

Summer Series: *The Joy of Being a God-Centered Church: The DNA of WBC*

Main Idea: As a church we are joyfully committed to sovereign grace in the conversion of a sinner. In today’s message we’re going to learn why by looking at Ephesians 2:1-10, and then consider some implications for us as a church.

- I. Let’s consider the beauty of sovereign grace in Ephesians 2:1-10.
 - A. Remember what we were (1-3).
 1. We were dead (1).
 2. We were deluded (2).
 3. We were doomed (3).
 - B. Remember what God did for us (4-7).
 1. He made us alive with Christ (5).
 2. He raised us up and seated us with Christ (6).
 3. He purposed to make us trophies of His grace in Christ (7).
 - C. Remember how God did it (8-10).
 1. He did it by His grace.
 2. He did it through our faith which is His gift.
 3. He did it, not by our works, but by Christ’s work.
 4. He did it so we would do good works.
- II. Let’s consider some implications for us as a church.
 - A. How does salvation occur?
 1. Option #1: Man does it on his own.
 2. Option #2: God makes it possible, but man makes it happen.
 3. Option #3: God makes it possible AND makes it happen.
 - B. Why does it matter?
 1. It affects how we view lost people.
 2. It affects how we view ourselves.
 3. It affects how we treat prayer.
 4. It affects how we do evangelism.
 5. It affects how we close our services.
 6. It affects how we handle professions of faith.
 7. It affects how we view eternal security.
 8. It affects how we view God.

Response: Praise be to God for His sovereign grace in the conversion of a sinner!

We are celebrating on Sunday mornings this summer at WBC. That’s what our current series is all about, *The Joy of Being a God-Centered Church*. We’re looking at twelve joyful commitments that God has wired into our DNA.

Two weeks ago, we began with the first, “*Our Joyful Commitment to Expository Preaching*.” Last week was the second, “*Our Joyful Commitment to Preaching the Whole Counsel of God*.” Today we come to the third, “*Our Joyful Commitment to Sovereign Grace in the Conversion of a Sinner*.” We’re going to learn why by looking at Ephesians 2:1-10, and then consider some implications for us as a church.

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2:1-10

When I was a teenager three of my unsaved friends came with our youth group to an all day sports outreach event. They came to play ball, and we played ball, but in the middle of the event we were instructed to sit down in an open field to listen to a message. A preacher began to challenge the young people to get right with God. He told some emotional stories to get our attention, then more stories to alarm us of the inevitability of

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the message preached at WBC in 2011 in our series, “Nine Marks of a Healthy Church.”

death and the horror of spending eternity in hell. Finally he asked in persuasive terms for those who wanted to get saved to raise their hands and seek counsel. All three of my buddies said yes to the invitation. And on the van ride home I rejoiced.

That was a Saturday. The next day was Sunday. Any guess as to how many of my three friends came to church? I think two did the first week. The next week it was one. And in less than a year he stopped coming. I remember thinking, "That doesn't seem right. If my friends really got saved, wouldn't there be some evidence, like a desire to learn and live God's Word?" As I read my Bible, I learned the answer was yes.

So what was the problem? Some would say the problem is faulty follow-up. If those guys had received better follow up, they would have grown and stuck. But I knew those guys. And I knew the follow-up was there, yet resisted. You can't cause something to grow if there's no life there to begin with.

Looking back, I'm convinced the problem wasn't faulty follow-up. It was faulty evangelism. I'm not questioning the preacher's motive, nor sincerity, nor his love for Christ and young people. But he assumed far too much that day in his presentation, about his hearers and even about himself and his ability as a preacher. And I regret to admit I've done the same thing myself.

I had been a pastor for about a year when, on a Sunday evening, just before the service, a lady in our church brought a younger family member to see me. As I recall, it was her niece, and she was greatly burdened for this niece's spiritual condition.

"I think she's ready to get saved," she told me.

So I began to talk with this teenager. It didn't take long before I discovered two things. One, this young lady was in need of being saved. And two, she didn't seem to be as ready to be saved as her aunt wanted her to be. I presented the gospel, asked her questions, showed her Bible verses, urged her to put her trust in Christ, but she just sat there with a blank stare, not saying anything.

