
The Master Craftsmanship of Saving Grace

Ephesians 2:1-10

People fear being alone. Alienation from others, a sense of isolation in the crowd, is the deep, painful experience of many. Deep within our souls God has implanted a sense of union and communion – of being a part of and being in relationship with others. I believe this drives a great deal of the social media today. You can walk around with your music in your ears, in your own bubble of isolated space and text with others walking around in their isolated space and think you are connected.

This is not only true of people in human relations, but with God as well. Most pleasure pursuits are attempting to fill the place left empty by people's alienation from God. The author of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul, speaks of why this sense of isolation exists in our text.

Paul speaks of the ruin that is a result of what caused that separation from God.

Many of us have seen the video of the explosion of the abandoned ship in the docks in Beirut, Lebanon. It is shocking to see the distant flicker of fires suddenly blossom. The shockwave of the explosion blows through the buildings in view until it hits and knocks the camera off. The destruction is sudden and devastating. It was the result of long years of abandoned neglect and rising but unattended to danger. It caused the ruin of a large tract of Beirut's dockyard and nearby buildings.

In China, there are whole cities that were built and are now mostly unoccupied. With some, they were intended to be occupied but ran out of money. Some were simply abandoned in the middle of nowhere. No one (at least publicly) knows why. But there they sit. Ravaged by disease, weather and the decay of time, these amazing places crumble more and more into ruin.

Man's problem is more than the ruin of wrecked dock yards or abandoned cities. It is sin. It is rebellion against God. And God has moved from eternity past and in time and space to restore the relationship. Let's think about that together from this, His Word.

Problem - Our Spiritual Ruin

(v.1-3)

Here is the horribly stark reality of our sinful estate. This is the true condition of people before they were saved. This is the true condition of every unbeliever you know, whether they are your nice, moral, upright neighbor or the serial killer jailed for life.

¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Its Condition - Deadness

(v.1)

We were separated from His life and thus were spiritually dead. The unbeliever is not sick: he is dead! The dead sinner needs life. "The only difference from one sinner to another is the state of their decay."ⁱ (Wiersbe) Every sinner ever conceived is in this condition. Every person is separated from the life of God. This is what it means to be spiritually dead.

Its Course - Disobedience

(v.2)

We were separated from a godly lifestyle and happily followed the world's ways. All the members of a symphony are following a score written by a composer and led by the conductor. All people who are dead in sin live lives of disobedience shaped by the world, by the evil beliefs and values of culture. That world system mediates the evil purpose of Satan. O, how the *zeitgeist*, the spirit of the age, paves the way for sinning disobedience. O, how Satan destroys his subjects (sons) by his lies and their lusts.

Its Conduct - Depraved

(v.3a)

We were separated from God's holiness and immersed in our sinfulness. All sinners are driven by the depravity of their lusts. God given desires are turned into God dishonoring satisfactions. Men will feed from the slop of sin while God is the manna of heaven for hungry souls. The sense here is that of wallowing and indulging in the thoughts and acts of sin. The flesh and the mind are partnered together. Here the body and the thoughts join together to pursue pleasure instead of God.

Whether we appear to be moral people or openly wicked people, here is the full picture of sin: inner drives of depravity shaped by the outward spirit of the age all to disobey and dishonor the Lord Jesus Christ. Though outward sin may look different in different ages, the essence of sin is still the same. Soon people become slaves to self and sins. There is no freedom in sin, only a deep dark abyss of ever growing but less and less satisfied cravings.

Its Condemnation - Doomed

(v.3b)

We are separated from His family. We were a part of the fallen family of disobedience and punishment. If we are by our deeds, the sons of disobedience (v.2) then we are by nature, the children of wrath. The infancy of sin in our nature grows up into an adulthood of sinful thoughts and actions. And so, we are doomed to the just and eternal wrath of God. The wrath of God is not only shaped by His holiness, but it is also exactly suited to our sinfulness.

The word "children" used here for "objects of wrath" shows the close relationship between sinners and the wrath of God. Have you ever so discovered your sinfulness so that you were in dread of God's wrath?

