



## The Calvinist's Exegetical Fallacy in Ephesians 2:8; Determining the Antecedent for *Houtos*: Grace, Salvation, or Faith? Exegesis Reveals It Is Salvation

### V. The Calvinist's Exegetical Fallacy in Ephesians 2:8

**Ephesians 2:8** - (NASB) For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

v. 9 - not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

**Ephesians 2:8** - (NIV) For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—

v. 9 - not by works, so that no one can boast.

**Ephesians 2:8** - (ETL) For by means of grace you have been saved [ σώζω, sōzō ] in the past with the result that you stand saved forever through the instrumentality of nonmeritorious faith [ πίστις, pistis ], and that [ οὗτος, houtos ] salvation is not from the source of yourselves, the gift is from the source of God;

v. 9 - not from the source of works that anyone should boast.

1. The hyper-Calvinists' error has to do with the pronoun οὗτος, houtos, translated "that" or "this." They make the mistake of designating as its antecedent the word faith, πίστις, pistis. This error causes the verse to read this way:

**Ephesians 2:8** - (Hyper-Calvinist translation) For by grace you have been saved through faith and that faith is not of yourselves, it [ this faith ] is the gift of God.

2. If the faith by which we believe in Christ is not from ourselves but rather finds its source as a gift from God then free will is not a factor in one's salvation.
3. This led Calvinists such as Bèza to develop the term "irresistible grace" to describe the sovereign act of God in saving the elect.
4. However, "faith" ( πίστις, pistis ) cannot be the antecedent of "that" ( οὗτος, houtos ) as we will demonstrate. The verse is introduced by the instrumental of means from the singular feminine noun:

χάρις, charis - "For by means of grace ..."

Note that the word is in the instrumental case and is feminine gender.

5. The next two words are verbs and form a *periphrasis*. This construction is carried over into the Koiné from the Attic dialect. It indicates that the writer cannot get all the details into one verbal form, therefore he uses two. In the Greek it forms a forceful and powerful affirmation of the principle being stated.
6. The Greek perfect periphrastic in Ephesians 2:8 is composed of two verbs. We will note first the perfect passive participle of:

σώζω, sōzō - "saved"

perfect: Intensive; emphasizes a present state that exists as the result of a past action. The past action is faith in Christ. This indicates that the act of salvation was completed in the past "by means of grace" and "through faith" as is stated in context.



The intensive perfect is the tense of a “finished product.” It directs special attention to the results of the action. Consequently, the stress placed upon the existing fact is intensified: “you stand saved forever.”

passive: At the point the sinner expresses faith alone in Christ alone, he receives the action of the verb. The action is an act of the Holy Spirit through efficacious grace in which He saves the person’s soul in a moment of time.

Verbs in the passive voice are generally intransitive as is the case here. There is no direct object here and therefore this verb makes a complete affirmation of the finished results which are: “By grace you have been saved in the past with the result that you keep on being saved forever.”

participle: Circumstantial; indicates an attendant circumstance which is one’s faith.

7. The second verb in the periphrasis is the present active indicative of:

**εἰμί, eimi** - “have been”

present: Static; expresses a state or condition that perpetually exists and thus becomes a universal doctrine that can never be changed. “You have been saved in the past with the result that you keep on being saved forever.”

active: The believer produces the action of this verb by being in a perpetual status of salvation.

indicative: Declarative; a dogmatic statement of biblical fact. Combined with the perfect passive participle of **σῶζω, sōzō** forming the periphrasis, this construction denotes a completed action with eternal results.

8. That which is instrumental in bringing about this absolute status comes next, the instrumental of means from the preposition **δίω, dia** plus the genitive case of the **feminine** singular of the noun:

**πίστις, pistis** - “through the instrumentality of faith.”

9. We are saved by means of grace through the instrumentality of faith. Grace is God’s part in the package while faith is our part. In human history the sovereignty of God and the free will of man must coexist by divine decree.

10. Faith is the instrument or means utilized by man to respond positively to the revelation of the gospel under common grace. Salvation is accomplished by the Holy Spirit through the agency of efficacious grace.

11. Next comes the controversial near demonstrative pronoun, the nominative **neuter** singular of:

**οὗτος, houtos** - “that”

12. Hyper-Calvinists refer this pronoun back to the word *pistis*: “faith.” However, the syntax of the sentence does not allow this.

