

God's Sovereign Grace

The impossibility of spiritual life apart from God's work: a meditation on Ephesians 2:1-10.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast." Ephesians 2:8-9, NASB

Many Christians think that salvation is not so much a gift to be received, as a destiny to be earned. Their concept of salvation is that God will pay them in eternity for what they accomplished in time. To them, salvation is achieved, not received. The tragedy of it is that salvation will never come to them by such an arrangement. As the Apostle wrote, **"But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace"** (Romans 11:6). Charles Spurgeon summarized the issue well when he said, "One might better try to sail the Atlantic in a paper boat than to get to heaven in good works."

Let's look at the context to see divine grace in action. Paul begins by describing the spiritual condition of the Ephesians BC; that is before they became Christians. He wrote:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you *formerly walked* according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all *formerly lived* in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. (Emphasis mine, Ephesians 2:1-3, NASB)

Yet as indicated by the adversative statement **"But God . . ."** (Ephesians 2:4), the pessimistic evaluation of our state in life turns for the better when *God's power* confronted *our plight*. Where would we be in life if it were not for God? I'll tell you where. We'd remain dead in our sins and headed for a Christless eternity separated from Him. But God's sovereign grace changed our helpless estate. By His grace in Christ He has done three things for the believer (Ephesians 2:5-6).

First, sovereign grace makes believers **"alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)."** The way in which spiritual life comes to God's children is the result of the sovereign working of His grace from above. Before grace our spiritual heart monitor was flat lined. But after grace, pulsating peaks and valleys signaled the presence of spiritual life. God brings those who belong to Him back from the dead (John 3:3, 5-8). *God regenerates us.*

Second, in grace God raises "**us up with Him** [Christ]." Not only does God give us believers a heart beat, but He also enables them to walk. The resurrection power of Christ enables us to get up out of our spiritual grave and walk! It enables believers to live like Christ. Our lifestyle changes. "**We are His** [God's] **workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them**" (Ephesians 2:10). *God rehabilitates us.*

And **third**, God's sovereign grace seats "**us with Him** [Christ] **in the heavenly places.**" God's grace positions us in heaven with Christ (Compare Ephesians 1:3, 20). Imagine . . . God's grace takes us and places us in a choice seat in heaven! *God reserves us.*

Now allow a closing word about grace to be stated. "**But God . . .**" This little adversative phrase defines grace. Could we, by our own power, raise ourselves from our spiritual deadness? "No!" In our own strength, could we rehabilitate ourselves from the spiritual paralysis sin causes? "No!" Could we by our own might lift ourselves up and usher ourselves into a choice seat in heaven? "No!" *But God* has done all three of these things for us, and all according to the working of His sovereign grace![1]

ENDNOTE

[1] All of the verbs in Ephesians 2:5-6 ("*made us alive* with Christ . . . *raised us up* with Him . . . *seated us* with Him") describe God's actions towards sinners who have been spiritually grafted into Christ. The participle ("**have been saved**") is a "divine passive" where it's understood that God is the giver and believers are the receivers of salvation. See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996) 437-438.