

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” Ephesians 2:1-10, NAS95.

Part 2

3. All who are outside of Christ are by nature under God’s wrath against sin.

Paul goes even deeper in analyzing the condition of man apart from God. The problem is not just behavior or even thoughts, but our basic nature. Of the religious Jews, Paul states that they were “by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.” When Adam sinned, the entire human race was plunged into sin (Rom. 5:12-21). This means that we are not sinners because we sin; rather, we sin because we are by nature sinners. We are born alienated from God, in rebellion against Him.

This is why unbelievers cannot exercise their “free will” to believe the gospel: they do not have a nature that is inclined toward God. They may dress up their old nature with good works, but it’s like dressing a pig in a tuxedo. He may look nice for a short while, but after awhile its just a pig out of place. He may look nice for a short while, but his nature will drive him back to wallowing in the mud. To change the pig, you’ve got to change his basic nature! Paul says that those apart from Christ are “by nature children of wrath.” This Hebrew expression means that they are characterized by being under God’s holy wrath against sin. While modern man scoffs at the notion of God’s wrath, it is a concept that occurs hundreds of times in both the Old and New Testaments, especially in the final book of the Bible, Revelation. It refers to God’s holy, settled hatred against all sin that will result in His final, eternal judgment against all sinners,

casting them into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15). John 3:36 states, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

I realize that this is a rather negative, depressing message, but I believe that Paul wants us to gather around the edge of the cesspool of what we once were so that we won't forget it. He wants us to remember our former condition so that we will appreciate what he goes on to proclaim (Eph. 2:4-5), "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)..."

I leave you with this question: Is there a but God in your life?

As you look at this gruesome portrait of the deadly power of sin, can you say, "Yes, that describes what I once was! But God by His grace broke into my life and made me alive together with Christ!"

If so, let it flood you with thankfulness for His abundant grace!

"He raised us up with him (v. 6a)."

"He seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (v. 6b)."

It is stunning, is it not, that people like you and me, who still live in our mortal bodies and still struggle with the sinful impulses of the flesh (see Paul's exhortations in Eph. 4-6) can be said to have already been raised and seated with Jesus Christ in the heavenlies? In fact, since we are still on this earth and continue to struggle with sin, in what sense can it be meaningfully said that we have been raised and seated with Christ?

(2) Second, why? or the purpose of our salvation in Christ 2:7

Making us alive in Christ and setting us free from the guilt and bondage of spiritual death was only the penultimate purpose of God. The ultimate motivation in God's heart for saving lost souls was so that they might become, throughout all eternity, trophies on display for all to see the magnificence and the surpassing riches of God's grace in

"The plural ages" is not simply a stylistic variation of the singular, but a more general conception, implying 'one age supervening upon another like successive waves of the sea, as far into the future as thought can reach'. In the light of this meaning it may thus be claimed: "Throughout time and in eternity the church, this society of pardoned rebels, is designed by God to be the masterpiece of his goodness (173)."

(3) Third, how? or the basis of our salvation in Christ 2:8-10

Here Paul says five things:

It is "by grace (v. 8a)." It is "through faith (v. 8b)." It is a "divine 'gift (v. 8c)."

What exactly is the "gift (v. 8) of God?" Arminians have often appealed to a point of Greek grammar that they believe makes it impossible for "faith" to be the "gift" to which Paul refers. The word faith, they argue, is feminine in gender, whereas the pronoun translated that (and that not of yourselves) is neuter. Had Paul intended to describe faith as the gift he would have used the feminine form of the pronoun. To what, then, does the word that refer? What is the 'gift of God?

Some point to the "grace (v. 8)" by which we have been saved. But the word "grace," like "faith" is also feminine in gender. Therefore, if 'that which is not of ourselves' cannot refer to "faith," far less can it refer to "grace," which has the added liability of being even farther removed in the sentence from the pronoun "that." So what is Paul saying? What is the antecedent, precursor of "that?"

Clearly the "'gift of God" is salvation in its totality, a salvation that flows out of God's grace and becomes ours through faith. From beginning to end, from its inception to its consummation, salvation is a gift of God to his elect. Consequently, that faith by which we come into experiential possession of what God in grace has provided is as much a gift as any and every other aspect of salvation. One can no more deny that faith is wrapped up in God's gift to us than he can deny it of God's grace. All is of God! Salvation is of the Lord!

It is not of human works, thereby excluding boasting (v. 9).

Here "works" is not "works of the Mosaic Law" (as in Romans and Galatians) but human effort in general, any and all deeds generated by the human heart in an attempt to put God in our debt. As Stott says, "it is neither your achievement ('not your own doing') nor a reward for any of your deeds of religion or philanthropy ('not because of works'). Since, therefore, there is no room for human merit, there is no room for human boasting either (83). Again, as Lincoln says, 'salvation by grace through faith destroys boasting; it leaves people no contribution of their own which they can bring to God (113).'"

The gracious foundation of our salvation is evident from three facts (v. 10).

(1) We are God's workmanship (2:10a). Self-creation is non-sensical. "You see then, says Calvin, 'that this word 'create' is enough to stop the mouths and put away the cackling of such as boast of having any merit. For when they say so, they presuppose that they were their own creators (162).'" Paul's point is that just as we contributed nothing to our initial physical creation neither did we contribute anything to our spiritual re-creation. This concept of our being the 'creation of God is linked to the anticipation in the age to come of the creation of a "new heaven" and "new earth". Paul's point here, as in 2 Cor. 5:17, is that the 'new creation that is yet to come has already come in part, in God's work of salvation in us.

(2) Good works are the purpose, not the procuring cause, of salvation (2:10b; see esp. Titus 3:8). Salvation is not by works but for works. In order to procure salvation works would have to precede it, whereas Paul says that good works follow salvation as its pre-ordained fruit. Works are excluded as the antecedent cause of salvation (v. 9) but essential as the subsequent evidence of it (v. 10).

(3) The good works themselves were preordained by God (2:10c). The NEB renders this, "the good deeds, for which God has designed us." But Paul clearly states that it is not us but our "good works which God prepared beforehand. The only other use of this verb is Rom. 9:23 which is an obvious predestinarian context. God's determination to

bring us to glory entails the intermediate steps of conforming us through good works to the image of his Son. And it was not only our initial reception of salvation that God purposed in eternity past (1:4-5,10-11) but also our ethical activity: our deeds, our thoughts, our works.