

# A Look at Ephesians 2:8-9

Allen W. Leigh

EPHESIANS 2:8-9 (KJV) SPEAKS OF SALVATION coming through the grace of God: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: / Not of works, lest any man should boast." The interpretation of these verses is controversial. Non-LDS Christians interpret them to mean that salvation comes as a free gift from God because of our faith in him. Latter-day Saints have difficulty with them because they seem to conflict with the church's strong emphasis on the necessity of good works.

I propose an interpretation based on the Greek meaning of the word "gift." Through this interpretation I have come to appreciate those verses as a beautiful expression of the Atonement, and I believe the verses are consistent with LDS doctrine.

In verse 8, Paul states that we are saved by grace: "*For by grace are ye saved.*" The scriptures teach that salvation comes by the grace of God (Acts 15:11; Rom. 3:24; 5:15-17; Eph. 1:6-7; 2:5-9; Titus 2:11; 3:4-7; Heb. 2:9; 1 Pet. 1:9-10; 2 Ne. 2:6-8; 10:24-25; 25:23; Moro. 10:32-33; D&C 20:30-31; 76:94; 84:99; 138:14). Even though we must keep the commandments of God and repent of our sins, removal of sin comes through the suffering of Jesus Christ, and that suffering resulted from his grace or love. Repentance and acts of service are necessary before Christ allows his atonement to cleanse us, but works have nothing to do with the actual removal of sin.

Paul continues that verse by stating that "it" is the gift of God without clarifying what "it" is. The common interpretation of that phrase is that after we have faith in God, he gives salvation to us as a gift—"it" is salvation. The Greek meaning of the word "gift," however, indicates that Paul is not speaking of the gift of salvation but is referring to a different gift. The word "gift" in verse 8 comes from the Greek word *doron* and refers to a present in the form of a *sacrifice* or *offering*.<sup>1</sup> Paul was, I believe,

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1. James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1890), 385.

saying that salvation is the sacrifice of God for our sins. That is, "it" is the atonement of Jesus Christ, and Jesus performed the Atonement by giving himself as a gift in the final and ultimate sacrifice.

In verse 9, Paul states that the gift referred to in verse 8 did not come by way of the works of man: *Not of works, lest any man should boast*. Obedience and repentance have nothing to do with the atonement of Jesus Christ. Jesus performed that unselfish mission completely by himself.

For me, Ephesians 2:8-9 are clear if we refer to the Greek meaning and substitute the word *sacrifice* for the word *gift*: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the *sacrifice* of God: / Not of works, lest any man should boast."