

# Gift of God

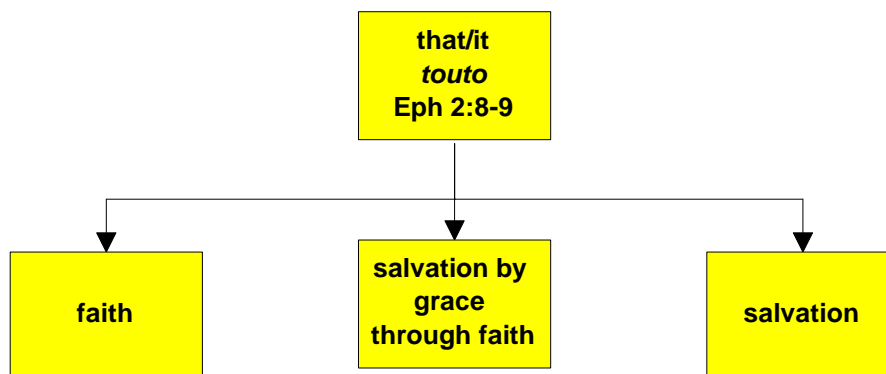
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## Text of Eph 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith;  
and *that* (*touto*) not of yourselves,  
*it* (*touto*) is the gift of God;  
(*touto*) not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

Leedy, in his NT diagrams, shows that although only the first *touto* is stated the second two are implied. The first occurrence is typically translated as *that*, the second as *it*, and the third is left untranslated. Therefore, three parallel affirmations are being made about the same portion of the first part of the text. But which part of the text is being described? As is commonly known, Calvinists use this text to assert that faith is a gift. So at the popular level, it might be assumed that faith is being described by *touto*. However, as Greek grammars note, this is impossible. *Faith* is feminine in Greek, but *touto* is neuter. This means that faith is not being referred to by *touto*.

## Basic Options for Eph 2:8-9



This leaves us with two basic possibilities. *Touto* might be referring to the whole phrase *by grace you have been saved* or to *salvation*. In harmony with a number of other FG writers, the last option is preferred herein. An adverbial antecedent is most probable so that Paul is to be understood as saying that being *saved* in this manner is a gift.<sup>1</sup> And although we disagree with [Zeller](#) on numerous matters, his article on this particular issue is commendable. On the other hand, even if it were a conceptual antecedent so that the whole phrase is in view, then logically faith would still not necessarily be a gift. For example, [Bing](#) and [Sapaugh](#) believe that the whole phrase is intended and yet deny that faith is a gift. According to Zeller:

John Calvin also held this view. Calvin did not believe that the pronoun referred to “faith.” He believed it referred to “salvation by grace through faith” (to the entire salvation process, including faith). Is salvation the gift of God? This view would answer “yes.” Is faith the gift of God? This view would again answer “yes” because faith would be considered part of the totality of the salvation process.<sup>2</sup>

Zeller is probably correct in perceiving Calvin to mean that the gift refers to the entire phrase. However, I must disagree with Zeller’s assessment in which he perceives Calvin as teaching that faith is a gift in this passage. In agreement with a number of other non-Calvinists, I understand Calvin as denouncing the view that faith is a gift in this context.<sup>3</sup> As some would remark, “There is room to question whether Calvin the theologian ever met Calvin the exegete when you read his exegesis of this passage.” Zeller fails to entertain the possibility that *touto* might refer to the entire phrase without making faith a gift. Yet this position is held by some non-Calvinists and even by Calvin himself apparently.

I will implement a substitution technique similar to what Zeller uses to retranslate the verse in terms of the structure given above:

#### ***Substitution of Salvation***

For by grace you have been saved through faith:

and *that (salvation)* is not of yourselves,  
*that (salvation)* is the gift of God;  
*that (salvation)* is not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

If a beggar reaches out his hand to take the *gift of bread* offered to him, this does not mean that reaching out one's hand to take the bread is a gift. Likewise, faith is not a gift. Granted, I just limited the word *gift* to refer to the bread itself, but Paul may mean the entire concept. I will use the same technique to show that the second option does not necessarily lead to the Calvinistic conclusion either.

#### ***Substitution of Conceptualization***

For by grace you have been saved through faith:

and *that (being saved by grace through faith)* is not of yourselves,  
*that (being saved by grace through faith)* is the gift of God;  
*that (being saved by grace through faith)* is not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

If the entire concept is meant, then the expanded phrase would be: *being saved by grace through faith is the gift of God*. Even so, it does not logically follow that faith is a gift.<sup>4</sup> Consider the following rewording of our beggar illustration: *being fed by merely reaching out one's hand to take the bread is a gift*. The gift is not merely the bread but being fed in this manner. Nevertheless, reaching out one's hand to take the bread is not a gift. The Calvinistic understanding in which the means of receiving the gift is considered part of the gift is as unnatural as it is illogical.<sup>5</sup>

Even though they cannot use *touto* or even the entire phrase to prove their point, Calvinists may nevertheless persist in trying to use the parallelism of the three phrases modifying *touto* to prove that faith is a gift. The fact that **salvation** is *not of yourselves* (or that **being saved by grace through faith** is *not of yourselves*) is somehow converted in Calvinistic alchemy into meaning that **faith** is *not of yourselves*.

