

The Letter Of Paul To The Ephesians

*⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
(Ephesians 1:7-10. ESV)*

Message 11

By Grace Through Faith

July 14th, 2013

Ephesians 2:4-10

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Introduction:

Open your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 2. We are on Holy Ground this morning. Along with Romans 3:21-26 the passage we are going to study today is perhaps the most famous expression of the Gospel found in all of Scripture. Before we read it, we need to remember what we read last week. Our text this morning is Ephesians 2:4-10 but I'm going to start reading at verse 1 so that you can appreciate the several contrasts that Paul uses to explain our great salvation. Hear then the reading of God's Holy, inspired and inerrant Word.

¹And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in 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—³among 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. (Ephesians 2:1-3. ESV)

That's what we read last week and I wanted you to hear that again so that you can appreciate the force of the BUT that Paul places at the start of verse 4. You were DEAD in your trespasses and sins:

⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, **made us alive together with Christ**—by grace you have been saved—⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:4-10. ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord – thanks be to God!

Amen! There is a story told about D.L. Moody the great evangelist who was preaching at a series of revival meetings in Chicago. On the first night he decided to give the bad news. He spoke on hell and eternal damnation and the utter and total lostness of man apart from the grace of God in Christ. On the second night he planned to share the Good News of grace and mercy and salvation through faith but unfortunately, after his first message and before the second the whole city caught fire in the Great Chicago Fire of October 8th 1871 and so D.L. Moody had to wait a long time to give the people of the city the Good News that absolutely has to follow the bad news. Happily, our church did not burn down after last Sunday's message and so we can carry on uninterrupted. It is good, though, to sit for a while under the awful truth of our own depravity and inability. We need to know that we were in fact that dead, that lost and that deceived before God in Christ took pity on us. We need that time. There is no Gospel without that time. But it is awfully good to come up for air and to see afresh the mercy and the kindness of Almighty God and that is the place we find ourselves in today.

My plan this morning is to quickly take you back through the text to make sure you have seen what you need to see, then to organize our insights and then lastly, to respond to the message contained therein. Let's begin then with a closer reading of the text:

Reading The Text:

Look again at verse 4:

⁴But God,

Again, not to belabour this point but the Good News of what God has done in Jesus Christ makes no sense and has no penetrating power unless it is preceded by the bad news of who we are as fallen and deceived human beings. If you don't know you are dead then you don't know you need to be born again. If the church ever stops telling people this truth we will have robbed them of the chance to get saved. Whenever the church skips this step they become tools of the devil and agents of damnation. There is no Good News without the bad news. Period. Don't tell the Gospel that way and don't listen to the Gospel that way. I don't often tell people to leave their

churches – that isn't my business but I will say it here – if you ever find yourself in a church that refuses to tell the truth about sin, deception, depravity and damnation – get out. You are in the waiting room of hell and you are by being there giving approval to that work of Satan. Is that too blunt for us as Canadians? Well another pastor, a far more important pastor than me, said it this way:

⁸But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:8-9. ESV)

Paul literally says: “To hell with anyone who messes with the Gospel”. This is way too important for excessive Canadian politeness. The truth is; the truth you need to know is; that you were dead in your trespasses and sins. You were dead and you were deceived. BUT GOD!

being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, **made us alive together with Christ**—by grace you have been saved—

We'll get to the significance of these truths in just a minute when we organize the text but I just want you to notice two things here; first the contrast that Paul is making: you were dead in your trespasses and God has now made you alive with Christ. The difference between an unsaved person and a saved person is the difference between death and life. You were dead, now you are alive. A person who doesn't look any different after they've met the grace of God in Christ obviously has not in fact met the grace of God in Christ. This is a huge change Paul is talking about. Its big and it should be noticeable.

