

Ephesians 2:8 – Is Faith The Gift of God?

Kenny Hodges, 2007

The nature of faith is an important part of the soteriological process. Some teach that salvation is totally from God and that even the faith a person must exercise in order to be saved comes from God. Others, who also hold that salvation is a free gift, see faith as being personal. In other words, believing is the role of the individual in securing the gift of salvation.

Ephesians 2:8 is often quoted as a proof text to show that God is the one who gives faith. Reformed theology goes even farther and states that a person is regenerated (born again) *before* he can exercise faith. R.C. Sproul states:

“A cardinal point of Reformed theology is the maxim: Regeneration precedes faith.”¹

Reformed Theology’s doctrines of Total Depravity (total inability) and Unconditional Election necessitate faith being God’s gift. If man is totally dead (like a rock) then it must be God who saves him and thus gives him the faith that is then expressed.

There are a number of good theological arguments against the view that faith is the gift of God. However, the strongest argument comes from the Greek grammar. The text reads:

τῇ γὰρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι διὰ πίστεως καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν
For by grace you are saved through faith and that not of yourselves
θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον
of God (is) the gift

τοῦτο (that) is neuter and cannot be referring to **πίστεως** (faith) which is feminine or **χάριτί** (grace) which is also feminine.

Baptist Greek scholar A.T. Robertson whose *Grammar of the Greek New Testament* is considered a definitive work, makes this statement about the gender of **τοῦτο**:

“...**οὗτος** agrees with its substantive in gender and number, whether predicate or attributive.... In Eph. 2:8... there is no reference to **πίστεως** in **τοῦτο**, but rather to the idea of salvation in the clause before.”²

Robertson elaborates in his *Word Pictures*:

For by grace (τῇ γὰρ χάριτι [*tēi gar chariti*]). Explanatory reason. “By the grace” already mentioned in verse 5 and so with the article. **Through faith** (διὰ πίστεως [*dia pisteōs*]). This phrase he adds in repeating what he said in verse 5 to make it plainer. “Grace” is God’s part, “faith” ours. **And that** (καὶ τοῦτο [*kai touto*]). Neuter, not feminine ταυτή [*tautē*], and so refers not to πίστις [*pistis*] (feminine) or to χάρις [*charis*] (feminine also), but to the act of being saved by grace conditioned on faith on our part. Paul shows that salvation does not have its source (ἐξ ὑμῶν [*ex humōn*], out of you) in men, but from God. Besides, it is God’s gift (δῶρον [*dōron*]) and not the result of our work.³

¹ Sproul, R.C., *Chosen by God*, Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1986, p. 72.

² Robertson, A.T., *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, Broadman Press, Nashville, Tennessee, 1934, p. 704.

³ Robertson, A. 1997. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Vol.V c1932, Vol.VI c1933 by Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Logos Research Systems: Oak Harbor

Kenneth Wuest states:

The words, “through faith” speak of the instrument or means whereby the sinner avails himself of this salvation which God offers him in pure grace. Expositors says: “Paul never says ‘through the faith,’ as if the faith were the ground or procuring cause of the salvation.” Alford says: “It (the salvation) has been effected by grace and apprehended by faith.” The word “that” is *touto* (τοῦτο), “this,” a demonstrative pronoun in the neuter gender. The Greek word “faith” is feminine in gender and therefore *touto* (τοῦτο) could not refer to “faith.” It refers to the general idea of salvation in the immediate context. The translation reads, “and this not out from you as a source, of God (it is) the gift.” That is, salvation is a gift of God. It does not find its source in man. Furthermore, this salvation is not “out of a source of works.” This explains salvation by grace. It is not produced by man nor earned by him. It is a gift from God with no strings tied to it. Paul presents the same truth in Romans 4:4, 5 when speaking of the righteousness which God imputed to Abraham, where he says: “Now, to the one who works, his wages are not looked upon as a favor but as that which is justly or legally due. But to the one who does not work but believes on the One who justifies the impious, his faith is computed for righteousness. One reason why salvation is a free gift of God and not earned by works, is given us in the words; “lest any man should boast.” Grace glorifies God. Works would glorify man.”⁴

J. Vernon McGee states,

Paul is not talking about *faith* when he says, “And that not of yourselves.” He is talking about *salvation*. Salvation is a gift that eliminates boasting. It is all of God and not of us. It is God’s *gift*.⁵

Gregory Sapaugh states:

Ephesians 2:8 is a magnificent statement concerning the eternal salvation which is graciously provided by God through the medium of faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is not a divine gift from God. Faith is a personal conviction which a person exercises when he or she encounters Jesus the Christ. The clear exhortation from Paul and the other NT writers is for people to believe. There is no biblical data to warrant the belief that faith itself is given by God. Robertson correctly concludes, “‘Grace’ is God’s part, ‘faith’ ours.” (Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 4:525.). God provides the free gift of salvation on the basis of His grace. People must receive the free gift of salvation by means of faith. Such is the clear and distinct message of Eph 2:8.⁶

From the standpoint of the Greek grammar, faith cannot be the gift referred to in Ephesians 2:8. The gift of God is clearly our salvation by grace (first mentioned in verse 5).

For a detailed study of the nature of faith see Chapter 17 of C. Gordon Olson’s excellent book, *Getting the Gospel Right, A Balanced View of Salvation Truth*.⁷

⁴Wuest, K. S. 1997, c1984. *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English reader* . Eerdmans: Grand Rapids

⁵ McGee, J. Vernon, Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee, Thru The Bible Radio, Pasadena, CA, Volume V, p. 237.

⁶ Sapaugh, Gregory, “Is Faith a Gift? A study of Ephesians 2:8”, Journal of the Grace Evangelical society, Spring 1994—Volume 7:12

⁷ Olsen, C. Gordon, *Getting The Gospel Right, A Balanced View of Salvation Truth*, Global Gospel Publishers, Cedar Kolls, New Jersey, pp. 216-230.