#### ***Not of Yourselves***

The phrase *not of yourselves* would generally be considered a genitive of source or production. Salvation (or being saved by grace through faith) does not find its source in us. We do not produce this salvation. The beggar does not produce the bread. Yet Calvinists want this to mean that the beggar cannot receive the bread; otherwise, in their minds, it would be salvation by works. If you want a beggar to receive the bread, you must pick up his dead arm and move it to the bread. Then, you must move his fingers to take the bread and move his arm back to his mouth. Next, you have to open his mouth, put the bread in his mouth, grasp his jaw, and then move it up and down to chew the bread. Finally, somehow, you must cause him to swallow it—at least this is how this Calvinistic mind-bending and text-twisting argument seems to regard the process.

One way some of those involved in this Calvinistic alchemy attempt to derive this conclusion is to define work as everything we do and thus anything we produce. According to this mindset, since we are not saved as a result of works, we are not saved as a result of anything we do. We cannot be saved by a self-produced faith. Making salvation conditioned on our response of faith is simultaneously ruled out Calvinistically by the premises that being saved is a gift and is thus not the result of something we produce such as faith. (1) Since faith cannot be self-produced, it must be a gift. (2) Since faith is not a work, it is not something we do or produce. To restate their deductive reasoning, being saved is not a result of works, so it cannot be a result of something we do since anything we do is work.

The primary flaw with this type of argument is that it has defined work as being anything we do or produce. To be sure, something we do or produce can be a work. But it is false to say that everything we do or produce is a

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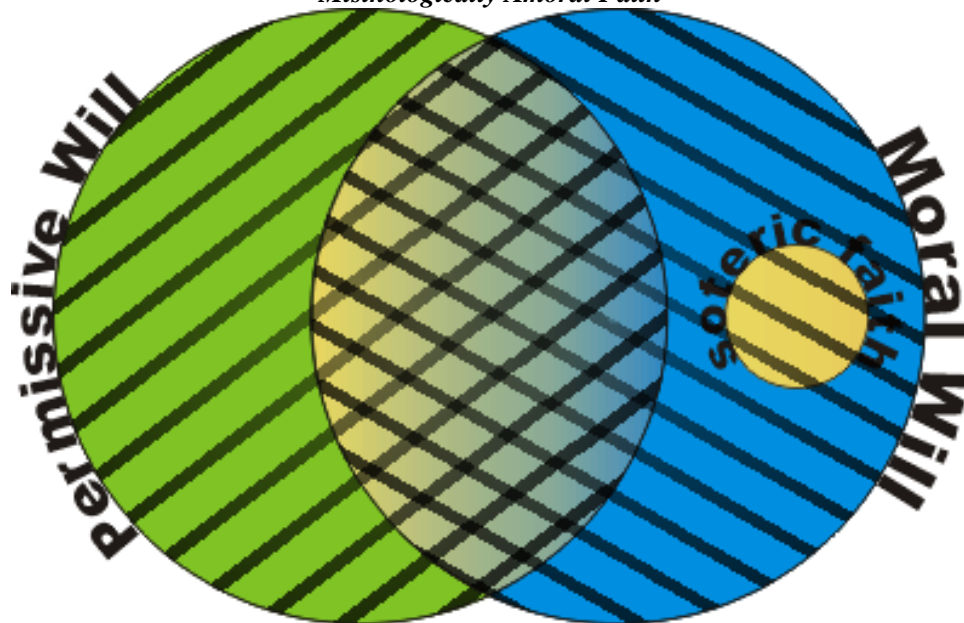
work. When I produce a snore in the middle of the night while I am sleeping, I have not produced a work. Common sense should be enough to tell us that this Calvinism is nonsense. But for those who are more academically and analytically inclined, I will proceed with a limited interaction with those responding from this Calvinistic orientation. I have already submitted substantial rebuttal of this Calvinistic premise elsewhere and will not need to repeat that here.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, I will draw upon and expand those conclusions for which I have already provided substantiation in these other articles.

### *Self-Determinism*

First, I have stated that saving faith is the singular exception to the rule that everything we do which has its source in the flesh or in the Spirit is a rewardable work.<sup>7</sup> Saving faith has its source in the Spirit in that the Spirit enables us to come to saving faith. Does this mean that saving faith is *not of yourselves*? No! Saving faith is dualistically of yourself and of the Spirit. When you encourage a beggar to look at the bread and smell the bread so as to create a hunger for the bread so that he will reach out and take the bread, you are to some extent responsible for the beggar's action. He acts of his own free will, to be sure, but you have nevertheless purposefully influenced him to respond in such a manner. You influenced him to take the appropriate action, and in this sense his action may be said to find its source in your encouragement, but the actual act of appropriation comes from him. The source of his response is he himself. This viewpoint is called *moral self-determinism*.<sup>8</sup> Some beggars may refuse to take the bread, but this only highlights the fact that a beggar's actions are self determined. Some people, under the influence of their flesh, reject the *Bread of Life*. Some people, under the influence of the Spirit, accept the *Bread of Life*. Actually, both sets of people are under the influence of both the flesh and the Spirit. So who determines which influence will win out? The individual does. The person (himself or herself; his self or her self) determines his or her own response.

