

Eph. 2:1-5 (WCF (:1-3) “Back from the Dead”

For the Children: Mum gives dad a jar to open – she can’t get that lid undone by herself. With a twist of his hand, dad easily gets the lid off. Mum looks at him and exclaims, “I must have loosened it for you!” People often like to claim that they have contributed to great deeds, even when they had only a small part, or no part to play at all. When it comes to our salvation, we contribute nothing. Our will only wants us to go against the Lord, until He saves us. He does that all by Himself, with no help from us. **Questions:** How can living people be called “dead”? Are sinners strong enough to break free of the devil’s control if they try really hard? What does it mean to say we are saved by “grace” alone?

Introduction:

First Point: A Pessimistic View of Man

- 1) Augustine’s Four States: WCF 9 follows Augustine’s 4-fold scheme about man’s states – before the Fall, able to sin or not to sin; the natural man after the Fall, able to sin but unable not to sin; the believer, able to sin or not to sin (though our old nature means we’re never free from sin); and in glory, able not to sin, unable to sin. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve had a good will, but it was able to change, to do evil. They did so, according to God’s predestined plan, but without any compulsion from God or any flaw built into their nature – they were “free agents.” They sinned because they wanted to, an act of a real will
- 2) Stone-Cold Dead: The result was that the natural man is now dead in his sins of commission and omission – deviation from, and failure to attain to God’s mark (“trespasses and sins”). “Dead” means he is separated from God’s life and under His judgement of death. Man is opposed to spiritual good at every point. And unable to change himself
- 3) A Three-Fold Slavery: The natural man is also enslaved – he walks “according to the course” set by the world/this present age; by the flesh, the human nature opposed to God, with its sinful lusts and false thinking; and by the devil
- 4) Children of Wrath: The natural man is by nature, as a member of a fallen race, a child of wrath – under the condemnation of God
- 5) All Implicated: Paul makes it clear that all are involved in this by nature – believers (“you,” “we”) and unbelievers (“even as the rest”)
- 6) No Neutral Part: Arminianism argues that man’s will is neutral, able to choose to co-operate with God. But the will is a part of the man who is said to be dead, enslaved and condemned. The totality of man’s depravity is stressed here so we appreciate all the more the grace of God in v.4 – “He made us alive”

Second Point: An Optimistic View of God’s Salvation

- 1) Love, Mercy and Grace: When we accept our total depravity, we can see how unlovable we must be in God’s eyes. Then we can see more clearly how great is His love that He loves those who are so unlovable. Since He loves *sinners*, this leads to His rich mercy (undeserved pity) and grace (undeserved favour). If we play down the depravity, we make this love, mercy and grace less rich and great
- 2) Quickened with Christ: The optimistic view of God’s work of salvation is grounded also in Christ. We are made alive in Him. Just as God raised His Son from the dead, so He quickens those in Christ, with powerful resurrection-life. The fact that we were “made alive” stresses His grace and sole initiative. There was no neutral will playing any part in this coming to life
- 3) Saved by Grace: Our salvation is therefore entirely by God’s grace. If we had a neutral will with a role to play in our salvation, that will would deserve some credit. But God’s favour is entirely undeserved

Conclusion: