

Why Men Find Sovereign Grace Offensive

By Henry Mahan

Bible Text: Ephesians 2

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All right. Let's turn back to Ephesians two.

The gospel—and there is only one gospel—it is the gospel of God. It is the gospel of God's glory. It is the gospel of God's grace. And this gospel is called by some Calvinism. It is called by some the Doctrines of Grace. It is called by some Sovereign Grace. And it is offensive.

Paul talks about it being offensive. He said it is offensive to the natural man. He called it the offense of the cross, hated by some. And whether a man is in the pulpit...there are men in the pulpit who hate Calvinism. There are people in the pew. There are people in the world.

But the natural man, wherever you find him, the unregenerate man, the one who has never been called by the grace of God, whether he is in the pulpit or the pew or out there in the world, whether he is religious or otherwise, he is offended. He is offended. And there are several things that offend them.

The sovereignty of God is offensive to the natural man. Now, men do not object to God ruling the waves, ruling the wind and ruling the world. But they object and they are offended when we preach that God's sovereignty also reaches to salvation, that he is not only a sovereign in creation and providence, but he, indeed, exercises his will and his purpose and his sovereignty in whom he saves.

He said to Moses, "I will be merciful to whom I will be merciful. I will be gracious to whom I will..." Now that is where men are offended. When we bring the purpose and sovereignty of God to this matter of redemption.

And then election. It is so offensive that many preachers will not even use the word. They say it is not fair. It is just not fair. Every son of Adam deserves a chance.

I remember what brother Barnard said when a man said that to him. He said, "Brother Barnard, don't you think everybody deserves a chance?"

And Barnard said, "Son, salvation is not by chance. It's by choice."

You chose your bride. But we won't give God the same privilege. You chose your house, but we won't give God the privilege of choosing his temple.

It is unrighteous for God to choose one and pass by another. That's what I am told. And yet God said, "Can I not do with my own what I will? Can I not do with my own what I will?"

"Who can stay his hand? Who can say unto him, 'What doest thou?' Hath not the potter power over the clay of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor and another one to dishonor?"

It is offensive.

And then effectual redemption. Now redemption is not offensive. But effectual redemption is offensive. People say, "Let Christ come. Let Christ die. Let Christ rise to make salvation possible, but not certain. Leave some part of salvation to the will and work of the sinner. Don't give Christ Jesus all the glory. Let men decide whether his blood shall avail. Let men decide whether his atonement shall atone. Let men decide whether or not his merits are sufficient. Leave us apart in this matter of salvation."

And then another thing that is offensive, it is offensive. Invincible grace. They used to call it irresistible grace. But all of us are guilty of resisting the grace of God too often. But I say that the grace of God, while it is even resisted by the sheep on many occasions, will be invincible. It will conquer. It will conquer. If our God sets his love upon an object of his affection, he will bring him. He will be willing. God will make him willing. And there may be a lot of struggling and conflict and resisting, but that grace will be effectual. That grace will be invincible.

And men are offended by invincible grace. But these all stand or fall together. Whom the Father purposed to save, the Son purchased. And whom the Son purchased the Holy Spirit will effectually call. If God chooses and Christ redeems, the chosen will be redeemed. And the Holy Spirit will call and make them willing. But here is what we say. We can't violate man's will. We can't violate man's will. What we preach must be consistent with the free will of man.

No, sir. What we preach must be consistent with the free will of God. Man's will is in bondage. Man's will is under the guilt of sin. And all men will perish if they can. Christ said, "You will not come to me that you might have life."

And then another thing that is offensive. The Lordship of Christ. That is offensive. Now today men will accept Jesus as their Savior. It is all right for him to be my Savior and he can keep me out of hell. And he can take me to heaven. But my life and my time and my possessions are mine. And if I choose, it is all right for him to be my Savior. And if I choose in some act of devotion or consecration to make him my Lord, then I will. But if I make him my Lord, I expect in glory a special reward for my devotion and my dedication. To declare his lordship over all whom he saves is offensive.

