

“Saved by Grace”

by Ilya Pavlov

KEY VERSES:

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” Ephesians 2:8-10.

FAITH STORY:

Ephesians 2:1-10

FAITH FOCUS:

Paul speaks about new life in Jesus Christ, being new creatures, having new beginnings. We are not the slaves of sin anymore; we have the power to resist the evil spirit that lives and works in the world. God's great love gives us an opportunity to be with Christ. We are saved by God's holy grace; salvation is the undeserved gift that he offers each person. We need faith in Christ in order to be saved. Faith and grace are two essential components that make salvation possible. We are not saved by works that we do. Works for Christ happen for a different reason. Our love for God, the desire to please him, to do something in response to his loving mercy, these are the main motives to do good works. To work for God is our own desire. It is what we have been created to do. We do it not because we have to but because we want to.

SESSION GOAL:

To encourage students to reflect on why they do “good things” and to start correcting their motives if they are wrong.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will:

Perform a play that illustrates bad motives for doing good “Christian” things.

Discuss and write down what Paul is saying in Ephesians 2:1-10.

Create another skit or story that illustrates either work righteousness or cheap grace.

Pray together.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

Bibles

White board and working marker (or two)

Paper and pens

SESSION OUTLINE:

FOCUS: (8 minutes)

After everyone has arrived and had some time to chat and “warm up,” ask them to take a few minutes and reflect on a good reason and a bad reason for the following things:

- Going to church
- Working in a homeless shelter
- Preaching a sermon
- Giving away a big sum of money.

Now put them in groups of 2-3 and ask them to come up with a skit that illustrates bad motives for doing any of the above things. Give them 5 minutes to get their skits worked out.

CONNECT: (15 minutes)

Now give the youth a chance to act out their skits. Follow up on the skits with these questions:

Do you think a lot of people do good things for bad reasons? How prevalent are these motives?

Do you think Christians have pure motives 100% of the time? Is that possible?

When does the occasional “bad motive” for doing good things become a true problem?

Transition into the Exploring the Bible time with this statement, *"The apostle Paul knew that Christians would be tempted to do the right things for the wrong reasons. And he knew that we could make a mistake in two different directions. Let's look at Ephesians 2 to see how he handles this sticky issue."*

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (15-20 minutes)

Ask one of the youth to read Ephesians 2:1-10. Ask them, *"What did you notice as you listened to these verses?"* Go to the white board and write down all their responses. Look at their comments and see if you can combine some of them. Do the following points emerge? If so, highlight that. If not, make these points yourself:

- We are all sinners and have disobeyed God (even if we were raised in Christian family).
- God loves us and therefore made us alive through Jesus Christ
- We do not deserve this gift and can only take it by our faith
- We do the works for God not to get salvation but because it is our natural response to his love.

Give the youth some paper and ask them to write some differences between a sinful life and life with Christ. After 5 minutes, ask students to share their lists. Discuss it with them. Ask, “*Which list seems more like death? So if we have been rescued from that, what should our response be?*”

Go back to the white board and ask the youth to list every “good work” they can think of. Now make these two phrases on the board: ***works righteousness*** and ***cheap grace***. Explain to them that sometimes Christians respond to doing good things for God in two negative ways. Without any more explanation, have the youth get back into the same small groups they were in before. This time they are to come up with a skit or a story that shows either the problem of works righteousness or cheap grace. Give them 7 minutes to come up with something. Walk around to the different groups and give them some ideas.

Call the groups together after 7 minutes and have each group share their skit or story. Have the rest of the youth guess whether they are illustrating self righteousness or cheap grace. Then give this mini lecture:

Some Christians think they have to do good works in order for God to love them. These people believe one must earn his or her salvation. They get caught in works righteousness. Others make the opposite mistake. They understand, correctly, that we are only rescued from sin by the gift of God’s grace. But they go too far and assume that this grace doesn’t work inside of us, changing us into different people. So they think all Christians have to do is say some magic words and they are “saved,” and they can go on living in sin. They fall into the trap of cheap grace.

Ask the youth, “What does Paul have to say to the work righteousness Christians?” (verses 8-9)

Ask the youth, “What does Paul have to say to the cheap grace Christians?” (verse 10)

APPLY: (10 minutes)

Ask the youth which of the two bad motives—works righteousness or cheap grace—that people today tend to fall into. Then ask the tough question: Which bad motive are you most tempted with? Brainstorm together some concrete ways that we can avoid these bad motives. Some possible ideas are:

- Remembering how much Jesus has done for us and then we want to obey out of gratitude.
- Remembering how awful it is to live in sin, which helps us remember that cheap grace isn’t so cheap after all.
- Using an accountability partner to help you with your motives.

Practicing a spiritual discipline daily, to help keep you in communication with God, so that you can gain the right motives.

Purposefully staying home from church or refraining from doing the “Christian thing” as a reminder that God loves us even if we don’t do all the good works.

Committing to do “good works” for a month just to try them out, not worrying about any motivation—just committing to let God do whatever God wants to do in your life.

RESPOND: (5 minutes)

End the session with a time of remembering, remembering everything Jesus has done for us. Lead the youth in this guided meditation:

Lord Jesus, we used to be dead, and now we’re alive. (Silence)

We didn’t deserve your help, but we got it anyway. (Silence)

When we truly remember everything you’ve done for us—wow—we don’t know what to say (Silence)

But sometimes we forget. (Silence)

Sometimes we go to church, read our Bibles and do service—because we feel like we have to. (Silence)

Help us do these good things for the right reasons. (Silence)

Help us do these things, so that we don’t fall back into the slavery of sin. (Silence)

Help us. Transform us. Truly heal us. (Silence)

Amen.

INSIGHTS FROM THE SCRIPTURE:

In this passage Paul describes both the sinful life where we rebel against God’s desires and the wonderful, vibrant life with Christ. We get trapped, enslaved by the sinful life because evil works in the minds and hearts of people. People follow their own desires but it contradicts the will of God. On the contrary, life with Christ is full of true freedom and joy. Christ saves everyone who believes in him by God’s grace. A person needs only to have faith to receive this wonderful freedom and salvation. We are saved by faith alone, not works. We don’t need to do works to gain God’s love, mercy and redemption. However, there is a place for good works. Experiencing God’s love and mercy, a person cannot stay neutral to it and, having Christ in our hearts gives us the desire to do good works. What can we do for God? Actually, nothing. God does not need anything and can live very well without our deeds. The works are more important for us, not God. Through these works a person grows spiritually, developing more and more freedom.