

# God's Plan of Reconciliation

**But God**

*Ephesians 2:4-5*

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## But God

### Scripture

Last week, I began a new series of eight sermons on Ephesians 2 that I am calling, “God’s Plan of Reconciliation.”

Ephesians 2:1-10 is a single sentence in the Greek text. The theme of this sentence is God’s grace in saving sinners. Paul began in Ephesians 2:1-3 with a devastating description of the way we were before receiving the amazing grace of God. In verse 4 Paul began to explain how God saves sinners.

Let’s read how God saves sinners in Ephesians 2:4-5. For the sake of context, however, let’s begin reading in verse 1:

<sup>1</sup> And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>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— <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup> **But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,** <sup>5</sup> **even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved.** (Ephesians 2:4-5)

### Introduction

Tony Merida tells the story regarding the ministry of the eighteenth-century evangelist George Whitefield, who reportedly preached thousands of times on John 3. He was pouring out his heart one day during a Great Awakening sermon. A

man with pockets stuffed with rocks came to physically attack the famous evangelist once the sermon ended. But after Whitefield's powerful message, the man made his way up to the preacher, emptied his pockets, and said, "I came to hear you with my pocket full of stones to break your head, but your sermon got the better of me and broke my heart" (Dunn, *Evangelical Awakening*, 17). God gave this angry, hostile man new life through the gospel.<sup>1</sup>

This story wonderfully illustrates what happens when God saves sinners. Before we were Christians, we were by nature hostile and opposed to God. That is because we were "dead in the trespasses and sins in which [we] once walked" (2:1). Before we came to know the grace of God in our lives, we were all – every one of us – in a hopeless, helpless condition before God. Listen again to how the Apostle Paul described every one of us in verses 1-3:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 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 – 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.

And then, in verse 4, Paul said, "But God"! These words teach us about God's marvelous intervention in our lives. As D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "These two words, in and of themselves, in a sense contain the whole of the gospel."<sup>2</sup> And

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), n.p.

<sup>2</sup> David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation: An Exposition of Ephesians 2* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 59.

James Montgomery Boice said, “They tell what God has done, how God has intervened in what otherwise was an utterly hopeless situation.”<sup>3</sup>

## Lesson

Ephesians 2:4-5 shows us God’s work in our salvation. I am borrowing heavily from James Montgomery Boice for today’s outline and message.<sup>4</sup>

Let’s use the following outline:

1. Who Is This God? (2:4a)
2. What Has God Done? (2:5b)
3. Why Has God Done It? (2:4b, 4c, 5b)
4. What Must I Then Do?

### I. Who Is This God? (2:4a)

First, who is this God?

Paul said in verse 4a, “**But God...**” He introduced the Person of God into the plan of salvation.

Most people today have a misunderstanding of God. Some think of God as a grandfatherly figure who loves everyone and will see to it that everyone gets saved in the end. Others think of God as powerful, austere, distant, and uninvolved in the affairs of men. And, of course, all the religions of the world have fashioned a god to suit their own religion.

This **God** about whom Paul was writing is not the god of human imagining. He is the God of the Bible. He is the true and living God. He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus

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<sup>3</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1988), 51.

<sup>4</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary*, 51–56.

Christ. He is the God Paul described in Ephesians 1 as the one who planned our salvation from eternity past. He is the God as described in our *Westminster Shorter Catechism* as “a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.”<sup>5</sup>

What else do we know about this God? Several things:

*First, God is sovereign.* The clear teaching of the entire Bible is that God is sovereign. That means that God created the world and everything in it. He controls it. He rules over it. Nothing happens apart from his knowledge; indeed, nothing happens apart from his eternal purpose. That is what Paul was teaching in the first chapter of Ephesians.

*Second, God is holy.* Of all the attributes of God listed in the Bible, only his holiness is stated in a threefold affirmation, once in the Old Testament and once in the New Testament. Isaiah 6:3 says, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” And Revelation 4:8, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” God is absolutely and uniquely excellent above all creation and without sin. Because of his holiness, he distinguishes between right and wrong. Therefore, he must punish sin so that his justice may be maintained.

