

Open the Eyes of My Heart (Part 10)

Ephesians 2:8-10

Pastor Edward Cheng

January 5, 2020

Many of us had parents who emigrated from Asia and had to work hard to make it here. Those who came knew that you had to work as hard as you could to succeed in America. That's why we are so offended when we heard of the recent college admissions scandal. Students shouldn't be admitted to universities because their influential parents bribed somebody. We hold tightly to the idea that it's only fair for people to earn what they receive. This is the way we would all like the world to work. But this worldly mentality is the opposite of the gospel message.

The gospel can offend people for many reasons. Some are turned off by the idea of following Jesus and obeying His commands, which they might not agree with. Others turn away because they can't face the fact that they are broken sinners, dead in their transgressions, as Ephesians 2:1-3 tells us. They want to think they are good people, but to accept the gospel one must first accept that none of us are good people and we all need to be saved from our sin. For a similar reason, the gospel is offensive because it tells us that salvation is given by grace. Those who want to see themselves as good people think they deserve salvation whereas others don't deserve salvation. They don't want to accept that God offers salvation to murderers and criminals. They want to think they have to earn salvation because they think they are capable of earning it, that they are worthy. This is why people are attracted to all other religions, for which salvation is by works. The idea of meriting salvation appeals to the way the world thinks, but this is not the wisdom of God.

In Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul describes the mechanism of our salvation, how God takes us from being dead in sin to being alive in Christ. First, in v. 8 we see that it is "by grace" we are saved. It's not because we are deserving or lovable, but because God is loving and gracious. He gives us this free gift. When we go to the pet store we want the cutest, healthiest animal to take home, but God picks the ugly deformed animals to adopt. We must understand that we are not that lovable, yet God loves us and chooses us. Just like a bride and groom promise to be faithful to each other even in potential poverty and sickness, God promises to be faithful to us despite our current spiritual poverty and sickness. Our congregation is successful in many of the ways the world values. We are educated, wealthy, and accomplished. Yet this means nothing to God. We

must look at things from His perspective and see that none of these things make us worthy of salvation. We are all broken, undeserving sinners who need His grace.

We also see in v. 8 that salvation is “through faith.” The gift is offered, but we must accept it. The way we accept God’s grace is through faith. Faith is our response to God’s grace, and it’s more than just mental or intellectual acceptance of the gospel. We see in Mark 1:15 and Matthew 21:32 that faith is coupled with repentance. This is also evident in the Old Testament (2 Chronicles 7:13-14). The idea of repentance is to turn around. We were walking away from God, but God reached out to us. Repenting means turning around and walking towards God. This is what it means to accept His grace through faith. It means that we follow Jesus instead of living for ourselves, which is actually following Satan. It means we pledge our allegiance to the King of kings.

Verse 9 tells us that salvation is “not by works.” Once again, it is a free gift, not earned. This is what separates Christianity from all other religions, from the systems of the world, and even from the system of the Old Testament, which all promise rewards based on merit. Our salvation does not depend on any works we do, or even on going to church every week.

That being said, in v. 10 Paul tells us that though we are not saved from works, we are saved “for works.” We are God’s handiwork, created for good works. We are born again to a new life. Our new identity and position as children of God, citizens and heirs of the kingdom of heaven, comes with the privilege and obligation to participate in His work. This is who we are now, and this is what we were saved for. Though we are expected to do works, we don’t do it to earn or keep our salvation. Once adopted, we cannot be disowned. It’s just like I would never disown my children, yet I still expect them to behave. So let us not forget that we have been adopted by grace through no merit of our own, and let us respond in faith and continue to follow Jesus, living the new life we are called to live.