

Boasting Banished

Ephesians 2:7-9
Halifax: 25 November 2007

Introduction:

Last week we looked at the great things God has done for those He saves from sin...

- Christian, what wonderful things He has done for you!
 - Things that many people have not experienced...
 - Things that many people *will* never experience.

In the first four verses, Paul shows you the desperate condition that you, and everyone else, is in until God saves you...

1. First, he shows that you are dead in trespasses and sins...
 - Not physically dead, but spiritually dead...
 - A physically dead person does not and cannot respond to what is around him...he had no response to dangers or opportunities because he is dead.
 - In a similar way, a spiritually dead person does not respond to God.
 - He does not obey God's commandments...
 - He does not tremble at God's threats of judgement...
 - He does not rush to God's promises to believe them and to take comfort in them...
 - He is dead...dead in his sins.
 - Before the Lord came to you and saved you, you were a spiritual corpse...
 - As insensible to God as a corpse is to the world around it.
 - 2. Secondly, Paul shows you that you were walking around in trespasses and sins...
 - You had your life in sin...you were active in it...
 - You just carried on after the ways of this present world,
 - without any discernment or point of reference—
 - just going along with the empty and vain trends of the day...
 - You were the dupe of Satan—given over to serve him who first led us into this death—
 - You just went along doing whatever seemed best to you as if there was no God to serve, no God to direct you...
 - You followed the desires of your flesh and of your mind.

3. And thirdly, we saw a thing most dreadful,
 - The apostle says that you were by nature children of wrath...
 - By your very nature, you were repulsive to God and so the very objects of His wrath and displeasure...
 - Such loathsome beings that it was to His glory to pour out His judgment and indignation on you forever...
 - That is what we all are by nature...

TRANS> Yours was a most wretched condition, for you yourself were a wretch...

- But in verse 5, Paul begins to tell you how everything was changed for all who are now in Christ!
 - He tells you about the miserable condition you were in and then He says,
 - “but God!”
 - God is the one who changed you!
 - He is the one who changed everything!

1. Paul explains what the change involves...
 - that you who were dead in sin are now alive in Christ...
 - that you who were walking in the way of the world, the flesh, and devil are raised to walk a whole new walk in Christ—to live a new life.
 - and that in Christ, you who were the objects of God’s wrath are now seated with Christ in the heavenly places...
 - sharing in His victory over sin and death,
 - no longer under condemnation,
 - but resting with Him in salvation to enjoy sweet communion with God!
2. Oh my believing brothers and sisters...
 - What a marvellous change!
 - You are truly a new creation in Jesus Christ!
 - Old things are passed away—all things have become new!
 - You were just like everyone else—
 - but God changed you!
3. This change is truly something to glory in!

- You have been forever transported from the realms of death and brought into living fellowship with the God of heaven!
- This is surely something to boast about!

But let me warn you of a noxious danger that threatens every believer!

- There is this ever-present tendency to boast in yourself rather in the Lord.
 - almost as if you think you saved yourself!
- The Bible often warns us about this...
 - In 1 Cor 1:31, it says,
 - "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."
 - In 1 Cor 4:7, is says
 - For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?
 - In Galatians 6:14, Paul himself, cried out earnestly,
 - "God forbid that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."
 - Even Paul himself struggle with boasting...
 - In 2 Cor 12:7 he explains that because of the abundance of the revelations he had received,
 - he was afflicted with a thorn in the flesh, lest he should be exalted above measure.

TRANS> Boasting in self is a real danger for believers...

- And so it is that in Ephesians 2:1-10,
 - as Paul speaks about the glorious transformation of the believer through Jesus Christ...
 - He also labours to banish all self-boasting (which I am going to refer to simply as boasting)!
 - From the beginning of his epistle,
 - he has been trying to get the Ephesians to grasp something of the glory of their salvation—
 - to see the greatness of what God has done!
 - It is something that every believer ought to glory in!
 - But the good apostle knows what believers are like...

- He knows that as soon as we see that our salvation is nothing less than life from the dead...
 - and that although others remain dead in trespasses and sins, **we** have been made alive...
 - we will start to boast in ourselves!
 - He knows that as long as we remain in this world, it will be a real temptation for us, even as it was for him...

- And so, I say, he labours in this passage to banish boasting...
 - He weaves pointed counsel through his glorious description of our transformation that is designed to wean us from our self-glorifying so that we may glory in the God of our salvation instead.