Then I looked at my watch. It was getting close to the start of our evening service. I remember thinking, "I've got to do something, and quick! What am I going to say to a church member if I have to tell her that I wasn't able to help her niece get saved? What kind of incompetent pastor am I? After all, she told me her niece was *ready*."

So I persisted. "It's simple," I told her. "Just believe in Christ." Until finally, with a little coaxing, the girl agreed to "pray the prayer." Once the "amen" was spoken, we left the room and I shared the "good news" with the aunt, and she rejoiced, and we made it to the evening service just in time. Mission accomplished.

Or was it? As it turned out, I never saw any evidence of salvation from that young person. I'm not sure she ever came back to church, or gave public testimony of her faith through baptism, or started reading and applying the Bible.

You might say, "Well, you're not God. You don't know her heart."

And you're right. I don't. And that's the problem. I don't her heart. But in my evangelistic efforts, I acted as if I did.

The question is, how is a sinner converted? Or I could put it this way and ask, how does a person "get saved"? Parents, you know that your kids need to be saved. How does that happen?

You say, "Well, that's the question the Philippian jailor asked Paul, 'What must I do to be saved?', and Paul told him, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31).' So there's the answer. To get saved, my child must believe in Christ."

And you're right. But your answer only raises more questions. What does it mean to *believe* in Christ? And what is it about the condition of your child that makes

believing in Christ necessary? And what can you do to facilitate that? Or for that matter, can you facilitate it? Can you bring about the conversion of your child?

These are vital questions, and here's our answer at WBC. As a church we are joyfully *committed to sovereign grace in the conversion of a sinner*. In today's message we're going to learn why by looking at Ephesians 2:1-10, and then consider some implications for us as a church.

I'm using the word "conversion," but I could use other words, for the Bible uses many terms to identify what occurs the moment a person enters God's family. The person is *born again/regenerated* (John 3:3; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet 1:23). He is *justified* (Rom. 3:24), *sanctified* (1 Cor. 1:2; although other texts show that sanctification is also a process; Heb. 10:14), *glorified* (in the eyes of God; Rom 8:30), *adopted* (Eph 1:5), *reconciled to God* (2 Cor 5:18), *redeemed* (1 Pet 1:18), *made new* (2 Cor 5:17), and *rescued from the kingdom of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son* (Col 1:13). And there are others.²

But the question is, how does it happen? What does it take for a sinner to be born again, justified, adopted, redeemed, *converted*, and so on? Can a preacher make it happen? A Sunday School teacher? A parent? Can the sinner himself make it happen? No. According to the Bible, it is something that *God* alone can do. God must be the subject of these activities.

I. Let's consider the beauty of sovereign grace in Ephesians 2:1-10.

When we open what we call the book of Ephesians, we're looking at a letter that the apostle Paul wrote to a church in the city of Ephesus (1:1). So this instruction is for Christians. These are people who had experienced God's saving work in their lives, most of them under Paul's ministry five to seven years earlier (see Acts 19:8-10).

This was a good church. They had good elders (we met them in Acts 20 in last week's message). They'd received good teaching from Paul and others (Acts 19:10 says Paul taught them daily for two years). But even good churches need reminders. And that's what this letter is full of, reminders.

In the first three chapters Paul reminds them of matters pertaining to their identity, of who they are. And then in the final three chapters he reminds them of the implications of their identity, of what they need to do.

We need reminders, too. That's a huge part of why we gather together every Lord's Day. We're prone to forget, so we need to be reminded. When it comes to our salvation, and that's Paul's topic in the first ten verses of chapter two, we need three reminders.

A. Remember what we were (1-3). What was true of us prior to conversion? And of course, if you haven't yet been converted, this is what is still true of you. Paul reminds us of three sobering realities.

1. *We were dead (1).* "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked." Paul begins, "And *you*." The NIV says, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins." He's talking to the Christians in Ephesus. He's taking them back to their BC days, before Christ. What word best sums up the condition of a person without Christ? Paul uses the word *dead*. You were dead.

