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## SALVATION IS TOTALLY OF GOD

Ephesians 2:4-7

By

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Ephesians Lesson 13

## Salvation is Totally of God Ephesians 2:4-7

The late Bible teacher, Harry Ironside, was quite a character. On one occasion, he was on a trolley car in Los Angeles when a rather peculiar looking lady got on board and sat down beside him. She was dressed in what he described as red bandanna handkerchiefs pieced together, with a shawl over her head and a lot of spangles on her forehead. As soon as she sat down, she asked Ironside if he would like to have his fortune told. Her fee was a quarter.

Ironside asked her if she was sure that she could do it. He explained that he was Scotch, and he hated to part with a quarter if she could not deliver the goods. She looked a bit bewildered, but then assured him that she could reveal his past, his present, and his future. Just give her the quarter and she would tell all.

Ironside said, "It's really not necessary because I have had my fortune told already. I have a little book in my pocket that tells my past, present, and future." She said, "You have it in a book?" "Yes," he said, "and it's absolutely infallible. Let me read it to you." He got out his New Testament and the fortuneteller looked startled. He opened to Ephesians 2 and said, "Here is my past." He read verses 1-3, about being dead in his trespasses and sins and living in the lusts of his flesh.

The nervous fortuneteller said, "I don't care to hear more." But Ironside held her gently by the arm and said, "But I want to tell you my present." He read (2:4-6), "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

"That's plenty," the woman said, "I do not wish to hear any more." But Ironside said, "There is more yet, and I won't charge you a quarter to hear it. Here is my future." And he read verse 7, "so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

By now, the woman was on her feet and Ironside could not hold on to her arm any tighter, lest he be charged with assault. She fled down the aisle, saying, "I took the wrong man! I took the wrong man!" (Adapted from, *In the Heavens* [Loizeaux Brothers], pp. 97-98).

Ironside was right: these verses reveal our spiritual past, present, and future. In the past, we were dead in our sins, living for selfish pleasure, completely alienated from the living God. We were mercifully saved by His grace alone when He made us alive together with Christ. In the present, God raised us up with Christ, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places. And in the future, we will be trophies of the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us. The overarching theme of these verses is that salvation is totally of God. Because salvation is God's doing, there is hope for even the worst of sinners.

Because our salvation is totally of God, there is eternal hope for all who are dead in their sins.

These verses (and the ones we will study next time) are a wonderful summary of the gospel, the good news that God saves sinners. On the one hand, the gospel is simple and easy to understand. Young children can grasp its truth as God opens their eyes to see. Yet on another level, the gospel is deep and unfathomable. It is, as Paul puts it (2 Cor. 4:4) "the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." That is an unfathomable subject! So the gospel is like the ocean, where a child may wade on the shore, but it is so deep and vast that we can never explore all of its depths. If you do not yet know Christ as Savior, pray that God will open your eyes to your desperate condition as a sinner and to the abundant riches of His grace. If you do know Christ, ask Him to take you deeper in your understanding of these glorious truths.

1. In the past, the cause of our salvation was God, who brought us from death to life because of His rich mercy, His great love, and His almighty power.
  - A. God and nothing else is the cause of our salvation

To get the flow of these verses, we need to go back and reread 2:1-3: "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, ac-

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." Then, the next words jump out at us with a startling contrast, "But God...."

Those are the greatest words of hope that we could want to hear! Death robs us of hope. When someone dies, hope of him returning to life is gone. And to be spiritually dead is to be without hope—unless you bring God into the equation.

God warned Adam that in the day he ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would die (Gen. 2:17). When Adam and Eve ate of that fruit, the entire human race was plunged into spiritual death (Rom. 5:12-21). As we saw (Eph. 2:3), by nature we all are born under God's wrath because of sin. Those who are spiritually dead have no capacity to seek God (Rom. 3:10-18), to understand spiritual truth (1 Cor. 2:14), or to believe in the gospel (2 Cor. 4:4). It is foolishness to them (1 Cor. 1:18). In verses 1-3, Paul wants us to feel the helplessness and hopelessness of our spiritual past. We were dead.

"But God!" What man cannot do, God can do! When you bring God into the equation, there is hope for the chief of sinners! After the rich young ruler walked away from salvation, Jesus explained to the disciples (Matt. 19:23-24), "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Contrary to a popular idea, Jesus was not talking about a certain low gate in the Jerusalem wall. He was talking about a literal needle! So we read (19:25-26), "When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, 'Then who can be saved?' And looking at them Jesus said to them, 'With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'"

There are many evangelicals today who view salvation as a joint project between God and men. God has done all that He can do, and the rest is up to the free will of the sinner. They don't view him as dead, but rather as sick or wounded. Like a drowning man,

there still is life in him. He can grab the rope if we throw it to him. But, if he refuses to cooperate, even God can't save him.