In my illustration *Source of What I do*, the things that we do that find their source in *self* (as opposed to the flesh) are pictured as yellow and thus misthologically neutral. The things that we do that find their source in the Spirit are denoted in blue as misthologically rewardable. In that discussion, I merely note that saving faith is an exception: "Saving faith is the singular exception in that it is misthologically neutral despite the fact that it is done through the Spirit and in obedience to God's expressed moral will."<sup>9</sup> In [Doxological Versus Misthological Amoral Faith](#), I present a number of diagrams in which misthologically yellow and blue spectrums are pictured within the spheres of God's moral and passive will. One such diagram is *God's Will in Color*. If the exception statement is combined with this diagram, the following diagram is derived.

### *Misthologically Amoral Faith*



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Saving faith is misthologically neutral and thus yellow. Consequently, it is yellow for a compound reason: It is a misthologically neutral response that is sourced in the person's self. Our self is the efficient agent in our coming to saving faith. But saving faith simultaneously has its source in the Spirit in that the Spirit is the **instrumental** agent in our coming to faith. The Spirit **enables** us to believe rather than irresistibly causes us to believe.<sup>10</sup> The Spirit influences us to believe. It is our responsibility to respond positively to this influence. If we do so, we get the gift of life. Consequently, saving faith is the singular exception, albeit a very big exception, to our expectation that something specifically desired and enabled by the Spirit would be rewarded by God. Saving faith results in a gift rather than a reward, so it has no misthological bluish tint to it whatsoever. Nevertheless, it has stripes running through it to show that it actively belongs to the sphere of God's moral will. God desires this specific reaction on our part.

The Calvinistic conclusion that faith cannot be self-produced is therefore false. We are to work to come to faith. Work is the expected precondition for our meeting the condition of receiving eternal life as a free gift. Jesus is not kidding when He urges us to work for eternal life (Jn 6:27) or strive to enter heaven (Lk 13:24).<sup>11</sup> Saving faith itself is not a work, but we are to work to come to such faith. Likewise, the Calvinistic conclusion that faith is not something we do or produce is thus equally false. We are to work to produce saving faith. We are encouraged by the Spirit to spend the necessary time, energy, and money that is necessary to come to saving understanding of the gospel. Do you want to go to heaven? Then buy a Bible, read it, and study it. Do the work that is necessary to come to saving faith. Faith frequently comes from hearing (Rom 10:17). Hearing is the means of coming to faith. This means that you may have to do some work to come to faith. Faith can be, and often is, the result of work. Note the devastating impact this parallelism has on Calvinism.

#### ***Substitution of Salvation***

For by grace you have been saved through faith:

and *that (faith)* is not of yourselves,  
*that (faith)* is the gift of God;  
*that (faith)* is not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

Picirilli rejects this Calvinistic substitution because it "would be nonsensical tautology in view of the fact that works is in contrast to faith already."<sup>12</sup> Actually, the situation in which this substitution puts Calvinism is worse than even Picirilli perceives it. Saving faith is frequently the result of works; therefore, the Calvinistic substitution results in misrepresentation of the biblical data. We are expected to take a very active role in doing what is necessary to receive this gift.

#### ***Self-produced Responses***

Consider the event that happened in Acts 2:38.<sup>13</sup> Suppose years later, Peter were to say to one of the three thousand who responded on that occasion, "By grace you received the Spirit through faith and baptism, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not as a result of works, that no one should boast." Could he say that and be theologically accurate? Yes. Does that mean that their baptism was monergistically produced by God? No. God did not pick them up by the collar and throw them in the river to baptize them. They had to walk to the river in order to meet the condition of baptism in order to receive the Spirit. Was their walk to the river not of themselves? Certainly it was. They did it. They produced that walk. God did not do the walking for them. On the other hand, they had to **cooperate** with God in order to meet the requirement by God. They could not baptize themselves. They were passive in the actual act of baptism. However, they had to actively work to come to the point where they could experience the passive result of baptism. They and God produced the baptism. The baptism was of themselves in that they had a very active part to play in producing it. Their baptism on that occasion illustrates the truth that the response necessary to receive the gift must come from yourself.

We too are expected to play a very active part in coming to faith, that is, in producing saving faith. Generally speaking at least, saving faith is the passive result of our intellectual and volitional actions. By the grace of God, we are expected to produce it. It must come from ourselves. It cannot come from someone else.

Nevertheless, since it results in a gift, it is not a work. The private, passive, punctiliar nature of saving faith also argues against it naturally being considered a work.

The response of saving faith must be *of yourself*. Saving faith is a response of a person's self. It is therefore produced by the person's self. Saving faith is the passive product created by a person's self. But it is not a work because not everything we produce is a work. We are urged to eat the Bread of Life. The appropriation of this nourishment must come from *our selves*. But this eating/appropriation is not considered a work. We do not work to earn the bread, nor do we work to produce the bread. As in the beggar illustration, we do not produce the bread, but we are the ones expected to eat it. Someone else is not going to chew it for us. Likewise, saving faith is *of yourselves*. God is not going to do the believing for you. I reject the Calvinistic notion that saving faith is *not of yourselves*.