*And third, God is wrathful against sin.* Paul said in Ephesians 2:1 that “you were dead in the trespasses and sins.” Furthermore, the Bible teaches quite clearly that “*all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). There are no exceptions to that truth. And because of our sin, Paul said in Romans 1:18 that “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.”

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<sup>5</sup> Q&A 4: *The Westminster Shorter Catechism: With Scripture Proofs*, 3rd edition. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

Many people think of God only as a God of love. He certainly is a God of love. But he is also a sovereign, holy, and wrathful God. The same chapter of the Bible – John 3 – that speaks of God so loving the world “that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16) also says in John 3:36, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, *but the wrath of God remains on him.*”

That is the God about whom Paul was writing. Paul was reminding Christians of the dreadful and deplorable spiritual condition in which they were before the God of the Bible intervened in their lives.

## II. What Has God Done? (2:5b)

Second, what has God done?

Paul said in verse 5b, “**But God, . . . even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.**” We were in a dreadful and deplorable spiritual condition. In fact, **we were dead in our trespasses.** Last week I mentioned that John MacArthur said, “Men apart from God are spiritual zombies, the *walking dead* who do not know they are dead. They go through the motions of life, but they do not possess it.”<sup>6</sup> At one time we were breathing, walking, talking, and thinking beings, but we were spiritually dead and cut off from God. **We were dead in our trespasses.**

But God! What marvelous words! Even when we were dead in our trespasses, God **made us alive together with Christ.** First, we must acknowledge that God brought Christ

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<sup>6</sup> John MacArthur, *John: Jesus - The Word, the Messiah, the Son of God*, MacArthur Bible Studies (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2000), 26.

back to life again. This is of course the message of Resurrection Sunday. The message of the Gospels, as well as the rest of the New Testament, could be summed up in Paul's affirmation to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 15:20, "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." God raised Christ from the dead. And because he did that, we have confidence that Christ was the first of many others who would also be raised from the dead.

We have a marvelous picture of what God has done in raising dead people back to life in the story of Jesus and Lazarus in John 11. Lazarus of Bethany had died. His sisters were Mary and Martha. They sent for Jesus, who arrived after Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Jesus went to the tomb of Lazarus, which was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." The *King James Version* says, "Lord, by this time he stinketh" (John 11:39, *KJV*). Of course he *stinketh*! He has been dead for four days! Decay had set in, and he was completely and utterly dead. After prayer, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." Jesus was calling to a dead man. A man who had been dead for four days! A dead man who *stinketh*! And then we simply read, "The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go'" (John 11:44).

Friends, this is what happened to us. Even when we were dead in our trespasses, God made us alive together with Christ. Perhaps you heard a preacher proclaim the gospel. One day God made you alive, the gospel made sense to you, you trusted in Jesus and you repented of your sins. Or you were listening to a Sunday school teacher, or Children's Church teacher, or

Vacation Bible School teacher, or an ESL teacher, or a friend. One day God made you alive, the gospel made sense to you, you trusted in Jesus and you repented of your sins.

### III. Why Has God Done It? (2:4b, 4c, 5b)

Third, why has God done it?

Why has God intervened and saved us? There are three words that Paul used in these two verses to describe why God saved us.

*First, God saved us because of his mercy.* Paul said in verse 4b, “But God, **being rich in mercy.**” The word **mercy** means “to show compassion, extend help for the consequence of sin.... The general meaning is to have compassion or mercy on a person in unhappy circumstances.”<sup>7</sup> Of course, our unhappy circumstances had to do with our being dead in our trespasses. Spiritually, that is not a happy circumstance at all! But God, **being rich in mercy**, intervened in our unhappy circumstance and did something to reverse it by sending his Son, Jesus, to save us by his death.

