



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

**Sermon for Lent 4**  
March 14, 2021

## Gift of God

### Ephesians 2:1–10

*<sup>1</sup> And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

I received an advertisement in the mail one day that I thought was trying to sell me something. But it looked like they were actually *giving* things away: Free jacket, free silverware, free stationary, free watch. Everything was free! Until you read the fine print. None of this stuff was really free. That's just what they made it look to pique your interest.

Most of us are pretty skeptical these days when it comes to things that are supposedly free. Years ago the old TV show "Candid Camera" had a man standing on a busy street corner trying to give away \$20 bills. Most people wouldn't take them, and those who did couldn't believe there wasn't some kind of catch. Now, maybe you're thinking, "I'd take it!" But, really, if a complete stranger wanted to just give you \$20, wouldn't you think there was something wrong with that? It's hard for us to believe in something that's "free." Maybe that's why it's so hard for people to believe in "The Gift of God."

Why would God give us anything anyway? He doesn't owe us. We haven't done anything to earn His favor. On the contrary, we daily sin much and deserve nothing but punishment. Indeed, "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23a).

"But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23b). God has given us a truly free gift. Scripture says that He planned for your salvation before the creation of the universe. He chose you to be His own even before you were born. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Jesus Christ gave the whole world something we didn't deserve: He gave His life on the cross to pay for the sins of all mankind; He shed His blood on the cross, to wash you clean and make you spotless and



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holy in God's sight; He died *your* death on the cross, to destroy the power of death over you, and He rose from the tomb on the third day, to give you eternal life. All this is the gift of God. And it's yours! No catches, no strings attached.

"For by grace you have been saved, through faith . . ." Ah! Is that the catch? You have to have *faith*? You have to *believe*? Well, how can I be sure my faith is good enough? How can I be sure I really, *sincerely* believe? Read on: "For by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." Yes, it's true, God gives us the *gift* of eternal life in Christ, but He also gives us the *gift* of the very faith by which we receive this gift of life!

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). Yes, but how do I believe? How do I get this faith? Faith comes by hearing – hearing the message of God's Word (Rom. 10:17); faith comes through the water and the Word in Holy Baptism; faith is strengthened by the body and blood of Jesus in Holy Communion. Saving faith comes to us – not from within us, but *to* us – from God. "And this not from yourselves – not your own doing – it is the gift of God." Our faith is not a good work *we do* to earn salvation. It's a work *God does* in us by His Holy Spirit, working through the Word and Sacraments.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not a result of works, so that no one may boast." Beloved, our salvation is not a reward for any work we *would* do, *could* do, or *should* do.

Certainly, our salvation *is* a reward, but it's a reward for the saving work done *in our place* by Jesus Christ. We're saved because of His good works for us. "Not as a result of [our] works, so that no one may boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works." Ha ha! *There* it is. *Now* we get to the fine print. "Created in Christ Jesus to *do good works*." So *that's* the catch: once we're saved we have to do good works. Oh, but read on: "Good works, which God prepared beforehand – *in advance* – that we should walk in them."

How about that? Even the good works we do are a gift from God. He has prepared these good works for us in *advance*. So, how does that work?

Imagine for a moment that a large corporation was given a government contract by the Department of Transportation. From scratch they were to design and build new cars, new trucks – all new vehicles. *And* they were to design and build all new *roads* for these new vehicles to travel on. Now, wouldn't it make sense to build the vehicles and the roads to be perfectly suited to each other? There wouldn't be any trucks too tall for the underpasses. There wouldn't be any dangerous curves where cars would lose control. The vehicles would all be just the right weight so as not to damage the roads and the roads would be strong enough to support the vehicles. Both the roads and the vehicles would be designed by master planners and built to complement each other perfectly. Sounds nice, doesn't it? I'd like to see that!



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Friends, “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” God is *the* Master Planner who designed you with your own special talents, resources, and abilities. Just like those new roads would be perfectly suited to those new vehicles, God has prepared in advance good works for you, perfectly suited to you, just right for the talents and abilities He has given you.

My beloved, what are the good works *you* can do? Look around. You’ll see all kinds of opportunities – prepared for you by God – at home, at work, at school, at church, in the community. He sets these good works before you; He gives you the desire to do them; He gives you the *power* to do them. And because His Son died for you, the works you do in faith are pleasing to Him.

“For by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God.” What’s the catch? Where’s the fine print? There isn’t any; it’s free! That’s impossible! No, that’s “The Gift of God” – bought and paid for by the blood of His Son – for you. In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.