Now I plan to show you from this chapter in Ephesians, chapter two, the foundation of the whole problem. God's sovereignty in salvation, God's elective grace, the effectual redemption of Christ, the invincible power of the Holy Spirit and our Lord Jesus Christ's lordship and reign in the heart of every person whom he saves. That's offensive. And I plan to show you why.

Here is the chief reason. It is found right here in Ephesians chapter two. The reason why men and women, preachers, have problems with salvation by grace is three fold. It is three fold and it is covered in this chapter. They do not understand three things.

Number one, they do not understand what happened in the garden, what really happened in the garden. I'm talking about the Garden of Eden. What really happened? What took place? How did it affect us? How did it leave us? What happened on that cross? When Jesus Christ the Son of God died on that cross, what really happened? What really took place? Thirdly, what really happens in a sinner when God saves him? When God effectually does a work of grace, now what really happens?

And this...this is what the preachers don't know and the people don't know and the world does not know. What happened? What really happened in the garden? What really took place? Do we know? If we find out what happened in the garden we will find out what sin is. If we find out what happened on the cross we are going to find out what redemption really is. And if we find out what God does when he conquers, when he conquers a rebel and saves a sinner, we are going to find out what salvation really is.

All right. Here it is. And you, verse one, "And you hath he quickened."

Now we know what quickened means, make alive. We use the term "the quick and the dead." Well, that means the dead and the alive. And he says, "You hath he made alive. You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." Who were what? Dead. Dead. Dead.

What is dead physically? Do you know what dead is physically? Of course you do. I do, too. It means a person is dead. They have no sight. They have no hearing. They have no thoughts. They have no life. They have no warmth. They are gone. They are dead.

Well, what is dead spiritually? What is this dead? This is dead spiritually. Well, what is this dead? It is the same thing spiritually. They cannot see. They can see physically, but not spiritually. They cannot hear.

Christ said they have eyes and they do not see. They have ears and they do not hear. They have hearts. They do not understand. They have no thoughts.

Look down at verse 12. This tells you the state of a dead sinner. Verse 12 in chapter two, "At that time...that at that time you were without Christ. You were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope and without

God, absolutely without God. This is what it means to be dead. Without Christ, without hope, without God. That's dead.

I was reading a sermon by Spurgeon one time on this and I have given this to you before, but it helped me more than anything I know. You see, the Scripture says, "As by one man Adam, what happened in the garden, by one man Adam sin entered this world and death...and death by sin."

Now we know that sickness and disease and physical death are the result of sin. That's the result of sin. We die physically because we are sinners. But the death of Adam in the garden of Eden was a spiritual death first and foremost. That's what brought physical death. Actually, Adam lived 800 years after he sinned, after he fell. And then he died physically. But he lived that 800 years dead spiritually. That's right. Dead. He died. And when he died we died spiritually.

And this is what Spurgeon said that helped me so much. He said, "You must realize there are several kinds of life."

There are several kinds of life. There is mineral life. There is life in the minerals. That is the reason oil burns. You get it out of the ground, but it has got energy. It has got life. Something is going on. It is not dead. Something is going on that sparks some kind of combustion.

And then the plants have life. Plants live and they die.

And animals have life and they die.

And human beings have life.

And that's four kind of life: mineral, plant, animal and human life. And human life is far above animal life. You wouldn't kill one of these boys and girls here for 10 million dogs. That's right.

I know these bleeding hearts talk about us using animals for experimenting medical experiment. Isn't that silly? I mean if you can kill 10,000 rats and save one human being, wonderful, or 10,000 pigs and save...we eat pigs. And we eat cattle. I mean there is animal life, but human life is above it.

Well, now there is another life I haven't mentioned: spiritual life, the life of God. When Adam was created in the Garden of Eden Adam had the life of God. He was made in the likeness of God. He walked with God. He was naked and didn't even know it. He didn't know sin or evil. He is spiritually alive. God talked to him. He talked to God. He was alive spiritually.

But when he sinned he died spiritually. He lost that light. He lost it. It died. It doesn't exist anymore. He is alive physically, natural life.