² The big umbrella term is *salvation*. Salvation involves at least four different tenses in the Bible. In eternity past, we who are in Christ were chosen for salvation (Eph. 1:4). In time past, we were saved from the penalty of sin (John 3:16-17). In time present, we are being saved from the power of sin (Eph 4:22-24). At a future time, when Christ appears, we will be saved from the very presence of sin (1 John 3:1-2).

Literally, “being dead.” It depicts a state of existence or condition. Not merely sick, nor disabled, but *dead*.

We know what dead is. My backyard is full of reminders of what dead is. I’ve buried a pet dog, several cats, fish, and birds there over the years. When I put them into the ground they may have looked the same, with fur, whiskers, physical features, but of course they were *dead*, meaning they were unable to respond to any stimulus.

The Bible doesn’t teach that we entered the world alive with death coming, but that we entered the world dead, unresponsive to our Maker, uninterested in Him, unaware of Him. Dead.

Paul is talking about a particular kind of death here, not physical death, but spiritual death. You were dead “in trespasses and sins (ESV).” In *trespasses*—the Greek *paraptoma* literally means “a slip or fall,” and here carries the idea of “taking the wrong road” and “going the wrong direction.” And you were dead in *sins*—the Greek *harmartia* is a hunting term meaning “to miss the mark.” When a hunter takes his bow, shoots at a target, and misses, that’s a *harmartia*. And that’s what we’ve done. We have failed to hit God’s target. We are thus dead in both trespasses (we’ve taken the wrong road) and sins (we’ve missed the mark).

That’s how every human this side of Adam and Eve enters the world, dead in sin, inherited sin and in the subsequent chosen sins. As those who are dead, sinners are totally incapable of responding to God and living in ways that please Him. To the contrary, as sinners, we go our own way (see Gen. 8:21; Ps 51:5).

Perhaps you’re thinking, “Not me. I may be a sinner, sure, but I’m still a good person. I’m a good parent, a good worker, a good friend, a good neighbor. You can ask anybody who knows me, and they’ll tell you.”

And it may be true that you could produce a hundred witnesses to attest to your goodness in their eyes. But right here we are seeing the conclusion of the only witness that will matter on judgment day. Our Creator is telling us that you and I entered this world *dead in trespasses and sins*. But there’s more, a second sobering reality.

2. *We were deluded (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.”

That’s interesting. Verse 1 says we were *dead*. But verse 2 describes how we *used to live*, literally, how we *walked*. You mean that dead people walk? That’s right. On the outside, we’re walking, going to school, getting married, working a job, coaching our kids ball team, but on the inside we were dead and incapable of living the kind of life that pleases God. We are like walking corpses.

But the sinner says, “I don’t feel dead. I feel like I’m accomplishing some pretty important things in my life, things that surely matter to God.”

He says this because he is deluded, and he is deluded by two influences. First, he is following “the course of this world,” and second, “the prince of the power of the air.” There is why he thinks he’s good. He’s deceived by these two influences: the world and the devil.

To which the sinner might say, “Now I know you’re crazy. The devil doesn’t control me. I don’t do séances and sacrifice animals. Nor do I lie (at least not too much), steal, or cheat. I do a lot of good, including for my church. You’re not talking about me.”

But herein lies the delusion. Whether he realizes it or not, the sinner is listening to the narrative of the world and the devil. Both whisper to him, saying, “You’re okay with God. You’re a good person.” And they whisper a lot of other lies too, like, “You

can live however you want,” because “God just wants you to be happy,” and “All roads lead to Him anyway.”

Brothers and sisters, that was our condition, and we need to stop and remember it. We were dead, and deluded. To make matters worse...

3. *We were doomed* (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.”

Paul shifts pronouns from “you” to “we.” He includes himself. It’s not just you. It’s me too, he affirms. You were Gentile pagans. I was a Jewish Pharisee. It makes no difference. We all lived that way. We were all dead, deluded, and worst of all, doomed.

We were, as the NIV puts it, *gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature* (in other words, living by our senses, our feelings), and therefore *by nature* (nobody taught us this) *objects of wrath*. Whose wrath? God’s. We were under the wrath of Almighty God.

