

Ephesians 2.4-5

All of Grace

Is salvation a free gift, or does God pay most of the cost and do most of the work, leaving us with a bit of a tab to pick up? If we are left with something to pay, I'm afraid that we would all find that the cost would still be far out of our reach. The Scriptures are emphatic on this point. Salvation is absolutely a free gift. Salvation is all of grace. It is God's work from beginning to end. What is the evidence that salvation is all of grace? We are going to consider **three truths** about salvation that demonstrate that salvation is all of grace. We will look at salvation's source, salvation's cause, and salvation's conditions.

Salvation's source is the God who is rich in mercy (4a). "But God, being rich in mercy." In the first three verses, Paul laid out the sorry condition of fallen humanity. We were dead in sin, enslaved to the world, the flesh, and the devil, and deserving of the wrath of God. It is wonderful just to hear the adversative conjunction "but" after all of this. It's like a child being told "You didn't clean your room, you pulled your sister's hair, you talked back to your mother, and you deserve to be grounded, but" There is doom and gloom as the youngster hangs his head in sorrow and shame. Then there is that "but," and suddenly his eyes catch a glimmer of hope. The word "but" is like that. It seems to have the power to practically erase what has been said and prepare you for a new reality. For example: "That was a good sermon pastor, but" Suddenly, I just forgot that you said, "That was a good sermon." So, Paul has just explained a very frightening truth about humanity's plight: dead, enslaved, and deserving Divine wrath. And then he says "but!"

Now, what follows this adversative is what makes Christianity unique among the world's religions and philosophies. Most religions have a doctrine of sin. They have to have some explanation for why human beings do so many bad things to each other. So, most religions and philosophies recognize a sin problem, and then develop a system to overcome the problem. Problem and solution is the basic structure of religion. The solution is what's on the other side of the word "but." You have this problem, but The most natural solution in man-made religion is self-help. Keep the Torah. Observe the five pillars and hope. Walk the eightfold path. Make sure your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds. The forms of religion are too many to count, but they amount to the same thing: humanity trying to fix the sin problem by itself.

But look back at our text. You have a grave sin problem, but what? – not "but I," rather, "but God." The solution to the sin problem is not you. The solution to the sin problem is not the law. The solution to the sin problem is not more legislation, more rituals, more discipline, more effort. The solution to the sin problem is "but God."

And here is why God is the source of salvation—"but God who is rich in mercy." Mercy is a theologically rich concept. When Moses asked to see God's glory, God said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (Exodus 33.19). When God proclaims His name, He defines Himself as sovereign grace and sovereign mercy. Free to show grace to whom He will. Free to show mercy to whom He will. In the very next chapter, "The LORD passed before him and proclaimed,

‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.’ And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped” (34.6-8). “Merciful” is God’s self-description to Moses. Mercy looks on the dead, weeps, and then brings life out of death. Mercy looks on the captive, binds the strong man, and then plunders his house, setting the captives free. Mercy looks on sinners worthy of wrath, steps into his place, and then forgives iniquity and transgression and sin. Mercy takes pity on the enemy, feeds the enemy when he is hungry, gives him water when he thirsts. Mercy touches the untouchables to make them whole. Mercy cleanses the unclean to make them holy. Mercy is that virtue displayed when the strong and powerful condescends to lift up the weak and helpless. Mercy is that kindness that does not inflict a deserved injury. Mercy is that kindness that lifts the poor from the dust and raises the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes, even the princes of God’s people.

God is rich—rich in mercy. That rich mercy was incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ—the riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus! While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. The source of salvation is God who is rich in mercy. Salvation did not begin with your cry for help. Salvation did not begin by your seeking God. Salvation did not begin by your yearning for God. Salvation began with the God who is rich in mercy. Salvation is all of grace, for salvation’s source is the God who is rich in mercy.

Salvation’s cause is the great love with which God loved us (4b). This is a very similar point to the previous, so let’s just briefly consider the cause or motive of our salvation from God, the Source. Why did God save you? So much of what I hear in pop-Christianity suggests that God looked at people and said, “Wow! Now there’s someone worth saving! Oh, I know she’s got a sin problem, but she has so much potential. Just think what I could do with that! She’s definitely worth the brutal slaying of My Son!” Some people say that you should measure your worth by the price God was willing to pay for you. Really? Are you worthy of the death of Christ? Are you worthy of the blood of the Son of God? Who could be worthy of this? I believe it is blasphemy to suggest that the entire human race, much less any single one of us, is worthy of Christ’s death. I believe it is a travesty of the gospel that we could look at the cross of Christ and think that the message of the cross is “I’m worth a lot.” That is pure narcissism. The message of the cross is not “I’m just all that.” The message of the cross is that God is rich in mercy. The message of the cross is that God is gracious.

Our salvation does not lead us to sing, “Worthy am I.” Our salvation, all of grace, leads us to sing “Worthy are *You*, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they existed and were created. . . . Worthy are you [Lord Jesus] to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth. . . . Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever! Amen!”