13. The pronoun “that” is in the *neuter* gender while the noun “faith” is *feminine*. The same can be said for the word “grace” which in this verse is also a *feminine* noun.



14. Instead, the *neuter* pronoun refers back to the periphrastic verbs, **σῶζω, sōzō** and **εἰμί, eimi**: “you have been saved in the past with the result that you keep on being saved forever.”
15. It is the doctrine of salvation that is referenced by the pronoun **οὗτος, houtos** not the divine act of grace or the nonmeritorious act of faith.
16. Confirmation of this exegetical analysis is provided by:

**Wallace, Daniel B. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 334-35:**

Ephesians 2:8 is the most debated text in terms of the antecedent of the demonstrative pronoun **οὗτος, houtos**. The standard interpretations include: (1) “grace” as antecedent, (2) “faith” as antecedent, (3) the concept of a grace-by-faith salvation as antecedent, and (4) no antecedent.

The first and second options suffer from the fact that **οὗτος, (houtos: “that”)** is *neuter* while **χάρις, (charis: “grace”)** and **πίστις, (pistis: “faith”)** are *feminine*. Some have argued that the gender shift causes no problem because there are other examples in Greek literature in which a neuter (pronoun) refers back to a noun of a different gender. In particular R. H. Countess [“Thank God for the Genitive!” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 12 (1969) 117-22] lists three examples from Attic Greek, arguing that such a phenomenon occurs frequently in Greek literature (p. 120). His approach has weaknesses, however, for not only does he cite no New Testament examples, but the usage is not at all frequent and in every instance requires explanation.

On a grammatical level, then, it is doubtful that either “faith” or “grace” is the antecedent of **οὗτος, houtos**. More plausible is the view that **οὗτος, houtos** refers to the third concept of a grace-by-faith salvation.

17. The reason these technical grammatical points are so important is because of what follows.
18. In verse 8 we find the identification of the *source* of salvation. We first learn who is not the source and then we find out who is. The negative:  
**οὐκ ἐξ, ouk ex** - “not from” plus the ablative plural of source from:  
**σὺ, su** - “yourselves”
19. You can now see the problem that occurs when the antecedent of the preposition “that,” **οὗτος, houtos**, is said to be “faith,” **πίστις, pistis**. Here is the way the verse would read under this assumption:

**Ephesians 2:8 - (Hyper-Calvinist translation) For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that faith is not from yourselves; that faith is a gift from God.**

20. From such a translation is how the false doctrine of the “gift of faith” was derived. It makes it appear that the predetermined few—the elect—are saved through grace by means of the imputation of a special gift from God called “faith.”
21. Those who do not receive this “gift of faith” cannot express efficacious faith in Christ and thus remain in reprobate status. Any expression of faith in Christ by the nonelect is considered to be “temporary faith” and thus nonefficacious.
22. However, this is not the correct translation. The following recognizes the perfect periphrastic, the feminine gender of both “grace” and “faith” and the neuter of the pronoun “that”:



**Ephesians 2:8** - (ETL) For by means of grace you have been saved in the past with the result that you stand saved forever through the instrumentality of faith, and that salvation ... not from the source of yourselves, ... the gift of God;

**v. 9** - not from the source of works that anyone should boast.

23. Note the ellipses at the end of verse 8. There are no verbs. A smooth English translation would read, "... and that salvation **is** not from the source of yourselves, it **is** a gift from God."
24. The absence of the verb "to be" is dramatic and places emphasis on who *is* and who *is not* the source of salvation: "and that salvation ... not from the source of *yourselves*, ... the gift of *God*."
25. But according to hyper-Calvinism, the person who is not among the elect cannot be saved. Even if he expresses faith in Christ, this faith is said to be "temporary faith" and as a result grace is made "ineffectual" for salvation.
26. The doctrine that emerges from these conclusions is "double predestination": the elect are predestined for salvation but at the same time the nonelect, classified as the "reprobate," are predestined for the lake of fire.
27. The question that immediately arises is: divine sovereignty has determined and divine omniscience has known who the elect are from eternity past, but how does an individual determine and ultimately know whether he is among the elect? The heretical conclusion submitted is that "you shall know this by your fruits."