Secondly notice the motivation: because of the great love with which he loved us. The “he” there is God the Father – we know that from 1:3-4. The ultimate wellspring of your salvation was the love of your Heavenly Father. Don't ever buy into a version of the Bible where the Jesus of the New Testament saves us from the angry, nasty, unloving Father of the Old Testament. That is not the Gospel. It is the love of the Father that sends Jesus into the world. By grace we have been made alive with Christ:

⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

Notice here that you have been given three things:

- i. Regeneration – that was named first back in verse 5 – “he made us alive together with him”
- ii. Resurrection – Paul speaks of our future resurrection as a present reality. Because Christ was raised we ARE RAISED. Our eternal life begins now in Christ.
- ii. Authority – you are destined to rule with Christ, in fact you are seated with Christ right now in the heavenly places. You share in his authority and you share in his rule. You were saved and raised to rule. That was the purpose of humanity way back in Genesis 1 and it is the purpose to which we are restored in Christ.

⁷so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

The Greek word translated as “kindness” there is *khraiy-stot'-ace* which literally means “moral excellence”. Hear that. The reason you were chosen for this gift and the reason some were not is that in some way those choices serve for all eternity the display of God’s moral excellence. People and angels will look at you, saved by grace, and at others justly condemned for their sins and they will say: “Surely God is merciful. Surely God is holy. His ways are just and righteous altogether.” That isn’t all we’d like to know, but it is all the Bible tells us.

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

The grammar of this text is remarkably precise and unambiguous. The “by grace” there is in the dative which implies causality. The cause of your salvation is God’s grace. It is expressly not your own doing, it is expressly not your own works or effort – it is the gift of God. All of it from start to finish is of God. There are two sentences in this paragraph from verse 1 through verse 10 and the subject of both is God. God is the subject – meaning he does all the active verbs. We are the object which means the actions are done to us or applied to us. God is the only doer in this paragraph. He makes dead things alive – this is his grace it is not our work lest any man should boast. Hear that.

Salvation is by grace and it is through faith. The word “faith” there is in the genitive which implies immediate agency meaning this is HOW the grace is appropriated. But – right here at the place we would be inclined to take credit – Paul again jumps in and says:

this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God (2:8. ESV)

Many of us are inclined to think of salvation as a partnership – a two handed work. God did his part – Jesus came and died on the cross and rose again and what not and then we did our part, we recognized the truth and value of that and put our faith in him. There you have it: we each did our share. God can have his credit and we can have ours. NO! Right at the entry point of pride and human merit the Bible slams the door and says: “No! This was not your doing, it was the gift of God!” Even your part was the gift of God. Even the faith to grab hold of the grace was the gift of God. All of it, from start to finish, from cause to means to effect was the gift of God. That is why we say salvation is a one handed work. God is still the only subject even here at the place of faith. It is God who works in you to believe. You were dead remember. Dead people believe nothing. Dead people do not repent. Dead people do not have faith. That is why Paul already told us what grace was:

⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, **made us alive together with Christ**—by grace you have been saved— (Ephesians 2:5. ESV)

Grace is defined as God’s act towards dead men; making them alive with Christ! This is the GIFT of regeneration – being born again. You can’t understand verse 8 unless you remember verse 5. Here is the wonder of what this text is teaching: you had to be born again by grace BEFORE you could put faith in Jesus Christ. Grace comes before faith. Did you know that? I’m not making that up, that has been the Gospel in this house for a very long time. Your grandparents understood this just fine. In the Old Baptist Confession they said this:

Section 10. Paragraph 2. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, nor from any power or agency in the creature,⁷ being wholly passive therein, being dead in sins and trespasses, until being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit;⁸ he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it, and that by no less power than that which raised up Christ from the dead.⁹

⁷ 2 Tim. 1:9; Eph. 2:8

⁸ 1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:5; John 5:25

⁹ Eph. 1:19, 20

Did you notice the footnotes there? The second footnote is Ephesians 2:8. This is how your great grandparents understood this text. They understood it to mean that God had to quicken us by his Holy Spirit, he had to renew us because we were dead in our trespasses so that we would have the ability to embrace the grace offered to us in Jesus Christ. They said that he did this as an act of free grace and not because of anything at all foreseen in us. Our grandparents got this exactly right. You were saved by grace, through faith, not by works lest any man should boast. Thanks be to God!