Calvinists are not the only ones who try to make faith a gift in this passage. Lutherans, even those who follow Melancthon (rather than Luther) by affirming that the human will plays a cooperative role in coming to faith, may nevertheless retain a tendency to put the human will in bondage. Lenski, for example, asserts in his commentary on Eph 2:8: "One often meets careless statements such as: 'Grace is God's part, faith ours.'" He is chiding Robertson, the Greek expert, who in commenting on this same passage in his popular *Word Pictures* explicitly states: "Grace is God's part, faith ours." Lenski appeals to Col 2:12 as proof that Robertson is wrong: "Faith is not something that we on our part produce and furnish toward our salvation but is produced in our hearts by God to accomplish his purpose in our hearts. Col. 2:12 states this directly: "through faith **of the operation of God.**"<sup>14</sup> But if it is, as Robertson believes, an objective genitive, then this verse is simply saying that our faith is *in* God's work rather than a work *of* God. So Lenski's citation of Col 2:12 fails to prove that faith is an operation of God. Even worse, when one turns to Lenski's commentary on Col 2:12, one finds that Lenski not only refutes Luther, Lenski also refutes Lenski:

Luther heads the list of those who regard the genitive as a genitive of cause: "the faith which God works," etc., "**of the operation of God**" (A.V.), i.e., produced in us by his work...Luther's causal genitive **is made doubtful** by the fact that, when "faith" is followed by a genitive, this genitive is either subjective, naming the person who believes; or it is objective, naming the person of the object which is believed.

The Greek fathers regarded this genitive as an objective genitive: "the faith *in* the working of God..." **We see no escape** from this construction. (Italics his.)<sup>15</sup>

In commenting on Eph 2:8, Lenski asserts that Col 2:12 substantiates his interpretation by adopting the *of-the-working-of-God* translation of the verse. Then he cuts his exegetical legs out from under himself when he interprets Col 2:12 by acknowledging that the translation to which he himself appeals is doubtful and that he can find no escape from the construction advocated by Robertson whom he criticized as being careless. In light of my own above analysis and in view of Lenski's own exegetical inconsistency, I believe that Lenski is the one being careless. Robertson is correct. Faith is our part.

If Lenski were logically consistent, he would have to acknowledge that faith is indeed cooperatively produced or at least the result of a cooperative response.<sup>16</sup> After all, when commenting on a classic text such as Jn 6:44, he states that the drawing power "**is never irresistible.**"<sup>17</sup> This part of his affirmation is consistent with his earlier comment on Jn 6:37 in which he stated, "The Father's drawing (v. 44) is one of grace alone, this it is efficacious, wholly sufficient, able to change the unwilling into the willing, but not by coercion, **not irresistibly.**"<sup>18</sup> Wonderful. He rejects irresistible grace. But how can this grace be universal to all, as Lenski acknowledges, and yet not result in the salvation of all if it is able to change the unwilling into the willing without any cooperation on their part? Would not this affirmation of independent efficacy be tantamount to irresistibility? Lenski addresses this concern in his comments on Jn 12:32 but refuses to provide a logically consistent answer: "Why some are thus lost and others won, all being under the same grace, constitutes a mystery insoluble by our minds." Somehow, in some mysterious unexplainable manner, Lenski responds: "We know only this, that those who are lost are lost solely by their own guilt, while those who are won are won solely by divine grace."<sup>19</sup> In doing so, Lenski seeks to ascribe to mystery that which is logically contradictory.

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If those brought to saving faith are brought to this point *solely by divine grace*, then divine grace sovereignly determines who will be saved and who will be lost independent of their cooperative response. There is no room for mystery here. Logically, in this theology, if God wants you to have saving faith, then He will produce it in you. Otherwise, He will not. Lenski admits as much on his comments on Eph 2:8, “There is no self-produced faith; faith is wrought in us. Saving faith is wrought by the saving grace of God.”<sup>20</sup> But if God produces it, and you have no choice in it, then how can it be anything but irresistible? At least when Luther put the will in bondage, he had a dual mechanism by which to take it out of bondage: God’s unconditional particular election operating through irresistible grace. In seeking emphatically deny the former and mysteriously deny the latter, Lenski has left himself with nothing by which to explain why some come to faith while others do not.

Lenski, surely aware of his own shortcomings, seeks to buttress his position with an appeal to common sense: “Even in human relations faith and confidence are produced by others...we never produce it ourselves. Even deceivers know that they must cunningly make their deceptions...appear true and...thus produce faith in those whom they wish to deceive. There is no self-produced faith.”<sup>21</sup> Deceptively-produced faith proves that there is no self-produced faith.