It’s painful to remember, isn’t it? Yes, but necessary. This is what we were. Dead, deluded, and doomed. Praise God it’s past tense. *Were*. And why is it past tense? Is it because of something *we* did? No, no, no. Which brings us to our second reminder.

B. Remember what God did for us (4-7). And make no mistake about it. He did it! Paul says in verse 4, “But God.” God and God alone is the agent of our salvation. He designed it. He initiated it. He accomplished it.

Why would He do that? Why would He intervene to help dead, deluded, and doomed sinners? Was it because He saw something good in us? No, it was solely because of something amazingly good in Him. Paul says, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us.”

In chapter one Paul takes us back to eternity past and marvels at God the Father’s electing love. “In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ (1:5).” Now in chapter two, Paul again highlights God’s love for us, this time taking us, not to eternity past, but to *our* past. What did God do for us in our past? Three actions.

1. *He made us alive with Christ* (5). “Even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.” What were we? Dead. What did God do for us? Made us alive. On what basis? On the basis of a connection He established *with Christ, by grace*. Don’t miss those four words. We’ll see them again and again in this text, for this is the basis for the work God has accomplished in our lives. With Christ. By grace.

2. *He raised us up and seated us with Christ* (6). “And raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Amazing. We were not only dead, but deluded and following the ruler of the kingdom of the air. Yet God brought us to life and put us on a throne in heaven, seated with His own Son. Talk about a change in status! We used to be pawns of God’s rival, but now we’re co-heirs with the Ruler of the universe!

“You mean, we *will* be co-heirs,” you say. “It’s future, right?”

Friends, look at the verb tense. God *seated* us with Him. Past tense. In God’s mind, it’s already happened. When Christ raised from the dead, we were raised. When Christ sat down on His throne, so did we. All the merit of Christ has been given to those who are in Christ. It’s not just a future hope. It’s a present reality.

We’re talking about a complete reversal. Do you see it? We were dead, but God made us alive. We were deluded by the evil one, but God raised us to new life. We were doomed under the wrath of God, but God blessed us with a heavenly seat next to His Son.

Alright, so what does this have to do with our question? How does a person get saved? And the answer we’re seeing is that it’s a work of God, from beginning to end.

We were dead, deluded, and doomed, but God made us alive with Christ, raised us up with Christ, and seated us with Christ on His throne in heaven.

God did it all. Which raises the question, “Why? Why would God do this for undeserving sinners like us?” And verse 7 gives us the answer, “...so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” There’s the reason.

3. *He purposed to make us trophies of His grace in Christ (7).* That’s what we are, fellow Christians. Trophies. God’s trophies.

There used to be some trophies on the fireplace mantle in our house. Now they’re in a box somewhere. That’s what happens to earthly trophies. But not heavenly trophies.

A trophy, of course, signifies a past accomplishment. That’s what we are to God. We exist to bring attention to Him, and to His accomplishment.

When will God put His trophies on display? In the coming ages, says Paul, throughout all eternity future. God is going to showcase the immeasurable riches of His grace. He’s going to point at His blood-bought children and say, “There is the accomplishment of My grace, My kindness, and My Son!”

This, my Christian friend, is the ultimate purpose of our salvation. It’s for God’s pleasure, for the display of His glory, and particularly the display of the glory of His grace. He loves to give to the undeserving. That’s why He sent His Son into the world, and then to the cross, so that He might rescue and pardon condemned sinners. And so, we who are in Christ get the benefit, but He gets all the glory.

My non-Christian friend, I have bad news and good news for you this morning. The bad news? You are what we all once were: dead, deluded, and doomed. Have you acknowledged this reality? This is not my assessment, but what God Himself says in His Word.

Now the good news. To borrow from the old hymn, “There’s room at the cross for you. Those millions have come, there’s still room for one. Yes, there’s room at the cross for you.”

This brings us to Paul’s third reminder. What we were. What God did for us.

C. Remember how God did it (8-10). Four characteristics of His work.

1. *He did it by His grace.* That’s the first part of verse 8, “For by grace you have been saved through faith.” Grace. Undeserved, unmerited favor. This is how God saved us, on the basis of His sovereign grace.