 - Brothers and sisters, it is so much better for you to glory in God!
 - Give attention to what the apostle says here!
 - I know that you like to glory in yourself,
 - I know it is hard for you to give it up, (like a child trying to give up his thumb)
 - But there is something much better for you to glory in...
 - And as long as you keep boasting in self—to whatever extent you keep boasting in yourself—you cannot boast in the LORD.

TRANS> This morning I want to show you two reasons not to boast that are found in Ephesians 2:1-10...

I. First, you ought not to boast in yourself because God’s purpose is that all should glory in Him when they see His saving work in you.

- **You are going against His purpose in your salvation when you boast in yourself!**

- A. Paul, having told of all that the LORD had done for him and for the Ephesians who believed, gives the reason that God did it in verse 7:
 - Eph 2:7: that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

 - 1. The LORD wanted future generations to look back to the first century and see how God had taken self-righteous Jews, like Paul,
 - and idol-worshipping gentiles, like the Ephesians,
 - and made them to be His very own people through Jesus Christ.

- a. Here was Paul, all religious, but ungodly...
 - a man dead in trespasses and sins...
 - having the law and the covenants and the promises,
 - but far far away from the life that they bring...
 - This man, who know all the commandments so well, actually believed that he had kept them sufficiently to please God!
 - That is about as dead as dead can be!
 - To have the law that exposes sin near to you and to actually think that you have kept it!
 - What blindness! What delusion! What folly!
 - I tell you, there are many like that today...
 - They are baptised, they are in the church, they have God's word...
 - and they actually believe that before God who is revealed in that Word that they are righteous on account of their own works!
 - They actually think they are good before God on their own!
 - Why do they ever think Jesus came in the first place if this is so?
 - But what a marvellous thing it is when God opens the eyes of a person like that!
 - What kindness it is on His part to take one so swollen up with pride as to think he is acceptable to His Maker without a Saviour...
 - and deliver that one from such deep blindness!
 - It is truly life from the dead!
 - And what mercy it is!
 - To take that one who has mocked Him and call that one to true salvation!
 - To pardon him and to reconcile him...
 - Truly He does it so that all may see His super-abounding grace in the ages to come!
- b. And here were these Gentiles...
 - Pagans—suppressing the truth of God—receiving life and food and all things from their Maker's hand...
 - but instead of giving thanks to Him, denying Him and suppressing Him!

- instead of worshipping Him in His glorious majesty, worshipping and serving idols...
 - worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator!
 - Giving themselves over to all sorts of corruption—sexual immorality, covetousness, oppression of the weak...
 - What wickedness! What ingratitude!
- These also are like many today...
 - completely ignoring the God who holds their breath!
- But the LORD such as these, dead as they were in trespasses and sins, and made them alive...
 - He did it so that all might see how kind and gracious He is!
 - So that in the coming ages,
 - “He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”
 - He wants all the coming ages to look at what He has done and to marvel!

2. What are those future ages?

- a. The ages to come refer to future generations... even to us who live in the 21st Century...
 - The gospel was no short-term venture!
 - The LORD purposed that there would be a posterity to serve him from generation to generation...
 - And those who were saved in the first century (Paul and the Ephesians to whom he writes) are a pattern for us of the depth and breadth and height of God’s grace!
 - When the gospel is preached to each generation, they are able to look back and see how kind God has been to previous generations...
 - Not that they have lived high in a worldly sense—
 - not at all—they are often persecuted...
 - but that they are called, redeemed, justified, and given a new life in Jesus Christ.
 - God saves in the present generation so that future generations can glory when He calls them to be saved.

TRANS> But I believe the “ages to come” also refers to something else...

- b. The ages to come also refers to the ages that Paul and the Ephesians and all other believers will themselves experience.
- 1) It is the nature of salvation that the longer we have it, and the more we learn about it, the more we glory in the God who gave it!
 - As God's redeemed people, we have the expectation that we will glory more and more in the riches of His grace in the future ages into which we will pass...
 - 2) What are these future ages?
 - a) Well, we are told that when we depart from this world, we will depart to be with Christ which is far better...
 - One of the main reasons it will be better is because we will see Him better—we will understand him more fully...
 - We will understand what He has done for our salvation!
 - We will understand the riches of His grace more than we do now, and we will glory in it...
 - We will see the glory of God as we have not seen it before...
 - But it won't be the glory of God in some new action or work that He will perform...
 - It will be the glory of His kindness to us in our salvation...
 - He will show us: "the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

TRANS> That is the future age into which we will pass that theologians call the intermediate state—

- the time subsequent to our death, but before the resurrection.
- b) Then there will come the next age, when Jesus returns and raises up our bodies, vindicates us, and receives us body and soul into glory.
- And in that final age,
 - Our LORD wants us to look back and remember how He came to us when we were dead in our trespasses and sins!
 - He wants us to remember the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us...
 - He wants us to remember the blood that was shed for our sins...
 - He wants us to remember how He took us when we were as dead as dead can be and made us alive by His Spirit.