That is an unbiblical view of salvation! The biblical view is summed up in the short sentence, "Jesus saves!" As the angel announced to Joseph concerning Jesus (Matt. 1:21), "He will save His people from their sins." He didn't say, "He will do all that He can, but He is limited by the sinner's stubborn will." He didn't say, "He will throw the rope to everyone, but they've got to grab on to be saved." God isn't frustrated in heaven, wishing that He could do more: "I'd like to save Saul of Tarsus, but the guy is so stubborn!" No, the hope of the gospel is that God saves sinners. We were dead—but God! He made us alive!

B. God saved us out of His rich mercy and great love.

Many wrongly think that in the Old Testament God is portrayed as a stern God of judgment and wrath, whereas in the New Testament, He softened into a tolerant God of love. That is false. When Moses asked to see God's face, He told him that he could not, because no man can see God and live (Exod. 33:20). But then God told Moses to hide himself in the rock. God would pass by so that Moses could get a glimpse of His back. Then we read (Exod. 34:6), "Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth.'" The Hebrew word translated "lovingkindness" often has the flavor of His mercy, His compassion for our miserable condition due to our sin.

Later, when Moses is predicting to the nation her apostasy and idolatry, and how God would scatter them among the nations because of their sin, he added that they would then return to the Lord and listen to His voice. He adds the reason for this (Deut. 4:31), "For the Lord your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your father which He swore to them." When David rehearsed God's many blessings, he wrote (Ps. 103:8), "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness."

When Jonah, the disobedient prophet, tries to explain to God why he did not go to Ninevah the first time, he says (Jonah 4:3b), "for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow

to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity." In other words, he knew that it would be just like God to forgive the evil people of Ninevah, but Jonah wanted them to get zapped!

When Nehemiah prayed, confessing the sins of Israel that had led them into captivity, he rehearsed the stubbornness of the people in the wilderness, who wanted to return to slavery in Egypt. Then he added (Neh. 9:17b), "But You are a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness; and You did not forsake them."

The theme of God's compassion and mercy runs throughout the Old Testament and, as you may expect, into the New Testament also, where the Greek word for mercy appears over 70 times. Instead of berating sinners or blasting them into oblivion, God delights to show them mercy if they will repent (Micah 7:18).

As if God's rich mercy were not enough, Paul throws in His great love (Eph. 2:4)! How can I describe such a thing! One of the best attempts outside of Scripture is the hymn, "The Love of God." A Nazarene pastor, F. M. Lehman, heard what is now the third verse recited at a camp meeting. A Jewish rabbi had composed it in Arabic in 1096. Later it was found inscribed in English on the wall of an insane asylum after the inmate had died. Pastor Lehman added the other verses and chorus (from *Amazing Grace*, Kenneth Osbeck [Kregel], p. 47). The third verse reads,

Could we with ink the ocean fill  
And were the skies of parchment made,  
Were ev'ry stalk on earth a quill  
And ev'ry man a scribe by trade,  
To write the love of God above  
Would drain the oceans dry,  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,  
Though stretched from sky to sky.

The chorus goes, "O love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong! It shall forevermore endure—the saints' and angels' song."

God's redeeming love was at the heart of Paul's life after he met Christ. In Romans 5:8, he wrote, "But God demonstrates His

own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." He brings Romans 8 to that great crescendo, that nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:39). He explained to the Galatians (2:20), "the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

Is this your view of God towards you, that He is rich in mercy and great in love? Before you met Christ, you were His enemy. But His great love, as shown at the cross, rescued you from His wrath and made you His child. The enemy will still try to get you to view God as your enemy, or as an angry parent who doesn't want you to have any fun or joy in life. Don't believe it! As Paul exclaimed (Rom. 8:31-32), "If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" Ask God to give you a greater experience of His rich mercy and great love!

C. God saved us through His mighty resurrection power and His grace.

Paul continues (2:5), "even when we were dead in our transgressions, [He] made us alive together with Christ...." Then, although it will be his theme in verses 8-9, it's as though Paul can't wait to say it, he interjects parenthetically, "(by grace you have been saved)." Grace means that we did not deserve it. We deserved God's wrath because of our sins, but He saved us by His unmerited favor. We were walking corpses, living for the lusts of the flesh, but He made us alive together with Christ.

This goes back to 1:19-20, where Paul prayed that his readers would know God's surpassing power towards us who believe. It is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at God's right hand, far above all rule and authority in the universe. It took that mighty power of God to save us, because, like Jesus in the tomb, we were dead.

We need to understand that salvation is not a matter of a spiritually sick sinner deciding to take the medicine. If it were, we could perhaps talk him into making that decision. It is not a matter of a drowning man grabbing the life ring. Who wouldn't grab it, if he knew his desperate condition? Rather, the sinner is a corpse,

floating face down in the water. He's dead. God must raise him from the dead. But the good news is, God can raise the dead! He can impart new life to dead sinners. If He can't, then why pray for the conversion of anyone? Is God in heaven saying, "Yes, I wish I could save him, but he just won't take the life ring"? No, God made us alive even when we were dead in our sins.