The text concludes:

¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:4-10. ESV)

I want you to see a few things here, first of all notice that whatever we are we are because God made us that way. God makes men and women what they are. Only God creates – sin doesn't create, the devil doesn't create. The devil destroys and perverts, sin causes change and decay, man at his best stewards and cultivates – no one but God creates. Even what we think of as our best creations are not creations – they are cultivations. We take things that already exist and we arrange them in beneficial ways. We take things God made and put them in a Petri dish and poke them with DNA or strands of this or that and we call it creation. Did we make the DNA? Did we make the cells? Heck, we didn't even make the Petri dish – we just melted the sand and formed a pot. Humans don't create, we cultivate and steward. God alone makes alive. And this act of new creation is given the same status in the Scripture as the creation of the cosmos. Both works of creation were by Divine Fiat. God spoke and his word brought life.

Secondly I want you to notice the purpose or goal of this work of creation – it is that we would do good works. The good works do not achieve the new creation – we don't do good works to get saved, we do good works because we are saved. Good works are the goal not the grounds of salvation.

Thirdly I want you to notice the final contrast that Paul has embedded in this text. In verse 2 we were walking in sin and trespasses now because of God's grace in Christ we walk in good works. Same Greek word. The grace of God in Christ CHANGES HOW YOU WALK. If it doesn't then you don't have it. Nobody walks the same after being struck by the grace of God – that is a Gospel sized truth and Paul says these good works which we were saved unto were planned by God from beforehand – this is an echo of his words back in 1:4:

⁴even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. (1:4. ESV)

God chose us before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless and that we should do specific good works in response to our salvation. All of that was planned and effected before you were even born. Before you did anything good or bad God decided to save you and to make of you something beautiful. To make you an instrument of worship to the praise of his glory and grace. Blessed be the Name of the Lord.

That is the text and that is the Gospel and having read it closely I want to just quickly organize it so that you can remember it and ponder it often in your heart. I'm not telling you anything new here, I'm just trying to show it to you in a way that has some hooks on it that will catch on the corners of your brain for storage and recollection. Let me organize what we have learned according to four well known categories.

Organizing The Insights:

1. Who?

As I mentioned above there are two sentences in this paragraph running from 2:1-2:10 and the subject of each sentence is God. God is the actor behind the verbs in these sentences. God is the only one who “does” anything. That is absolutely critical. The Gospel is the Good News of what GOD HAS DONE in Jesus Christ to secure our salvation. Let me say that again: The Gospel is the Good News of what GOD HAS DONE in Jesus Christ to secure our salvation. The Gospel is not what we need to do to get saved. The Gospel is what GOD HAS DONE IN CHRIST to

secure our salvation. Any presentation of the Gospel that focuses more on what we need to do than on what God has already done is not the Gospel.

The second “who” in this passage is us – not in the sense that we are the subject – the only subject here is God – but we are the object, meaning that the action of God is done to us. We are the passive recipients of God’s work. Look for example at verse 10:

¹⁰For we are his workmanship, **created** in Christ Jesus for good works... (Ephesians 2:10. ESV)

That is an aorist PASSIVE participle meaning that we WERE created – the creation work was done BY GOD – IN CHRIST – ON US. We are the objects UPON WHOM the work of God is done. It is so important that you understand that God is the author and actor of our salvation and we are the passive recipients. Not passive in the sense that we don’t do anything – we do repent and we do believe – but those actions themselves are attributed to the active grace of God. God works in us to repent and believe. That’s the “who” of the Gospel.

2. Why?

The “why” of the Gospel is spelled out in two places; first and primarily we see it in verse 7:

⁷so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 1:7. ESV)

You were saved as a canvas for the display of the goodness and moral excellence of Almighty God. The why of your salvation is ultimately what you would expect it to be: The glory of God.

