

25.02.07 Coromandel Baptist 10:00 a.m.

Works of Grace

Bible Readings = Eph. 2:1-10 and Titus 3:1-11.

Introduction:

- (1) Last time we were giving our attention to Ephesians, Ray led us in consideration of the closing portion of Eph. 1.
- (2) This week we turn to the opening portion of Ephesians 2. There is a direct relationship between these two parts of the letter, as we will see. Simply put, the fact that any one of us is a believer is due to the reality of the resurrection. The power that raised Christ from the dead is the same power that has raised us from the dead, in him.
- (3) What we call the new birth in Christian experience, is nothing short of resurrection of dead people.
- (4) This resurrected group of his people is now *alive in him*. It *does* things, *in him*. It has been created to do his works *in him*.

This week we will concentrate on the remarkable revelation of grace and mercy given to us in Christ, whereby we who were children of wrath are made to be the children of God and freed to walk in his ways.

1. Dead People who Live in Sin (Eph. 2:1-3)

(1) We cannot overstate the peril and desperate nature of our plight apart from the grace of God.

- None knows what sin is, not one of us. We can only have some knowledge of it by forgiveness, and this has to come through the revelation of Christ and him crucified. But even then, we do not really *know* what sin is. It is blinding, deceitful and inherently untrustworthy. None of us can know the depths of the human heart in its sin, but from the vantage point of grace, as we stand in Christ, we can understand to some degree the terrible nature of the offence that sin is in the face of the holy nature of God.

(2) In these verses the apostle indicates that in our sin we are dead, *in trespasses and sins* (Eph. 2:1 cf. 2:5; Col. 2:13; 3:1-4).

- Death is a state of existence, not just an event. We 'exist' in a state of death (cf. Matt. 8:22; Luke 15:24, 32; John 5:11; John 5:24 especially compared with 1 John 3:14).
- This death-state is marked by certain things:
 - It is a place where *we are active*. We 'walk' in it, but according to the will of evil powers (2:2 cf. John 8:44; 12:31; 2 Cor. 4:4; 1 John 5:19; etc.). Men and women are *never* free standing entities. Way of man is not in himself (Jer. 10:23) is an ontological principle. Everyone must 'walk' according to some principal, master, ruler etc.
 - In New Testament theology this place is associated with 'flesh', 'sin', 'darkened mind', 'dominion of Satan', etc. I.e. we are never in a 'free' state.
 - It is place where the rebellion of *human sin held full sway*, and in response to which *we were under the just wrath* of God. (2:3 cf. 4:17ff.; Rom. 1:24,

26, 28). Indeed the wrath of God is experienced *as he gives us over* to our sin. This is to be *by nature*, children of wrath i.e. by our fallen nature, given over to sin, and thereby experiencing the wrath of God.

(3) We need to give particular attention to the pronoun: *we* were (Eph. 2:3)

- Paul does not exclude himself as a Jew and as an ex Pharisee from this state (see also Titus 3:1ff... ‘foolish, disobedient, deceived enslaved’).
- All of the covenant benefits are enormous, but every one of us is in the same situation apart from grace.
 - A word here to the young people from Christian families among us
 - A word to those of us who have been in the folds of the Church for many years

§ Never under any circumstances do we stand in Christ by anything other than the grace and mercy of God. The temptation to establish and claim a righteousness of our own derived from works of the law is constantly with us, and is the most deadening thing in all the world to the life of the people of God. Where we give in to it we find the fruit of the Spirit seem to wither on the vine, joy evaporates and love dries up.

- Do you look at any man or woman with contempt?...then it is on the basis of a righteousness of our own.

2. *But God...*(Eph. 2:4-9)

(1) This is one of the great phrases in the whole of the Bible, and sums up in two words the whole story of salvation history.

- Think of some of the examples: Gen 3:15 (where would humanity be if it had not that promise built into it?...see the way in which all peoples look for someone to rescue them); Abel and Cain...Seth; the violence of the earth ...Noah; the rebellion of the nations...Abraham; the impossibility of the task...Isaac; etc.
 - The whole of salvation history is the account of *God's* action...but God at every turn.

§ What about your own life? Where would any of us be if there were no ‘but God’ for us?

(2) Lavish grace, again!

- The connection thematically is with Eph. 1:5ff...and the lavish grace of God. God is *rich in mercy*. His action is *because of the great love with which he has loved us*. A little later Paul speaks of the *immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus* (2:7).
- Titus 3:3-7 is another exposition of the lavish nature of God's grace.
 - Last time, when Ray was preaching, we saw the Paul's prayer was for their/our hearts to be enlightened so see the inexpressible. More of this in a later prayer in Eph. 3:14ff. But remember the picture that Ray painted for us...on the motor way, with blinkers on, only looking at the end, without realizing that (in terms of the benefits we have already been granted in Christ) we are already there...we are seated with him in the heavenly places...the inheritance is all around us. The reality of grace encompasses us. It is indeed, our habitation: Rom. 5:1-2 Therefore, since

we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God

(3) The lavish mercy, grace and kindness is all *in Christ*.

- Do not look at our own personal circumstances, as to whether they ‘prove’ God’s goodness and mercy etc. All is found in Christ, who has been *abandoned up* for us all (Rom. 8:32 cf. Rom. 5:6-11).

3. For the Demonstration of His Grace and Glory (2:7, 10)

(1) It has been said that ‘works are what grace is all about’.

- We have already seen that God’s plan and purpose is that we might be to the praise of his glory, or to the glory of his grace (Eph. 1:6, 11, 14).
 - This not simply that we will praise his glory, or praise his grace, but that our very existence is to *be* to the praise of his glory.
 - Jesus said “Father, I have glorified you on earth” How? “Having accomplished the work that you gave me to do” John 17:4 (cf. John 14:31 but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father

§ This is culminated in the work of the Cross (John 13:31-32 When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once).

- So, God’s purpose is to have a people in whom his works are seen, and known. *His workmanship...created in Christ...good works...he has prepared...*
 - Nothing of ourselves, all is of him. Our only task is to participate in the works he has given us to do in Christ.
 - Not for us to stipulate what these may be! Gifts, callings, ministries given according to *his* will, distributed in the body according to *his* wish.

(2) And all this has an eschatological goal...Eph. 2:7 cf. 3:10.

- This is the destiny of God’s peer community (to use Geoff Bingham’s phrase once more).
 - All of the angelic rulers will be in thunderous praise for the glory of his grace (as in Rev. 4-5) and those principalities and powers which have rebelled against him will have their mouths stopped.
 - Theirs has been a rebellion which impugned his character, and enslaved his people. The whole universe will see that God is love, that the story of human sin is met with the triumph of grace, and that all the evil one’s insinuations and accusations have no basis. His name will be declared as holy among the heavenly host, through his redeemed Church.
 - Thus see Eph. 3:10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places

(3) We are already there, in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 2:6 cf. 1:3, 1:20; 3:10; 6:12)...but then we will *see* where we are, face to face.