That's your past, if you now believe in Christ as your Savior. God saved you from spiritual death because of His rich mercy, His great love, His almighty power, and His grace alone.

2. In the present, the result of our salvation is that God has raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly places.

God not only made us alive from the dead, but Paul continues (2:6), "and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus..." Note the repetition in 2:5-6, God "made us alive together *with Christ*," He "raised us up *with Him*, and seated us *with Him* in the heavenly places *in Christ Jesus*." Paul means that we are totally identified with Jesus Christ in His death, resurrection, ascension, and present position in heaven! All of the blessings that we enjoy come to us by virtue of our identification with Jesus Christ. There is no salvation apart from Christ and all that He is to us.

When Paul speaks of being raised up with Christ, it refers not to His resurrection from the dead, but rather to His ascension. When He ascended into heaven and took His place at the right hand of the Father, we are there in Him. Although we still live on this earth, we are now citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20). We were formerly members of Satan's domain of darkness, but now we live in a different realm, as a part of God's heavenly kingdom (Col. 1:13). So we should behave here as foreigners and pilgrims. We don't really belong here. Our true home is in heaven.

This is not an easy concept to grasp, but to the extent that we see our identification with Christ in heaven, we will live differently on earth. We won't be ensnared by the world's vain treasures. We will seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at God's right hand. That is where our true life is hidden (Col. 3:1-4).

Also, our being seated with Christ in heaven means that we can exercise His authority over the forces of evil. As we saw in chapter 1, God's right hand is the place of authority over all rule and dominion. While there is still a battle raging, in that all of Christ's enemies are not yet subject to Him, we are to engage in that battle through prayer. When we pray against the forces of darkness, we do so in the name of Jesus and because we are in Him. We cannot stand against the enemy in our own strength, but rather because we are seated with Christ in heaven. He administers His authority through His praying church. That is our present position and privilege!

But we may worry, "What if I don't make it as a Christian? What if my faith fails?" Paul goes on to reveal our glorious future:

3. In the future, the ultimate purpose of our salvation is to show the surpassing riches of God's grace in kindness toward us in Christ.

Paul assures us by showing that God's purpose in saving us is bound up with His glory and thus extends throughout eternity, which he calls, "the ages to come." If God brought you from death to life through the death and resurrection of His Son, He isn't going to let you go! We all will be trophies of His grace and kindness throughout all eternity, to the praise of His glory! The angels themselves will marvel at the surpassing riches of God's grace when they see the company of the redeemed in heaven (1 Pet. 1:12). Our salvation is first and foremost a demonstration of the glory of God. As Jonathan Edwards astutely argued, God created the world and put us here to further His glory (see John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory* [Crossway Books]). That theme extends through eternity!

Martyn Lloyd-Jones pointed out (*God's Way of Reconciliation* [Baker], p. 111, italics his), "*Salvation vindicates the greatness and the character of God in a special way and in a manner which nothing else does.*" Satan's object in tempting Adam and Eve was to detract from the glory and majesty of God. But God allowed sin to enter this world in part because His plan of redemption revealed certain aspects of His holiness, justice, wisdom, mercy, love, and grace that would not have been known apart from the cross (see Rom. 9:22-23). It's mind-boggling, but we will play a part in displaying the surpassing riches of God's grace throughout eternity!

## Conclusion

Paul wants us to know that because our salvation is totally of God, there is eternal hope for all who are dead in their sins. The dead can't raise themselves and they can't even decide to do so, but God is in the business of raising the dead! If He has opened your eyes to your true condition as a sinner under His just wrath, flee to the cross. Trust in Christ alone. He has a vast fortune of surpassing riches of grace for every sinner who comes to Jesus.

If you have received new life in Christ, God wants you to live in light of it. Seeing your past and what He did in raising you from death to life should fill you with gratitude and joy. Seeing your present, totally identified with Christ in heaven, should cause you to live as a citizen of heaven, separate from this evil world. Seeing your glorious future as a trophy of His grace should give you assurance and hope, even in the midst of trials or in the face of death itself. Praise God for His rich mercy, His great love, and the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus!

## Application Questions

1. Why is it important to affirm that salvation is not a joint effort between God and men, but that it is all of God? What is at stake?
2. Does your view of God begin with His abundant mercy and great love? If not, why not? Note that His discipline is because of His love (Heb. 12:6).
3. What are some practical implications of our present identity with Christ in the heavenly places?
4. Do you look forward to heaven or view it as kind of boring? Ask God to fill you with the hope of Ephesians 2:7.

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