2. *He did it through our faith which is His gift.* Verse 8 again (NIV), “For it is by grace you have been saved, *through faith*—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” The ESV says, “And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” And lest we miss the point that salvation is by faith alone, verse 9 clarifies, “not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

So when God saves us, He does not bypass faith. He creates it. He gives those He chooses the ability to put their trust in His Son. Consequently, that’s what they do. They believe in His Son. They trust in Christ. Though they were once dead, deluded, and doomed, they do what they would never have done, never *could* have done left to themselves. Because of God’s gift, enabled by grace, they put their faith in Christ.

I take “gift” here to refer to the whole package, faith, grace, even salvation itself. For by grace you have been saved, through faith, for it, the faith that is essential for salvation, the grace that enabled the faith, and the salvation itself, it’s all *the gift of God*.

We need to remember this, dear friends. How did God save us? One, by His grace. Two, through our faith which was His gift to us.

3. *He did it, not by our works, but by Christ's work.* That's the point verse 10 emphasizes, "For we are his workmanship [God is doing the work], created in Christ Jesus." Stop there. Look at that phrase, "in Christ Jesus." We've seen this emphasis on our union with Christ throughout this section. God made us alive *with Christ* (5). God raised us up *with Christ* (6). God seated us in heavenly realms *in Christ* (6). God will show the riches of His grace to us *in Christ Jesus* (7).

There's how God saved us. Not by our works, but by Christ's work. If we have trusted Christ, God has imputed our sins to Christ and the merit of Christ's work to us.

Watchman Nee, a Chinese church leader who spent the last twenty years of his life in prison until he died in 1972, shares a helpful illustration in his book *Sit, Walk, Stand*. "If I put a dollar bill between the pages of a magazine, and then burn the magazine, where is the dollar bill? It has gone the same way as the magazine, to ashes. Where the one goes the other goes too. Their history has become one. But just as effectively, God has put us in Christ. What happened to Him happened also to us."³

If you want to know more about the believer's inseparable connection to Christ, check out Romans 6.⁴ It boils down to this, to borrow again from Watchman Nee, "Our deliverance from sin is based, not on what we can do, nor even on what God is going to do for us, but on what He has already done for us in Christ."⁵

One more characteristic of God's work. He did it by grace, through faith which is His gift to us, not by our works but by Christ's work, and...

4. *He did it so we would do good works.* That's the end of verse 10, "for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Yes, God saves us by faith alone, but the result isn't faith alone. It's faith that shows up in good works. This is the result of God's salvation. When He saves a sinner, that sinner begins to live the kind of life God always intended him to live, a Christlike life filled with Christlike deeds.

So there's the message of Ephesians 2:1-10. Step back and take another look. We worked through this passage to see how the Bible views the conversion of a sinner. Where's the focus? It's on God, right? What's the sinner's contribution? Nothing but faith, and even that is God's gift.

This isn't just the story of the church in Ephesus. This is the story of this church in Wheelersburg, Ohio. This is *what we were*—dead, deluded, and doomed. This is *what God did for us*—He made us alive in Christ, raised us from the dead and put us on a heavenly throne in Christ, and determined to make us trophies of His grace in Christ forever and ever. And this is *how God did it*—by His grace, through our faith which He gave us, not by our works but by Christ's work, and so that as a result of being in Christ we would do good works.

And so, as a church we are joyfully committed to sovereign grace in the conversion of a sinner. Since that's true, there are huge implications.

II. Let's consider some implications for us as a church.

³ Watchman Nee, *Sit, Walk, Stand*, p. 21.

⁴ We're told in Romans 6:4-5, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection." And verse 6, "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin." And verse 11, "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

⁵ Watchman Nee, p. 21.

I want to discuss two questions. The first may seem rather obvious, but it's vital.

A. How does salvation occur? There are basically three options.

1. *Option #1: Man does it on his own.* That's what some say. Ask the self-made man where his hope lies, and he'll talk about his favorite subject, *himself*.