One can only stand back and remark, “Oh really?” When Satan tempted Eve in the garden, are we to understand that he produced her doubt in God and trust in himself while she stood by as the helpless victim? Are we unable to take up the shield of faith and shield ourselves from Satan’s lies? When Paul, James, and John urge their readers to *let no one deceive you or do not be deceived* are they speaking falsely in insinuating that their readers are the responsible self-determining agents in determining whether or not they will be deceived (1Cor 6:9; 1Cor 15:33; Eph 5:6; Jam 1:16; 1Jn 3:7)? No, no, and no! There is something very much amuck in Lenski’s deduction from third-party deceptively-produced faith.

Even aside Lenski’s logical inconsistency regarding irresistibility, his theological inadequacy concerning mystery, and his exegetical shortcomings pertaining to third-party deception, one can demonstrate the futility of his position syllogistically from yet another angle. His argument amounts to something like this:

1. Faith is produced within us by deceivers.
2. Deceivers are people other than ourselves
3. Therefore, faith is produced within us by people other than ourselves.

According to the Bible, however, deceivers are not always someone other than ourselves. We can deceive ourselves (1Cor 3:18; Gal 6:3; Jam 1:26). Therefore, a more accurate syllogism would be:

1. Faith may be produced within us by deceivers.
2. Deceivers may be ourselves.
3. Therefore, faith may be produced within us by ourselves.

We ourselves are capable of producing faith within ourselves. How can this be so hard to understand? When checking our children’s math homework, it is apparent that they have produced answers that they believe to be correct. They have produced faith within themselves that their answers to the math problems are correct. Nevertheless, they sometimes produce correct answers, and sometimes they produce wrong answers. In the case of the wrong answers, they have deceived themselves into believing that they were correct. When their answer is challenged, they have to find the correct answer and in so doing prove to themselves that they had deceived themselves into believing that their original answer was correct. Right or wrong, they are responsible for the answer they produce and the corresponding belief they embrace. Likewise, saving faith is something we produce and for which we are therefore responsible. We are expected to play an active role in finding the truth and convincing ourselves as to whether or not it is the truth. To say otherwise puts our faith in bondage to others. There is no room for an appeal to mystery if we acknowledge that we are the responsible party.

In his section entitled *What is the Source of Faith?* Olson provides the answer in his subsection *faith is always ascribed to man, not God* (e.g., Mt 9:22,28-29; Mk 5:29; 10:52; Lk 7:50; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42). As he and other non-Calvinists note, and as is demonstrated in the *Outer Darkness*, Calvin likewise teaches that faith is the instrumental means that we bring to the experience of being saved.<sup>22</sup> Just as the only thing a beggar must bring to the table is his appetite, so the only thing we must bring is faith. The emphasis here is that **we** are the ones who must bring it. Picirilli states it this way: “The believing itself can finally be done by none other than the person who is called on to believe the gospel, and that will to believe savingly is the free decision of the individual.”<sup>23</sup> Although he is articulating a volitional view of faith, while I prefer a persuasional view, I agree that faith comes from the person himself. What is ultimately the deterministic source of faith? The individual. As a rule, God may bring the stubborn mule to the water, but ultimately the Lord is not going to make him drink the water (cp. Rev 22:17). The sinner must bow his head and drink. It must be his own thirst and desire which causes him to make the appropriation.

### ***Responsible Party***

Satan is certainly a responsible party in producing doubt in us but so are we in allowing it. We are both responsible. The doubt is attributable to both of us. We are supposed to stand firm in the faith even when he attacks. Faith is our responsibility because we can produce it and maintain it through the enabling power of the Spirit. Ultimately, we are the responsible agent as to whether or not we will be brought to faith; the Spirit is the instrumental agent. So in the final analysis, who is the source of our faith? We are, and so is the Spirit. We are co-sources. Ultimately, we are responsible for our faith or lack of it. We are the morally responsible agent; the Spirit is the doxological agent. He gets the praise for bringing us to faith; we get the gift of eternal life for coming to faith. We **synergistically** work together with the Spirit to produce a faith which is not a work since it results in a gift.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, such faith, by its very nature (of being passive, punctiliar, and persuasional) was not considered work by Paul or his readers.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Soteriological Boasting***

It will be objected that if faith is of ourselves, then this means that we can boast about earning our salvation. Not so. One cannot boast in producing a non-meritorious result. The beggar cannot boast that he has earned or deserves the bread just because he came to the table to eat it. To further illustrate, suppose a man who has become rich by painting famous masterpieces wants his two sons to share his passion. So he calls them to his art studio and tells them that he will provide them with the drawing materials and reward them with a million dollars if they will paint a picture that will sell for a thousand dollars. At the same time, he also informs them that he will give them a gift of one thousand dollars for simply acknowledging that it is impossible for them to produce a painting that has any value.

His youngest son tries for a day and then gives up, acknowledging to his father that he cannot paint anything of value. The older son tries for a week and then comes to same persuasion. Their paintings are absolutely worthless, fit for nothing but the garbage. So their father throws their paintings in the garbage bin outside the studio. As promised, he gives them the gift of a thousand dollars. Will the older son then boast to his younger brother that he tried harder so therefore he in some way is more deserving of the thousand dollars? Of course not. Although it took more work for the older son to come to the same conclusion, there is no merit in his coming to this persuasion. Not being able to paint anything of value is nothing to boast about. This experience only produced the persuasion in them that they could paint nothing of value.