- The church triumphant will do this forever!
- We will never forget the pit from which we were dug!
- We will never forget the cross!
- We will always glory in the grace of our God...
 - He has saved us to demonstrate that grace to us for ever and ever so that our eternal worship and delight in our God will be enriched!

TRANS> That is God's purpose in giving us life... He has done it for His glory.

B. This being so, do you now see how wrong it is for you to glory in yourself?

1. When you take glory to yourself, you are acting in opposition to God's purpose in saving you!
 - a. Here He is trying to show His graciousness in saving a wretch like you...
 - and here you are, trying to come up with reasons why He should have saved you!
 - God is endeavouring to show off His grace, and you are endeavouring to show off your own goodness!
 - b. You see a sad and open spectacle of this all the time?
 - You see Christian leaders who make it their goal to bolster up a believer's self-esteem—
 - to even tell them that they were so valuable to God that He saved them!
 - These leaders have taken a page right out of the manual of humanism!
 - Of course when you are trying to get on without God, self-esteem is everything...
 - But the last thing a believer needs is self-esteem!
 - We need God-esteem!
 - We need to find security in the LORD...in His gracious work!
 - We need to die to self—to deny self—and live for Christ!
 - It is not how great you are, but how great He is that is to be your animating principle!

TRANS> There is a sad an open attempt to glory in self that is all too common in the church...

- c. But don't you also find far too much boasting in your own heart—you who claim to know better?
 - Isn't there that pride back of your saving experience with God that wants to say to the unbeliever:
 - "I came to God and you didn't!"
 - "I was always seeking God and you weren't..."
 - Of course it is true that you can and others did not, that you sought and others did not...
 - but it was not because of you, it was because God was giving you life from the dead!
 - He wants you to give the glory to Him!
 - You were dead and He made you alive in order that all might see His grace and kindness to you!
 - Why do you try to siphon off some of that glory to yourself?
 - It is His, not yours!
2. I want you to consider that to whatever extent you try to glory in self,
 - you fight against God.
 - a. You are fighting with Him to obtain the glory of your salvation!
 - You cannot win!
 - He will chasten you and humble you to keep you from glorying.
 - Even Paul was given a thorn in the flesh to keep him from glorying because of all the revelations he had been given.
 - God would not allow him to glory in His presence.
 - He will not allow any flesh to glory in His presence.
 - It is not appropriate!
 - b. The Bible teaches us that God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.
 - If you are proud, you will be resisted by Him...
 - But if you glory in Him and what He has done, He will give you even more grace...
 - He is all out for His own glory!

TRANS> What do you think about that—does that seem wrong to you? does it seem wrong for God to seek His own glory?

C. I want you to remember how proper it is for God to seek His own glory...

1. The world hates this idea... they think God is evil to seek His own glory...

a. And I suppose it is no wonder...

- as it stands for the unbeliever, unless he repents,
 - the glory of God will be revealed in his destruction!
- That's right,
 - If you are not made alive in Jesus Christ,
 - God will display His justice by giving you what your sins deserve.
 - He will cast you into the Lake Fire forever and ever.
 - You will say, "well I don't think I'm that bad—I don't think I deserve that!"
 - No, I suppose you don't...
 - If you did, you would have realise how dead you are and how much you need Christ...
 - and you would come to Him... if only you could see yourself as He does...
 - But it really doesn't change the facts if you think you don't deserve such punishment...
 - God is the judge and the judge has spoken plainly...
 - He says that we all deserve to go to Hell...
 - And those whom He has not pardoned in Christ will go to Hell, and those who are pardoned will marvel at God's grace to them in not sending them to hell when they fully deserved it.

b. The world will say,

- But what kind of God is this that does everything for His own glory?
 - Who does He think He is?
 - What kind of self-importance is that?
 - Who would want to serve a God like that?

TRANS> The world hates this doctrine that God does all things for His glory...

2. But it is only right that He should act for His own glory...

a. It is only right because He **is** God!