You see, that's what Christ told Nicodemus when he breezed in the house that day and said, "Good master, we know you are a teacher come from God. No man could do these miracles except God be with you."

And Christ said to him, "Nicodemus, you have got to be born again."

He said, "Born again?"

"Yeah, born again. You see, you have got natural life. You have got to be born again."

That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the spirit is spirit, spiritual life.

Nicodemus said, "Well, I'm going to be born again. Can I enter my mother's womb and be born again?"

Well, you would still be born of the flesh. You can do that, but that is impossible. And our Lord said, "That which is born of the flesh stays flesh. But that which is born of the Spirit of God is Spirit."

And that is what I am talking about and that is what he is saying here. You had he given new life, spiritual life, the life of God who were dead. You weren't dead physically, but you were dead spiritually.

And that is what happened back there when Adam fell. Death, the whole human race was without God, without hope, without Christ, dead.

And here is the results of that death. Look at it. Verse two. "And you walked. In times past you walked." What is your walk? It is your direction. It is the tenor of life. It is your, Billy, your will. It is your occupation.

Now a flower...a dog is going to be a dog. A dog is a dog is a dog. And a dog is going to think like a dog and act like a dog and bark like a dog and eat like a dog and act like a dog because he is a dog. And you can't change it. He will turn to his vomit. You wouldn't do that, but a dog will. That's his nature. And the reason he does it is because he is not a man. He is a dog.

And a pig is a pig is a pig. And you are not going to change it. A pig is a pig's nature. A pig loves the hog wallow. That's what he loves. A pig will go to his wallow. He is a pig.

Now, you don't enjoy lying in the mud and rooting around, eating your food out of a trough, because you don't...you are not a pig. You are not a pig's life. You...human life. But a pig is a pig.

You know what I'm saying?

And a man is a man. A natural man is a natural man. Can the Ethiopian change his skin? No, he is black by nature. Can the leper change his spots? Cut his hair off. It will grow back and he is still spotted because it comes from within. And neither can you do good. You and I cannot do good. We can't please God because we are dead. We are alive physically. We can eat and drink and talk and think, but just like a dog is a dog, a man is a man, a woman is a woman. You are not going to be anything else. You can't make it anything else. You can't dress it up, clean it up, shine it up, smell it up. Do what you want to, but he is still a human being. That's right.

And the way we walk...look according to the course of this world, the principles of this world, the thoughts of this world, the values of this world, the manners of this world.

Sitting right here this morning, do you... you know, we are in the presence of God? We are here to worship God. Has any thought entered your mind that you are ashamed of. Anything gone through your mind and thought you...

You say, "Well, yes, to be frank it has."

Well, that's natural. You are a human being. That's natural.

And I can get up here and I can say, "Now let's every one just think on nothing but God."

It ain't possible. That's absolutely because our...our manners and values and principles and ways and thoughts are flush.

Read on. "And according to the prince of the power of the air." That's Satan. Why is he called prince of the power of the air? Because he controls the wind? No. Because he controls the storms and tornadoes? No. God controls those things. But it is talking about the principalities and powers and demons and devils and things that inhabit the air. That's his domain.

And we...Christ said to those people. He said, "Satan is a liar and you are, too. He is a murderer from the beginning and so are you. You do the deeds of your father."

And we were motivated by that gentleman. The spirit that no worketh in the children of disobedience among whom also we all, everybody here, every human being, every Son of Adam had our conversation, our citizenship, our behavior, our principles, our values in the flesh.

We say it just comes second nature to think those things. No, it is first nature. It is first nature because that is our nature.

Fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind we were by nature children of wrath even as others.

Do you understand what I am saying? Dead. And you can't make it anything else. Without God. Without Christ. Without hope. Dead. Physically alive, naturally alive, fleshly alive and oh, so alive in those areas. But dead spiritually.