Provision - Its Saving Riches

(v.4-6)

What sweet words these are in the sinner's ear: *But God...*

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,
⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

We were dead, depraved, disobedient and doomed: But God made us alive, raised us up and seated us in the heavenlies with Him so that He might show the surpassing riches of His grace. This is the core sentence

In its Source

(v.4)

What would move God to do this? Well, there are the ultimate ends in God's saving purposes: the glory of Christ and the delight God has in Him. But here it is the relational ends that are in view.

The Mercy of God

We have a *rich in mercy* kind of God. The holiness and mercy of God come together in our God in a powerful moving of God to save and make sinners holy in His sight.

The Love of God

God's love for us is a great kind of love. It is a full and overflowing and deep and wide and sinner redeeming kind of love. It is not only great in its size, but great in its outreach and great in its expression.

Thank God for all the ways in which He is rich according to Ephesians: He is rich in grace (1:7). He is rich in mercy (2:4). HE is rich in kindness (2:7). He is rich in glory (3:16).

In its Specifics

(v.5-6a)

What does the mercy and love of God do for those who are dead in sin and transgression? How does what Christ did in his death and resurrection change us?

Once again, we are in truths that are simple on the surface and for that we are grateful. These truths also represent some of the most difficult aspects of our salvation.

Raised through Regeneration

We have been made alive - This is Paul's term for the new birth. It is God's solution for our deadness. He makes us alive by giving us His Spirit (John 3:5-8) through His Word (1 Peter 1:23). In this way He imparts to us the life of God in the soul so that we are born spiritually and come to life.

Regeneration is the entrance of the life of God into His chosen people. Regeneration unites us to God through the indwelling of the Spirit. Regeneration also applies the death and resurrection of Jesus to us so that we die or are separated from the old creation and our old selves. We are made alive in the spirit. This provides the foundational place and power to overcome sin and sinning. In regeneration, the inward

life of the Spirit through the Word begins an outward transformation in our lives. The ongoing transformation or renovation will reach its culmination when we are given our new creation bodies when Jesus comes back. Then, just as our souls have been made alive by the Spirit, so will we have a body that is physical but is from heaven. We see the final change when we put off this earth stuff and put on heaven stuff.

Empowered by Resurrection

We have been moved from the sphere of the flesh into the sphere of the spirit. The resurrection brought up Christ out of the earth and out of the body of the first creation and moved Him into the body of the new creation. This is why the resurrection of Christ is different from, say, that of Lazarus. Lazarus soul was rejoined with a body that would die. Jesus' soul was clothed in a body of glory that will never see death.

Joined in Exaltation

We have shifted the focus of our existence from the earthly to the heavenly. Now many Christians today are not well taught in this. But saints of old had greater and clearer light. Today we are so surrounded by the New Age and oriental mysticism that we are hesitant to move with freedom in the garden of this truth. As a result, the necessary strengthening vitamins and spiritual antidotes to worldliness and materialism simply aren't a regular part of a Christian's diet. Suffice it to say this now: if you are a Christian, the source of your life and the focus of your soul is in heaven and on Christ. Now we live in both worlds: we are yet earthly until we put off the tabernacle or tent of this body. There is an already (seated in the heavenlies in our spirits), and a not yet (walking here in earth). But there will come a day when Jesus comes and brings the greatness and glory of the not yet and we, in all ways will be made new.

Its Scope

(v.6b)

I want you to notice two very important phrases: (v.5) together with Christ and (v.6,7) in Christ. Nothing that God has done for us is done apart from Christ. These phrases point to both our position and our present experience of it.

Secondly, notice that by grace we are saved, explains the dynamic, not the motivation. The powerful life of God in the resurrection and ascension is the enabling grace that is moving for us and in us. Again, I say to you that "God's riches at Christ's expense" is not only an inadequate explanation of grace, but also may actually trivialize the super-amazing power that is grace to us and in us.

Purpose - Its Surpassing Reasons

(v.7-10)

How simple the truths of Scripture can be in their connections: we were (v.1-3) but God (v.4-6) so that (v.7-10). We were dead, but God raised us *so that He might put on lavish display the wondrous wealth of His glory in grace.*

⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Its God Exalting Declaration

(v.7)

Salvation is God centered. God saved us in order to bring Him glory. It is amazingly and sadly easy to fall into a man-centered orientation. But what God has done for us is ultimately for the praise of His own worth and grace and glory. The plan that provided salvation has as its objective the magnifying of God. So though out all the rolling ages of eternity (not just the centuries to come, but in all the unfolding eons of glory) God might put on exhibit the splendor of the fabulous wealth of His grace. This grace for us is His kindness and tenderness and covenant faithfulness in Christ, the Messiah.