God was not moved to save you because He saw something in you that compelled Him to save you. This is not the gospel of self-esteem. The gospel of Jesus Christ says that God’s motive in saving you was

within Himself—because of the great love with which He loved us. Consider God’s election of Israel in the Old Testament. God says, “It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set His love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that He swore to your fathers” (Deuteronomy 7.7-8). So God did not choose them because they were an impressive stock. They weren’t wealthy and powerful. They were few. In fact, they were slaves. But God loved them. Well, then maybe they were chosen because they were very moral people. Not so. God says in Deuteronomy 9.6, “Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people.”

Beloved, there is no greater security than knowing that your salvation is all of grace. How blessed to know that God loves you as a completely free action of His own good pleasure! He can say, “You’re stubborn, but I have chosen to love you. You’re weak and small, but I’ve chosen to love you. I saw what you thought about your boss, but I’ve chosen to love you. I saw that lustful look you cast upon that woman, but I have chosen to love you. I heard those cursed words you uttered under your breath against another image bearer, but I have chosen to love you. Last night you watched an hour of TV and then complained that you couldn’t find time to read My Word and talk to Me, but I’ve chosen to love you.”

Don’t think I’m promoting antinomianism, for not only does God’s sovereign love give us great security, it also sanctifies us. God’s love is a transforming love—a sanctifying love. He keeps us in His love. He disciplines us in His love (Heb 12). In love He predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son! Salvation’s source is the God who is rich in mercy. Salvation’s cause is the great love with which God loved us. Finally, we see that salvation is all of grace because . . .

Salvation’s conditions are met by God (5). “Even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” Chapters 6-9 of Deuteronomy are so full of this theme of God’s sovereign grace, I hope you don’t mind if I dip in there one more time to reinforce the point I’m making from Ephesians 2.4-5. In Deuteronomy 8.17 God says to Israel, “Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’” God drew their attention to a common problem we humans have—our pride leads us to have grander views of ourselves and our achievements than we ought to have.

I don’t know if they still use this illustration in Evangelism Explosion, but we used to illustrate this tendency with an imaginary story. A man bought a mustang for his son and brought it home. When he presented his son with his gift he was floored. After taking it all in, he reached into his back pocket and pulled out a dollar and handed it to his father and said, “I know it’s not much but I just want to say thanks by putting a little something toward the purchase.” The next day at school his friends gather around to check out his new ride. They said, “Dude, how did you ever afford this just working at Chic-fil-a?” He says, “Well I had a little help from my old man.” Similarly, our pride causes us to try to find something for which we can take credit in our salvation. There are two truths contained in verse 5 that prevent us from saying that we met the necessary conditions for heaven, with a little help from God.

The first is “we were dead in trespasses. The second is that our salvation is a work that requires Divine power.

We were dead in trespasses, incapable of doing anything salvific (5a). Paul just spent the first three verses of this chapter summing up the human condition apart from Christ. Now, as he begins to expound on God’s solution to our plight, it is as though he wants to pause one more time to say, “And by the way, just in case you think that you had it within you to meet God’s conditions to enter the kingdom, let me just remind you that WE WERE DEAD IN TRESPASSES!! We were in no condition to contribute to our salvation. Salvation must be all of grace because we were incapable of doing anything salvific for ourselves.

Being made alive together with Christ is a work of resurrection/new creation, which is a divine work (5b). There are actually three verbs that Paul uses in verses 4 and 5 of salvation: “He made us alive together with Christ,” “He raised us up with Him,” “and He seated us with Him in the heavenlies.” These realities parallel what Paul had said about Christ in 1.20 where we are told that God “raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.” Who has the power to raise the dead? God does. God is the living God who breathed life into Adam’s nostrils at creation. God gives each of us life, and when He withdraws His breath from us, according to Job, we return to the dust. One day our salvation will be consummated with the resurrection of the body, when we will be made like Jesus and see Him as He is. Now, God makes us alive in union with Christ. The same God who spoke at creation and said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4.6). Because God has spoken this creative word into our lives, Paul can say in 2 Corinthians 5.17 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” Our spiritual resurrection is a foretaste of the New Heavens and New Earth that God has promised. Who could do such a work of creation? God made the world out of nothing. Now He is making saints out of sinners—an even more extraordinary work than the original creation.

Just briefly consider the other two verbs. Who has the prerogative to “raise someone up with Christ?” Who has the prerogative to seat someone with Christ in heavenly places? We are talking about being seated on thrones with Christ to judge the nations—yes even to judge the angels. Who has the authority to give us such a place? Only God. This position of being seated with Christ is a position above every enemy of God and every enemy of our souls. Our conquest over the enemies that we saw in verses 2-3, the world, the flesh and the devil, is a gift from God who by His Divine power and authority seated us with His Son in the heavenlies. This means that even our present warfare is waged by the grace of God. So, our salvation is all of grace, for we are incapable of saving ourselves or even contributing one dollar to our salvation, and the work that had to be done to save us is a work that only God has the power and authority to execute. All of Grace.

Salvation must be all of Grace because—salvation’s source is the God who is rich in mercy; salvation’s cause is the great love with which He loved us; salvation’s conditions are met by God.