Now that is what happened in the garden. When Adam fell death passed upon all men for all sinned. As in Adam all died. Now that's not talking about physical death, though it is. We...eventually we will die physically because we are nothing but flesh and the flesh was...dust returns to the dust from whence it came, the earth from whence it came. It is spiritual life. We just by nature don't have it. And walking down this aisle and shaking my hand won't do it. Going into the pool won't do it. Turning over a new leaf won't do it. We can turn over that leaf and it is clean on that side for a while. But after a while it looks just like the other side. You know that, because it is the same leaf. We have got to have a new leaf. We have got to have a new tree. We have got to have a new life.

Now watch verse four. "But God. But God..." Not but you, or but the preacher or but we or but the church. It says this is what we were even like everybody else. Without God. Without hope. Without Christ. But God. "But God who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved us..."

We didn't love him.

Jason just sang that song by John Newton who wrote, "Oft it gives me anxious thought. Do I love the Lord or no? Am I his or am I not?"

Do I love God? Not like I ought to, not like I want to, not like I will. But that is not the issue. It says, "But God who is rich in love for his great love, rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us." He loved us. He chose us. He set his love upon us. He purposed to save us.

But God...when I was in this dung him and in this pit and in this state of inability and wretchedness and corruption, I didn't make a decision. God made a decision. I didn't love him. He loved me. I passed by you, he said, when you were in your blood. And it was the time of love. You didn't love me. I loved you.

And I said what? What did I say? Live.

"Yeah, but I'm alive."

No, you're not. You're dead. You are alive physically. You are dead spiritually.

I said unto you live spiritually and, my friends, when that took place, listen. Even, verse five, when we were dead in sins he quickened us, he made us alive. He gave us his life, divine life, spiritual life, the life of God. And he quickened us together with Christ.

By grace you are saved. And he raised us up. He raised us up. When Christ lived we lived. When he died on that cross we died to sin. When he was buried we was buried.

When he arose we arose. And he raised us up and he made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

God did that.

You say, "When did God do that?"

All right. Let's talk about when God did that. The Bible said, "Whom he foreknew he predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son. And whom he predestinated he called. And whom he called he justified. And whom he justified he glorified."

When did God do this? God did this back in eternity, back in eternity.

You say, "You mean we are eternally justified?"

In a sense, yes.

Now, let me illustrate. Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Bible is called what? The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Isn't that right? The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. In other words, in the purpose of God, in the mind of God, in the covenant of God who declares the end from the beginning Christ was already the Lamb slain. That is the only way God could love us and God could accept us and God could choose us. He chose us in the Redeemer. A redeemer is one who has redeemed.

See, follow me?

So Christ was already crucified. But Christ had to come and be born of a woman and live in this world and he had to die on that cross. God decreed it. God purposed it. In God's purpose it was done, but it had to be done experimentally. It had to be done in time.

Do you follow me? He is the Lamb slain, but he had to be slain. He was the covenant surety, but he had to come and fulfill our righteousness and die for our sin. And he had to be buried and he had to rise. And he is the surety. He is the mediator from all eternity. But he had to ascend and sit at the right hand of God and be our mediator.

So even though God decreed it in eternity and in the purpose and mind of God it was as good as done, Christ had to come and literally fulfill it.

No watch. When God chose us in Christ in the covenant of grace, though...it says, "Whom he foreknew he glorified." Past tense. "Whom he foreknew he predestinated. He called. He justified and he glorified before the world began."

Arthur Pink has a sermon on four fold justification. In the mind of God I have always been in Christ, always been loved, always been accepted. But when Christ came to this earth and died on that cross, he took in his body our sins and paid for them. And when he died on that cross I was justified. His blood was shed for me and for you and we were

saved. That was 2000 years before I was born. I was saved 2000 years before I was born. Isn't that correct? It has to be. Two thousand years before I was born I was justified by the blood of Christ.

But even though that is done in the mind and purpose of God, I was born into this world and lived and there came a time when God crossed my path and I was his son. He's looking for sheep. The boy was lost, never ceased to be a son. But he had to be brought home. In that same way you and I got to hear this gospel and believe it just like Christ was the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world and we are children of God in his eternal purpose. Still Christ had to come and die. And we have to die to this world and receive Christ.