Its Grace Centered Description

(v.8-9)

Here is the first reason God is exalted in His salvation: it is by grace.

By Divine Grace

It is God's initiative: His free favor that gives the sinner the right and power to believe; that is, it is all grace. You don't deserve it. You can't earn it. It is freely given by God out of the pure freedom of love and mercy.

By the gift of faith

That we believe is not of ourselves it is the gift of God. Therefore, a saving belief in God is not natural in man nor is within the ability of man nor is it like man's belief in other things. It is a God given trust and rest in God.

Not by works

The faith that grace gives is not a work that merits salvation. There is no work that merits salvation. It cannot be earned because it has already been bought; it cannot be earned, because we do not have the currency; it cannot be earned because it is not for sale. What currency of works we might offer are mere menstrual rags in God's sight. Why would we bring that when we have in salvation the wonder of the worth of Jesus' righteous merit and sin bearing work?

Now hear this and hear it well: a right and spiritual understanding of these truths produces humility and a deep sense of the great supremacy and worth of God. Yet, I hear believers professing sovereign grace with pride and boasting and self-exaltation. May God have mercy on us when we take the grace centered, God exalting, man humbling purpose of grace and turn it into a ground for boasting. That grace saves us is so that no man may boast. God forbid that we should glory save in the cross of Christ Jesus our Lord!

Its Holiness Producing Design

(v.10)

Here is the second reason God is exalted in His salvation: it is for good works.

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Three words shape this design:

The Divine Workmanship

God's fashioning of believers is a work of art: it is a *poima* a fine and skilled craftsmanship. Let's mediate on that for a moment.

This is God's work. He is the master craftsman. Think of all that God designed and made and sustains in nature. It is a marvelous thing in all its intricacy. Yet, God's creation work is rough coal in comparison to the diamond of God's salvation work.

This is a master work of art. << Illustration of Rijks Museum in Amsterdam >> Even the greatest painting, the most amazing sculptures cannot compare to the work of God in even the simplest of Christians. But then you think of the totality of the design of God to bring into existence a magnificent, multi-faceted lens all designed to highlight the glory of Jesus.

We are the master work. We are God's work of art. This is both individual and corporate. The combination of all Christians becomes the great work of art. The purpose of the work of art is to glorify the Lord Jesus.

The Godly Works

God has created us in Christ Jesus for good works. Grace without works saves us for good works. Usefulness and holiness are why God has formed you in Christ and is fashioning you to be like Christ. We therefore do not work to be saved, but work because we are saved. All who are truly saved know they have not worked for it and are working because of it.

The Obedient Walk

Each individual work is woven together into a walk. Each act of obedient faith is forming the conduct and character of a godly lifestyle. And it is not just the individual acts, but the whole of all that it means to be godly in a dark world in the light of the glory of heaven that God has prepared beforehand.

Reflect and Respond

Have you ever really seen with your spiritual eyes your deadness, depravity, disobedience and doom in God's sight? I don't mean in a disconnected, academic way: in a soul and self shattering reality?

Does your life now really still look an awfully lot like the life described in (v.1-2)?

If we have a rich in mercy kind of God, should not Christians also be rich in mercy as well? The exercise of mercy always has sin in view. So let us view the mercies of God for sinners in such a way that we are merciful to repentant sinners. Let us be slow to believe and accept the worst. And when faced with a believer who is repentant of sin, let us be rich in mercy.

Does the way we live reflect our understanding of our position in Christ? Do we live resurrected, ascended lives?

Does it come as a shock to you that salvation is God centered?

Is the grace of God evident in your life as a faith that believes God in an obeying way?

I challenge all of us who hold firmly to sovereign grace, that we might not boast in ourselves but rather magnify the supreme worth of our glorious God.

ⁱ Warren Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary 2*, (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989), p.18.