The second “why” isn’t really another “why” it is just a negative way of restating the first and only “why”, we see it in verse 9:

so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 1:9. ESV)

If your understanding of the Gospel glorifies anyone other than God it is not the Gospel. If it glorifies human choice, it is not the Gospel. If your testimony makes you sound smarter or wiser than the unsaved, it is not a Gospel testimony. If the emphasis is on how you found God or you

came to Christ – it is not a Gospel testimony. It is a works righteousness testimony and it only proves that you do not know the Gospel. The Gospel is the Good News of what God has done in Christ to secure our salvation. It glorifies God or it is not the Gospel.

3. How?

The “how” of the Gospel is found in verse 8:

⁸For **by grace** you have been saved **through faith**. (Ephesians 2:8. ESV)

By grace through faith. Because of the unwarranted and undeserved grace of God through the working of faith, which is itself no cause for boasting because it is the gift of God, Paul goes on to say. God makes us alive – that’s regeneration and then God works faith in us through the Holy Spirit. He makes us alive, he opens our eyes, he digs out our ears and he softens our heart so that the first thing we do as born again men and women is hear, repent and believe unto salvation. We do believe. We do see the sinfulness of sin and the beauty of God in Christ but only because God makes us alive and opens our eyes unto salvation. It is by grace you have been saved though faith, and this not of yourselves it is the gift of God.

4. What?

The “what” of the Gospel refers to its product. In fact that is the word used in verse 10; where the English has:

¹⁰For we are his **workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus for good works, (ESV)

The Greek word is actually *poy'-ay-mah* which means “product” or “thing that is made”. We are the “what” of God’s grace, – specifically we reborn creatures inclined and empowered to good works are the thing that is made by the Gospel. The product of the Gospel is a people delighting in and empowered unto works of service, mercy and worship. That is what should be manifest in a church that holds to the Gospel. A Gospel preaching and believing church should be characterized by overflowing worship, service, obedience and deeds of mercy. A Gospel believing person should desire to respond to God’s grace in wilful acts of obedience, mercy and

service – this according to Paul in Romans 12:1 is our reasonable service of worship. This is how truly saved people RESPOND to the Gospel. You shall know them by their fruit the Bible says. The fruit of faith or the fruit of the Spirit is proof positive that a person or church has been the object of new creation.

That is the who, why, how and what of the Gospel as presented in this passage. Now as the little video reminded us we aren't finished preaching until we have suggested an appropriate application.

Applying The Message:

The application itself is suggested in the text. There are three obvious ways to personally apply Paul's teaching in Ephesians 2:1-10:

1. Repent!

After all if it's true that we were born running head long into sin and death then the only response that makes any sense is to stop, turn around and run to Jesus. That's what the word "repent" means. It means to stop and see that the direction you are heading in is the direction of rebellion and that it leads into the pit of hell. The wages of sin is death. Repent means turn around. It means to turn your back on the wisdom and spirit of the age. It means to reject and forswear autonomy and self definition and it means to bend the knee in total surrender before your God and Creator. Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand!

2. Believe!

Secondly you need to believe and trust in the Gospel. You need to see what God has done in Christ to secure your salvation and you need to trust in that and in no other. You need to forsake and forswear your own deeds of righteousness – you need to name them as filthy rags and as thinly veiled works of pride and vanity. When you stand before God you don't dare list your accomplishments – you declare: "Have mercy on me a sinner! I claim the cross and forsake all other!" Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. That's faith. You throw in with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and forswear all else. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ

and thou shalt be saved! See in the cross the sinfulness of sin and the beauty of God in the face of Jesus and claim it for your own life and soul.

3. Respond!

As a saved man or woman, as a new creation in Jesus Christ offer your life a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is your reasonable service of worship. Obey him, serve him, worship him, give of your time, talent and treasure in grateful response to all of what God has given to you in Jesus Christ. The rest of your life is response. It is gratitude. It is worship. Serving in the nursery is worship. Not cheating on your taxes is worship. Giving freely of your resources is worship. Speaking the truth is worship. Showing kindness to the orphan or the widow or the stranger is worship.

All of these things – repentance, faith and response – all of these are the gracious gift of God. For we are what he has made us. Created in Christ Jesus to do good works which he prepared in advance to be our way of life. This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!