- The reason we have problems with God seeking His own glory in the salvation and the condemnation of men...
 - is because we have forgotten who He is!
 - or maybe I should say, we have lost sight of what it really means to be God.
- 1) The unbeliever says, “Who does He think He is?”
 - He thinks He is God—the creator! the all-glorious one!
 - He cannot deny Himself and He cannot deny what is His due.
 - Our problem is that we don’t think it is His due.
- 2) Of course, it would be a horrible thing for a man, who is but a creature, to do everything for his own glory...
 - Man is not worthy of such glory...
 - Man is only a flesh, only a creature...
- b. But God is not a man!
 - It is a grave injustice for Him not to receive the glory that is His due!
 - Our happiness as creatures depends upon our beholding of His glory!
 - You have no good reason to even want to live forever until you have come to know your God...
 - An eternity of worshipping the glorious God is an eternity of delight, but an eternity without Him is an eternity in miserable darkness.

TRANS> So you see how the apostle teaches us that God redeems us for the praise of His own glory...

- When you boast in yourself, you compete for that glory...
 - That is the first reason he presents here to keep you from boasting...
 - Now lets look at the second:

II. Secondly, you ought not to boast in yourself because you have no grounds for boasting yourself.

- A. For sure, you have a very great salvation to glory in—
 - but the apostle labours to remind you in this passage that this salvation is not of your doing—
 - He declares to you that it is all of God’s grace so that you will not glory as if it is something you have done.

1. You can see this back in verse 5...
 - No sooner does he say that Christ made us alive when we were dead than he reminds us:
 - “By grace you have been saved.”
 - It should have already been obvious that this new life was God’s doing...
 - after all, were dead in trespasses and sins...
 - and dead men do not raise themselves up...
 - He was saying that God made us alive when we were dead...
 - But to make absolutely sure that there is no mistake, he adds the words:
 - “By grace you have been saved.”
 - Grace means that it is all of God’s doing...
 - He made you alive...
 - He raised you up with Christ...
 - He made you to sit with Christ in the heavenly places...

2. But the Apostle is not even satisfied to leave it at that...
 - a. He knows how prone we are to take glory in our salvation...
 - If we are distinguished from others by salvation (and we are)...
 - our tendency is always to attribute that distinction to something we have done instead of to what God has done...
 - b. So in verse 8, Paul raises the point again that it is by grace you are saved...
 - and this time he really drives the point home...
 - Look at what he says:
 - Eph 2:8-9: For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.
 - c. Let’s analyse this—
 - just look at how many times he tells you that salvation is not of you in these two verses!
 - If it weren’t for the fact that we so prone to take glory to ourselves, it would be redundant.

- 1) First, he says (for the second time) that it is by grace...

- “By grace you have been saved.”
 - Grace, as I said already, means that it is something that God does...
 - It is something God does that is not of necessity—
 - I mean, something that He was not obligated to do by the nature of things...
 - By definition, grace is something that goes beyond what is required—
 - It is something we don’t deserve...
 - It rules out any notion that I was saved because I was better than others or was somehow entitled to salvation.
- 2) Secondly, he says that it is through faith...
- That means that it is only through depending on Him to do it...
 - As faith is used with respect to salvation,
 - it means that you put trust in God to do something instead of trying to do it yourself.
 - It means that if you are saved,
 - you yourself realised that you cannot save yourself and that only Jesus can save you...
 - and so you gave up on yourself and turned to Him!
 - When that is the case,
 - Its hard to turn around and boast about salvation as if it is something you did!
- 3) Thirdly, he says that it is “that not of yourselves.”
- A question arises as to what the word “that” refers to here?
 - What is it that is not of ourselves?
 - Some grammarians say it is the faith just referred to that is not of ourselves...
 - Others say it is salvation as a whole that is not of ourselves...
 - Both are true—the difficulty is that the word translated *that* is neuter on the Greek while the word *faith* is feminine...
 - One might expect that if Paul were referring to faith, he would have used the feminine form of the word *that*.

- But others have pointed out that the neuter is frequently used in Greek to refer to abstract nouns such faith, hope, and love...
 - For this reason, I am inclined, because of the proximity of the word *that* to the word *faith*, to say that Paul is saying that even *faith* is not of ourselves...
- In other words,
 - Paul realises that a person might boast in his faith—
 - He might say, “I believed and you didn’t” with the implication,
 - “I am better than you.”
- Now it is true that if you are in Christ and another is not, you believed and the other person did not...
 - But Paul is showing you that even your faith is not of yourself...
 - Of course it is you who believed...
 - but it did not originate you...
 - It was given to you by grace—by God!
 - The point is that even faith itself did not originate with us...
 - It is God who made us alive...
 - and we did not believe until we had life...
 - A dead man can’t believe.
 - Paul is showing you that you can’t even boast that you believed!