2. *Option #2: God makes it possible, but man makes it happen.* This view is quite popular in many fundamental, evangelical churches. Salvation isn't something God accomplished at the cross, rather, it's something He made possible. With the emphasis on man's free will, the preacher will give this sort of invitation:

"Oh sinner, Jesus died for you. He provided a way for you to be saved, but now it's up to you. He is waiting, broken-hearted. You must make the decision." And so the invitation hymn goes on and on, verse after verse, waiting for the sinner to respond.

3. *Option #3: God makes it possible AND makes it happen.* There are actually a couple of sub-sets to this option. For some it leads to fatalism. Like the pastor who told the father of modern missions, William Carey, "Young man, if God wants to save the heathen in India, He doesn't need your help."

But that type of thinking ignores too many Bible texts which make it clear that God's sovereignty doesn't cancel out human responsibility. To the contrary, it enables it. God made salvation possible *and* He makes it happen, by sending out gospel preachers, and by convicting sinners and granting them faith to embrace the message they hear.

Does the Bible teach free will? The answer is *yes*. It teaches that God has a free will and can do whatever He wants. What about man? Is he free to do whatever he wants? What did we just see in Ephesians 2? Yes, he's free to do what he wants, but that's his problem. He doesn't *want* to do what God wants Him to do. He's dead, deluded, and doomed. He doesn't want Christ to rule his life, for he'd rather do that himself, all the way to an eternal hell.

Since that's true, the sinner's only hope is for God to intervene, not just by offering him the gift of salvation, but also by giving him a heart that wants to receive it.

B. Why does it matter? Here are eight implications of sovereign grace.

1. *It affects how we view lost people.* Think about the unsaved person that works next to you, or sits in class next to you. What's true of him or her? Brothers and sisters, while that person may offend you with their vulgar speech and actions, please remember they are what we once were and still would be apart from grace. They are dead in their sins, and deluded, and doomed. They are not the enemy, but helpless victims of the same enemy that once enslaved us. They need our compassion, and they need to hear the same good news that set us free.

2. *It affects how we view ourselves.* Who are we? We are *saved* people. That means we're not smarter than other people, not inherently better than other people, and not merely more religious than other people. We are people who have been *saved*.

Just ponder that term. *Saved*. It indicates that we were once hopelessly lost and powerless to do anything about it. It reminds us that instead of letting us perish as we deserved, God broke in and rescued us and made us co-heirs with His Son.

That's why there's no place for pride in this church and why we must see it as an unthinkable evil. That's why we place high value on humility in this church, and urge each other to pursue it diligently. That's why we must work hard at our relationships. It's why we're not surprised when someone steps on our toes from time to time, and why we don't give up on them. How could we not be gracious with each other? We are sinners saved by grace.

It's why there's no place for the attitude, "I'm saved but I have nothing to offer to this church." That's not what God says. If you have been saved, you have been saved *unto good works*. There are ministries He intends for you to accomplish for His honor.

And when we do ministries, it's not about us. We don't sing to bring attention to ourselves. We don't preach to get a pat on the back. We don't get protective about our ministry turf. We don't fight for our agenda in the budget. Not as long as we're remembering who we are, sinners saved by grace.

3. *It affects how we treat prayer.* Friends, if our kids enter this world as lost sinners, and they do, and if there's nothing we nor they can do about it, then we'd better be talking to the One who can do something about it! Only God can open blind eyes. Only God can break a stubborn sinful will. Only God can cause a skeptical heart to believe in Christ. We're desperate for God to work, and that's why we pray.

"My heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved," says Paul (Rom. 10:1). That's why prayer is so important for this church, and why we must make our prayer services top priority in our schedules.

Are you grateful that someone prayed for your soul? I am. Now it's our turn. There are unsaved people that need our prayers, family, classmates, people next door, people in the next country.

Think about this. Most people who struggle with God's sovereignty in theory don't struggle with it when they pray. When they pray, they don't say, "Dear God, I know you can't do anything about my wayward son's heart because it's all up to him now." Rather, they cry out, "Oh God! Open his eyes! Change his heart. Help him believe in Jesus!" And the Sovereign Father loves to hear that prayer!