So it is with saving faith, God gives us the drawing material, that is, He does things in our lives that help us draw the conclusion that we cannot save ourselves. Even with His drawing material, there is nothing in and of ourselves that we can produce that has any meritorious value. Like the father in the story, God wants us to produce something of value, but first we must come to the point that we realize that we need more than His drawing material in order to do so.

But back to the story. After his sons come to the persuasion that they cannot produce a painting of any value, their father tells them that he will spend a year not only giving them drawing supplies but teaching them how to paint and assisting them in their painting so that they can paint something of value. As expected, after a year

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of working one-on-one with their father, they are both able to produce a painting that sells for well over a thousand dollars. This second phase of painting produces the persuasion in them that now, with their father's training, they can produce paintings that have value. As promised, he rewards their paintings (and their new persuasion) with a million dollars. Thus it is with **misthological faith**. God rewards this kind of faith and the works that are produced because of it.

In summary, the works we produce in coming to saving faith are worth nothing in regard to meriting heaven. As we paint our efforts on the canvas of our lives, the canvas becomes nothing but a filthy rag. Being given salvation as a result of merely coming to the realization that we can do nothing that merits the promised gift gives us no room for boasting. The amount of work that goes into producing that persuasion does not change the fact that the persuasion itself has no meritorious value. Correspondingly, in Eph 2:8-9 we do not produce salvation. What we produce is the persuasion that we cannot produce salvation. We cannot produce such a salvation, only receive it. There is no merit in receiving something that one cannot earn. Saving faith involves the persuasion that the faith we produce in order to receive the gift of eternal life has no saving value in and of itself.

The sufficiency of saving faith comes from its Object rather than from its source. We are the source; Christ is the Object. Faith alone in Christ alone saves. That such faith may be produced by our efforts in no way deters from this conclusion. Preconditions must be distinguished from conditions, and the condition is faith itself. We may have to examine the facts to come to the conclusion that our works have no salvific value. In performing this act of self-persuasion, we are the active agent in bringing ourselves to such a persuasion through the instrumental agency of the Spirit and the instrumental means of the material we are examining. This persuasion does indeed come from one's self. It is self-produced through the Spirit's enabling grace. To be sure, faith comes from hearing the word of God (Rom 10:17). However, the person who takes time to listen and study that word is exerting the Spirit's persuasive influence upon himself in bringing himself to the place where he accepts that witness as true.

I therefore affirm co-agency in coming to saving faith. In this process of self-persuasion, a person brings himself to accept the Spirit's persuasion as true. Since this persuasion comes from his self, it is rightly said that faith comes from his self. Not exclusively of course, the instrumental agency of the Spirit and the word are absolutely essential; nevertheless, as an expression of the Spirit's normal *modus operandi*, we may expect a person to play a significant role in his coming to saving faith. Although self-persuasive efforts are to be expected in one's coming to saving faith, the irony is that saving faith itself is the conviction that we cannot save ourselves by such preconditional efforts. We cease to perform any effort to merit that which we cannot merit when we come to saving faith because **soteriological faith** contains the persuasion that we cannot merit salvation and that even this persuasion has no merit.

Once we do come to the persuasion that in and of ourselves we can produce nothing of meritorious value, God not only gives us the gift of eternal life, but He also gives us a new canvas upon which to paint the story of our life from that point forward. This painting can be a masterpiece with His enabling grace. He begins the process of making us painters, or as Paul says in Eph 2:10, "We are His workmanship." He produces the painter; we produce the painting. The work we perform in creating this new painting gives us a new persuasion. This new persuasion is that our efforts now have value. These works strengthen our confidence that our paintings do indeed reflect our Father's touch and thus are immensely valuable. This faith in our Father is indeed valuable as well. The **misthological faith** that enables us to produce a work of art will be well rewarded.

#### ***Cooperation ≠ Synergism***

Calvinists will still object by trying to make any *cooperation* with God a synergistic response and thereby reject cooperation as salvation by works. Unfortunately, Arminians have sometimes accepted this simplistic Calvinistic definition of synergism. I would prefer the definition of *working together* for synergism over the simplistic one of *cooperation*. When a beggar holds out his hand to accept a loaf of bread, he has cooperated with the giver by receiving the bread. Nevertheless, his cooperative action would not be misconstrued as a contributive response toward meriting the bread. To use another popular illustration, when a drowning victim ceases trying to save himself and passively allows the lifeguard to save him, one would not attribute any merit to this passive cooperation. This

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cooperation is not a work. The beggar cannot boast to the giver because of his receptivity, and the drowning person cannot boast to the rescuer because of his passivity. Neither can boast that they deserved to be saved because of their cooperative response. Their cooperative response was nonmeritorious and thus not a work.

Despite the self-evident nature of the distinction between cooperation and works, Calvinists continue with their remonstrance by claiming that the cooperative may boast to the uncooperative: “I was more \_\_\_\_\_ (open, willing, perceptive, etc) to the gospel than you were. I accepted it; you rejected it. So I am more \_\_\_\_\_ than you. What’s wrong with you?”