4) Fourthly, he says “it is the gift of God”...

- If something is given to you, you cannot boast about it—
 - especially when that gift is a new life and walk and acceptance with God...
 - I mean, a person might boast that they were given the gift because they were considered so worthy in the eyes of the giver to receive it...
 - that is sometimes true, is it not?
 - A person will give another person a great gift because they delight in them and think they deserve it...

- But when the gift is a new life and new walk and new acceptance with God to one who was absolutely dead in trespasses and sins,
 - There is no merit in it at all...
 - In such a case, the gift itself is needed because you have no merit...
 - The think you are in need of is the very thing that disqualifies you from deserving it in any way...
 - It is a gift you in no way deserve—a pure gift of grace...
 - There is no occasion for boasting.
- 5) Fifthly, he says, “not of works.”
- That means that salvation was not given to you because of something you did...
 - He has already said that it was by grace, and grace is given to one who has no claim on the gift.
 - In Romans, Paul contrasts grace with wages...
 - Wages are paid because they are owed for work that is done...
 - but grace is given apart from work—it is a free donation.
- 6) So you see that these five reasons are given to show that there are no grounds for boasting...
- and now to make absolutely sure that he is understood, the apostle says,
 - “lest anyone should boast!”
 - He makes it crystal clear that it is his intention to banish all boasting from us about our salvation.

TRANS> You see how the apostle goes on and on to drive home the point.

3. Boasting about your salvation is one of the most inappropriate things you can ever do!
- a. Just think of it—
- a fellow is drowning—completely helpless,
 - and he is a fellow who has robbed the life guard, murdered his son, raped his wife, and whatever else you can think of...
 - And the life guard jumps into the water and rescues that man...

- How inappropriate it would be for that man to boast in himself of his rescue!
 - He ought to boast in the life guard,
 - but what an ass he would be if he were to boast in himself!
- b. My brothers and sisters, it is far more inappropriate for you to boast about your salvation!
 - The apostle shows you that there are no grounds for it at all!
 - You were dead—and God made you alive.
 - You were completely unworthy—and He saved you anyway!

B. But we still do boast...

1. We still look for reasons to boast and we still suppose that we have found them even though the apostle says, “not of yourselves lest anyone should boast.”
 - a. There are those who say that God saved us because we had some redeeming quality in us...
 - God saw something in us that attracted him to us... something good and beautiful...
 - but no...
 - the bible says, “that not of yourselves...”
 - When God saved Noah, He declared that all flesh was corrupted and that the imagination of mans heart was only evil continually...
 - He repented that He had made man...
 - Salvation is not merely a reformation, it is a new creation...spiritually...
 - It takes us when we are wholly corrupt and gives us new life—
 - it raises us from death—
 - not just from nothingness, but from death in trespasses and sins—
 - from being by nature the children of wrath—even as others...
 - just like everyone else.
 - b. There are those who say that God saved us because of what we did...
 - because we had a tender heart...
 - because we sought God...
 - because we believed...
 - but the Bible says, “that not of yourselves...”

- All of those things may have become true of you before your conversion,
 - You may have had a tender heart, sought God, and of course you did believe...
 - but these were given to you by God...
 - They were brought to you, not from your own wicked heart, but from God, by His grace.
 - It was not of yourselves, it was the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

TRANS> And so, brothers and sisters, I hope you see these two reasons that you ought not boast in yourself about your salvation that we have looked at this morning...

- First, because God saved you to display His own glory (and you rob Him when you take that glory for yourself)
- Second, because there are no grounds for boasting—salvation is all of God’s grace, not of you.

Conclusion

Now I want to plead with you a little before I close...

- We are so hardhearted about this...
 - We are so eager to boast—
 - We want to make at least some small part of our salvation to depend on what we have done...
 - The Bible is telling you that it doesn’t depend on what you have done!

Yes, you had to repent, you had to believe, you had to see your sin, you had to see what Christ had done for you and embrace it...

- Yes, I would never deny all that...
 - If you are saved today, you have done all that!
 - But the point is that you did not do any of this apart from God’s grace that imparted life, resurrection, and forgiveness to you...
 - If you had been left to your own depraved nature, you would never have responded to God at all!
 - The reason you have life and the fellow down the road doesn’t have life is because God gave you life!
 - It is not because of you, it is because of God’s electing grace.

- Would you rob God of the glory of your salvation?
 - Stop it at once!

- Give Him the glory that is due to His name!
 - That will be just...
 - That will be your happiness...
 - There is nothing better for you to do than give up trying to promote your own glory and start promoting His.