4. *It affects how we do evangelism.* If we believe in sovereign grace in the conversion of a sinner, there's no room for emotional manipulation, nor high pressure arm twisting. Should we present the good news and plead with people to repent and trust Christ? Absolutely! But let us never forget that the sinner's predicament is too grave to go after a quick, man-centered fix. They don't just need their emotions stirred. Nor do they merely need to "make a decision". They need a brand new heart.

That's why I don't tell a lot of emotional stories in my sermons. And why we avoid scare tactics in our children and teen ministries. You can't scare a sinner into heaven, nor grow the saints that way either. Faith comes by hearing the Word. So our task is to find ways to share the Word, and then pray with all our might for God to bless that word and turn it into faith!

I'll have a lot more to say about this next week, as we consider our joyful commitment to God-centered evangelism. For now, let's address a very specific implication of sovereign grace.

5. *It affects how we close our services.* A question I hear at times is, "Do you give an invitation at your church?" And my answer is, yes. Every time I preach I invite people, in fact, I *urge* people to respond to the truth they've heard. And I'll do again now. If you are not a Christian, I invite you to ask God to save you right now. And if you are a Christian, I invite you to put into practice the truth you've just heard.

But usually, when a person asks about our invitation, they have a picture in mind. They want to know if at the close of our service, we sing a song, and if we urge people to walk to the front of the church, to the "altar," to get saved.

In my first year of being your pastor a man came to me. He was upset and said, "You're not finishing the service right. You need to prime the pump. That's what the invitation hymn is for, to get people moving in response to your message."

To which I responded, “I’m just trying to be biblical. I don’t see what you’re describing anywhere in the Bible. In fact, the first ‘altar call’ didn’t happen in church history until basically the 1800s.”

It’s true. It wasn’t until Charles Finney started using “the anxious bench” in frontier camp meetings that the “altar call” became a staple in gospel-preaching churches. Let me cite an article from ChristianHistory.net posted 10/22/08, entitled “Walk the Aisle.”⁶

Successful evangelists such as George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and John Wesley never gave an altar call. In fact, they did not even know what it was. They invited their hearers passionately to come to Christ by faith and regularly counseled anxious sinners after their services. But they did not call sinners to make a *public, physical* response after evangelistic appeals.

You can tell which view of salvation a church holds by watching how they close their service. If they don’t challenge people to trust Christ, they must believe either #1, that man is okay on his own, or #3b, fatalism, what will be will be. Or, if they insist on priming the pump with a touching story or a long hymn, they likely believe #2, that God makes salvation *possible*, but *man makes it happen*. But at WBC, we seek to close our services in light of what Ephesians 2 says, and so we call for the response of faith, and cry out to God to produce that response.

6. *It affects how we handle professions of faith.* Professing something doesn’t make it true. The sad reality is that hell will be full of professing Christians. That’s what Jesus said in Matthew 7:21-23). So at WBC we want to be careful about giving people false assurance. So rather than saying, “Billy got saved in Sunday School today,” it’s better to say, “Billy made a profession of faith in SS today.” If the profession was genuine, then he is indeed now part of God’s family. If not, then he still needs for God to open his eyes and *save* him. All we know for sure is that he made a profession. We can’t see his heart, which means we can’t tell yet whether God truly produced the miracle of new birth and thus saved Him. Time will tell.

7. *It affects how we view eternal security.* If Ephesians 2 is true, then a person who has been saved is secure, for when God saves, He saves completely. If God has raised up a dead sinner and seated him with Christ on a throne in heaven, you can be sure that person isn’t going back to the grave again! If God is the author of salvation, then those He saves are eternally saved and secure (see John 10:27-29; 1 John 5:11-13).

8. *It affects how we view God.* Simply put, it’s all about Him. So, “let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith,” says Hebrews 12:2. He’s the hero of the story, not us.

Response: Praise be to God for His sovereign grace in the conversion of a sinner!

“For from Him, through Him, and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever (Rom. 11:36).”

Closing Song: #409 “*I Know Whom I Have Believed*” (verses 1, 2, 3)

June Benediction: Jude 24-25 (KJV)

⁶ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/thepastinthepresent/storybehind/walktheaisle.html>