Since boasting is associated with works in Rom 4:2, the Calvinist assumes that the potential boasting above rules out the potential for any cooperation. But let us note the slight-of-hand trick used by Calvinists in this objection. The object of the boast is moved from God to the uncooperative in the above Calvinistic illustration. However, when Paul excludes works-based boasting in Eph 2:9 (obviously before God as the giver of the gift), it is not altogether evident that Paul has excluded all forms of boasting. In Rom 4:2 itself, Paul makes a distinction between boasting before men and before God by noting that works may allow one to boast before the former rather than the latter.

I will entertain a similar possibility here and dare assert that some in fact do receive the gospel because they are more open, willing, or perceptive than others. After all, according to scripture, the reason the Bereans believed while the majority of the Thessalonians did not was because the Bereans were more *noble-minded* (i.e., *open-minded*) than the Thessalonians (Acts 17:10-12). As Wilkin observes: “This verse destroys the Reformed idea that unbelievers are like rocks and that they have no spiritual sensitivity.”<sup>26</sup> The *therefore* (*oun*) introduces the result of v. 16 and explains why they believed in v. 17. As has been often remarked, when you see a *therefore* look back and see what it is there for. In this case, it explains why some believed while others did not believe: “Now these [Bereans] were more noble-minded...*therefore* many of them believed” (NAU). They believed because they were more noble-minded. One reason that some people believe while others do not believe is because some unbelievers are more noble-minded than other unbelievers.

Could the Bereans fill in the above blank by boasting to the Thessalonians, “We are more noble-minded than you”? Presumably so. According to Scripture, this is the reason they were willing to examine the scripture and came to faith as a result. Were the Bereans more cooperative than the Thessalonians? Certainly so. Were they saved by works? Definitely not. The ability of the Bereans to boast to the Thessalonians that they were more noble-minded than the Thessalonians and came to faith as a result of their being more noble-minded does not give the Bereans the right to boast before God, but it does give them the right to boast before the Thessalonians and in turn to condemn the Thessalonians for not being more noble-minded (i.e., open to examine the scripture).

With the right to boast comes the right to condemn. The men of Nineveh who repented at the preaching of Jonah will condemn the Jews who rejected the preaching of Jesus (Mt 12:42). They will be able to boast will they not: “We repented, you did not. What’s wrong with you?” The men of Nineveh could boast before the Jews of their perceptivity and therefore denounce the Jews for their lack of perceptivity. The queen of the south was willing to seek for wisdom, so she will be able to condemn those who do not (Mt 12:42). Does not the fact that she can condemn others for not seeking what she was willing to seek give her the right to boast before them that she did something they could have and should have been willing to do themselves?

God “is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Heb 11:6). Do some unbelievers seek God while others do not? Yes. Does this give them a right to boast of their coming to faith while those who do not do not? Apparently. Since they will be able to rise up in judgment and condemn others for not doing what they did, they could be regarded as boasting that they did what the others could have and should have done. Even so, it does not give them the right to boast before God that they have in anyway earned their salvation. The prohibition against boasting before God in Eph 2:9 does not apply to potential boasting before men who do not seek God. Boasting about being open to the gospel is not the same as boasting that one has earned one’s salvation.

If boasting is what it takes to get our unsaved friends to examine the scripture, then may we, like Paul, conclude that such “boasting is necessary” (2Cor 12:1). There are times when our boasting may help others draw the conclusions they should draw if they would just consider the evidence with an open mind and willing heart. If necessary, let us boast to our unsaved friends that we are believers because we are more open-minded to examine the evidence than

they are in hopes of driving them to try to prove us wrong by examining the evidence for themselves. Better to boast before them now than have to condemn them latter for not doing what we were willing to do.

<sup>1</sup> See Eph 2:8 in ch. 8 of *The Outer Darkness*.

<sup>2</sup> [Zeller](#), Appendix #2.

<sup>3</sup> See “Calvin’s Gift in Eph 2:8-10” in *The Outer Darkness*.

<sup>4</sup> See “Logical Result Versus Subset” in *The Outer Darkness*.

<sup>5</sup> Saving faith, like reaching out one’s hand, is the instrumental means. See [What is Work](#).

<sup>6</sup> See [What is Work](#), [Work is Something We Do](#), [Doxological Versus Misthological Amorality](#), [Work of God](#), and [Work is Determined by Source](#).

<sup>7</sup> See [Work is Determined by Source](#).

<sup>8</sup> See Bryson, *Calvinism*, 324-326 for a concise articulation of this view as expressed more fully by Norman Geisler.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> See [What is Work](#) for a similar discussion of the difference between efficient versus instrumental means.

<sup>11</sup> See “Prerequisites for Gift” in *The Outer Darkness* for these two texts and others like them. See indexes in *The Outer Darkness* for numerous discussions of preconditions.

<sup>12</sup> Picirilli, *Free Will*, 166.

<sup>13</sup> For various interpretations of Acts 2:38 and our harmonization with FG theology, see extended discussion in *Salvation*.

<sup>14</sup> Lenski, *Ephesians*, 422.