*Second, God saved us because of his love.* Paul said in verse 4c, “But God...**because of the great love with which he loved us.**” C. S. Lewis described the love of God for us as follows, “God, who needs nothing, loves into existence wholly superfluous creations in order that he may love and perfect them. He creates the universe, already foreseeing – or should we say ‘seeing’? there are no tenses in God – the buzzing cloud of flies about the cross, the flayed back pressed against the uneven stake, the nails driven through the mesial nerves, the repeated

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<sup>7</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).



torture of back and arms as it is time after time, for breath's sake, hitched up.... Herein is love. This is the diagram of Love Himself, the inventor of all loves.”<sup>8</sup>

*And third, God saved us because of his grace.* Paul said in verse 5b, “...by **grace** you have been saved.” The word **grace** is an important word for Paul. He used it 86 times in his letters. Here he used it twice in almost the same way in the same paragraph. He said again in verses 8-9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” **Grace** is defined as, “A favor done without expectation of return; the absolutely free expression of the loving kindness of God to men finding its only motive in the bounty and benevolence of the Giver; unearned and unmerited favor.”<sup>9</sup>

So, why has God intervened and saved us? In these verses, Paul said that it was because of the mercy, love, and grace of God. God acts the way he does toward sinners because of who he is. He does not act the way he does because we deserve it, or because he have earned it.

#### IV. What Must I Then Do?

And finally, what must I then do?

The Apostle Paul was writing to the Christians in Ephesus about what God had done for them in their salvation. Paul reminded them of their former condition when they were dead in the trespasses and sins in which they once walked. Then, he also reminded them of the mercy, love, and grace of God that saved them. He wanted them to live with these truths in mind.

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<sup>8</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1960), 176.

<sup>9</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

In his best-selling book *The Reason for God*, Tim Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, NY, shares the story of a woman in his congregation who was learning how the grace extended to her through Christ's work on the cross can be more challenging than religion (which he defines as "works-based righteousness"). He writes:

Some years ago, I met with a woman who began coming to church at Redeemer and had never before heard a distinction drawn between the gospel and religion. She had always heard that God accepts us only if we are good enough. She said that the new message was scary. I asked why it was scary and she replied: "If I was saved by my good works then there would be a limit to what God could ask of me or put me through. I would be like a taxpayer with 'rights' – I would have done my duty and now I would deserve a certain quality of life. But if I am a sinner saved by grace – then there's nothing he cannot ask of me."

.... She knew that if she was a sinner saved by grace, she was (if anything) more subject to the sovereign Lordship of God. She knew that if Jesus really had done all this for her, she would not be her own. She would joyfully, gratefully belong to Jesus, who provided all this for her at infinite cost to himself.<sup>10</sup>

If you are a Christian, you must remember that you are not your own. You belong to Christ, as the opening words of the Heidelberg Catechism say, "That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ."<sup>11</sup> And that means that you will live wholeheartedly for your faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

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<sup>10</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (Riverhead Books, 2008), pp. 189-190.

<sup>11</sup> P. J. de Bruyn, *Your Only Comfort: The Heidelberg Catechism for Mankind Today* (Potchefstroom: PU vir CHO, 1997).

And if you are not yet a Christian, let me urge you to ask God to intervene in your life today and save you.

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed God's work in our salvation in Ephesians 2:4-5, we should know that God saves sinners.

Years ago, J. I. Packer wrote a masterful statement about the truth that God saves sinners. He wrote:

There is really only *one* point to be made in the field of soteriology: the point that *God saves sinners*. *God* – the Triune Jehovah, Father, Son and Spirit; three Persons working together in sovereign wisdom, power and love to achieve the salvation of a chosen people, the Father electing, the Son fulfilling the Father's will by redeeming, the Spirit executing the purpose of Father and Son by renewing. *Saves* – does everything, first to last, that is involved in bringing man from death in sin to life in glory: plans, achieves and communicates redemption, calls and keeps, justifies, sanctifies, glorifies. *Sinners* – men as God finds them, guilty, vile, helpless, powerless, blind, unable to lift a finger to do God's will or better their spiritual lot. *God saves sinners* – and the force of this confession may not be weakened by disrupting the unity of the work of the Trinity, or by dividing the achievement of salvation between God and man and making the decisive part man's own, or by soft-pedalling the sinner's inability so as to allow him to share the praise of his salvation with his Savior.<sup>12</sup>

This is the gospel! God saves sinners. This is what Paul was teaching in verses 4-5 when he said, "But God." Amen.

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<sup>12</sup> J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 130.

# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church  
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can  
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1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons).
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