

“Stewards — Transformed by Grace, Faith and Love”
—Ephesians 2:8-10

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Stewards — Transformed by Grace, Faith and Love”, is Ephesians 2:8-10 → *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

How many of you have ever been in love? That is actually a loaded question which can make one hesitant to answer. “Ah, if I raise my hand I don’t want my spouse to give me the elbow and say, ‘Been in love? Aren’t you in love **now**?’” (treating it like a “trick question”). Some may simply be a little self-conscious to raise their hand, not wanting to reveal they’ve been in love for some reason. Others may be a little more analytical and ask, “What do you mean by being “in love?”

The culture in which we’ve grown up reinforces the desire built into human beings for being “in love” as an ecstatic, emotional feeling filled with excitement, joy and exuberance with an overwhelming desire for

another, which translates into a feeling that you just can't live without him or her. It makes one act and feel rather free and adventurous, even irrational, believing that with this person you can conquer the world. It is expressed in thousands of movies, cards, poems and songs about "love." They follow a similar pattern as expressed in the words of one song from the '70s: "Someone like you makes it hard to live without somebody else. Someone like you **makes it easy to give—never thinking of myself.**" (Carpenters)

Love makes you want to give in a way where you never think of yourself? Is this possible? Any married couple can tell you how quickly such a concept of being "in love" with no thought of self or personal expectation fulfillment breaks down in relationship. Those who made unconditional wedding vows knowing in their heart of hearts that they were perfect for each other soon see that neither one of them is perfect. When you live with a sinner you have to deal with sin—yours and your spouse's. It's easy to love the lovable when that love is reciprocal. Sin brings the challenge of loving the unlovable, whether it's in you or the other person. True love must be governed, motivated and expressed on the basis of something far more powerful than what you can muster in yourself.

Our text reveals this powerful action when it refers to your salvation—your eternal life with God, Who is madly, crazy, "head-over-heels" in love

with you! Verse 8 tells you that it is *by grace you have been saved*. Grace is experiencing the love and favor of someone **even though we don't deserve it**. It is totally unconditional. This is a tough concept for us to fathom. Since everything in our lives—jobs, civil obedience, academic achievement, human care and yes, even relationships—is based upon performance, it is impossible to fathom this grace which is not our *own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works*. (Verse 9)

The more serious reason we cannot fathom God's grace is because we are sinners. Ephesians 2:1 describes the condition of the sinner being so bad that he is *dead in . . . trespasses and sins*. Since you cannot receive God's grace because of being dead in your relationship with God, **He makes the initiative to bring you into relationship with Himself because He loves you so much!** Ephesians 2:3-5 says that even though we *were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind . . . God, being rich in mercy, **because of the great love with which He loved us**, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved*. Notice, **He has done all the work of your eternal salvation!** How?

This grace is motivated by His love for the unlovable. If you think about it from a stewardship perspective what would motivate Yahweh to love people? He has gifted and entrusted everybody with that which is

good in life. (cf. James 1:17) How does the meaning of the 1st Article of the Apostles' Creed put it? "God has made me and all creatures . . . given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them . . . clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, spouse and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me." That makes everyone a steward.

Yet, how many stewards of His good gifts in our world refuse to acknowledge He even exists, let alone recognizing that He is the One providing for their daily living? How many steward of His good gifts in the world give their love over in idolatry to such possessions, people or positions in life in an effort to control them for selfish, self-serving purposes? How many have been "graced" by God only to declare, *My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth?* (cf. Deuteronomy 8:17) How many have experienced the affects of sinfulness or made sinful choices which have reeked havoc on the good gifts which He has given only to shake their fist and blame Him for their messed up lives? Yet, Yahweh still provides! This too is His perfect grace!

The ultimate expression of His love is when He took on human flesh

in the person of Jesus and did all necessary to provide salvation for such sinful ingrates. Romans 5:6,8 puts it this way: *While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly . . . God shows His love for us in that **while we were still sinners, Christ died for us**.* God's grace is motivated by His love a sinner such as you. God's love is expressed in His grace. This is why stewards must be "transformed" from stewards dominating God's good gifts to stewards exercising dominion over God's good gifts. According to verse 8, this transformation comes *through faith* which is also *the gift of God*.

The Holy Spirit calls all people through this Gospel of God's love and grace to *faith*. Faith is not some ability to process information about God intellectually. Rather, it is repenting of your idolatrous stewardship of God's good gifts, receiving His forgiveness in His absolution and walking in a new way of living. It is walking daily "in love" with God so that, in the midst of the many temptations whereby the devil strives to steal, destroy or tarnish that love, the Holy Spirit continues to keep you in your love relationship with God. Jesus rebuked the church in Ephesus in such terms in Revelation 2:4-5 → *I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.* In one sense, confession and absolution is "falling in love with God" all over again!

In such grace, faith and love you then recognizes that for which you

have been created and re-created according to verse 10 of our text: *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* It is interesting how people talk about “destiny” in connection with romantic love. Here God talks about His love in Jesus for you empowering you to do that for which you were *prepared beforehand* by Him to do—*good works*.

Thus, this new *walk* strives to give graciously to others, wanting to express the undeserved love and favor of God in Christ Jesus, frail as your efforts may be. This new *walk* strives to love unlovable sinners in Christ’s love, frail as your efforts may be. This new walk strives to trust in Christ alone for salvation, frail as such faith is much of the time. This new *walk* is the stride of stewards transformed by God’s grace, faith and love, *not your own doing* but empowered by the Holy Spirit to use all He has provided you to reflect His grace, faith and love to others. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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