That's right. Bow to him and receive him. And it will be done.

But now wait a minute. I am not justified yet. One day God is going to raise me from the grave and leave this old flesh in the ground and this old nature. It is going to be done. He is going to raise me. The corruption will put on incorruption. The defiled will put on immortality and holiness. This shame will put on glory and I will be taken into his presence. You will, too. And then I can say, "Free at last. Free at last." Isn't that right? Justified.

So this is what this is saying here. You were dead. "But God, but God who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead, quickened us with Christ, quickened us with Christ and raised us." It has all been done. Raised us with Christ and everybody in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, even these boys and girls here some of them haven't confessed Christ. They haven't received Christ. They haven't followed in baptism. But I will tell you...I'll tell them right now. If you are one of God's own you are already seated at the right hand of God.

That's right. When Saul of Tarsus was on his road to Damascus to kill Christians he was already seated at the right hand of God. That's right. In the mind of God in Christ all who are in Christ are in Christ.

And what we are doing...we say, "What are you doing?"

I'm preaching the gospel to call them to Christ. They have got to love him.

Read on. And verse seven said in the ages to come he is going to show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us. He is not going to show off our faith. He is going to show his faith. He is not going to show our love. He is going to show his love.

Maybe you boys and girls have a trophy you won as a football player or a basketball player. Well, the trophy is a trophy of what you did, not what the trophy did. People don't stand there and say, "That was a sure fast trophy running." Or, "How many free throws did that trophy make?"

The trophy didn't make any. I made them. That trophy didn't cross the blue line. I crossed it.

Well, what's the trophy for?

It is there to show what I did.

And that is what you are going to be in glory. You are going to show what he did. You are not going to show what you did. You are going to be a trophy of his grace and of his love and of his faithfulness and his call and his righteousness. That's right. He is going to show off his kindness towards you.

“For by grace have you been saved through faith and that is not of yourselves. That is the gift of God. It is not of works lest any man should boast.”

But let me tell you something. We are his workmanship. And he who chose us and loved us and redeemed us in Christ. He is going to call us. Watch it here. We are created in Christ Jesus, created, created, that's right. That new spiritual life, that life I was talking about a while ago is created in Christ Jesus.

Down here you came from your momma and daddy. But this new life is created by God and given to you, created unto good works. We are going to work. We have works of faith and labor of love which God before ordained. We are going to walk with him because he ordained it. We are going to believe on him. He ordained it. We are going to love him. He ordained it. We are going to serve him. He ordained it. We are going to help the missionaries. We are going to help our neighbor. We are going to forgive one another. We are going to love because he ordained it that way. Just like his Son was ordained to walk this earth in perfection. His people are ordained to walk this life in obedience. He ordained it.

So therefore, now, verse 11. This is what happened, you see, in the garden. We are dead. What happened on the cross? He redeemed us, justified us. What happens in a sinner? God makes him a new creature. He creates spiritual life.

Now verse 11. You remember. Remember what you were. In times past you were Gentiles in the flesh. You didn't even have a part in Israel's circumcision. You were called uncircumcision by that which is called circumcision. At that time, remember, you were without Christ being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenant of promise, having now hope, without God. Remember that. And remember what God did now in Christ Jesus through Calvary's cross, through his obedience. “You that were one time far off...” How far off? Dead. How far off? In the grave. How far off? Without hope. How far off? Without God. That's what you were. “You are now made nigh.” How? “By the blood of Jesus.”

That's what happened on that cross. He didn't try to save anybody. He saved them. That blood atoned. That blood cleanses. That blood redeemed. That old sinner that was dead

and made alive, that old sinner that was so far off you couldn't even see him, is now made at the right hand of God.

Now remember that. And remember who did it. Verse 14. He is our peace. He is our peace. Christ is my peace who made both Jew and Gentile one and broke down even that middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile. He abolished in the flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments. He is our tabernacle. He is our sabbath. He is our sacrifice. He is our high priest. He is our passover. He put away all those types and shadows contained in the ordinances and made in himself, in Christ of those two, Jew and Gentile one new man, brand new so making peace and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross having slain the enmity thereof. And he came and preached peace to you.

