no longer children of wrath (v. 3), but children of God—we have *a new status* because of God alone. His gift of salvation is undeserved as well as unmerited—it is free! We can do nothing to warrant or earn it. Remember, we were spiritually dead, and He had to act to change our circumstances. Now, our new spiritual position in heaven with the Father because of Christ makes every believer a permanent resident. Citizenship cannot be revoked!

*Believers have  
a new status  
because of  
God alone.*

Ephesians 2:10 clarifies why salvation demonstrates God's grace. As a result of a new standing before God, *believers can now choose* to live in ways that are pleasing to Him—*new behavior*. Previously, each one of us lived according to the world's values and standards (v. 2). Now, as a result of God's provision in Christ, each believer *can* live out the good works that God had in mind.<sup>1</sup> Works never earn salvation (v. 9), but once saved, obedience and works are anticipated and expected. Why?—In order that believers may

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give evidence of God’s presence in their life. Think of it as being a living showcase, revealing to the entire world the surpassing riches of God’s generosity.

### Making Sense of It All

When the Philippian jailor was told to “believe in Jesus,” did that faith save him? Ephesians 2:8 provides the answer—“Sort of!” The text states, “For by grace you have been saved through faith.” Obviously, without faith it is impossible to be saved. So is it grace that saves? The text seems to indicate just that. However, would you again believe the answer is “Sort of!” Both answers are “Sort

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salvation.*

of” because salvation is not *because of* faith or *because of* grace, even though both are involved in conversion. Faith is neither the cause nor the effect of salvation, but certainly the instrument by which salvation is appropriated. Also, grace is not

the cause of salvation; rather it is the basis. To properly grasp these ideas, we must carefully look at five key issues.

*First, God alone is the cause of initial salvation.* Based upon God’s gracious character, He chooses to save us from spiritual death (Eph. 2:1-3) and impart spiritual life (Eph. 2:4-7). We are “saved by God” or better “saved because of God.”

How then are we to understand the expressions, “saved by grace” and “saved by faith?” Insight is provided from the particular grammatical construction of the words used in the original language. In Ephesians 2:8, the phrase “*by grace*” is one word and not a prepositional phrase, but is translated as such to express the intent of the word used. The translation explains the *means by which salvation is accomplished*.<sup>2</sup> However, this particular word form can also be understood to designate the actual cause of an action and therefore can be translated “saved because of grace.” As previously discussed,

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the actual cause of initial salvation is the action of God found in verses 4-6. As a result, the better translation would be “saved by means of grace,” since God’s grace is the basis of His choice to act in giving eternal life to those who believe.

Likewise, the construction of the prepositional phrase “*through faith*” emphasizes the *means by which salvation is accomplished*.<sup>3</sup> Rather than the cause, being translated “because of faith,” the proper translation in this instance is again “by means of faith” or “through faith,” indicating that faith is the basis on which action is taken. As previously discussed in *Myth 2: Faith Is Active*, the faith of man is the basis of action, but in initial salvation the only action taken is by God. Man believes, but God acts.

*Second, saving faith is not equivalent to being saved by faith.* Saving faith concerns the realization of the trustworthiness of Jesus and His promise of eternal life. Saving faith is embracing the credibility of Christ. In the Scriptures, we find the following concepts: walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7), live by faith (Gal. 2:20), justified by faith (Rom. 3:28), and saved by faith. In each case the concepts of walking, living, justifying, and saving are not caused by faith, but rather faith is the bases for each action.

I know how we talk in Christian circles. Haven’t you heard someone ask another, “Brother, have you been saved by putting your faith in Jesus Christ?” And the response is heard, “Yes, I have been saved by placing my faith in Jesus.” The underlying idea being that that one is saved “because of” putting his faith in Christ. As a result, “saved because of faith” becomes the *litmus test* for association with a body of believers. At the moment of salvation, however, you are never saved “because of” faith.

Note that the expression “saved by faith alone” indicates from our perspective that *we* can do nothing nor add anything to God’s gift of salvation. Yes, we must believe in Christ as Savior to individually appropriate salvation. Remember, however, that faith is only a passive realization of the truth concerning Jesus Christ, nothing more.

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*Third, salvation means to be delivered from someone or something.* As discussed earlier, it can refer to either physical deliverance or spiritual deliverance. It is useful to ask the question, “Deliverance from what?” In Philippians 1:19, the issue for Paul was present, physical deliverance. “For I know that this shall turn out for my *de-*

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*liverance* through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” [emphasis mine]. In the passage currently under consideration (Eph. 2:8-10), spiritual deliverance is under discussion, but a distinction must be made here between past and present spiritual deliverance. The cause of *past* salvation is the gracious action of God, delivering a person from the penalty of sin (v.8). Verse 10, however, addresses *present* deliverance from the power

of sin in the Christian life. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.” This passage presumes good works by believers, as they walk by faith. The new position a believer now holds in Christ provides the opportunity to choose to walk in obedience to God’s Word.

*Fourth, grace and faith converge at conversion.* They occur simultaneously. One cannot take place without the other. God does not save you and then you believe. If so, you could be saved without believing. Equally as important and previously mentioned, believing cannot cause or initiate salvation.

### It’s All about Him

The Philippian jailor “believed in Jesus” and he was delivered in an instant from death to life in Christ. However, Paul wrote in



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Ephesians 2:8 the work of God alone saves. Grace and faith are involved, but all glory belongs to Him.

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### Myth 5, NOTES

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1. Even though some understand that God has predetermined the actual good works to be accomplished in and through each believer, this flies in the face of the believer's responsibility to choose to walk in good works.
2. Philip R. Williams, *Grammar Notes* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary Greek class notes, 1971), p. 12.

A noun in the dative form, denoting the means by which something is accomplished, is a *dative of means* and typically indicated with "by" or "by means of." On the other hand a noun in the dative form, denoting the cause by which something is accomplished, is a *dative of cause* and typically indicated with "by" or "because of." Since the actual cause of deliverance from death to life comes from of God, the *dative of means* is preferred and rendered "by means of grace."

3. Eugene Van Ness Goetchius, *The Language of the New Testament* (New York; Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), pp. 153-154

The use of the preposition *dia* with a *genitive form* of its object conveys the meaning "through, by, by means of." On the other hand the use of the preposition *dia* diaaccount of, because of." Since the genitive form of "faith" is used in Ephesians 2:8, the meaning of "by means of" is conveyed.