<sup>15</sup> *Idem*, *Colossians*, 109-110. To be sure, even though Lenski can find no escape from Robertson’s construction, he still tries to escape Robertson’s conclusion. But Lenski has to do so with mere theological blustering since he has destroyed his own exegetical bolstering. His argument, if one can call it that, appears to have been reduced to theological assertion:

1. “The fact that faith is *in toto* of God’s production is the teaching of all Scripture” (p. 109).
2. Faith relies only on divine attribute because this work in which our faith relies “is the energy or working of all God’s saving attributes” (emphasis his, 110).

But this is circular reasoning:

1. Saving faith is produced by God’s work (so Lenski).
2. Saving faith is in God’s work (Col 2:12).
3. So saving faith in God’s work is produced by God’s work.

He has failed to prove his major premise. And by this exegetical failure, he has falsified his claim that “all Scripture” teaches his point “that faith is *in toto* of God’s production” since he has failed to prove his point from the very verses in question, namely Eph 2:8 and Col 2:12.

<sup>16</sup> Our ranking would be:

- Calvin may be ranked with all five points (TULIP), even though some of his followers would question his consistency on L at least.
- Amyraldianism is not quite as rank (TUIP) since it removes (L) limited atonement from its acronym.
- Luther may be accused of only holding three points (TUI) even though some Lutheran Synods today would acquit the later more mature Luther of holding the (U) unconditional particular election of his earlier work (*The Bondage of the Will*) which equated foreknowledge with election by declaring that God knows nothing contingently, only immutably. Luther tittered on the brink of double predestination and treaded very close to limited atonement in other works, perhaps only avoiding both by refusing to face the logical outcome of his theology with an appeal to paradox. Nevertheless, we will not charge Luther with limited atonement since he did affirm, “The God Incarnate, — I say, was sent for this purpose — that He might desire, speak, do, suffer, and offer unto **all [men], all things** that are necessary unto salvation” (*Bondage*, 102). And of Jn 1:12, he acknowledges: “A full opportunity was given to **all men** of becoming the sons of God, if they would believe” (*Bondage*, 93). See Martin Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio “On the Enslaved Will” or The Bondage of Will*. Available at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/luther/bondage.html>. Unfortunately, Luther did not believe this opportunity included the ability to believe. But at least limited ability did not equal limited atonement: Christ died to make salvation objectively possible for all but not subjectively possible for all.
- Many Lutherans came to abandon the bondage approach by making a distinction between foreknowledge and predestination and basing the latter on foreseen (instrumental) faith. Lenski makes this distinction, and his commentary on Rom 8:29 reads like typical Arminian theology: God foreknows who will persevere in faith and

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predestines that they will be conformed to the image of Christ (*Romans*, 557-560). Three times within that discussion, he criticizes the appeal to mystery to explain God's decree to save only some of the depraved. With Lenski, we reject the appeal to mystery as being a suitable means by which justify unconditional election. But by the same token, we find Lenski's appeal to mystery to be an inadequate justification for refusing to face the logical outcome of his explanation regarding the effectiveness of grace.

- Lenski might be charged with only half a point off (½ I) from escaping the TULIP. Since he has no (U) unconditional election upon which to base (I) irresistible grace, he explicitly rejects (I) irresistible grace. Nevertheless, he implicitly necessitates it on the other hand by logical necessity but refuses to acknowledge the discrepancy between his explicit statements and implicit comments by appealing to mystery. But there was a way out for Lenski that would have allowed him to reject the absolute soteric bondage of the will, yet maintain his staunch rejection of unconditional election, and still affirm that saving faith is a gift. This option would perhaps be attractive to those in FG who believe that saving faith is a gift. One could affirm that a person acts in synergistic cooperation in coming to the point where God irresistibly creates faith in him monergistically. In this way, enabling grace is initially resistible but contingently irresistible. It would appear that Lenski could have had his cake and eaten it too. Still, we reject this proposal in favor of our present discussion nevertheless entertain this alternative as a hypothetical possibility in our discussion of Jn 6:44. (See *Conditional Irresistibility in The Outer Darkness*.) Our preference is to say that we act in synergistic cooperation in coming to the point where we non-synergistically, yet cooperatively, produce saving faith. If *synergism* be properly defined as *working together*, then we reject the notion that saving faith is synergistically produced since saving faith is not a work. It is cooperatively produced, not synergistically produced.

<sup>17</sup> Lenski, *John*, 475.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 465.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 876.

<sup>20</sup> *Idem*, *Ephesians*, 423.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 422-423. The view that God produces our faith has already been refuted in our treatment of Jn 6:29. This is not a genitive of source. God does not produce our faith. Rather, it is a genitive of possession (or reference) meaning that God's requirement is our faith. Faith is our response. It is the passive response we are responsible to produce.

<sup>22</sup> Olson, *Calvinism*, 220, 224-225.

<sup>23</sup> Picirilli, *Free Will*, 167.

<sup>24</sup> But our synergistic cooperation in meeting the precondition must be distinguished from our nonworking cooperation in meeting the condition. Not all cooperation is synergistic.

<sup>25</sup> See [Doxological Versus Mithological Amortality](#).

<sup>26</sup> Wilkin, GIF, Nov-Dec, 2007.