“Who did?”

Christ did.

“Christ never preached to me.”

He preached to you just like he preached to those people in Noah's day over there in 1 Peter. Noah preached to them. When Noah preached to them Christ preached to them. And when I preached to you this morning Christ is preaching to you. We are ambassadors of Christ as though God did beseech you in Christ's stead. He came and preached to every one of his people. He will cross your path. He came and preached peace to you that were afar off and to them that were nigh, both Jew and Gentile. For through Christ we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Come boldly before the throne of grace. We have access to God by Christ.

Now, therefore, you are no more strangers. Isn't that great? What who they make... ? But God. But God. The...most people want to say, “But I did this, but I did this, but I did this.”

No. But God. You who were fallen without hope, without Christ, without God, dead. You are no more strangers.

Now listen. Fellow citizens with the saints, fellow heirs of Christ, the household of God. And you are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, you are a temple of God. You are a building of God and the whole building in whom...in Christ the whole building is fitly framed together and groweth unto a holy temple to the Lord.

Let me illustrate that.

Years ago brother James Thompson and H.B. and I and some more fellows built a house over here in back of this university, if you remember over on that hill, a prefab house. Did you ever see a prefab house? Prefab.

You lay the foundation. We laid...they laid the foundation. I helped them. They laid the foundation. And then they brought in a truck and that whole house was on that truck. Do you remember? That whole house was on that truck, every bit. That is so strange to me. This wall was on that truck. This wall was on that...it was numbered. On the blueprint every piece...the doors were on that truck. The windows were on that truck. The joists were on that truck. The stairs were on that truck. The roof was on that truck. The roofing was on that truck. The [?] was on that truck. The closets were on that, everything. And we just got the pieces and put them together.

I stood back after several days and there stood a house.

Well, let me tell you something. God has a temple, a building. He laid the foundation. Christ Jesus came into this world. He is the foundation. He is the chief cornerstone and he is going to build on that foundation a holy temple to the Lord.

And let me tell you something. Every part, every brick, every stone, every door, every window, every wall is already marked. Got a right wall marked on it. That's right. Got a left wall. Got a this wall, south wall or north wall. It's got a...this is a joist and this is a truss and this is a...and he's bringing it together. That's right. He is building a temple. And every piece...that's what this verse is saying.

This verse is saying...verse 20, "And you are built upon that foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ the chief cornerstone." And the whole building is already marked, decreed, every living stone is chosen if it's going to be a part...I want to be a part of that temple. That's right. And there is not going to be any odd parts in it, either. It would mess up the whole thing. It is going to be perfect. It is going to be a temple created in Christ Jesus.

Now look at verse 22. "In whom you also are builded together for a habitation of God to this day."

Brethren, I know that out yonder in the world today there are a lot of people that I preach that, they gnash their teeth. I know there are a lot of preachers and I don't know, maybe somebody here. I don't think there is, but they say, "That's too cut and dried for me."

It's not for me, especially if God cuts it and dries it, especially if God purposes it and plans it. It's his temple. His temple. And I tell you the building is going to fit the foundation, too. It isn't going to stick out anywhere. It is going to fit the foundation. It is going to rest on that foundation.

And you, also, are living stones in that holy temple. And God is bringing them together.

And here is the thing. It is like I told you a while ago. It is just like Christ is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. But he had to come into the world and fulfill all

that was decreed of him. And you and I and whomever that makes up this house, we are going to fulfill what is decreed of us. And God is going to call us.

And this is the gospel by which we are called.

You say, "How do you know whether you are one of God's elect?"

If you hear the gospel and believe it, you are one of God's elect. And it is no little house, now, brethren. This is a great temple, a great temple, a great temple all for his glory. That's so.

I was going to talk about that mystery tonight, talk about chapter three tonight. All right.